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THE IMAGE OF A RESEARCH INSTITUTION AS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN SHAPING THE LEVEL OF COMPETITIVENESS OF THE ORGANISATION

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Summary

The primary objective of the publication is defining the factors and processes affecting the efficient course of actions undertaken around building a positive image of the organisation. The study raises key aspects of this issue. The diagnosis providing that the recipient is guided in his/her purchasing decisions by the opinions about a given product or service that reach them through all the available content distribution channels is appearing increasingly often in subsequent study findings. The same studies have also confirmed that an inherent feature of a knowledge-based economy is the level of the intangible asset share as regards determining the position of an organisation (brand, reputation). The unbridled increase in competition has led to the generation of a growing volume of advertising offers for buyers, as a result of which standing out among other market players has now become more of an issue. One of the ways to enhance an organisation's presence in a changing environment includes measures promoting its positive image creation and shaping of favourable (valuable) opinions about it. The selection of the appropriate image concept to a constantly changing business environment in terms of competing or consumer preferences requires an effective response to their experiences in the cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions. If they are positive, they will contribute to building a favourable mindset among consumers, which in turn will facilitate the formation of a positive image of the organisation.

Keywords: organisation, image of an organisation, identity of an organisation, corporate identity, reputation, image management, brand, competitiveness of an organisation, minib

Introduction

In an era of increasing market competition, every organisation wanting to stand out on a saturated market must take great care in building its image. This is because the commitment and effort put into its creation and into maintaining it at an appropriate level contributes to securing the right position in the awareness of clients, employees and the business environment.

A prominent reputation consistent with the organisation's business strategy facilitates sales, encourages high profitability ratios and creates new opportunities for development in the area of new offerings, new client groups, and markets. Thus, the nurturing of the image is a key element in the effective management of a scientific and research organisation.

The image is a complex, intellectual or sensory interpretation, a way of perceiving somebody or something, a product of the mind resulting from deduction based on the available premises — both real and imagined, which is contingent on impressions, beliefs, ideas, and emotions.

An image is an opinion that the environment has about the organisation and its activities. It is an image of the institution in the minds of people. This picture is based on a spectrum of different assessments, experiences, perceptions, views, and expectations related to the organisation.

Most definitions of the image of a scientific and research organisation suggest that it is something external to the organisation which is formed in the awareness of recipients. One could say that the ultimate designator of an organisation's image is the mind of the buyer, which operates on two levels: the conscious, responsible for rational analysis (an analysis of the offer's utilitarian features in the cost-benefit aspect), and the unconscious, concerning the intangible advantages, experiences, and emotions. The concept of experiential marketing taking account of both the cognitive and emotional processes taking place in the mind of the recipient enables both perspectives of analysis to be linked.

The image plays a very important role in marketing activity as it shapes the approach to created concepts. It is closely related to the adopted business model, which contains essential elements and values presented by the organisation in the offering to the client. The type of these elements depends on the consumer attitudes. Those that affect the reputation of the

organisation should, for image reasons, be the most emphasised and highly featured. Each offering contains specific functional components (factors) as in the number of contractors and the goods or services sold). The most important, essential to the brand quality shaping process, are the self-expression (emotional) components constituting the consumer assessment. The emotional factor is manifest in the attitudes and sentiment of the environment in relation to the organisation, the individual experiences in contact with it or the information obtained about it, which is frequently linked to functional factors. Marketing is charged with taking measures to shape the appropriate image of the offerings and of the institution alike. The choice of tools and methods used in such actions may vary depending on the image objective of the organisation. Moreover, considering the highly competitive market and if considering the image concept through the dimension of a consumer's assessment of an organisation, it becomes perfectly clear that building marketing without the image is not at all easy, albeit not impossible, but highly cost-intensive and much more time consuming. It is also unstable. Ineffective marketing and the ensuing trade deficit and unrealised business assumptions are the primary consequence of a badly built image of an organisation.

According to Piotr Masiukiewicz, the credibility of an organisation and the corresponding confidence levels of stakeholders constitute a valuable intangible asset of theirs, boosting competitiveness on the market. The scientific institutions that understand this dependence build their credibility and strengthen consumer confidence in this very way. The marketing instruments creating the image of a scientific and research organisation are important in building its credibility.

As the organisation has no direct impact on its external image, it should take such factors as organisational identity, reputation, service offering, the environment, and contact staff into account in the image management process.

Corporate identity

The concept of corporate image is often confused with identity. This is not the right approach. The concepts of image and identity of a scientific

and research organisation are related but constitute separate categories.

Identity is the way in which an organisation identifies itself and is distinguishable in the market environment.

Identity constitutes a comprehensive, proprietary image which the institution intends to convey to the market in the communication process, whereas the image is a reflection of the organisation's identity in the awareness of the recipients of the message.

A building block of the identity of a scientific and research organisation is visual identity, which consists of the trade name, the company logo and symbols, as well as the organisation's corporate colours and typography. Furthermore, the following non-visual areas also fall under identity:

- Corporate attitude — covering the philosophy and the mission of the organisation;
- Corporate behaviour — designated by the forms of operation of an institution; and
- Corporate communication as a system of communication with the external and internal environment.

Marketing communications sent to clients in writing — technology offerings for commercial use, reports on achievements featuring a rationale of the study or investigation plans and their implementation expenditure should be consistent with the visual identification of the institution. They repeatedly reach the client and directly affect him/her, becoming a recognisable showcase of the scientific and research organisation committed to making the given brand recognisable on the market.

Corporate identity is manifest in the surroundings in unified best practices and communication models expressing the philosophy of the institution. It is composed of visual identity understood as a unique visual and aesthetic code allowing the very information (signals) that matter most to the organisation to be conveyed, that is, such that build or consolidate its favourable image in the environment.

Corporate identity is not just a question of the adopted name and symbolism but, above all, the personality of the organisation and its principles of conduct rooted in the embraced value system. It consists of a clearly defined strategy and initiative presented to the recipient using

appropriate communication templates. Organisations focus solely on the visual and verbal identification system when building their image. They carry out these actions, devoting most of their attention to creating a colourful logo and distinct name based on their own aesthetics, forgetting to match the symbolic sphere with the business strategy. It is imperative that both the appearance as well as the markings of all the components of scientific and research organisation activities are an inherent part of the system of presentation and of the organisational culture. When creating the image of the organisation, one might venture comparing it to the human body where the mind is the mission, the vision, or the strategy of the organisation, the soul is the organisational structure, the voice is the communication, where all these elements interact with each other.

In so much as the identity is the strategy, the image is the context for this strategy existing in the brand environment, its reflection in the reality of the competitive environment, positioning is a tactic intended to lead to a state of maximum convergence of the image with the identity. Positioning entails measures connected with the creation of the offering and of the image leading to claiming an important and prominent place in the memory of target audiences. Positioning aims to specify and promote the differences that will help the organisation stand out in a crowd of competitors, encourage purchasing, lead to loyalty, and evoke associations in accordance with the adopted, desired identity.

Corporate image

While the manner in which managers perceive the organisation, its features, advantages that it gives, and values that it represents determines the actual identity, its desired equivalent presents the condition that the same managers would like to achieve. It refers to their plans, goals and ambitions concerning the brand. The image, however, is a firmly rooted picture of the organisation in the awareness of recipients. Organisations, through measures intended to shape specific brand associations in recipients, create a desired image that frequently differs from the expected image. As recipients register a picture that differs from that desired by the organisation, they create the actual image.

Specific differences between the desired and the actual image of the organisation may exist in the awareness of recipients. The source of these differences is the impact (interference) of the marketing environment factors of the organisation on the desired image. Customer satisfaction researchers emphasise that the subjective and sometimes irrational concepts or, at times, even misconceptions of clients about the organisation should be treated as the actual condition it is in since it based on these very perceptions that buyers create an image of the scientific and research organisation and make their choice of offer.

The ideal state for an organisation is one where the actual image is a reflection of the organisation's desired image.

Unfortunately, in practice we are often faced with a lack of harmony in this respect. The causes of this divide between the desired and the actual image may include:

- Failure to ensure adequate responsiveness of the organisation's attributes towards external and internal client expectations;
- An inefficient system of communication with the environment;
- Discrepancies between the declarations of the organisation and its actual behaviour;
- Lack of active participation of workers in the image creation process of a scientific and research organisation;
- Negative past experiences of clients and employees.

The effectiveness of the image shaping process which is close to the intended image is also conditional on the level of knowledge about clients and competition, an integrated marketing communication system, and building positive client experiences in the sphere of product and customer service quality.

The scope of the conducted actions in the sphere of marketing management in relation to the image of a scientific and research organisation and its brand reveals a strong resemblance on the planning, organisation, coordination and oversight stage. Similar study methods and techniques (monitoring the press, projection methods, word association tests, sentence completion tests, drawing collages, as well as brand party techniques, bubble diagrams, Brandsights-core, and PCDs — perceptual

circle diagrams) are used to analyse the corporate image and position of a given brand on the market. Comparable measures are also used in their measurement, e.g.: assisted memory where the respondent chooses the brand/institution from the presented list; and spontaneous memory where the respondent recalls the name of the brand/institution using his/her own efforts upon provision of the goods category. Public relations and advertising play a vital role in the shaping of the image and of the brand on the communication action phase.

The prime objective of every organisation should be the creation of an image that would correspond to the current market situation and be consistent with its vision. In order to meet these challenges, the situation requires continuous monitoring, a plan of action must be developed and implemented, and a system controlling the adopted solutions must be in place.

Cooperation

The mission of every organisation, regardless of the nature of the business, is development. Organisations do not act independently in this scope. The constantly evolving market requires cooperation in order to be successful. Not every organisation is capable of creating and delivering a product or service completely single-handedly, while others are incapable of meeting challenges when confronted with new technologies.

Three main factors for establishing cooperation between organisations can be identified:

- To a much greater extent than ever, many skills and resources essential to the success of an organisation lie outside its limits and beyond the direct control of the management board;
- In order to take full advantage of the arising opportunities, scientific and research organisations must be capable of creating, shaping, and maintaining a wide range of strategic alliances;
- The objective of every cooperation is achieving a synergy effect — together, we can gain much more than by acting alone, however, this cooperation may produce different effects.

The business model, as general concept, formulates the framework of the logic of running a business and such features thereof as innovation and competitiveness. Thus, it encompasses a description of the values offered to clients, the basic resources, actions, and relationships with partners, which serve the purpose of creating this value and ensure its competitiveness.

Competitiveness

Nowadays, competitiveness is set at a higher level, exceeding the dimension of the service itself and encompassing the sphere of purchase experiences and perceptions at every phase of the relationship with the research institute. Client experience includes all the impressions elicited through contacts with the organisation and arises from the cognitive and emotional analysis of marketing stimuli. No organisation can avoid elicited client experiences but every organisation can consciously shape these experiences. Harnessing the power of experiential marketing in the organisation's strategies not only presents a considerable challenge but also an opportunity for the institution in the scope of positive image building.

Attention should be given to three fundamental competitive strategies in order to retain the expected position on the market appropriate to the relevant sector of business and to generate better results:

1. Leadership in terms of total costs (cost leadership);
2. Differentiation (diversification);
3. Concentration (greater scale of specialised activities).

The manner of achieving a competitive advantage is very different in all the strategies. The defining of competitive strategies reveals that focus on the detail or the area where there is a great potential for competitiveness for the organisation is important to obtain positive effects of the actions undertaken because remaining active in all three areas and maintaining the lead position at the same time is rather unlikely. Today, organisations, in order to significantly emphasise their presence on the market, are forced to create their own competitive advantage with the use of bold solutions. Apart from the presentation of the common attributes of the offered products or services, the reputation of the organisation is becoming increasingly important.

If change is a feature of today's economy, paradigms of competition cannot remain stagnant. The fact that building on specific schema was effective yesterday does not mean that its utilisation will be equally successful today. Achieving and keeping a competitive edge in an increasingly competitive and chaotic environment is not an easy task. Setting a scientific and research organisation apart from the competition and soliciting clients requires new values to be incorporated into the offering, which increasingly more often include intangible factors like the brand, the reputation, the value of experiences, and the quality of the relationship. Intangible assets are becoming an important tool in contemporary times for competition between scientific and research organisations and, as they are difficult to imitate, they heighten the resistance of the organisation to external competition. This is of particular importance in the situation of an open market and accelerating globalisation processes.

In a fast-changing business culture, building an image strategy taking the emotional needs of recipients into account is more than just an opportunity for the organisation to be distinguished but rather a requirement of the transition of the economy into the era of experience economy.

Experience economy is one of the characteristics of contemporary economies.

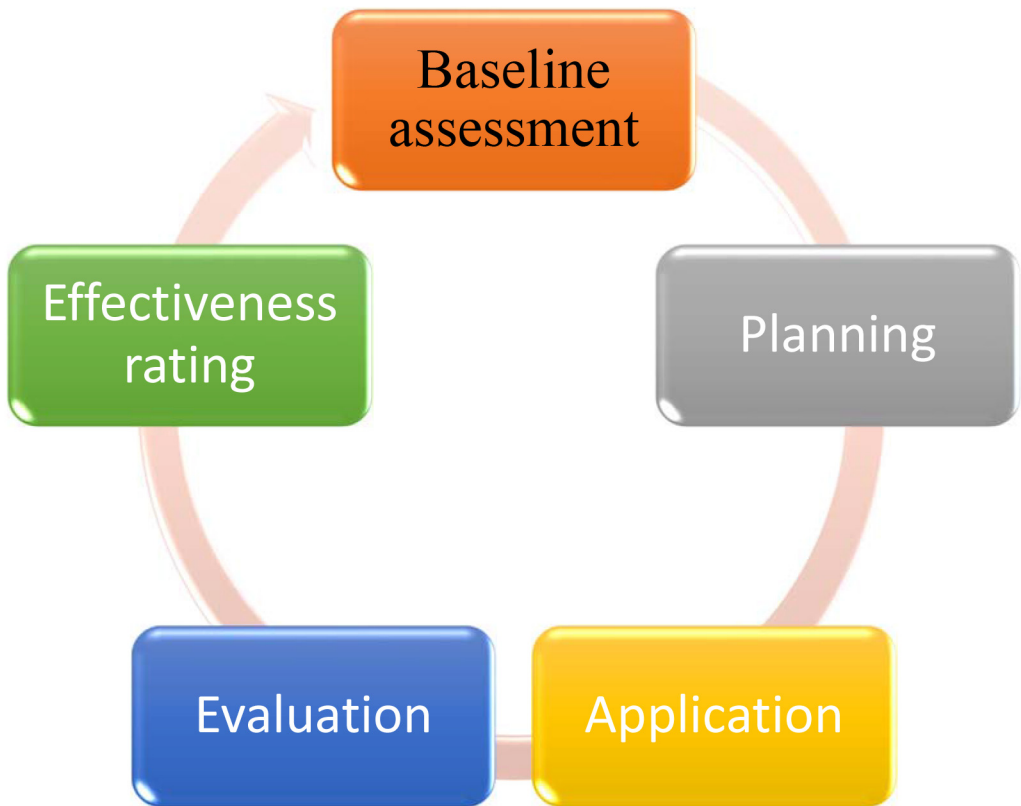
Image creation of a scientific and research organisation

The image creation of a scientific and research organisation is a continuous process. An assessment of the effectiveness of the actions undertaken in this process is the starting point on the way towards the planning and implementation of further action.

The baseline assessment is conducted based on preliminary studies aimed at identifying the present image of the organisation and of the competition, the sentiments and opinions of recipients, communication tools distributing the message and its impact on the target audience, as well as the development policy introduced by the institution, which should be included in the image communication. Strategic planning can be characterised as a structured decision-making process facilitating building the desired image of the organisation and agreeing on the methods used in its development. The planning process can be divided into several stages:

1. Definition of the operational objectives based on the adopted strategic objectives;
2. Target group identification;
3. Selection of appropriate image management tools;
4. Determination of the magnitude of funds (expenditure) enabling the execution of the planned measures.

Figure 1. Image creation process

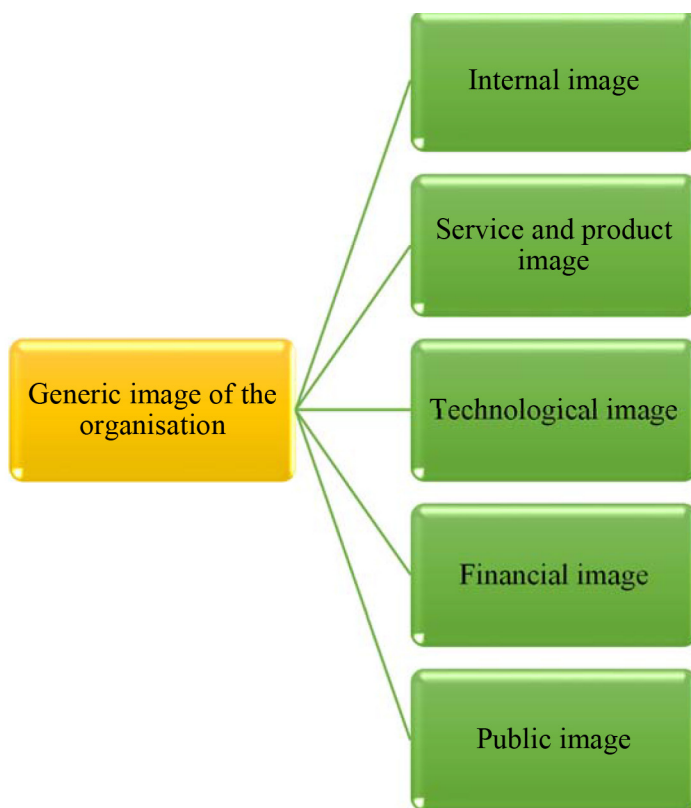


Source: Own elaboration based on: Katarzyna Majchrzak. Zarządzanie reputacją w przedsiębiorstwach sektora naftowego. [Reputation management in oil companies] Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH [Warsaw School of Economics Publishing House].

Prior to commencing with the creation process of the desired image of the organisation, an analysis of the organisation's strategic objectives outlined in the adopted mission and vision for development has to be

carried out. During this analysis one has to bear in mind that the generic image of the organisation consists of several indirect images (factors) incorporating the elements presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Components of the generic image of the organisation

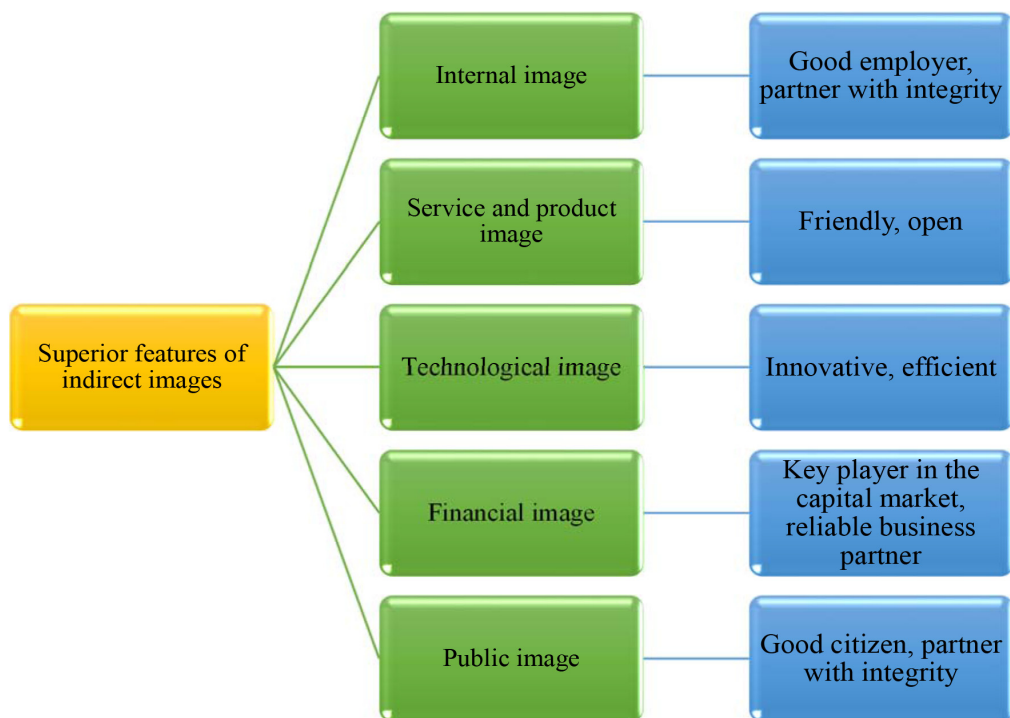


Source: Own elaboration based on: Katarzyna Majchrzak. Zarządzanie reputacją w przedsiębiorstwach sektora naftowego. [Reputation management in oil companies] Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH [Warsaw School of Economics Publishing House].

During the subsequent stage in the generic image shaping process, the definitive qualities that are characteristic of the organisation and are consistent with its corporate personality (identity) require identification for each of the aforementioned indirect images. Figure 3 presents a diagram of the superior features of indirect images. A maximum of three superior features should be selected from among a long list of features for each indirect

image. It is important that the actual, transparent image of the organisation, stripped of any false features, is shaped at this stage. Over time, the recipient will always detect any falseness, which will lead to the organisation losing its credibility. If the created image is a reflection of the actual image of the organisation, this mitigates the possibility of it being deformed while at the same time improving its creation efficiency. The seamless presentation of indirect images enables the creation of a uniform generic (mass) image and obtaining a positive evaluation from the target group.

Figure 3. Superior features of indirect images

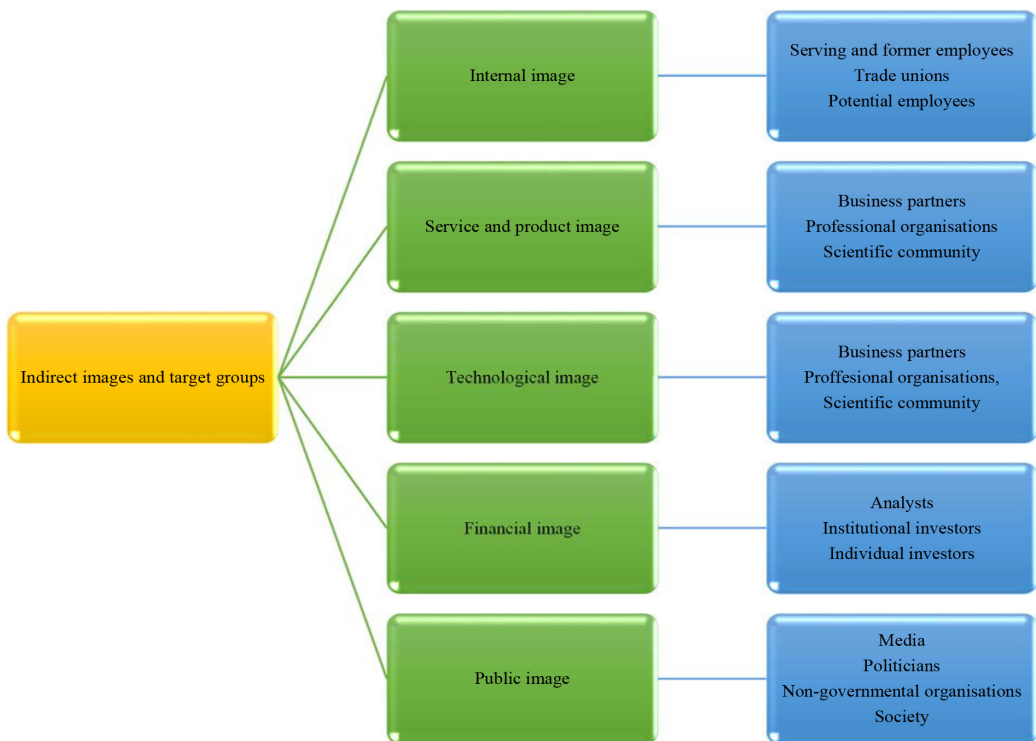


Source: Own elaboration based on: Katarzyna Majchrzak. Zarządzanie reputacją w przedsiębiorstwach sektora naftowego. [Reputation management in oil companies] Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH [Warsaw School of Economics Publishing House].

The next stage in the process of creating the image of an organisation is defining the target groups. Before taking any action, the following questions must be answered: who is the recipient, what is their significance for the organisation, what impact do they have or will they have on its operations?

Figure 4 shows the indirect images and their target groups. A common strategy in place until quite recently, which concentrated all efforts on influential recipients alone thereby downplaying the needs of any other groups, now seems to be *passé*. The reason for this is the development of the information society. The ability of this society to exert an influence is incomparably greater and, using computer networks, creates a global, free and publicly accessible information exchange system. The recipients, due to their multi-layered nature, the volatility of the point of relation to the organisation, can belong to more than one group, being both a shareholder and a local community member at the same time, or also act as an employee and a client alike, etc. The variability in these relationships increases the strength of their impact as well as their significance for the organisation, which is why no identified target audience group should be disregarded at this stage of implementation of the process.

Figure 4. Wizerunki pośrednie a grupy odbiorców



Source: Own elaboration based on: Katarzyna Majchrzak. Zarządzanie reputacją w przedsiębiorstwach sektora naftowego. [Reputation management in oil companies] Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH [Warsaw School of Economics Publishing House].

Once the objectives and recipient groups have been identified, the tool selection stage ensues facilitating contact with these groups. This requires the appropriate selection of tools for each indirect image, which will assist the execution of the measures connected with shaping the image of the organisation.

The choice of tools harnessed in the indirect image creation process:

Internal image:

- Internal communications: intranet, internal television, presentations;
- Sponsorship: staff parties and functions, anniversary celebrations, team-building events;
- Two-way communication: meetings with the Management Board and inter-departmental meetings;
- Comment and suggestion boxes.

Service and product image:

- Advertising campaigns;
- Promotional actions;
- Information campaigns;
- Sponsored articles.

Technological image:

- Direct contacts: informal meetings, open days, trade fairs, exhibitions, seminars, workshops, and lectures;
- Environmental reporting.

Financial image:

- Reports;
- Interviews;
- Roadshows.

Public image:

- Charitable activities;
- Sponsorship, donations;
- Lobbying;
- Involvement in the life of the community in which the organisation operates, e.g., through non-governmental organisations.

Programmes supporting indirect image creation processes are created to obtain the expected brand positions. The image created by the programme can take various forms and, for instance, show the organisation as the leader in a particular branch of industry, an environmentally-friendly company, and a trustworthy citizen.

The image creation process of every organisation often is a laborious and drawn-out process where one wrong move could ruin many years of work, thus, having the opposite effect to that desired. Given its sensitive nature, the process of rebuilding a weakened image may extend over many years. However, keeping it on the appropriate level assumes long-term prospects of success. Therefore, relevant internal and external programmes are created based on the broad range of advantages which assist the desired image creation process and, in the long run, further consolidate a strong reputation. The programmes implemented within the organisation refer to two core segments that have a significant impact on the reputation of the corporation, namely, product quality and organisational integration. Pursuing the right quality management policy informs employees of the position of the organisation in relations with clients, makes staff aware of the stature the organisation has, and of how responsible it is for its own offering. The role of external programmes, on the other hand, is creating an image that will help foster positive relations with clients.

A panel of services focusing on the artificial image creation of an organisation on the internet has been dynamically developing for some time now (*complaint remover, remove your name, reputation defender*). These solutions consist of creating a large volume of positive content about the organisation and possibly removing negative content from the

web. These actions allow the image of an organisation to be built relatively rapidly but this has often led to misrepresentations, which may prove to be detrimental to the organisation over time.

Building a corporate identity

An important consideration in building corporate identity is bringing together all the elements that are part of the organisation, also in the communicated corporate identity dimension. The creation of a homogenous identity in the area of organisation allows for the communication of its transparent and genuine organism, which facilitates the creation of clearer perceptions of the components of organisations forming (reflecting) its competences and potential.

A strong corporate identity is essential for an organisation's internal and external processes. It intensifies consolidation processes inside the organisation, facilitating greater awareness among employees of being a part of structures of a strong and stable economic operator. It presents a strong, well-established position of a reliable strategist with a clear vision of development in the market space, which empowers it to create the expected image in the context of the entire organisation as well as specific components. In the long-term perspective, it becomes a clear confirmation of the organisation's potential.

Tendencies and preferences designated by competitive, both domestic and foreign organisations are an important factor on the path to forging a uniform corporate identity. In order to efficiently preserve or successfully improve the established market position, the performance of those tasks in the field of communication that will be capable of responding to the activities of the competition, becomes a major factor.

The creation of a transparent brand structure within the organisation is a decisive factor for the implementation of a uniform corporate identity. A transparent brand structure should indicate both the place and the significance of each of the components across the entire organisation. An optimal model from the point of view of the achievement of the organisation's consolidation objectives ordering the relationships between its various components is the monolithic model. This model assumes

building a complete and consistent identity of all components making up the organisation, both on the linguistic (verbal) and visual levels. On the linguistic level, this involves actions aimed at standardising the naming (nomenclature) of various components of the organisation and, on the visual, brand logo level, this comprises of shaping the corporate identity. The monolithic model, through setting the path to change the existing brand structure, should be treated as the target, which conditions the selection of the indirect vision for the implementation of the visual identity of the organisation in the area of its various components.

At each stage of implementation of the new corporate identity, the obligation to inform employees of the projects carried out in this framework cannot be overlooked. Apart from actions on the corporate level, the involvement of all the components of the organisation in the information measures of the marketing and public relations departments is of paramount importance. A technical factor determining the implementation of the new corporate identity is the harmonisation of the procedure in the field of visual communications of each of the components of the organisation and developing its own systems of visual identification respecting the individual communication interests of the specific components of the organisation.

Risks and adverse effects

The lack of control over the activities of the brand owner related to its image may prove to be disastrous for the organisation. In the absence of coordination of these actions, the brand, apart from the expected image, also becomes an element of other, unwanted perceptions and connotations. The cause of this state of affairs should not be solely confided to the errors committed on the stage of determining the marketing mix. These errors may already occur at earlier stages. Moreover, they do in fact occur when:

- Several alternative options of the desired identity arise in the organisation. The situation where different departments and people are working on the brand and their actions are completely different and in no way coordinated is very precarious. Every one of them presents and

implements a different vision. Consequently, such actions lead to brand schizophrenia. Alterations to fixed standards, unless on the ground of exceptional circumstances, are out of the question. Every ill-conceived interference in already adopted directives may create confusion on the market and destroy the level of awareness of the supported brand. Any modifications in visual identification may only be justified by such important factors as changes in competitive organisation behaviour, the development of new aesthetic tastes of clients, the emergence of numerous attempts of imitation on the market, the introduction of new quality standards, and changes in the ownership structure;

- Only one identity strategy is held but positioning takes place in conditions of an uncontrolled margin of discretion of actions in this field, which are being taken by different departments and different people. In effect, efforts are being made to create one image but in different and all too often mutually exclusive ways. The actual image is formed in the awareness of the recipients, which was forged by a combination of many factors. When this image complies with the desired identity it may be deemed that the brand was successful at this stage. Otherwise, corrective action is required. The starting point for acquiring knowledge on the subject is feedback in the form of marketing surveys. The information obtained in this way has an impact on the way the brand is perceived by managers, becoming the driving force for further action in the field of enhancing the visibility of the characteristic features, advantages and values that it conveys (actual identity). In order to obtain maximum convergence between the desired identity and the actual image, this process should be repeated.

Conclusions

The image, as the product of consistent and wisely tailored actions to the organisation, has a measurable impact on the organisation's standing. It enables the creation of bonds with recipients. Despite the activities facilitating image creation clearly not being a straightforward matter, they seem to be the only relevant solution in times of growing competition and market dynamics.

Corporate image building is a complex process. What is important in the process of shaping it is taking those actions that refer to the condition and resources of existing realities. Every organisation should take the following into account when developing its image: the adopted values, the mission of the organisation, the skills held, the standards of behaviour and other components of the organisational culture, as well as the adopted strategies, the product and brand resources, and the organisation's material and financial foundations. What is important is for the content reaching the recipients to be consistent with their personal experiences that have developed around frequent contacts with the organisation.

The success of image communication depends on the level of recognition and uniqueness of corporate identity in relation to the sector environment. It is important for managers to consistently analyse the condition and position of the organisation.

The positive image of a scientific and research organisation has a major impact on the competitive advantage of the organisation. The creation of the appropriate image enables the organisation to cut advertising costs, reduce client purchasing decision time, create a positive image of the organisation as a trusted business partner both among suppliers and clients alike, reinforce the position of the organisation on the market, increase customer service quality, and forge the personality of the organisation.

The performance of activities generating positive attitudes among recipients is the overarching prerequisite of every image strategy and gist of building an organisation's value. The successful building of the image of an organisation generates attitudes and reactions among recipients that will have an impact on the desired image of the organisation. The essence of contemporary marketing is focusing on the management of the perceptions and attitudes of recipients. Those positively tinged will account for the organisation's particularly significant image assets.

A competitive advantage can only be gained if a positive image is created of the organisation. This is done by enhancing and emphasising its unique characteristics if the potential hidden inside it has not yet been fully exploited, or by creating its image from scratch if earlier actions undertaken to this end failed to produce the intended effects. A tangible result of a positive perception of the organisation's image is the respect

instilled among investors, which leads to an increase in the added value of the organisation. It increases the organisation's resources, its intangible assets, and also leads to a fresh inflow of capital to all the component parts of the organisation. In conclusion, to be successful, the organisation has to do better in anticipating the future and take strategic image decisions, which will, in turn, contribute to strengthening the competitiveness of the organisation.

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