

## CHAPTER 13

# Corporate image, reputation and identity



## Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- define organisational public relations and recognise it in practice
- define the various elements belonging to organisational public relations
- describe and understand the strategic process involved in the management of organisational public relations.

## Structure

- Organisational public relations
- Organisational image
- Organisational reputation
- Organisational identity
- Personality and culture
- Organisational identity, strategy and process: two models

## Introduction

Since the early twentieth century, organisations such as Shell, Mercedes-Benz and Michelin have harnessed the power of their visual identities to communicate their values to key audiences. But organisations communicate in more ways than through logos or visuals. Within this chapter we explore the related elements of image, reputation, identity and personality that make up the total communications of an organisation.

Corporate communications, corporate affairs, communications and public relations: despite the discrepancies in job titles, their job functions are largely similar (Dolphin and Fan 2000). Although practitioners use these terms fairly interchangeably, the academic literature on communications often makes a distinction between the terms above, circumscribing their remits to specific areas (see Van Riel 1995; Balmer and Greyser 2003, for accounts of the various perspectives and opinions to do with these terms and their meanings). This situation has led to a relative lack of perspective or a limited inclusion of the topics that form the core of this chapter in some of the public relations literature. This could be misleading for those new to the field in that they might believe that the term 'communications' involves *only* the specific act of communication (for example, communicating with the media, prospective investors and other stakeholders). However, this is not the case if we refer to the definition of public relations adopted by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations in the UK: 'Public relations practice is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics' (Gregory 1997: 14)

From the above, it is clear that the aims of public relations are wide ranging and that a strategy (hence the word 'planned') is required for its correct implementation over time.

Successful communication strategies are used to attain healthy relationships between organisations and their stakeholders (or publics; see also Chapter 12). These communication strategies, if used effectively, are not 'just' isolated actions that are completely independent from one another. In every organisation, communication strategies need to be based on, and to share, sound common parameters to provide cohesion to the communications. In this way the risk of confusion and misinformation among the organisation's publics can be reduced.

Based on the implications and scope of the definition above, and to avoid misinterpretations, this chapter uses the term organisational public relations rather than corporate communications, corporate affairs and so on. An explanation for this decision is given below.

This chapter contains two major sections: the first one, 'Organisational public relations', explores the various terms commonly used in organisational public relations; the second one, 'Organisational identity, strategy and process: two models', looks at the management process (the strategic element) involved in organisational public relations.

## Organisational public relations

The academic literature refers to the concepts of 'corporate public relations' (Gregory 1997) or 'corporate communication' (Van Riel 1995). They are worth closer examination. The meanings of public relations and communication have been dealt with in earlier chapters and at the beginning of this chapter. So, what does the term 'corporate' add – what is meant by it?

When we think of organisations, we might think of them as lots of different sections and departments, such as sales, top management, accounting, production, marketing, human resources, research and development and so on, where these sections interact with one another to some degree. However, in order to understand the concept of 'corporate' we must adopt a different view, in which we look at an organisation as one body, as a whole, as if we were looking at a person. Human beings consist of many different elements, from organs to limbs to way of thinking. We tend not to think of people as parts, but as one entity: John, Marie, Klaus, the elderly lady in the bus, etc. It is the same with an organisation. Before considering its component parts, when you think 'corporate' you think of the organisation as one whole entity.

Let us extend the concept of corporate to 'corporate public relations'. If corporate is to do with an organisation as a whole, you need to look at corporate public relations (or corporate communication) in exactly the same way – the communication activities and public relations of the whole organisation and not of just one of its sections (for example, the mar-

keting department or the human resources section in isolation). Van Riel (1995: 26) defines the term corporate communication as follows:

*Corporate communication is an instrument of management by means of which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonised as effectively and efficiently as possible, so as to create a favourable basis for relationships with groups, upon which the organisation is dependent.*

Van Riel defines the specific aims of corporate communication as well as presenting it as a tool used by management to shape an organisation's *deliberate* communications with all its stakeholders. It is worth remarking on the deliberate nature of corporate communication since, as we will see later on, other forms of communication also play an important role in the relationship between an organisation and its stakeholders (or publics). He also uses the terms 'favourable relationships', which implies a reciprocity (or symmetric approach) between the organisation and its stakeholders. In order for the relationship to be favourable to all parties, it is imperative that the differences and discrepancies between them are eliminated or, at least, reduced to a minimum.

Using the term 'corporate' with reference to public relations could be misleading in this age of globalisation, competition and takeovers, and of great financial and economic power wielded by a number of large companies, also known as corporations. The term 'corporate' could be seen as referring only to organisations that exist, among other things, to provide a dividend to their shareholders. This could

make someone think that public relations is only used by commercial firms. However, most organisations, from local and national governments, charitable organisations, educational institutions to pressure groups, charities and religious orders engage actively in public relations. To avoid any possible confusion, and with the aim of making it clear that public relations can be used by a wide range of entities, we are going to replace 'corporate' by 'organisational' from now on in our terminology.

It is the all-encompassing nature of *organisational public relations*, and the proactive and symmetric managerial aspect it involves that suggest the following definition.

**Definition:** *Organisational public relations* affects an entire organisation and not just one (or a few) of its parts in isolation. It does so in a proactive way by deploying and managing strategies with the aim of reducing the gap between how the various internal and external publics of an organisation view it and how the organisation would like to be viewed by those publics.

It helps to think of organisational public relations as an umbrella that covers the entire organisation. Every sector of the organisation is influenced by it. Organisational public relations is a management function that achieves its aims by providing a leitmotiv (a characteristic and coherent theme and style, or 'lead motive') that aims to inform and influence how *everyone* in the organisation acts, behaves and communicates.

Organisational image, reputation, identity and other such terms are often used informally as if they were synonymous. However, in the context of organisational public relations each one has got a specific sense and it is important to agree on their meanings to avoid confusion.

## Organisational image

As the word implies, image is a reflection. In this particular case, it is the reflection of an organisation in the eyes and minds of its publics. (See Activities 13.1 and 13.2.)

The following provides but one definition of *organisational image*.

**Definition:** *Organisational image* is the impression perceived by an individual of an organisation at one moment in time. Organisational image can change from individual to individual and also throughout time.

## activity 13.1

### Organisational image

Think of the shop where you, your family or friends buy their groceries. Ask two or three of them what they thought of that shop last time they visited it. What were their answers? Next time you go there, ask two or three of the members of staff what they think of that shop on that day.

#### Feedback

Did you find any similarities or differences between the various answers? How did they compare? In other words, what were the images those different publics (e.g. an external public like the customers and an internal one, like staff) had of that shop? You may have come across differences depending on who you asked. However, they all referred to the same store – or *did* they? Yes and no. Strictly speaking it was the same store: they all referred to 'that' store, same address, same name . . . However, the picture (or image) was probably different in each case. What does this tell you about image?

Over time an individual might accumulate a number of different images of the same organisation.

## activity 13.2

### Thinking again about organisational image

You could try repeating the exercise in Activity 13.1 on a different day, let's say a fortnight after you conducted the first one. You ask the same question about the shop to your friends and you also go to the shop and ask the question to the same members of staff (if you can find them again).

#### Feedback

How do the recent answers compare with the previous ones? Are there similarities or differences? What is your conclusion this time? Did you get *exactly* the same answer again from each individual? It is quite unlikely. So, in addition to saying that corporate image changes from individual to individual, we can also say that it changes in time.

## Organisational reputation

Metaphorically speaking, we could think of the relationship between image and reputation in terms of photography. Organisational *image* could be equated with a photograph of an organisation taken at one moment in time by an individual; *organisational reputation* is when that individual collates all the photographs (or images) taken over a period of time into an album and forms an opinion of the organisation by looking at the entire collection of photographs. (See Think about 13.1, overleaf.)

## think about 13.1

## Organisational reputation

Think about your own experience at college or university. Before you chose to join your institution it would be fair to assume you had quite a positive image of it. However, now that you have been a student there for a while, you have accumulated different images of the institution over time. Maybe you found certain aspects that you were unhappy with, others that were unexpectedly good, and so on. Taking all those various images into account, would you say you are happy you joined that institution? Has your opinion about it changed radically? Please reflect on what you are now drawing on in order to answer these questions. You are considering an accumulation of different images and probably taking stock of the pluses and minuses to help you find the answer. In other words, you are considering the reputation *you* hold of the institution.

**Definition:** *Organisational reputation* is arrived at by considering the sum total of images an individual has accumulated over a period of time that help that individual form an opinion about an organisation.

So far we have established that image can be quite fickle. In what way is this relevant to an organisation? Organisations pay a great deal of attention to the image their publics hold of them. This has been stressed by some authors (Bernstein 1984) who argue that image should be considered as *true reality* by organisations . . . Does this sound a little strange at first? (See Think about 13.2.)

## Organisational identity

We have seen how important image and reputation are and how much can depend on them. This leads organisations to want to influence the images and reputations their various stakeholders hold of them. To do this they use organisational identity. We will explore *organisational identity* in more detail now. When the term identity was applied in a corporate communications context for the first time, authors

referred specifically to those visual elements organisations used to portray themselves to their publics. The main element here was the organisation's logo-type (or 'logo', for short) – this was a visual emblem designed by the organisation with the aim of conveying a number of characteristics it wanted its publics to think of in relation to the organisation. Logos were also intended to help those publics recognise and differentiate the organisation from others. Organisations put a lot of thought and invest large sums of money in nurturing their logo, making sure it conveys the right message and, where appropriate, adapting or changing the logo (see Figure 13.1) to fit in with changes in the environment (e.g. cultural tastes) or changes in the organisation itself (e.g. cases of mergers or acquisitions such as BP and Mobil Oil).

The pictures in Figure 13.1 are examples of organisations that take proactive steps and measures to influence their publics' images of the company or institution. In the case of PepsiCo, the company wanted to replace an old-fashioned logo with one that reflected more clearly its brands. To achieve this aim it used a variety of colours, representing the colours of its divisions. The globe reflects the company's global scope. For 3Com it was a case of

## think about 13.2

## Corporate image once more

Is image reality? How do you feel about this? Do you agree or disagree?

Think back to the previous reflection about yourself and your image of your college or university before you enrolled. Whatever image you held of the college or university was a mental representation of what you thought was true about the institution and was strong enough to encourage you to apply. Had your perception not been regarded as reliable or truthful enough at the time, you might not have applied for a place. (Of course, if you ended up somewhere you did not want to study at, you would have had negative images of the place, which may have since been changed by experience.)

Now put yourself in the position of the college or university. The image prospective students hold of the institution is really important for the college/university. This image (or a sum of images, i.e. reputation) is the deciding factor taken into account by prospective new students when judging whether to apply or not. Since universities and colleges depend on these people for their survival, institutions take the images (and reputations) held by prospective students to be *real* factors – and devote a lot of time and resources to influencing those images in a positive way.



FIGURE 13.1 Organisations that have proactively managed their logos. (Source: Spaeth 2002 in [www.identityworks.com](http://www.identityworks.com); copyright Pepsico © 2001 Pepsico, Inc. Used with permission; copyright 3com. Used with permission.)

upgrading its logo to a more contemporary 3D design.

One of the common denominators among the items on the list in Activity 13.3 is that they are all *proactive* and therefore *deliberate*. They are premeditated actions and efforts by organisations to communicate with stakeholders and influence them. However, organisations also influence stakeholders' image through *unintentional* actions and factors outside their control or volition. (See Think about 13.3.)

There are many elements over which an organisation has no or little direct control; however, they play a very important role in the formation of image in a customer's mind. Taking this idea a little further, we can say that every organisation has an *organisational identity*, whether it is deliberate or not. Just by their existence organisations portray and send messages to their various stakeholders – and it is those messages that influence the stakeholders' image of the organisation.

**Definition:** *Organisational identity* consists of the sum total of proactive, reactive and unintentional activities and messages of organisations.

What follows in Box 13.1 (overleaf) is a statement on organisational identity that was put together by an international group of academics.

The statement does not highlight the unintentional elements that are also a significant part of an organi-

### activity 13.3

#### How organisations influence their image

Think of other ways in which organisations influence the image their publics hold of them. To help you do this, think of a large organisation you are familiar with, perhaps a clothes retailer, sports team or phone provider. Now make a list of the stakeholders of the organisation and next to each write the tactics that the organisation uses to influence them.

Such a list can be extensive and will probably contain some of the following:

- advertising
- community relations
- corporate colours and designs
- direct marketing
- events
- financial communications
- lobbying
- media relations
- newsletters
- personal selling
- relationship marketing
- sales promotion
- sponsorship
- staff training
- staff uniforms.

sation's organisational identity. In fact, the statement does not offer a definition of corporate identity – it simply states that every organisation has got a corporate identity. This is so because organisations exist within a societal context. Even by doing nothing an organisation conveys a message. Its stakeholders will still form an image of the organisation however active or inactive that organisation happens to be.

The Strathclyde Statement places great emphasis on the proactive element of organisational identity. As such, identity is described as 'a strategic issue' that should be managed by organisations and that this leads to a number of beneficial outcomes for the organisation.

There are very close links between the various concepts introduced so far in this chapter. It is the relationship between these concepts that creates a management function in organisations that has very specific responsibilities and aims. This management function is organisational public relations.

### think about 13.3 Unintentional factors in image change

Go back to the grocery store example from Activity 13.1 and consider possible unintentional factors that may have contributed to some of the customers' change in image of the store. These could have been elements to do with the service provided by an attendant – the person in question may have been affected by good or bad personal circumstances that influenced the way in which they treated a customer on a particular day. Maybe a delivery lorry was delayed by road repair works en route to the store, resulting in a shortage of stock of certain items a particular customer wanted to buy.

**box  
13.1**
**The International Corporate Identity Group's (ICIG) statement on corporate identity: 'The Strathclyde Statement'**

'Every organization has an identity. It articulates the corporate ethos, aims and values and presents a sense of individuality that can help to differentiate the organization within its competitive environment.

'When well managed, corporate identity can be a powerful means of integrating the many disciplines and activities essential to an organization's success. It can also provide the visual cohesion necessary to ensure that all corporate communications are coherent with each other and result in an image consistent with the organization's defining ethos and character.

'By effectively managing its corporate identity an organization can build understanding and commitment among its diverse stakeholders. This can be manifested in an ability to attract and retain customers and employees, achieve strategic alliances, gain the support of financial markets and generate a sense of direction and purpose. Corporate identity is a strategic issue.

'Corporate identity differs from traditional brand marketing since it is concerned with all of an organization's stakeholders and the multi-faceted way in which an organization communicates.'

Source: Balmer et al. in Balmer and Greyser 2003: 134

When comparing the various perceptions (images and reputation) of an organisation held by the various stakeholders of that organisation – including the internal stakeholders (for example, the frontline staff, the dominant coalition or management, and so on), it is likely that a gap or dissonance between those perceptions will appear.

Also, dissonance (inconsistency or conflict) might exist between how the organisation would like to be perceived and how it is perceived in reality. The task of organisational public relations is to reduce dissonances to a minimum. The 'tool' used by corporate public relations to achieve this is organisational identity. Organisational public relations strategies address the proactive and reactive actions and communications of the organisation as well as trying to minimise any negative unintentional ones. It is through doing this that organisational public relations influences the images and reputations of the organisation's stakeholder. (See Activity 13.4.)

What shapes and influences an organisation's identity? In essence, the answer to this question is what the organisation is like, the way it simply 'is'. Using a metaphorical approach, some authors (Bernstein 1984; Meech 1996, among others) have likened organisations to human beings. They talk about an organisation's personality as being that factor that defines what the organisation is like.

### Personality and culture

The concept of organisational personality is very difficult to pin down and define. Why? (See Activity 13.5.)

### activity 13.4

#### Comparing images

Let's do a quick comparison . . .

Think of two or three airlines, like a long-established national carrier and a low-cost newcomer, for example, and the different images you have about them. Now think of the types of communication and actions that made you arrive at those images. What is the nature or style of their corporate identities? What makes them different? Is it their advertising campaigns? The friendliness of their staff? . . .

It is difficult to define your own personality (see Chapter 14 for more about personalities). In the case of an organisation it is more difficult still. What group of stakeholders would we use to find out the personality of an organisation? What would we find if we were to ask more than one group of stakeholders? The simple fact that there are so many different stakeholders might lead to different answers to our questions.

To make matters more complicated, the terminology used by academics can be confusing. In addition to 'personality' the term 'culture' is often used.

**Definition:** *Organisational* (or corporate) *culture* is described as 'the way in which attitudes are expressed within a specific organisation' (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1999: 7).

This definition offers a wide-angled and encompassing view of *organisational culture*. The attitudes

### activity 13.5

#### Defining personality

Take a few seconds and answer the following quickly.

What is your personality? Are you an extrovert or an introverted person? A bit conservative or maybe rebellious?

The point here is not to dwell on your type of personality (however tempting this might be!). Take a moment now to think about how you arrived at your answer. What made you say you are the way you defined yourself to be just now? How do you know *what* your personality is?

#### Feedback

It is highly likely that you know what your personality type is because someone else told you or maybe you read the information after completing a test. In other words, you may have found that the answer to the question is based on someone else's image of you.

(and opinions) in an organisation are expressed through a variety of channels. Some are quite observable, like the different communications used, while some others are less so.

During the 1980s there was a strong tendency to look at organisational culture from a very prescriptive perspective, namely that which represented the views of the dominant coalition or management (Parker 2000). For some, this is still the prevalent perspective today. Important elements that affect an organisation's culture are its aims, the mission statement, and the overall strategy (the organisational objectives and the type of tactics the organisation uses to achieve them). In some cases, the founder's or owner's personality spreads onto the organisation's culture. This phenomenon is quite typical in small organisations or businesses, but it can also happen in larger ones – the Virgin group of companies and the influence of its founder, Richard Branson, are a good example of the link between the personality of a founder and the culture of an organisation ([www.virgin.co.uk](http://www.virgin.co.uk)).

The managerial version of organisational culture is imposed on stakeholders through very explicit rules, mission statements, procedures, organisational public relations, marketing communications, systems and styles of management (see Mini case study 13.1, overleaf). However, there are other aspects of an organisation's culture that are often less obvious:

- the predominant types of communications (personal vs impersonal) used in the organisation
- the level of formality vs informality in communications and personal interactions (for example, do customers need to fill in endless forms and paperwork before their requests are actioned?)

- tacit 'rules' for promotion (for example, are promotion opportunities the same for men and women?)
- unstated expectations from staff by management (for example, are employees 'expected' to work long hours?) and many others.

The managerial approach to culture in organisations tends not to consider such aspects. This less overt area of culture is explored in more detail by the French approach to identity (Moingeon and Ramanantsoa 1997).

### The 'iceberg' concept

The 'French school' likens the whole phenomenon of culture and identity to an iceberg, where the more 'obvious' elements are exposed while those elements that are more difficult to access and diagnose (rites, myths and taboos in an organisation) are 'under the surface'. The latter shape the internal dynamics of organisations and affect the organisation's identity and the image stakeholders have of the organisation.

Those engaged in organisational public relations must be aware that the invisible elements take a long time to be discovered and cannot be influenced or changed very easily. In a study of a merger of various French saving banks where employees from the various organisations were taken on by the new company, Moingeon (1999) found a number of elements, mainly feelings and perceptions among staff, that were covert (the submerged part of the 'iceberg'). Some of these were the nostalgia people felt for the warmth and friendliness of their 'old' organisation, the tensions that arose between staff from different 'old' companies, the view that power was not shared equitably between staff from the old organisations and the perception that a number of them had lost some level of autonomy as an individual after the merger. These feelings and perceptions are very real for those whom they affect and might have a degree of influence in the way these people behave and communicate among themselves and with other stakeholders – and, therefore, influence the organisational identity of the institution!

The managerial aspect of organisational personality will have a direct impact on the type and style of those elements that are proactively planned by an organisation as part of its organisational identity activities.

However, the managerial aspect of the personality can also affect the reactive and unintentional elements of the organisational identity. This influence might be reflected, for example, in times of





PICTURE 13.1 Icebergs have hidden elements beneath the water's surface. The 'French school' likens culture and identity to an iceberg, they consist of visible and concealed elements

crisis for the organisation, when it is imperative that the organisation tries to remain operational. In other words, the organisation must keep running its 'business as usual'. In order to achieve this, members of staff may be expected to show cooperation by working longer hours or taking over duties that are not usually their own. In such situations staff need to rely on their own initiative. However, this might be very difficult for staff if, for example, they have been used to working under a very authoritar-

ian management. This will affect their decisions and communications and, in doing so, shape the corporate identity the organisation is projecting towards stakeholders.

In addition to the managerial aspects, there are other elements that affect organisational personalities. These are articulated less formally but nevertheless are equally powerful and influential. Often the type of industry or activity will influence organisational culture. For example, if we think about the

### mini case study 13.1

## Mission statements and straplines

### Bayer

From Bayer's mission statement: 'Working to Create Value: Bayer is a global enterprise with core competencies in the fields of health care, nutrition and high-tech materials. Our products and services are designed to benefit people and improve their quality of life.'

Bayer's strapline in its global website: Bayer – Science For A Better Life

Source: [www.bayer.com](http://www.bayer.com)

### Nestlé

From Nestlé's Business Principles: 'Since Henri Nestlé developed the first milk food for infants in 1867, and saved the life of a neighbor's child, the Nestlé Company has aimed to build a business based on sound human values and principles.'

Nestlé's strapline: Nestlé – Good Food, Good Life

Source: [www.nestle.com](http://www.nestle.com)

banking industry in the last decade or two, it is apparent that banks have changed radically in the way they do business with their customers and in the way they are perceived by them. One aspect of this change is reflected in the design of bank premises. Gone are the days when banks were intimidating, fortress-like, safe-looking buildings. Today banks are housed in open, airy buildings designed to give customers and staff a friendly feeling.

Another element that can influence an organisation's personality is its country of origin. The culture of the country of origin often impacts on the social ways in which people interact in the organisation. (See also Hofstede on national culture in Chapter 17.)

Without wanting to reinforce national stereotypes, the culture of the country of origin is particularly influential in larger multinational organisations where it can shape behaviours, systems and, in general, the way things are done. For example, the former Swiss airline Swissair imposed the Swiss sense of punctuality on its staff around the world even in countries where the local customs related to punctuality were different. (See Mini case study 13.2.)

We can conclude then that organisational culture is made up of a number of overt (open to view) and a number of covert (concealed) elements with an area of interface where the overt and the covert elements converge.

### mini case study 13.2

## Audi



Source: Advertising Archives

One good illustration of how country of origin influences organisational identity is the case of the German car manufacturer Audi and its operations in some English-speaking countries around the world. In the UK, Audi has consciously incorporated a strapline in German, 'Vorsprung durch Technik' (advancement through technology), in its marketing communications activities. Similarly in South Africa, Audi is using 'Vorsprung, the spirit of Audi' in its communications.

Why is Audi using the language of its own country where the majority of people do not speak German? Audi is 'borrowing' the image among consumers in the UK and South Africa that things German are of good technical quality and linking this perception with its products and brand – the association here is so strong that customers need not speak German to understand the message!

Source: [www.audi.co.uk](http://www.audi.co.uk)

## Organisational identity, strategy and process: two models

Organisational public relations is a management function that uses strategies to achieve its aims and objectives. This way of working is similar to the strategic approach employed in any public relations campaign.

### Organisational identity management strategy

When reading books and journals about strategic management and also when discussing this topic with tutors and practitioners, we find that the specific words used to talk about strategic management are often very confusing – people employ terms like objectives, aims, strategy and so on very widely but often with different meanings. When we talk about strategy, do we mean a combination of different tools to achieve an outcome? Or do we mean the overall process of management? What is the difference between aims and objectives? It is wise practice to clarify terminology before we talk strategy. The main purpose of the model in Figure 13.2 is to ‘cut through the jargon’ by using simple open-ended questions in order to clarify what the various words mean and to

show what each stage in the model is about. The model is also a tool that reminds us of the different stages in a strategy and shows the relationships between the various elements that make up a strategic approach to organisational identity management within the realm of organisational public relations. (See also Chapters 2 and 10 for more about strategic planning.)

#### Research

Research helps you identify and/or clarify issues from the environment in order to define and fine-tune your strategy. Research will help you find answers to specific questions, which may address a multitude of areas, depending on the public relations task ahead. For example, through research you might be able to: define an aim (if this has not been provided); find out who the stakeholders are you need to target; get an indication as to what the best tactics are, and so on.

#### Aims

These provide you with the basic reason why you are going to engage in a particular communication strategy. Aims tend to be broad in nature and reflect the organisation’s mission statement or business principles.

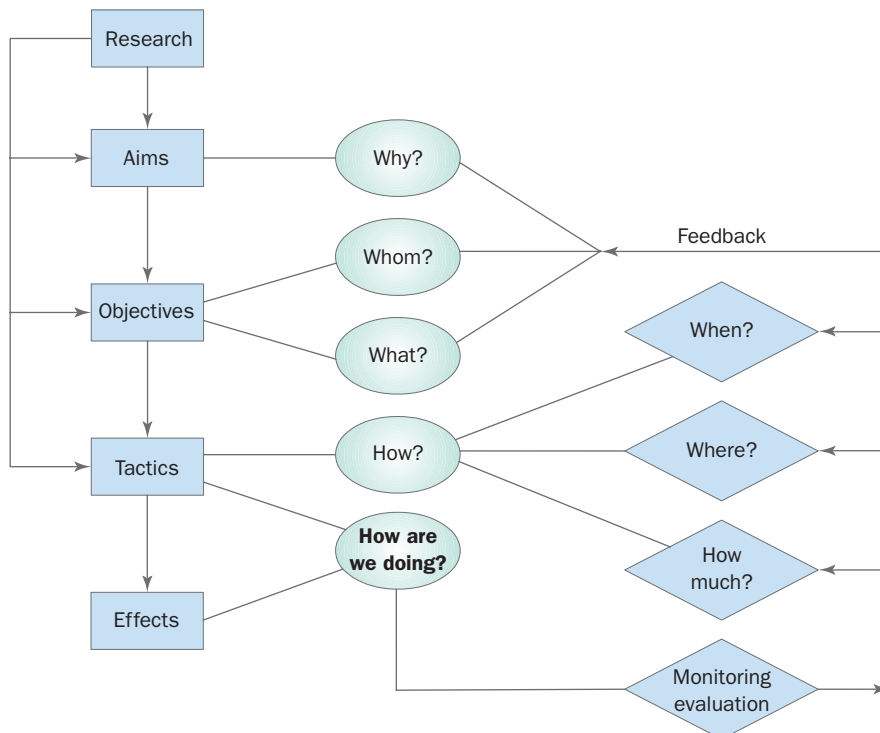


FIGURE 13.2 Organisational identity management strategy © Daniel Löwensberg. Used with permission. Source: based on Harrison 1995: 47–50.

### Objectives

Objectives are very time-specific goals you can measure. In general, good objectives will be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time bound). The objectives will make it clear who needs to be addressed (stakeholders) and what you are going to convey (the messages).

### Tactics

How are you going to achieve your objectives? What specific actions will you use? These could be several (for example, corporate advertising, media relations, and events). You will need to address questions of timing – when these actions are going to take place, where they are going to take place (you can consider both geographical locations and virtual ones, www) – and you will need to consider budgets (how much?).

### Effects

How are we doing? The arrows link monitoring and evaluation with all the elements in the model. This is so because you need to establish your efficiency while deploying your tactics during the strategy and also to work out whether your objectives and aims have been achieved at the end. The sort of questions you

will ask are: did we use the most resource-effective tactics? Do we need to change the publications we have targeted originally? Have we exceeded or fallen short of our planned objectives; if so, by how much? Are things happening on time? And so on. The ‘how are we doing?’ stage will help you correct any shortcomings while your strategy is ongoing and will also help you define your aims and objectives better for future projects (remember we all learn from experience . . .).

A word of advice about the model: it is intended to be a tool and as such you should feel free to adapt it to the circumstances in which you are going to use it. For example, you will need to decide the stages at which you will conduct research and what type of research you can afford. The number of objectives and tactics you decide to employ will be dependent on your professional judgement on the one hand, and, again, on the time and budget available on the other.

### Organisational reputation process

The next model, ‘Organisational reputation process’ (Figure 13.3), addresses the relationship between the various elements focused on in this chapter, namely organisational culture, organisational public relations, organisational identity, organisational image

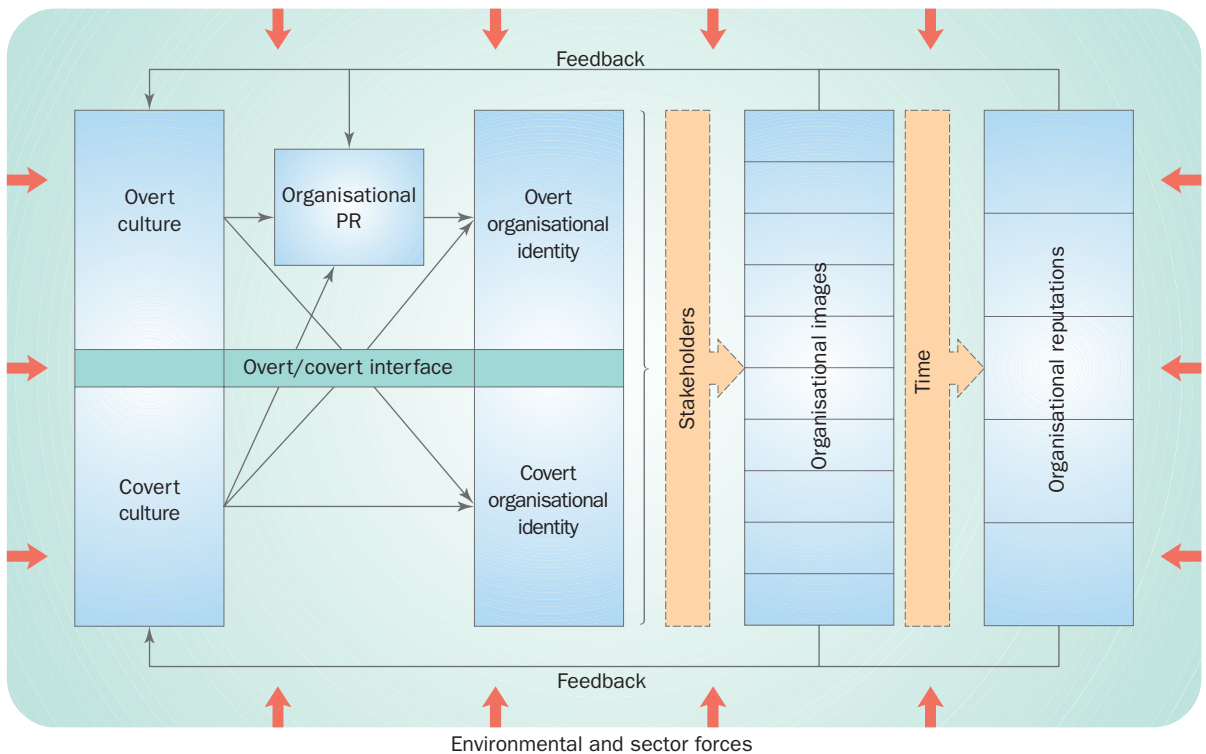


FIGURE 13.3 Organisational reputation process. Source: © Daniel Löwensberg. Used with permission

and organisational reputation. It places these elements in a process that consists of various stages. The model helps to understand which element has an influence on which other elements.

The model reminds communication practitioners of the elements that contribute to the formation of reputations. In addition, the model alerts them of the fact that the various phenomena involved do not happen in isolation and that we must always remember to look at the process as a 'whole' – very much in the same way as we discussed how to view organisations in the first section of this chapter.

### Environmental and sector forces

The whole organisational reputation process is immersed within an environmental and sector of activity context. The environmental forces consist of factors related to politics, the economy, social contexts, technology, information technology and communications, national and international laws, the natural environment, and so on. Sector forces refer to the sector or type of activity or industry the organisation belongs to (for example, the hotel industry, the charity sector or the government). Environmental and sector forces can influence every stage and section of the model, as well as the process as a whole, including feedback.

### Culture (overt and covert)

The starting point in the formation of organisational reputation is the organisation's culture – this concept includes the organisational personality, which has not been mentioned separately since it can be argued that culture and personality could be regarded as the same or are, at least, very closely interlinked and interdependent. The model highlights both cultural elements, the overt and covert ones, and how these have an influence on the next stages in the model.

### Overt/covert interface

This is the overlap area between overt and covert cultural elements. Using the French analogy of an iceberg again, this area is the water surface. Like any water surface, the interface zone is not static meaning that the divide between overt and covert culture can fluctuate – what is overt for some stakeholders will be covert for some others, for example. Organisational public relations professionals need to pay attention to the interface area. They need to discover covert cultural and identity elements in the organisation. In doing this, they will convert covert elements into overt ones for their own purpose and communication activities – otherwise the undiscovered covert elements could turn into

## case study 13.1

### Vulcan's organisational reputation among employees

Vulcan Industries is a British manufacturer of high-quality cookers. At the time of the research the company had grown to approximately 800 employees who worked in a number of different sections, including engineering, marketing and management. The research looked at organisational culture in Vulcan and at its identity. Through a process of qualitative research it was discovered that the company had a number of issues in relation to its workforce and the image of the firm held by its employees. Some of these issues are going to be presented here to illustrate the validity and use of the organisational reputation model.

A message of a 'family-type organisation with a common language' (*overt culture*) was used by management in messages to staff (*organisational public relations*) to convey a happy message (*overt identity*) to them. However, there were a number of rituals (*covert culture*) in the company that had an influence on the *covert identity* the firm conveyed to staff. For example, there was a ritual by which people of one section would eat in a specific area of the refectory and never move to another section's area. This custom contradicted the 'friendly' *overt identity* promoted by management

by promoting a perception of 'us and them' (*covert identity*) in the workforce. Also, the geographical location of offices and workshops (*overt culture*) and the quality of décor, which was more lavish in the 'white-collar' work areas and offices than in the workshop managers' offices (*overt culture*), contributed to the segregation (*covert culture*) in the firm. An illustration of the *overt/covert* interface area could be found in the divide (another ritual) that existed between old and new members of staff, which is a very personal matter and could vary from person to person. Public relations professionals need to recognise the existence of this ritual when implementing communication strategies that target these two stakeholder groups to avoid miscommunication.

One of the interesting findings in the research was that members of staff would report different images at different *times* to the researcher. At some moments in time, depending on the situation, they would reflect the 'family' *overt identity* while at some others they would reflect the fragmented nature of the *covert identity*.

Source: adapted from Parker 2000: 127–156

## think about 13.4 **Vulcan case study**

This abbreviated example shows the complexity inherent in the formation of organisational image and reputation in just one group of stakeholders. It also illustrates the importance of time and context, on the one hand, and the fact that organisational reputation in the minds of stakeholders is made up of many different images on the other.

Have you noticed any differences between the stated or overt culture of a workplace or university and the actual behaviour, practices and attitudes (covert culture)? How do you explain any gaps?

barriers to the public relations communication process.

### Organisational public relations

This is the management function that operates in a proactive and deliberate way using strategies to achieve its goals (see Figure 13.3). Because of this it is placed in the overt section of the model. However, covert cultural elements will also have an influence on it.

### Organisational identity (covert and overt)

The model shows that the organisational identity also has an overt and a covert aspect – some of its aspect are premeditated communications efforts by the organisation, while some others happen without the organisation being proactive or consciously involved in the communication. Organisational identity is affected by the overt and covert cultural aspects as well as by organisational public relations strategies.

### Stakeholders

These are the publics who are the receivers of the organisation's identity. They process the organisational identity and create organisational images in their minds.

### Organisational images

There are many organisational images. They will vary from stakeholder to stakeholder and, within one

stakeholder's mind, they will also be numerous and accumulate over time. Influences from environmental forces can be particularly relevant in the shaping of organisational images.

### Time

Time is the factor that will allow for an accumulation of organisational images that will contribute to the formation of organisational reputations in the minds of stakeholders.

### Organisational reputations

Similar to the case of organisational images, there are many organisational reputations. Reputations will vary from stakeholder to stakeholder, and will also be influenced to some degree by environmental forces.

### Feedback

The organisation must put research tactics in place in order to obtain feedback from its stakeholders' perceptions (the organisational images and reputations). In addition to premeditated research tactics, feedback will also return to the organisation through unplanned channels (for example, gossip between internal and external stakeholders or unprompted opinions from customers). Feedback will therefore inform the overt culture of the organisation (for example, the business principles dictated by the dominant coalition) and organisational public relations strategies, as well as elements of the covert culture. (See case study 13.1 and Think about 13.4.)

## Summary

The main aims of this chapter were to introduce the concept of organisational public relations, to define some of the terms used and also to present the strategic processes involved in this activity.

Organisational public relations can be used by any type of organisation. Also, organisational public rela-

tions acts like an umbrella covering every sector of the organisation and provides a sense of cohesion to its activities.

Image is a stakeholder's perception of an organisation at one moment in time. Stakeholders accumulate a number of images of an organisation over time. The

aggregate of images forms the organisational reputation in the minds of the stakeholders.

Organisational identity consists of the sum total of proactive, reactive and unintentional activities and messages of organisations. Organisational public relations uses the proactive and sometimes the reactive elements of identity as a tool to help reduce the dissonance that might exist between how the organisation would like to be perceived by its stakeholder and the actual image the stakeholder has of the organisation. Organisational public relations uses a strategic approach in its management of the organisation's identities.

An important element that has an influence in an organisation's image and reputation is its own culture or personality. Organisational culture has two aspects: the overt ones – those that are easily recognisable and premeditated; the covert, often present as rituals or 'ways of doing things and behaving' that are not explicit. Both these elements of culture have a defining influence on the identities projected by the organisation and, therefore, will affect images and reputations of the organisation. Consequently, it is vital that professionals working in organisational public relations are aware of both elements of organisational culture to produce effective communications in line with their strategies.

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For glossary definitions relevant to this chapter, visit the **selected glossary** feature on the website at: [www.pearsoned.co.uk/tench](http://www.pearsoned.co.uk/tench)