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The impact of organisational characteristics on corporate visual identity

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to develop a research model to investigate corporate visual identity (CVI) management from an organisational perspective. It is assumed that characteristics of the organisation and of the way a CVI is managed will affect consistency of CVI.

Design/methodology/approach – The model was tested in a survey carried out among employees in 20 Dutch organisations. Structural equation modelling with AMOS was conducted to get insight into the various influences and relationships.

Findings – CVI management characteristics – socialisation processes related to CVI, knowledge of CVI strategy, and CVI tools and support – have a strong impact on the consistency of CVI, and organisational characteristics affect the way CVI is managed. With the exception of the openness and dynamics of an organisation, no supporting evidence was found for a direct relationship between organisational characteristics and CVI consistency.

Research limitations/implications – CVI has been measured by the judgement of the respondents, all employees of the organisation concerned. Therefore the measure was the *perceived* consistency of CVI. Further research could include a visual audit and the perception of external stakeholders towards the visual identity. There was no distinction examined among the main corporate visual identity and sub- or product brands. The study was conducted in the Netherlands, where the Dutch term *huissijl* is unambiguous and clearly related to the corporate brand or identity. Future research can take different brands into account or can broaden the concept of CVI (including cultural aspects, language, rituals, myths, etc.).

Practical implications – The results indicate that CVI management matters, that CVI management is related to more general organisational characteristics, but that communication managers nevertheless have a considerable amount of freedom in determining the way they manage their CVI.

Originality/value – Corporate visual identity has received little attention in research and hardly been studied at all from the perspective of this paper. This paper has value to both researchers in the fields of corporate identity and organisational identity, as well as professionals involved in managing the corporate identity.

Keywords Corporate identity, Corporate communications, Organizational culture, Logos, The Netherlands

Paper type Research paper

The concept of corporate identity has undergone some remarkable changes. Originally, it seemed to refer primarily to the graphic design of logos and other visual identity elements. Gradually, however, it became evident that it also comprises many intangible



characteristics, such as the culture of an organisation and the behaviour of its members (see for example Balmer and Greyser, 2003; Brun, 2002; Knox and Bickerton, 2003; Topalian, 2003). As a result, attention has shifted from design to the nature of the organisation itself. Attention to corporate visual elements has decreased. Nevertheless, Corporate Visual Identity (CVI) plays a significant role in the way an organisation presents itself to both internal and external stakeholders. Key elements of a CVI are the corporate name, logo, colour palette, font type, and a corporate slogan, tagline and/or descriptor and these may be applied on, for instance, stationery, printed matter (such as brochures and leaflets), advertisements, websites, vehicles, buildings, interiors, and corporate clothing. Sometimes architecture can also be an important element in an organisation's visual identity (examples: McDonalds and Ikea).

In general terms, a CVI expresses the values and ambitions of an organisation, its business, and its characteristics. Four functions of CVI in corporate communication can be distinguished. Three of these are aimed at external stakeholders. First, a CVI provides an organisation with visibility and "recognisability" (Balmer and Gray, 2000; Dowling, 1993; Du Gay, 2000). For virtually all profit and non-profit organisations it is of vital importance that people know that the organisation exists and remember its name and core business at the right time. A visual identity provides people with additional cues to remember an organisation. Second, a CVI symbolises an organisation for external stakeholders, and, hence, contributes to its image and reputation (Schultz *et al.*, 2000). A weak visual identity may be a symptom of corporate malaise (Baker and Balmer, 1997). The importance of reputation to the viability of an organisation is undeniable, and this has been confirmed in several studies (Bickerton, 2000; Fombrun and Rindova, 1998; Greyser, 1999; Roberts and Dowling, 2002). The specific contribution of CVI to corporate reputation has not been investigated as such, although experimental studies have shown that the choice of logo, colour or even font type can affect people's judgements and behaviour (Doyle and Bottomley, 2002; Gabrielsen *et al.*, 2000; Van Riel and Van den Ban, 2001). Van den Bosch *et al.* (2005) explored possible relationships between CVI and reputation, and concluded that CVI plays a supportive role in corporate reputations. Third, a CVI expresses the structure of an organisation to its external stakeholders, visualising its coherence as well as the relationships between divisions or units (Olins, 1989). A fourth, internal function of CVI relates to employees' identification with the organisation as a whole and/or the specific departments they work for (depending on the corporate visual strategy in this respect). Identification appears to be crucial for employees (Bromley, 2001; Dutton *et al.*, 1994; Kiriakidou and Millward, 2000), and CVI probably plays a symbolic role in creating such identification.

As the most tangible asset for the self-expression of an organisation, CVI must be viewed as an important strategic instrument within corporate communication. Organisations appear to be willing to make large investments in the development and implementation of their CVI, and it is generally acknowledged that it is important to reach a considerable degree of consistency in the way a CVI is applied. Corporate visual identity (CVI) can be seen as the visual common thread that runs through the way an organisation expresses itself.

Special attention is paid to CVI in times of organisational change. In the case of mergers, take-overs and acquisitions, CVI is a major factor in strategic decisions, since it symbolises the change in the organisation and is one of the few directly manageable

instruments in building a new corporate identity. Developing a new CVI raises issues such as corporate identity and strategic choices (Baker and Balmer, 1997; Balmer and Dinnie, 1999; Brun, 2002). Repositioning an organisation – for instance finding new markets, new products, or new distribution channels – may also imply changes in the CVI.

Another reason for changing or adapting a CVI is modernisation, as trends in design change over time. Changes in the CVI can be drastic, but can also be so subtle that they are hardly noticeable for many audiences. The changes may involve alterations in the logo or additional visual elements or new applications. Once a new CVI is implemented, attention to CVI-related issues generally tends to decrease. In our view, CVI needs to be managed on a structural basis, to be internalised by the employees and to harmonise with future organisational developments. After all, the effectiveness of a CVI depends to a great extent on its consistency.

The subject of managing CVI receives little attention in management and communication literature. In publications on corporate identity, corporate communication and reputation, the development of strategies plays a central role, while the CVI is merely considered one of the means organisations have to express themselves. Contributions that touch on CVI either focus on the relationship between strategy and CVI, or address the effects of visual elements. Theories in the first category focus on identity structures (Olins, 1989) e.g. monolithic, endorsed and branded identities the visibility of the parent company (Van Riel, 2000); and standardisation or localisation of the CVIs of multinationals (Melewar and Saunders, 1998, 1999; Melewar *et al.*, 2001). Those in the second category focus on the design and impact of corporate logos (Henderson and Cote, 1998; Van Riel and Van den Ban, 2001), typeface (Doyle and Bottomley, 2002) and design elements (Gabrielsen *et al.*, 2000). As yet, very little research has looked at how to manage a CVI and make it consistent. In an earlier practice-oriented study we explored the relationship between various measures and their effectiveness on the consistency of a CVI. The results show that the total number of measures taken has a positive effect on the consistency of a CVI and that two measures are most effective: managers setting an example and having up-to-date CVI guidelines (Van den Bosch *et al.*, 2004).

In this paper, we further investigate the relationship between organisational characteristics and a consistent CVI. Our research is based on the classic distinction between strategy, structure, and culture (see Appendix). Organisational characteristics may apply to business processes in general or to specific domains, such as CVI management. The research question is whether and to what extent organisational characteristics and CVI management characteristics affect the consistency of CVI. To study these influences we focus on:

- The influence of general organisational characteristics on a consistent CVI.
- The influence of CVI management characteristics on a consistent CVI.
- The influence of general organisational characteristics on CVI management characteristics.

Method

The study was conducted in 20 Dutch organisations. The inclusion criteria were that their headquarters should be located in the Netherlands, the organisations should be of

a certain size (at least 400 employees), and they should not be engaged in implementing a new visual identity or have introduced a change in visual identity recently (less than two years ago), since we assume that CVI gets more attention in a change process and this might affect the results. We included both profit and non-profit organisations, manufacturing and service organisations and organisations that focus on business-to-business markets and/or consumer markets. The research focused on the opinions of employees in the participating organisations, and not on external stakeholders. After all, employees have to apply CVI guidelines, and therefore have a major influence on its consistency. Furthermore, they can be expected to have a good overall view of CVI consistency in their organisation, whereas external stakeholders will have a more scattered view.

From communication departments in the participating organisations we obtained names and postal addresses of approximately 70 employees to whom we sent a questionnaire. Based on our criteria, our contacts – those responsible for the visual identity – made a selection of employees with a variety of jobs, such as in marketing and communication, secretariats and support units (e.g. in-house reprographic department, vehicle fleet control, building management and purchasing). We asked our contacts to select employees who need to know about CVI guidelines for their jobs. Fifteen organisations provided addresses, so that the questionnaire could be sent directly. In four organisations, the contact persons distributed the questionnaire themselves. In one organisation, an online questionnaire was sent to e-mail addresses. Confidentiality was assured and the (anonymous) questionnaires were returned directly to the researchers. In return for participating in the research, each organisation received a summary of their own results. The average response rate was 48 per cent, with a range from 13 per cent to 78 per cent. In all, 686 questionnaires were returned and processed. The positions held by the respondents were: unit managers (9 per cent), departmental managers (20 per cent) and employees (71 per cent).

Consistent CVI

In our study, the measure of consistency of a CVI did not reflect the quality of the design or the coherence among the various design elements, both of which are based on a similar “look and feel” among the various CVI elements. The variable Consistent CVI was defined as the extent to which the various CVI elements were actually employed as intended. The assumption is that the consistency of the CVI depends on the development of CVI guidelines and the way the defined CVI guidelines are applied, resulting in a more or less consistent visual expression of the organisation. The dependent variable Consistent CVI was measured using eight statements. All responses were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The reliability of the scale was good (Cronbach’s alpha 0.80). A high score corresponds with a consistent CVI, whereas a low score implies that in the perception of the respondents the CVI is not consistent. See Table I for the full measurement scale.

Organisational characteristics

The survey consisted of questions referring to organisational characteristics and statements on CVI management in the organisation. All items were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). In total

Variable	Items
Consistent CVI (dependent variable)	Our organisation can be easily identified by its CVI The CVI fits our organisation The CVI of our organisation is untidy ^a Everyone in our organisation contributes to the good image of our organisation Everyone in our organisation observes the CVI rules In my opinion it is important to apply the CVI The visual materials in our organisation lacks consistency ^a Everyone applies the CVI as they feel best ^a
OC Knowledge of Strategy	I know what our organisation stands for I know where our organisation is heading It is important for our organisation to be easily recognised It is important for our organisation to differentiate itself from other organisations I know the mission statement of our organisation
OC Tools and Support	Within our organisation I get sufficient training to do my work Within our organisation I'm given adequate tools to do my work Specialist staff departments support me in doing my job Within our organisation nobody is interested in the results of your work ^a In our organisation we continuously consider how the work can be improved Within our organisation people are aware of the way I carry out my tasks
OC Quality of managers	Managers have clear objectives Managers are knowledgeable about the work Managers stimulate us to learn more about our work My manager does not explain why tasks must be carried out ^a In general managers do their job well
OC Internal Communication	In general there is a good cooperation between departments There is consultation between business units and the board of directors There is mutual consultation among business units I am well informed about what is going on in our department I am well informed about what is going on in our organisation Communication between our department and the board of directors is good Communication among departments is good Communication within the department is good
OC Open and Dynamic	Most of the work can be organised by the staff members themselves Newcomers are quickly accepted in our department It's not appreciated in our organisation if you take the initiative ^a Our organisation continually anticipates new developments In general I can voice my opinion within the organisation
CVI Knowledge of Strategy	I know the rationale behind our company logo The CVI is helpful in making our organisation recognisable The CVI provides a good image of our organisation
CVI Tools and Support	There is sufficient information to apply the CVI rules The guidelines of our CVI are up to date In our organisation we have tools that help us apply the CVI easily Within our organisation it's easy to get information on the CVI We get good answers when we have questions on the CVI
CVI Socialisation Processes	Managers set an example and apply the CVI Newcomers to our department always get an induction course on the CVI Applying the CVI is a matter of course in our organisation When I do not apply the CVI, I get criticised I get positive feedback when I apply the CVI

Table I.
Full measurement scale
with items

Notes: ^a Recoded items; the questionnaire was written in Dutch. There may be problems with some of the translated items, as no back translation was performed to test their accuracy

we included five organisational characteristics (OC). OC Knowledge of Strategy (five items, Cronbach's alpha 0.71) measured respondents' knowledge of the strategy of their organisation. The variable OC Tools and Support (six items, Cronbach's alpha 0.70) was the measure for the co-ordination mechanism used to support the differentiated units and functions in the organisation. Statements used for the variable OC Quality of Managers (five items, Cronbach's alpha 0.70) referred to respondents' opinion of their managers. The variable OC Internal Communication (eight items, Cronbach's alpha 0.79) measured perceptions of the quality of internal communication within the organisation. Finally we included the variable OC Open and Dynamic (five items, Cronbach's alpha 0.68) reflecting the extent to which an organisation is in a dynamic environment and therefore has to act flexibly and anticipate changes.

The operationalisation of organisational characteristics (OC) is based on the different perspectives on organisations in literature. There is a great deal of academic and management literature that portrays the strategy of organisations (Johnson and Scholes, 1999; Mintzberg *et al.*, 1998). The corporate strategy relates to the overall purpose and scope of the organisation. For this we included the variable OC Knowledge of Strategy. Some authors define an organisation as a system in which labour is divided among individual members, who work together to achieve company goals or objectives. The focus is on the structure of the organisation and co-ordination between different functions and tasks (Hall, 1991; Hodge *et al.*, 1996; Mintzberg, 1979). These theories were used to include the variable OC Tools and Support. Others focus on the culture and describe the shared values and beliefs of the organisation's members, how they communicate and behave, and how newcomers are socialised (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Schein, 1992; Trice and Beyer, 1993). Leaders or managers play an important role in creating and consolidating a culture. From this perspective we included the variable OC Quality of Managers. We included OC Internal Communication for the reason that the perceived quality of communication in organisations is also an important subject in academic and management literature (Hargie and Tourish, 2000). Finally we want to know whether organisational dynamics play a role in the consistency of CVI. According to open systems theory, an organisation interacts with its environment and adapts to it in order to survive (Burns and Stalker, 1961; Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967). We named this characteristic OC Open and Dynamic.

CVI management characteristics

We also included organisational characteristics related to CVI management. Again, all items were measured on five-point Likert scales (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The variable CVI Knowledge of Strategy (three items, Cronbach's alpha 0.70) measures knowledge of the rationale behind the CVI and its objectives. Corresponding with OC Tools and Support we also included in the variable CVI Tools and Support (five items, Cronbach's alpha of 0.85). Finally we defined the variable CVI Socialisation Processes (five items, Cronbach's alpha 0.73), which focuses on formal and informal learning processes and the behaviour of managers, through which members of an organisation and newcomers gain insight into their expected behaviour in relation to the CVI. See Table I for the full scale used to measure all the independent variables.

Hypotheses

As described above, we constructed one dependent variable (Consistent CVI), three independent variables relating to CVI management characteristics (CVI Knowledge of Strategy, CVI Tools and Support, and CVI Socialisation Processes) and five independent variables relating to organisational characteristics (OC Knowledge of Strategy, OC Tools and Support, OC Quality of Managers, OC Internal Communication, and OC Open and Dynamic).

The first thing we investigated was whether there is a direct relationship between organisational characteristics and a consistent CVI. We hypothesised that knowledge of organisational strategy, the availability of tools and support, good managers and communication have positive effects on the consistency of a CVI. The direction of the effects of an open and dynamic organisation can be either way: on the one hand, it can be assumed that a pragmatic organisation will engage in pragmatic behaviour relating to CVI as well; on the other hand, it can be assumed that a dynamic environment underlines the importance of consistent presentation, which may lead to more CVI awareness among employees. To summarise, as regards *H1* the direct relationship between organisational characteristics and a consistent CVI, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

- H1a.* Knowledge of organisation strategy has a positive effect on CVI consistency.
- H1b.* The availability of tools and support in the organisation has a positive effect on CVI consistency.
- H1c.* High-quality managers have a positive effect on CVI consistency.
- H1d.* High-quality internal communication has a positive effect on CVI consistency.
- H1e.* The openness of the organisation and a dynamic environment both have an effect on the consistency of a CVI.

Next, we assumed that all three CVI management characteristics would have a positive influence on the consistency of a CVI, leading to the following three hypotheses:

- H2a.* Knowledge of CVI strategy has a positive effect on CVI consistency.
- H2b.* The availability of CVI tools and support has a positive effect on CVI consistency.
- H2c.* Socialisation processes related to CVI have a positive effect on CVI consistency.

Finally, we assumed that there is a relationship between the organisational and the CVI management level, and that the quality of internal communication affects all three CVI management characteristics. The following hypotheses were tested:

- H3a.* Knowledge of organisational strategy has a positive relationship with knowledge of CVI strategy.
- H3b.* The availability of tools and support in the organisation has a positive relationship with the availability of CVI tools and support.
- H3c.* High-quality managers in the organisation have a positive relationship with socialisation processes on CVI.

H3d. High-quality internal communication has a positive relationship with all three CVI management characteristics (CVI Knowledge of Strategy, CVI Tools and Support and CVI Socialisation Processes).

Results

A first exploratory step in our analysis of the results is a correlation analysis including all independent and dependent variables (see Table II). As can be seen, the highest correlations (Pearson's correlation coefficient above 0.50) were between CVI management characteristics and CVI consistency. However, the correlations between organisational characteristics (OC) and CVI consistency are also significant.

To get insight into the various influences and relationships, we conducted structural equation modelling with AMOS (Arbuckle and Wothke, 1999), a software package which supports data analysis techniques known as structural modelling, analysis of covariance structures, or causal modelling. Structural equation modelling basically makes it possible to test a set of regression equations simultaneously, providing both parameter statistics for each equation and indices which indicate the "fit" of the model to the original data. Figure 1 shows the structural equation model that best fits the data and has the strongest explanatory power.

Although AMOS produces a large number of different statistics, four are commonly reported:

- (1) The Chi-square value indicates the absolute fit of the model to the data and is the result of testing the null hypothesis that the model does indeed fit the data. For the model in Figure 1, the Chi-square test of overall model fit is 49.385, with 14 degrees of freedom, returning a probability value of 0.000. This indicates that the model does not fit the data, but since the Chi-square value is largely dependent on the sample size, this may be the reason why the model does not fit.
- (2) Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) is a measure of the discrepancy between predicted and observed covariances, as devised by Jöreskog and Sörbom (1984). The GFI value should be less or equal to one. A value of one indicates a perfect fit. The value of 0.985 indicates a good fit.
- (3) The Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) is a relative fit statistic that is not sensitive to sample size and non-normality. It compares the absolute fit of the specified model to the absolute fit of the most restrictive model possible, in which all relationships between the observed variables are assumed to be zero. The greater the discrepancy between the overall fit of the two models, the larger the values of these descriptive statistics. TLI values close to one indicate a very good fit (Arbuckle and Wothke, 1999), and for the model in Figure 1, this value is 0.96. So, this is further evidence of a good fit of this model to the data.
- (4) The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is based on a comparison of the values in the specified model to population means and covariance structures. There are several rules of thumb concerning this statistic, such as the one by Brown and Cudeck (1993), who claim that an RMSEA of 0.05 or less would indicate a close fit of the model in relation to the degrees of freedom (Arbuckle and Wothke, 1999), and a value of 0.08 or less would indicate a good fit. Since the model in Figure 1 has an RMSEA of 0.061, this statistic provides further evidence that the model has a good fit.

Table II.
Mean scores, standard deviations and correlation of consistent CVI, organisational characteristics and CVI management characteristics

Variable	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Consistent CVI (1)	3.51 (0.67)	–	0.43**	0.41**	0.35**	0.31**	0.42**	0.55**	0.60**	0.58**
OC Knowledge of Strategy (2)	4.05 (0.66)		–	0.49**	0.42**	0.46**	0.51**	0.48**	0.32**	0.28**
OC Tools and Support (3)	3.64 (0.64)			–	0.59**	0.47**	0.54**	0.34**	0.33**	0.35**
OC Quality of Managers (4)	3.43 (0.64)				–	0.39**	0.56**	0.30**	0.24**	0.33**
OC Open and Dynamic (5)	4.06 (0.58)					–	0.44**	0.31**	0.18**	0.15**
OC Internal Communication (6)	3.35 (0.60)						–	0.36**	0.33**	0.39**
CVI Knowledge of Strategy (7)	3.88 (0.89)							–	0.44**	0.33**
CVI Tools and Support (8)	3.29 (0.90)								–	0.33**
CVI Socialisation Processes (9)	2.93 (0.80)									–

Notes: ** $p < 0.01$; 636 < n < 677

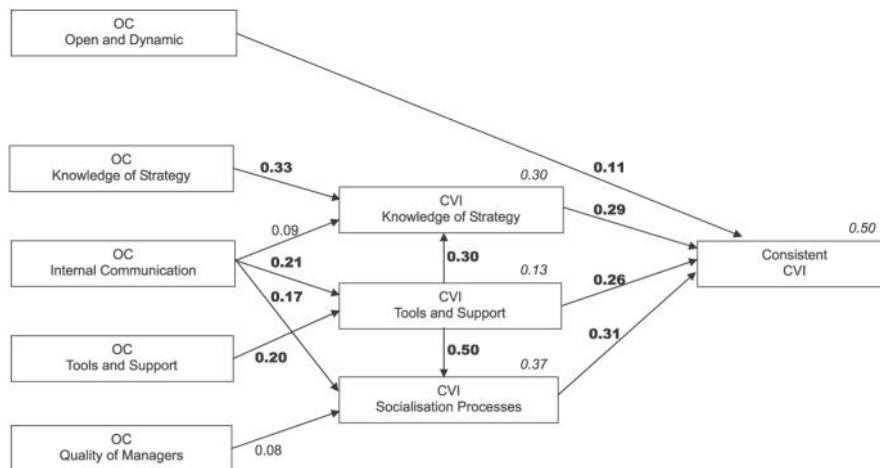
All the relationships shown in Figure 1 are significant and the total explained variance of consistent CVI is 0.50. In order to get a model that fits, we used the modification indices provided with the AMOS 5.0 software package. These indicated two relationships, which had not been hypothesised before, i.e. the relationships between CVI Tools and Support and CVI Knowledge of Strategy, and between CVI Tools and Support and CVI Socialisation Processes. These relationships are examined in the discussion part of this paper.

Of all the OC characteristics, only the openness and dynamic environment of organisations (OC Open and Dynamic) has a direct positive influence on CVI consistency. So of the five hypotheses under (H1), only H1e is supported by the results of this study. In contrast, the hypotheses under (H2) are all supported by the results. All three CVI management characteristics appear to have a substantial influence on CVI consistency. In addition, all hypotheses under (H3), which relate to the relationship between OC and CVI management characteristics, are confirmed as well. The amount of explained variance, however, is considerably lower (with R^2 varying from 0.13 to 0.37). Table III provides an overview of the results of the hypotheses.

Discussion and conclusions

This study was designed to offer insight into the topic of CVI management. We investigated the question as to whether organisational characteristics influence the consistency of CVI. We developed a model in which we distinguished characteristics at the level of the organisation and at the level of CVI management. The measure of CVI consistency was derived from the perception of the employees; they judged the visual identity in their own organisation.

We demonstrated that all CVI management characteristics influence the consistency of a CVI. CVI Knowledge of Strategy and CVI Socialisation Processes



Note: All estimates are significant (those in bold at $p < 0.001$, those not in bold $p < 0.05$). The proportion of explained variance is given in italics above the variable.

^aIndexes: $\chi^2 = 49.385$, $df = 14$, $p < 0.001$; GFI = 0.985; TLI = 0.960; RMSEA = 0.061. Standardized parameter estimates are presented. Covariates are omitted for clarity

Figure 1.
AMOS model for organisational characteristics (OC) and CVI management characteristics as they affect the consistency of CVI^a

	Hypothesis	Result
<i>H1a</i>	Knowledge of organisation strategy has a positive effect on CVI consistency	Not supported
<i>H1b</i>	The availability of tools and support in the organisation has a positive effect on CVI consistency	Not supported
<i>H1c</i>	High-quality managers have a positive effect on CVI consistency	Not supported
<i>H1d</i>	High-quality internal communication has a positive effect on CVI consistency	Not supported
<i>H1e</i>	The openness of the organisation and a dynamic environment have an effect on CVI consistency	Supported
<i>H2a</i>	Knowledge of CVI strategy has a positive effect on CVI consistency	Supported
<i>H2b</i>	The availability of CVI tools and support has a positive effect on CVI consistency	Supported
<i>H2c</i>	Socialisation processes related to CVI have a positive effect on CVI consistency	Supported
<i>H3a</i>	Knowledge of organisation strategy has a positive relationship with knowledge of CVI strategy	Supported
<i>H3b</i>	The availability of tools and support in the organisation has a positive relationship with the availability of CVI tools and support	Supported
<i>H3c</i>	High-quality managers in the organisation have a positive relationship with socialisation processes on CVI	Supported
<i>H3d</i>	High-quality internal communication has a positive relationship with all three CVI management characteristics (CVI Knowledge of Strategy, CVI Tools and Support and CVI Socialisation Processes)	Supported

Table III.
Results of hypotheses

appear to be of major importance. CVI Knowledge of Strategy provides employees with reasons for maintaining the visual identity, whereas the socialisation processes can be seen as internalisation, resulting in behaviour related to the visual identity that is infused with motivation and feeling. These help to explain the direction and persistence of individual and more collective behaviour (Albert *et al.*, 2000). CVI Tools and Support are also relevant to the consistency of a CVI. The results showed significant relationships between CVI Tools and Support and CVI Knowledge of Strategy and between CVI Tools and Support and CVI Socialisation Processes. Although we did not expect to find these relationships, it is plausible that tools such as for instance a digital manual, which contains information on why and how to use the CVI, are relevant to obtaining knowledge of the CVI. Support, either through personal coaching or answering questions on the CVI may also explain the “socialisation” of applying the CVI.

The organisational characteristics we used appear to have a very limited direct influence on CVI consistency. Our assumption that CVI management characteristics are influenced by organisational characteristics, however, is supported by the results. CVI Knowledge of Strategy is positively related to OC Knowledge of Strategy. Pilditch (1970) refers to the “*Gestalt*” of an organisation, in which corporate logos are used to support other artefacts of the organisation. He advised designers to put themselves into the position of the organisation when they develop a new or adapted visual identity.

The results also show that CVI Tools and Support are influenced by OC Tools and Support. To some extent, the availability of tools and support in general appears to be indicative for the availability of tools and support for applying the CVI. Internal

communication in the organisation positively influences all three CVI management characteristics. Finally, OC Quality of Managers appears to have a positive relationship with CVI Socialisation Processes. Schein (1992) defined culture as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learns when solving problems such as external adaptation and internal integration, and one that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to new problems. In this, the behaviour of the managers setting an example and their influence on socialisation processes are important. In our study, socialisation processes related to CVI appear to be of major importance and managers can influence them.

One organisational characteristic we used turned out to be of direct influence on CVI consistency. Organisations that are open and dynamic appear to use their CVI more consistently than those of a closed or static nature. To operate in a dynamic environment, these organisations have to be flexible and responsive. As a result, a continuous development and awareness of corporate strategy is needed in all organisational layers (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). This may have a positive effect on the employees' appreciation of and commitment to the CVI. Another explanation might be that a dynamic environment places greater demands on consistent presentation than a static environment, thus creating a sense of urgency among the personnel.

To sum up, the results of this study demonstrate that organisational characteristics are a factor of importance for CVI consistency. With the exception of the openness and dynamics of an organisation, no supporting evidence was found for a direct relationship between organisational characteristics and CVI consistency. CVI consistency appeared to be substantially predicted by the CVI management characteristics we distinguished, which, in turn, correspond to organisational characteristics.

From the point of view that CVI is an important tangible asset in the expression of the organisation and used as the "glue" in communication, this study can be helpful to corporate identity managers and communication professionals alike. An important implication of the findings is that CVI management matters: the choices made regarding strategy, socialisation processes and tools and support appear to have a significant impact on the consistent use of the CVI. Another implication is that CVI management characteristics are, on the one hand, rooted in organisational characteristics – there are unmistakable relationships between organisational and CVI management characteristics – but, on the other hand, are not predetermined by organisational characteristics. Given the relatively low amounts of variance explained by organisational characteristics, it can be concluded that communication managers have a considerable degree of freedom in shaping their CVI management. Managing an organisation's brand can be seen as a dynamic process that needs to be continuously adjusted to vision, culture and image, and which reflects all the functions in the organisation (Hatch and Schultz, 2003). Employees must be motivated to propagate the brand (Ind, 2001). Therefore the communication managers responsible for CVI management need to observe and understand organisational aspects and developments. They not only have to look externally – at the impact of the CVI design – but also internally (at management practices and their consequences).

A multi-channel approach to CVI management will give the best results. It can be helpful to embed the CVI in existing tools and support. Besides this, information has to

be provided on the CVI strategy and socialisation processes are necessary for internalising the need for applying it. Both formal and informal learning processes can be helpful in anchoring a CVI within an organisation, e.g. by defining it and explaining the criteria for its utilisation – what is desirable, what is not, and why – and solving problems relating to its application. The formal learning process may start with introduction programmes for new hires. Informal learning processes include the behaviour of managers, who can provide an example of how best to apply the CVI. Earlier research has shown that both types of socialisation processes positively influence the consistency of CVI (Van den Bosch *et al.*, 2004).

Pilditch (1970) stressed the importance of establishing a strong correspondence between the visual design and the characteristics of the organisation. While developing a visual identity, designers have to have a clear view of what an organisation stands for. The results of our study extend this view to the issue of CVI management. It appears to be equally important to provide information on organisation and CVI strategy to everyone who has to apply the CVI. Knowing about this background information will increase employees' willingness to comply with guidelines. But graphic designers also need to be familiar with background information to produce appropriate materials. It's the job of communication professionals to provide this type of information.

This study has three limitations. First, the consistency of each CVI has been measured by the judgement of the respondents, all employees of the organisation concerned. We did not carry out a visual audit and we therefore measured the consistency of the perceived CVI. Further research could include a visual audit and the perception of external stakeholders towards the visual identity and thus make a distinction between actual consistency and perceived consistency by internal and external audiences. The second limitation is that we only examined the main corporate visual identity and not sub- or product brands. We conducted the study in the Netherlands, where the Dutch term "*huisstijl*" is unambiguous and clearly related to the corporate brand or identity. Future research can take different brands into account or can broaden the concept of CVI (including cultural aspects, language, rituals, myths, etc.). Another approach could be a benchmarking study in which a number of organisations are compared. The last limitation has to do with the openness of organisations in a dynamic environment, which leads to the question as to whether the typology of organisation –, e.g. profit or non-profit – has an impact on the consistency of its CVI. Further research can define types of organisations and measure their CVIs.

In this paper we investigated CVI from an organisational perspective. So far our study illustrates useful findings for communication professionals responsible for integrated communications and managing the corporate identity. It is striking that visual identity – regarded as a self-evident asset in most organisations and used by many to present them selves to the outside world – has received so little attention in research and hardly been studied at all from the perspective of this paper.

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Appendix

The selection of organisational characteristics and CVI management characteristics is based on an earlier exploratory study by Van den Bosch (2000). The "Leiden Octahedron" was used as a model to explore the dimensions that influence the consistency of a CVI. The model was adapted from Leavitt (1965) and developed in the Netherlands by Demenint *et al.* (1989). The "Leiden Octahedron", which visualises the way an organisation reacts to a dynamic environment, consists of six clusters of variables: organisation goals, strategy, structure, culture, technology and people. People work towards common goals and the results are influenced by strategy, structure, culture and technology. In the exploratory study, general theories and concepts were applied to CVI management. In this research on the impact of organisational characteristics on corporate visual identity, the results of the exploratory study were transformed into a questionnaire, which was sent to a number of organisations in the Netherlands.

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