

MIGNON D. VAN HALDEREN

# Organizational Identity Expressiveness and Perception Management

Principles for Expressing the Organizational Identity in Order to Manage External Stakeholders' Perceptions of a Company



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and Perception Management**

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Expressiviteit van de organisatie identiteit en perceptie management  
Principes voor het uitdrukken van de organisatie identiteit om de percepties van externe  
stakeholders over een organisatie te managen

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To Louis, my Dad



## Acknowledgments

I remember as a young girl that my parents bought a beautiful new car. I was so excited and involved with this new car that on one day, I went to my daddy and told him that I experienced such an awkward thing: since we had this new car, I couldn't help seeing the same car everywhere I looked! My dad told me this was called 'selective perception' and that I should remember this word, since it had for a great deal to do with how people perceive stuff. He explained that how people see things, is central to how people act in all aspects of their life. I thought it was an intriguing but also very difficult word, so I kept a note for myself on which I wrote (although wrongly) 'perspective selection'. Now, twenty years later, I can't help thinking back to what he said. This dissertation had everything to do with the management of people's perceptions and their subsequent behavioral intentions. And how exciting it has been! I've reached the point of finishing this interesting period of my life. A period that I did not go through alone...there are so many wonderful people that I want to thank for walking with me on this path.

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Mignon



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# **Part I**

## **INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF DISSERTATION**

This dissertation consists of three parts. This first part starts with introducing the research question in chapter one. I explain that organizational scholars as well as practitioners increasingly acknowledge the importance of expressing the organization's identity to manage the perceptions and behaviors of external stakeholders. It is described that, despite this growing importance, they still lack systematic knowledge on how organizational identity expressions can affect external stakeholders' perceptions and behavioral reactions. It is argued that, on the one hand, organizational identity scholars have acknowledged the importance of organizational identity expressions to manage external stakeholders' perceptions, but few have taken empirical efforts to study how such expressions can influence their perceptions. Perception management scholars, on the other hand, have looked at how different types of perceptions can be constructed, but have been silent on how such perceptions can be formed through the complex nature of a firm's organizational identity expressiveness efforts. In order to address this gap, I formulate the overall research question as: How can organizations effectively express their organizational identity in order to manage positive perceptions and subsequent behavioral reactions among their stakeholders?

Chapter two positions this research question in the light of existing literature on organizational identity expressiveness on the one hand and perception management on the other. I show that, despite the fact that both fields originally have different foci, they have a crucial underlying correspondence: a focus on similar types of identity-related information. By showing how they cross roads on these similar types of identity-related information, I conclude that the insights of each field can be combined in order to study the research question of this dissertation.



# 1 Introduction

It all added up to an image of Shell as a sort of giant phantom in a forest – difficult to see, with no specific contours, but with enormous, uncontrolled, undefined parts that might well do us harm. Moreover, it was a silent phantom. The multinational entity told no story about itself. Outsiders could only guess why it existed, what it did for a living...and how the world would be different if the company did not exist at all. (De Geus, 1997; in Fombrun and Rindova 2000)

The quotation above poignantly reflects how the Anglo/Dutch energy company Shell was facing severe perception management problems after two major crises in 1995. The first crises ignited when Shell decided to sink one of their aged offshore drilling platforms, The Brent Spar, to the bottom of the North Sea. Shell was harshly scrutinized by Greenpeace claiming that Shell had not taken thoughtful consideration of disposing the drig and had bluntly chosen for a low-cost alternative, despite scientific conclusions that sinking would be the least environmentally damaging alternative for disposing the platform. Greenpeace's activists went over to the Brent Spar location and physically occupied the platform to prevent Shell from sinking it. They simultaneously made clever and skillful use of the media to attract the world's attention. Within less than a few hours countries, politicians, opinion leaders and customers picked up on the Brent Spar issue. What started with accusations from this one single NGO, rapidly turned into a global uproar against Shell's decision regarding the Brent Spar. The company faced enormous critique from worldwide influential opinion leaders, even resulting in German customers boycotting Shell stations and investors selling the company's shares. Although it turned out in a later stage that Shell's decision to sink the platform appeared to be the environmentally safest option, the high pressure from external stakeholders forced Shell to abandon its plans to dispose of Brent Spar at sea.

What had been going on here? How could it happen that Shell's story based on scientifically sound facts could not bear up to Greenpeace's worldwide campaign against the company? Part of the reason was that Shell had lost touch with how external stakeholders

perceived the company (Fombrun & Rindova, 2000). It appeared that many stakeholders had no idea of who Shell was, what it was doing and why, which led to growing misunderstandings, rooted prejudices and anxious attitudes toward the company. As illustrated in the quote in the beginning of this chapter, Shell was seen by outside publics as a 'giant phantom in a forest' 'that might well do us harm'. These already tensed perceptions and attitudes, made it for Greenpeace just a matter of lighting the fire.

The second crises in that same year evolved around Shell's business relationship with the dictatorial government of Nigeria. Since the dictatorial government's welfare was largely dependent on the country's oil exports, the military dictatorship heavily exploited from the oil-rich soils of the indigenous Ogoni people. As they saw how the government forcefully destructed their environment and ignored their human rights, Ogoni activist groups under the leadership of Mr Saro Wiwa, heavily protested against the Nigerian state. Their actions were simultaneously targeted towards Shell whom they claimed to be just as well responsible for the government's crude actions against its own people. Massive protests, sabotage and threats to Shell workers were part of their strategy (Hammer, 1996; Moldoveanu & Paine, 2006). This crisis escalated when the military government arrested Mr Saro Wiwa and eight of his fellow-activists, and sentenced them to death. Shell became under enormous international pressure from the media, human rights groups and foreign governments to condemn the proceedings and persuade the Nigerian government by threatening to pull out of Nigeria (Moldoveanu & Paine, 2006). Yet, although the company had taken several efforts to plead for clemency and to stress to the government the negative consequences of executing the activists, Shell's business principles<sup>1</sup> refrained the company from taking a political role in the controversies. In November 1995, Ken Saro-Wiwa and his co-defendants were executed. On an international stage, Shell was harshly criticized because of the neutral and passive political role that it had taken during these unfortunate events.

Both crises made Shell's managers realize that the organization was seen as "bureaucratic, inward-looking, complacent, self-satisfied and arrogant" (Fortune, 1997). It induced Shell's managers to re-examine Shell's image among its variety of stakeholders and to express more proactively who they are, what they are doing and why they are doing the things they are doing. In other words, they started to put intensive efforts in expressing their organizational identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Stating that 'companies should endeavor always to act commercially, operating within existing national laws in a socially responsible manner and avoid involvement in politics' (Moldoveanu & Paine, 2006, p. 11).

During the past decade, many other companies have started to ‘open up’ regarding their organization’s identity. While for some organizations, like Shell, the incentive was to elicit more understanding among their stakeholders, other companies are convinced that conveying the organizational identity of the company is an effective strategy for positioning themselves in today’s communication-cluttered environment. In order to convey their organizational identity, companies have for example increasingly started to publish social reports in which they provide stakeholders extensive information on who they are as an organization, what they stand for, what they are doing and why. In addition, entire corporate websites are dedicated to explaining the organization’s vision, mission and values or the ins and outs of new projects that the organization is undertaking. Also, corporate advertisements are put out to position the company’s organizational features, like its innovativeness (i.e. General Electrics), its sole dedication to social responsible business behavior (i.e. The Body Shop) or its unique, irreverent character (i.e. Yahoo; Virgin). Despite an increased acceptance to reveal the identity behind the organization, managers are often finding difficulties how they can express their identity characteristics in the most effective way in order to manage positive perceptions and subsequent behavioral reactions among their critical stakeholders. In this dissertation, I focus on this question.

## **1.1 Organizational Identity Expressions and Perception Management**

Organizational identity is traditionally defined as those characteristics that are found throughout the organization (central), that have been present for a considerable time (enduring) and that distinguish the organization from other organizations (distinctive) (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Organizational identity expressions are in that respect conceived as the expressions of an organization that explain the central, distinctive and enduring characteristics of an organization. Central to this definition is the notion that organizational identity expressions portray an organization’s *essential* or *intrinsic* characteristics (cf. Hatch & Schultz, 2004). In other words, they are open about their real identity characteristics, their real thinking and their real behaviors within the company. As described by Whetten and Mackey (2002, p. 401), organizations are “doing their best to faithfully represent to outsiders what they consider to be the organization’s most central, enduring and distinctive characteristics”.

Several scholars have however questioned the attainability of this traditional definition of organizational identity (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994).



They argue that because of today's volatile environments, organizations are continuously subjected to change. Their organizational characteristics may, therefore, to a certain extent be less central, enduring and distinctive than the above-described definition would suggest. They have, therefore, pled for a looser and more flexible definition of organizational identity, one that captures the notion that organizational identities do reflect the inner-characteristics of a company, but that simultaneously allows for change and dynamic in these organizational characteristics. Organizational identity can according to this view be defined as those characteristics of an organization that define who the organization is or what it stands for. In this dissertation, I adopt this more flexible definition to investigate organizational identity *expressions*. Such expressions about the organizational identity are often broad in scope and include a constellation of different types of identity information such as the firm's vision, mission, standpoints, values, culture, history, programs and skills. Explanations about these kinds of identity-related information are often best expressed through a firm's rhetorical or linguistic efforts, as language has the power to communicate many of the meanings in our often complex environment as nuanced as possible (Daft & Wiginton, 1979). Hence, this dissertation is particularly concerned with organizational identity expressions through a firm's communicative, or rhetorical, efforts. Organizational identity expressions are defined as the broad range of rhetorical efforts of an organization that explain who the organization is, what it stands for, what it does and why.

Scholars from different research disciplines such as reputation, legitimacy or corporate branding have been concerned with how to influence the perceptions of an organization's external stakeholders (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Elsbach, 1994; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). These scholars contend that positive company perceptions of stakeholders are an important precursor of their behavior toward a company, such as buying the company's products or making investment decisions regarding the firm. Reputation management studies have for example particularly focused on stakeholders' perceptions of a company's performance in relation to its competitors, such as offering high quality products (Prabhu & Stewart, 2001; Weigelt & Camerer, 1988) and having a good financial performance (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). These studies have shown that good reputations have favorable consequences for companies such as enhanced financial performance (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990), increasing sales (Shapiro, 1982) and higher attractiveness of applicants (Rynes, 1991). Corporate branding scholars have been concerned with how to create strong and favorable associations around a company's corporate brand. Studies in this field have shown that strong and positive corporate brand associations

have a positive influence on consumers' buying intentions toward a company (Berens, Van Riel, & Van Bruggen, 2005; Brown & Dacin, 1997). The company activities that these studies refer to have been labeled by Elsbach (2003; 2006) as 'perception management'. In this dissertation, I adopt this term to refer to research on managing external stakeholders' perceptions.

While organizational identity scholars have traditionally focused on how organizational identity expressions affect the perceptions of internal members *within* an organization (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Pratt, 1998), several scholars have explicitly proffered that organizational identity expressions also plays a crucial role in managing external stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward the organization (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004; Hatch & Schultz, 2004; Rindova & Schultz, 1998; Schultz, Hatch, & Larsen, 2000; Scott & Lane, 2000). These scholars hold the view that the very nature of organizational identity expressions may strongly affect how external stakeholders of an organization, such as customers, shareholders or activist groups, perceive and relate to a firm (Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006). They argue that a clear formulation of a firm's organizational identity can provide stakeholders with a meaningful and easy to interpret schema of who the company is (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004). As such, it acts as a perceptual filter through which stakeholders can understand and provide meaning to organizations' behavior or activities (Pfeffer, 1981; Weick, 1995). Also, scholars tend to emphasize that organizational identities can intensify stakeholders' emotional attraction towards a firm, eventually leading to stronger identification with the organization and inherently positive behaviors toward the firm (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004).

Moreover, scholars contend that in today's society, organizations gradually make their way toward more open systems in which external stakeholders are just as easily exposed to internal identity expressions as that employees are confronted with external identity projections (Cheney & Christensen, 2000; Rindova & Schultz, 1998). External stakeholders, for that matter, are taking increasingly more interest in the back stage life of organizations (Hatch & Schultz, 2004). They are often not satisfied with the more 'superficial' identity campaigns and demand more insight and even influence on organizational identity related aspects such as the company's vision, mission, values, structures and processes. The Brent Spar and Nigeria incidents within Shell were a stark example of how a neglect of expressing the organization's organizational identity led to stubborn perception management problems among (influential) external stakeholders. As a consequence, in expressing their organizational identity, organizations increasingly expand their boundaries to external stakeholders and start to explain who they are

and what they stand for (Rindova & Schultz, 1998).

Despite these acknowledgments that the boundaries between internal and external stakeholders are shading into each other, scholars in the field of organizational identity on the one hand (e.g. Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Harquail, 2006; Hatch & Schultz, 2002) and perception management on the other (e.g. Brown & Dacin, 1997; Elsbach, 1994; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990) still seem hesitant to bridge their insights in order to better understand how the originally more internally focused organizational identity expressions can be beneficial to manage the perceptions of external stakeholders.

Organizational identity scholars, on the one hand, have originally introduced the concept of organizational identity expressiveness and have, on a primarily conceptual level, described its nature and important role *within* organizations (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; 2002; Hatch & Schultz, 2004; Rindova & Schultz, 1998). According to these scholars, organizational identity expressions are a powerful way through which members can be aligned behind a preferred collective identity within the organization (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Gioia & Thomas, 1996). Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail (1994, p. 243) have for example argued that organizational leaders engage in a broad repertoire of expressiveness efforts such as rituals, ceremonies and stories in order to imbue members with such a collective identity. Others have also suggested the role of stories in instilling the organizational identity in members' perceptions about their organization (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Martin, Feldman, Hatch, & Sitkin, 1983). However, these insights have not given full justice to our understanding of how the often complex nature of organizational identity expressions can be managed to external stakeholders. Indeed, expressing the organizational identity to external stakeholders is acknowledged to be a difficult process in which a myriad of interrelated identity characteristics has to be explained through various messages and to a variety of stakeholders who all have different, and sometimes conflicting, interests in the organization (Cheney & Christensen, 2000; Ginzel, Kramer, & Sutton, 1993). Such a broad and complex array of organizational identity expressions is often difficult to captivate in the traditional 'corporate identity' models (Olins, 1989; Van Riel & Balmer, 1997) but beg for a thinking that takes account of the process of continuously messaging, explaining, shaping and refining the organizational identity to a broad variety of external stakeholders. Although increasingly more scholars nowadays explicitly acknowledge this and start to point toward critical success factors to manage these inquisitive and critical stakeholders through identity expressions (Cornelissen, Haslam, & Balmer, 2007; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004; Schultz, Antorini, & Csaba, 2005), scholars lack a precise and

empirically grounded understanding of the processes or principles along which such organizational identity expressions can be managed most effectively.

Perception management scholars, on the other hand, have particularly looked at different informative signals and strategies that affect the perceptions of external audiences and how these perceptions affect stakeholders' behavioral reactions toward the company (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Elsbach & Glynnn, 1996; Rao, 1994; Rindova, Williamson, & Petkova, 2005). For example, reputation management scholars have argued that stakeholders form perceptions of an organization based on signals that inform them about a firm's organizational characteristics such as its products and service or financial performance (Fombrun, Gardberg, & Sever, 2000; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004). Corporate branding scholars conceive the corporate brand as a vehicle through which organizations signal their identity characteristics and have for example looked at different corporate brand name variants that organizations can use to influence stakeholders' associations with the company and its products (Berens, Van Riel, & Van Bruggen, 2005; Rao, Agarwal, & Dahloff, 2004). However, although these scholars insinuate that these signals reflect the organization's identity characteristics and that such signals can come from either the organization or from external instances such as the media or business rankings (Rao, 1998; Rindova, Williamson, & Petkova, 2005), they have less thoroughly focused on how organizations can manage such identity signals through the complexity of organizational identity expressions. For example, reputation management studies that looked at the effect of several organizational signals, were often based on available databases that provided objective information about characteristics of a company, such as a firm's financial performance or amount of charitable contributions to foundations (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Orlitzky, Schmidt, & Rynes, 2003). Most of them did not study how such signals can be managed through a firm's organizational identity expressiveness efforts. Corporate branding studies that looked at the effect of identity signals were often experimental settings in which respondents were offered a short description about a company in which several types of identity signals were manipulated, such as a company's expertise or its status on corporate social responsibility (Biehal & Sheinin, 2007; Brown & Dacin, 1997; Keller & Aaker, 1998). Although these studies provided us with a welcome insight in what types of identity signals are important to external stakeholders, they have so far not been concerned with the complex nature of organizational identity expressiveness. Indeed, organizational identity expressions consist of a broad range of information that goes beyond single identity signals. The here reported experimental studies

have so far not provided us a sharp understanding of how such a fuller scope of identity signal can be expressed effectively.

Thus, while organizational identity scholars have introduced the notion of organizational identity expressions and have mainly been concerned with its role among internal members of an organization, they have under-explored the impact of organizational identity expressions on external stakeholders. Conversely, although perception management scholars have looked at identity signals that can impact external stakeholders' perceptions of a company, most of them have neglected the question of how to manage the complexity of an organization's organizational identity expressiveness efforts in order to influence positive perceptions of external stakeholders. This dissertation attempts to bridge both streams of research and examines how organizational identity expressions can be effective in managing the perceptions and behavioral reactions of external stakeholders.

## **1.2 Focus of this Dissertation**

This dissertation takes the above-described observations as a starting point, arguing that organizations gradually make their way toward more open systems where external stakeholders demand more insight into the organization's real identity characteristics. As a consequence, organizations increasingly stretch their organizational identity expressions to external stakeholders in order to manage their perceptions of the organization. It is however at this margin, that we do not yet have specific insight in how organizations in fact manage their organizational identity expressions and how this affects external stakeholders' perceptions and subsequent behavior. In an effort to gain more insight into this question, I attempt to bridge the insights of organizational identity expressiveness and perception management literature and work toward a model that illuminates how organizational identity expressions can affect the perceptions of external stakeholders.

This dissertation therefore addresses the following overall research question:

*How can organizations effectively express their organizational identity in order to manage positive perceptions and subsequent behavioral reactions among external stakeholders?*

This overall question is broken down into three specific research questions.

1. *To what extent can organizational identity expressions influence stakeholders' perceptions of and subsequent intentions toward a company?*
2. *According to what kind of principles do companies orchestrate their organizational identity expressions in order to manage positive stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward their organization?*
3. *To what extent do the principles that organizations use to express their organizational identity influence stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward a company?*

The first specific research question attempts to get empirical insight into the extent to which organizational identity expressions indeed matter to external stakeholders. As argued in this chapter, although scholars have increasingly proffered the important role of organizational identity expressions for managing external stakeholders' perceptions, few studies have provided us with empirical evidence that this is indeed the case. The second research question is a first step toward gaining insight into how such organizational identity expressions are managed by organizations to affect external stakeholders' perceptions. Finally, the third question draws on the second question and tests the extent to which the identified expressiveness principles impact external stakeholders' perceptions and behavioral reactions toward a company.

### **1.3 Overview of the Dissertation**

The structure of this dissertation is depicted in Table 1-1. The dissertation is divided in three parts. Part one began with this chapter, in which I discussed the focus of my research. That is, the aim of this dissertation is to empirically study how organizations can effectively express their organizational identity in order to manage positive perceptions and subsequent behavioral reactions among external stakeholders.

Chapter two describes extant literature on both organizational identity expressions and perception management. I show that, despite their different foci of concern, both types of research streams focus on similar types of identity-related information. I argue that it is at these similar types of identity-related information that both research streams cross roads and where we can combine insights to study the role of organizational identity expressions in managing external stakeholders' perceptions and behavioral reactions toward an organization.

In alignment with the three specific research questions, part two consists of three studies. The first study, described in chapter three, addresses research question one. Research question one is an introductory question in order to be able to investigate the two other more central research questions. That is, before investigating how organizational identity expressions should be expressed effectively, I first need more insight in whether such expressions matter in the first place. Despite prior assumptions in the literature that organizational identity expressions also matter to external stakeholders, there have been few empirical efforts to investigate the extent to which these expressions indeed affect external audiences. This first study therefore examines the degree to which identity expressions matter to (two types of) stakeholders. Specifically, an experiment is conducted in which it is tested whether organizational identity expressions in addition to just job information or stock information has an added value to potential applicants and shareholders, respectively. In other words, do potential applicants or shareholders care about a firm's organizational identity expressions when forming their perceptions of a company and making decisions about working for or investing in a company? By testing the influence of organizational identity expressions on these two types of stakeholders, this first study provides a stepping stone for the other two studies.

Study two is discussed in chapter four and is devoted to the second research question. Since the literature has been scarce on how organizations can effectively express their various identity characteristics, this study takes an inductive research approach and extensively studies the organizational expressions of six large oil companies in order to identify specific principles along which these companies express their organizational identity. Based on the insights of this qualitative study, I develop a model describing four principles along which organizational expressions can be orchestrated in order to manage favorable perceptions and behavioral reactions among stakeholders. For each expressiveness principle, the model enunciates specific tactics that managers can use in creating their expressions according to the specific principle. Moreover, by combining theories that are used in the field of organizational identity expressiveness with theoretical insights that are common in the perception management literature, I provide insight into why these oil companies specifically seem to use these four principles in order to manage external perceptions of their organization.

Study three, as described in chapter five, extends the qualitative study by deductively testing the model that has been developed. In particular, an experiment is conducted that tests the degree to which and how the four identified principles influence stakeholders' perceptions of and responses toward companies.

The final part of this dissertation consists of chapter six and discusses the theoretical and managerial implications of this dissertation and puts these in perspective of the limitations of my work and suggestions for further research.



Table 1-1 Overview of the Dissertation

Part	Chap	Broad Research Question	Specific Research Question	Methodology
I	1	Introduction	Why are organizational identity expressions important to manage external stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward a company?	Literature review
	2	What do we already know from literature on organizational identity expressions and perception management and where do both research streams cross roads?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What types of identity information do organizational identity expressions constitute of?</li><li>• Through what types of signals are stakeholders' perceptions of a company constructed?</li><li>• How do these types of identity information and signals relate to each other?</li></ul>	Literature review
II	3	To what extent do organizational identity expressions influence stakeholders' perceptions of and subsequent intentions toward a company?	To what extent do organizational identity expressions in addition to only recruitment or financial information influence potential applicants' or potential investors' perceptions of and intentions toward the company?	Experiment
	4	Along what types of principles do companies generally orchestrate their organizational identity expressions in order to manage stakeholders'	How do companies in the oil industry express their organizational identity in order to manage positive stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward their organization?	Qualitative grounded theory approach

Part	Chap	Broad Research Question	Specific Research Question	Methodology
		perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward their organization?		
	5	To what extent do these expressiveness principles influence stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward a company?	To what extent and how do the in study two identified expressiveness principles have an effect on stakeholders' perceptions of, and their intentions to buy, invest or work for, oil companies?	Experiment
III	6	Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the main theoretical and managerial contributions of this dissertation?</li> <li>• How should the findings be interpreted in the light of the limitations of the conducted studies?</li> <li>• What are welcome future research directions?</li> </ul>	Synthesis



## **2 Bridging the Organizational Identity Expressiveness and Perception Management Literatures**

“Perception without conception is blind, conception without perception is empty” (Weick, 2007, p. 14).

In the previous chapter, I described that organizational identity scholars have mainly focused on organizational identity expressions to manage the perceptions and behavior of members within organizations, but underspecified how such expressions can impact external stakeholders. Perception management scholars, by comparison, did examine how to manage external stakeholders’ perceptions, but overlooked the specific role of organizational identity expressions in these perception management questions. In this chapter I review current insights that scholars have gained so far on organizational identity expressions on the one hand and perception management on the other. In doing so, I will show that although both research streams traditionally have different foci, the underlying features of both streams are more similar than scholars explicitly acknowledge. That is, the organizational identity expressiveness and perception management literature have both pointed to three similar types of identity-related information that are argued to be important for managing organizational expressions on the one hand or the perceptions of external stakeholders on the other. This chapter devotes attention to these types of identity-related information and argues where both research streams can be combined in order to examine the role of organizational identity expressions in managing external stakeholders’ perceptions of, and behavioral reactions toward, a company.

### **2.1 Organizational Identity Expressiveness**

This section discusses existing literature that provides insight in what types of identity-related information organizational identity expressions specifically consist of. Table 2-1 provides an overview of these types and shows how each links to prior literature on organizational identity expressiveness. Although the categorization is not intended to be mutually exclusive and

is most certainly not comprehensive, it is a helpful conceptual tool to pin down where the field of organizational identity expressions and perception management cross roads.

### **2.1.1 Strategic Identity Information**

Several scholars have investigated how during organizational change, managers seek to align members within the organization with the new strategic direction envisioned for the future. To this purpose, they often employ expressiveness efforts that reflect information about the firm's future 'desired identity' – the organizational identity that organizational leaders envision for the future of their organization, fitting this new strategic direction (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Fiol, 2002; Gioia & Thomas, 1996). For example, in a study by Gioia & Thomas (1996), it was observed that a university that aspired to become a top ten public research university, permeated the identity label 'Top ten University' through members' day to day interactions in order to align them with this new strategic vision. Through such expressiveness tactics managers attempt to shake members loose from their current identity perceptions in order to instill this new desired identity (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000).

Strategically oriented identity information has also been reported under the label of 'projected identities', sometimes referred to as 'intended' (Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2006), 'communicated' (Balmer & Greyser, 2002) or 'corporate identity' (Van Rekom, 1998; Van Riel & Balmer, 1997). While the 'desired identity' refers to a firm's envisioned identity for the future, scholars studying 'projected identities' basically refer to expressions of the organization's current identity (Carroll & Van Riel, 2001; Soenen & Moigneon, 2002).

Some of these scholars have been mostly concerned with projecting identities to internal stakeholders in an attempt to align members with the organization's actual strategic purpose and related identity (Carroll & Van Riel, 2001; Elstak, 2007; Elstak & Van Riel, 2004). In such cases, organizational leaders express strategically related information to internal members such as the organization's vision, mission or the group's distinctive characteristics vis-à-vis their competitors. Other scholars have looked at projected identities to strategically position the organization on the market and gain support from external stakeholders (Soenen & Moigneon, 2002; Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). These scholars have pointed to strategic identity information that distinguishes the company from competitors in terms of its corporate abilities like the firm's innovativeness, quality, programs and skills (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004).

Table 2-1 Types of Identity Information that Organizations Can Express

Types of Identity Information	Strategic Identity Information		Institutional Identity Information		Personality-Related Information	
	Grounded in	Desired Identity /Organizational Change:	Institutionalized Identity		Organizational Identity and Identification:	
		Managers express a desired future identity to imbue on their internal members a new strategic direction that managers envision for the future of their organization (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996).	Focus on institutional claims: explicit stated views about what an organization is and how it connects to societal norms, beliefs and demands (Czarniawska, 1997; Fox-Wolfgramm, Boal, & Hunt, 1998; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Whetten & Mackey, 2002).		Through intriguing chunks of information about an often charismatic person in the organization (e.g. the company founder) managers attempt to align members' thoughts about who they are as an organization with the personality characteristics of this specific person (e.g. Harquail, 2006).	
		<b>Projected Organizational Identity:</b> Managers express their strategic identity characteristics to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– align internal members toward the actual strategic direction and related identity (Caroll &amp; Van Riel, 2001; Elstak, 2007; Elstak &amp; Van Riel, 2004) or</li></ul>			<b>Organizational Stories:</b> Organizations express their personality to external stakeholders, often through easy to interpret and attractive stories (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004; Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006)	

Types of Identity Information	Strategic Identity Information	Institutional Identity Information	Personality-Related Information
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to strategically position the organization in the market and gain support from external stakeholders (Elstak, 2007; Elstak &amp; Van Riel, 2004; Soenen &amp; Moigneon, 2002; Van Riel &amp; Fombrun, 2007).</li> </ul>		
<b>Examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vision, mission, future beliefs (Gioia &amp; Chitipeddi, 1991; Gioia &amp; Thomas, 1996).</li> <li>Technology, innovativeness, business activities, types of products or services (Soenen &amp; Moigneon, 2002; Van Riel &amp; Fombrun, 2007).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Values, business principles, codes of conduct, programs and activities regarding social responsibility issues (Cheney &amp; Christensen, 2000; Czarniawska, 1997; Fombrun &amp; Rindova, 2000)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>History, country of origin, founding fathers, culture, management or people (Rindova, Pollock, &amp; Hayward, 2006; Schultz, Antorini, &amp; Csaba, 2005)</li> </ul>

Whether having an internal or external focus, these types of identity-related information are often expressed through a variety of corporate messages or channels such as an organization's intra- or internet site, corporate magazines, annual reports, the media or speeches by and interviews with company spokespersons (Czarniawska, 1997; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006).

An example of a company that has clearly focused on projecting or expressing its strategic characteristics is the Dutch Electronics company Philips. In line with its new strategy, Philips sets in motion a variety of internal and external expressions to demonstrate its identity of being a leading technological innovator. Through its slogan 'Sense and Simplicity' and statements such as "At Philips, we believe that technology should be as simple as the box it comes in" the company emphasizes that it is a technological leader that wants to enhance the quality of people's lives through technological innovations.

### **2.1.2 Institutional Identity Information**

Several scholars have argued that organizations express their identity characteristics and related goals and activities in such a way that it connects with more social concerns of their various stakeholders (Cheney & Christensen, 2000; Fox-Wolfgramm, Boal, & Hunt, 1998), such as whether the organization is concerned with its social environment or operates in safe and environmental friendly ways. Such dynamic types of identity have also been labeled as 'institutionalized identities', wherein the organization's self-definition becomes to a considerable extent a reflection of the social demands, beliefs, norms and values of today's society (Czarniawska, 1997; Whetten & Mackey, 2002). Through so-called 'institutional claims' organizations explicitly state their view of who they are (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006) and thus conform this to the institutional beliefs and norms within their environment (Fox-Wolfgramm, Boal, & Hunt, 1998). Such institutional claims are expressed through the firm's values, business principles or codes of conduct, but also through explanations of their social programs and activities (Cheney & Vibbert, 1987; Czarniawska, 1997) and even through the naming of the organization (Glynn & Abzug, 2002).

Cheney and Christensen's (2000) conceptual work describes how some organizations cleverly monitor what kind of social or environmental issues are likely to become a concern to the external environment and then proactively try to define, shape and express their organizational identity in the light of these emerging issues. As an example, by portraying Novo Nordisk as 'the world's leading diabetes care company', the Danish pharmaceutical organization



attempts to blend its organizational identity with one of the most difficult concerns (diabetes) in the health care.

However, organizations do not always conform their identity and related expressions to changing institutional demands without reluctance or resistance (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Fox-Wolfgramm, Boal, & Hunt, 1998). For example, in their study of the New York Port Authority, Dutton and Dukerich (1991) show how institutional pressures can initially create resistance from organizations to conform to these demands because the demanded changes do not fit with the organization's perceived organizational identity. Yet, in case their existing standpoints and behavior deteriorate the organization's image, organizational members do feel compelled to change because the damaged organization's image brings doubts and uneasiness about their organization's identity as well as members' own sense of self, as both are often tied to what external stakeholders think of them.

Moreover, organizations do not necessarily change their identity completely, but rather refine or expand their identity to include and express new identity elements that help the fundamental identity of the organization to be more flexible to institutional norms, beliefs and demands (Fox-Wolfgramm, Boal, & Hunt, 1998). Fombrun and Rindova (2000) have for example described how Shell, after its crises in 1995, re-considered its current identity by changing those identity elements that needed adaptation in accordance with institutional norms, values and beliefs. This led to an expansion of the company's business principles, by incorporating commitments to social, environmental and human rights. The organization started to put intensive efforts in expressing their refined identity, while simultaneously taking consideration of institutional concerns with regard to the company.

### **2.1.3 Personality-Related Identity Information**

Literature also points to expressions that reflect a firm's so-called 'personality'-related characteristics in terms of history, country of origin, culture, management and employees (Aaker, 1996; Harquail, 2006; Schultz, Antorini, & Csaba, 2005). For example, Harquail (2006) observed how the Heartland corporation used its founding mother Carrie King as a brand icon to personify their organizational identity to the internal members within Heartland. Through narratives describing who Carry was, what she stood for and how she came to start her company, Carry became an inspirational icon for the organizational members of Heartland in their day to day activities. By clearly expressing Carry's personality to internal members, they intend to align members' thoughts about who they are as an organization with the personality

characteristics of the founding mother of the company.

Similar personality-related information is also used to express the identity to external stakeholders (Aaker, 1996; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004; Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006). Scholars have for example pointed to the role of organizational stories in expressing the corporate personality of the organization (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004; Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006). By capturing the organizational identity in a story that evolves around the organization's personality, organizations not only attempt to express their identity in a comprehensible and attractive way (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004), they also seek to build a relationship with relevant stakeholders as stakeholders are more likely to identify with a company of which they perceive its personality to be similar to their own (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

Intriguing stories around the organization's personality also appear to be attractive 'information subsidies' for journalists who seek for intriguing facts to incorporate into their news stories (Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006). This is important for organizations to anticipate on because by channeling packages of personality-related information to the media, organizations can influence the type of identity-related information that flows from the media to their relevant stakeholders. For example, stories around IKEA's decision to abolish both Christmas parties ('why celebrating Christmas in specific and not other religious festivals?') and wedding gifts to just-married employees (because they did not want to signal that it is more 'correct' to be married than single) have traveled through the media and exemplified IKEA's unconventional personality (Schultz, Antorini, & Csaba, 2005).

Similar as with internal identity expressions, externally directed expressions regularly consist of stories referring to the founders of the firm. For example, Yahoo!'s expressions center on the story about how the two co-founders David Filo and Jerry Yang, two Ph.D. candidates in Electrical Engineering at Stanford University, started the business in a campus trailer. By often linking their identity expressions to these two irreverent personalities, the company claims the unique characters of these persons as part of the company's personality (Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006).

## **2.2 Perception Management**

During the past decades, perception management has been studied by organizational scholars from a variety of different research disciplines such as reputation management, legitimacy or corporate branding (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Elsbach, 1994; Fombrun & Shanley,

1990). Although from different theoretical backgrounds, these scholars have studied the important antecedent of stakeholders' perceptions of a company by paying attention to how such perceptions are constructed through the signals that stakeholders receive about the company. A signal refers to informational cues that stakeholders can receive about a company and that they can use to assess relevant attributes of the firm, such as whether a firm produces innovative products or is concerned with the environment in which it is operating (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Rindova, Williamson, & Petkova, 2005; Spence, 1974). Signals therefore serve to form perceptions about a firm and can as such reduce stakeholders' uncertainty regarding their future actions toward the company (Spence, 1974; Weigelt & Camerer, 1988).

This section provides an overview of the signals that have been reported to affect external stakeholders' perceptions and shows that these informative signals resemble the types of identity information that organizational identity expression constitute of: 1) strategic signals, 2) institutional signals and 3) organization personality signals. Table 2-2 summarizes the different types of signals and shows how they stem from different fields within the perception management literature.

### **2.2.1 Strategic Signals**

The significance of strategic signals has been explicitly recognized by reputation management scholars. Reputations generally refer to the perceptions that multiple stakeholders have on how well, in relation to its competitors, it can deliver value along key dimensions of performance (Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006) such as offering high quality products (Prabhu & Stewart, 2001; Weigelt & Camerer, 1988) and having a good financial performance (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). Those scholars studying reputation maintain that for instance a company's past actions (Weigelt & Camerer, 1988) or performance (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990) are important strategic signals that reflect the key strategic characteristics of the firm and help stakeholders to judge how well the company will perform vis-à-vis its competitors.

Table 2-2 Signals that Can Affect External Stakeholders' Perceptions of a company

Grounded in	Strategic Signals		Institutional Signals		Organization Personality Signals	
	Strategic Views on Reputation Management:	Strategic Views on Reputation Management:	Institutional Views on Reputation Management:	Organization Personality Perception:	Organization Personality Perception:	Organization Personality Perception:
	Strategic signals such as the firm's financial performance or the quality of its products help stakeholders to judge the company's reputation in relation to other companies (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Kindova, Williamson, & Petkova, 2005).	Strategic signals, signals that show that the organization conforms to its social environment are important input for stakeholders to judge the reputation of the company (Deephouse, 1999; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990)	People use personality traits such as 'friendly' 'trustworthy' or 'charming' to form their images of a companies (Chun & Davies, 2006; Davies, Chun, Silva, & Roper, 2003; Slaughter, Mohr, Zickar, & Highhouse, 2004);			
	<b>Resource-Based Views:</b> Strategic signals inform stakeholders whether an organization is able to meet their performance expectations, which stakeholders need to know in order to decide whether to provide the company with resources (Barney, 1991; Suchman, 1995) .	<b>Legitimacy:</b> Perceptions of legitimacy are the outcome of informative signals about the degree to which a company's behavior reflects the social expectations of the environment in which it is immersed (1990; Elsbach, 1994; Suchman, 1995). Such signals can be either substantive or symbolic (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990).	<b>Organizational Psychology:</b> Personality-related trait inferences such as 'trendy', 'exciting' or 'cool' add incremental positive value in assessing an organization as an attractive place to work for (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens, Hoye, & Schreurs, 2005).			

	Strategic Signals		Institutional Signals		Organization Personality Signals
	Corporate Branding:		Corporate Branding:		Cognitive Psychology:
<b>Examples of Types of Signals</b>	Corporate ability signals carry diagnostic types of information in forming perceptions of a company and its products (Berens & Van Riel, 2004; Biehal & Sheinin, 2007; Brown & Dacin, 1997)		Besides corporate ability signals, stakeholders are also sensitive to signals that convey a firm's corporate social responsibility in forming perceptions of a company and its products (Berens & Van Riel, 2004; Brown & Dacin, 1997; Handelman & Arnold, 1999)		'People interpret behavior in terms of an applicable and accessible personality trait, either one provided or one that comes to mind' (Fiske & Taylor, 1991, p. 301).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accounting profitability and risk, market valuation and dividend yield (Fombrun &amp; Shanley, 1990)</li> <li>Advertising or pricing strategy (Shapiro, 1983)</li> <li>Pattern of investments (Dierckx &amp; Cool, 1989)</li> <li>Vision and leadership (Fombrun, Gardberg, &amp; Sever, 2000; Fombrun &amp; Shanley, 1990)</li> <li>Product quality and innovativeness (Brown &amp; Dacin, 1997; Keller &amp; Aaker, 1998)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Substantive signals: structures, procedures, programs that conform to social expectations and demands (Ashforth &amp; Gibbs, 1990)</li> <li>Symbolic signals: certifications (Rao, 1994)</li> <li>CSR signals through cause related marketing (Handelman &amp; Arnold, 1999; Sen &amp; Bhattacharya, 2001)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The type of products or services, the architecture of an organization's office buildings (Slaughter et al., 2004)</li> <li>Logo's, visuals and language (e.g. 'hip' language for exciting companies) (Aaker, Fournier, &amp; Brasel, 2004).</li> </ul>

For instance, the findings of a study by Fombrun and Shanley (1990) showed that strategic signals like a firm's accounting profitability and risk, but also its market valuation and dividend yield are important informational cues that stakeholders attend to when forming reputational judgments of a company. Also an organization's advertising or pricing strategy (Shapiro, 1983) as well as its pattern of investments (Dierickx & Cool, 1989) are reported to be vital signals that inform stakeholders about a firm's underlying strategic characteristics. Moreover, several scholars have reported that in forming their perceptions of an organization, stakeholders are, besides the earlier mentioned products and services or financial performance, also sensitive to signals that inform them about strategically related characteristics such as the company's vision and leadership (Fombrun, Gardberg, & Sever, 2000; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004).

Scholars from a resource-based perspective have pointed out to the importance of strategic signals in order to influence the perceptions of stakeholders on whom they depend for their resources (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Suchman, 1995). According to these scholars, organizations can only get access to their resources if they can signal to these resource-critical stakeholders that they are able to meet their performance expectations (Barney, 1991; Suchman, 1995). For example, substantive actions such as providing a good return on shareholders' equity or offering reliable and reasonably-priced products for customers may serve as important signals that the company performs consistent with critical and influential stakeholders' expectations (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990). Apart from such substantive signals, more symbolically related signals are also used to convey performance-specific characteristics (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990). For example winning a certification contest may effectively symbolize that the organization's practices are of a high caliber (Rao, 1994). Such symbolic signals are picked up by constituencies who use them as informational inputs in judging the strategic legitimacy of the firm.

Although not explicitly labeled as such, the importance of strategic signals has also been acknowledged by corporate branding scholars (Berens, Van Riel, & Van Bruggen, 2005; Bichal & Sheinin, 2007; Brown & Dacin, 1997). That is, these scholars have shown that stakeholders' associations about an organization's corporate ability, or its expertise in producing products or delivering services, profoundly determine stakeholders' overall evaluations of a company and serve as diagnostic information for evaluating the organization's products or services. (Bichal & Sheinin, 2007; Brown & Dacin, 1997; Keller & Aaker, 1998). For example, a study by Keller and Aaker (1998) show that corporate marketing activities that signal a company's product

innovation leads to favorable perceptions of corporate expertise, which subsequently impacts consumers' intentions to buy products from the specific company.

Thus, scholars within different fields of perception management share the assumption that signals that convey an organization's underlying strategic characteristics such as its financial performance or ability to deliver qualitative products, profoundly impact stakeholders' perceptions of the firm. However, these scholars have paid little attention to how such signals can be managed when they derive from an organization's broad array of expressiveness efforts.

### **2.2.2 Institutional Signals**

Scholars in the field of reputation, legitimacy and corporate branding have commonly recognized that, besides strategic signals, institutional signals are also a matter of concern to stakeholders in forming their perceptions of a company (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Deephouse, 1999; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Handelman & Arnold, 1999; Rindova, Williamson, & Petkova, 2005). Institutional signals inform stakeholders about the degree to which a company is socially legitimate, that is, whether its behavior reflects the expectations and norms of the environment in which it is immersed, specifically in terms of its responsibility with regard to social and environmental issues (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Suchman, 1995).

Within the corporate branding literature, for example, a study by Handelman and Arnold (1999) shows that consumers *do* expect a minimum level of corporate social responsibility (CSR) from a firm below which corporate ability (CA) associations about the firm do not have any impact. Thus, even though a company elicits highly positive CA associations among its consumers, if these consumers think that their CSR associations are below a certain level of acceptance, their level of support for the organization in terms of buying or loyalty behavior "becomes barely distinguishable from that of a low performative firm" (Handelman & Arnold, 1999, p. 43). Thus, the interplay between CA and CSR associations is important in influencing stakeholders' behavioral reactions toward a company.

Just as strategic signals, institutional signals can rest on either substantive actions or symbolic management. With regard to the former, organizations can implement visible new structures, procedures or programs that signal that they substantially conform to institutional demands (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Elsbach, 1994; Suchman, 1995). For example, organizations increasingly align their operations with international environmental standards such as ISO

14000<sup>2</sup> where the company operates according to environmentally accepted quality standards and commits to have its operations monitored by external agencies. With regard to the latter, organizations can tie to a highly regarded institution or seek to win a social or environmental certification contest in order to symbolize that the organization's practices are legitimate (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Rao, 1994).

Although scholars have focused on the effect of such specific institutional signals, they have less specifically focused on how managers can have control over such signals by means of their organizational identity expressiveness efforts.

### **2.2.3 Organization Personality Signals**

Some scholars have argued that stakeholders form images of a company by attributing certain personality traits such as 'friendly' 'trustworthy' or 'charming' to companies (Aaker, 1996; Davies, Chun, & Silva, 2001; Davies et al., 2003). While image formation based on personality-traits has originally received attention by researchers in the field of marketing (Aaker, 1997) organizational scholars have in similar ways started to tease out the different types of personality-traits that stakeholders use to form perceptions of organizations (Davies et al., 2003; Slaughter et al., 2004). For example, Davies, Chun and Silva (2003), adapted Aaker's (1997) five-factor scale that measured perceived brand personality, and found seven human-trait dimensions to be important in describing a certain organization. These five dimensions were labeled as: 1) agreeableness (e.g. friendly, pleasant), 2) enterprise (e.g. cool, trendy), 3) competence (e.g. reliable, ambitious), 4) ruthlessness (e.g. arrogant, aggressive), 5) chic (e.g. charming, stylish), 6) informality (e.g. causal, simple) and 7) machismo (e.g. masculine, tough).

Several studies have suggested that personality-related signals affect stakeholders' overall perceptions of attractiveness of an organization (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens, Hoye, & Schreurs, 2005; Slaughter et al., 2004). For example, in two interesting studies conducted by Lievens and his colleagues (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens, Hoye, & Schreurs, 2005) it is shown that personality-related trait inferences such as 'trendy', 'exciting' or 'cool' add incremental positive value, over and above job/organizational inferences, in assessing an organization as an attractive place to work for. Moreover, such personality-related traits also appear to work as good differentiators from other organizations (Aaker, 1996; Chun & Davies,

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<sup>2</sup> The ISO 14000 environmental management standards exist to help organizations minimize how their operations negatively affect the environment (e.g. cause adverse changes to air, water, or land), comply with laws, regulations and other environmental requirements, and continually improve on the above. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISO\\_14000](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISO_14000))



2006; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). That is, organizational attributes of a firm (or ‘strategic’, as labeled in this dissertation) such as its level of quality might not always be good discriminators because the differences on such attributes between firms are often trivial. It is at these marginal differences, that personality-related traits do still have the potential to distinguish the organization from other companies.

Finally, personality-related inferences may provide stakeholders with an easy to interpret framework to judge the organization’s decisions and actions. As Fiske and Taylor (1991) note, ‘people interpret behavior in terms of an applicable and accessible personality trait, either one provided or one that comes to mind’. This would imply that signals that provide stakeholders with an idea about the firm’s ‘personality’ can shape stakeholders’ subsequent interpretations and judgments about the decisions or behaviors of that firm.

Noteworthy is that these studies have examined how people perceive organizations in terms of personality traits, but hardly looked at how such personality-related perceptions exist as a result of actually emitting personality-related signals, let alone as a result of signals coming from a firm’s own expressiveness efforts. Nevertheless, their findings do certainly suggest that in forming perceptions of a company, stakeholders are highly sensitive to such personality-related signals.

## **2.3 Conclusion**

The foregoing discussion has provided insight in the extant literature on organizational identity expressiveness on the one hand and perception management on the other. By teasing out the different types of identity information that each research stream has focused on and describing how these correspond, I have attempted to show that, despite their different foci, both literatures have more in common than scholars have explicitly acknowledged.

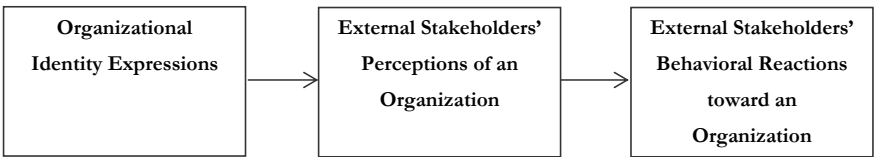
I believe that it is by virtue of their divergent foci as well as by this shared concern for organizational identity-information, that the different types of literature can fulfill complementary goals in studying the research question of this dissertation. That is, the organizational identity expressiveness literature has provided conceptual insight in the nature of organizational identity expressions and has investigated its important role within organizations, together serving as a fruitful starting point for studying the impact of organizational identity expressions on stakeholders outside the organization. The perception management literature provides insight into how external stakeholders’ perceptions can be influenced through different types of identity-related signals, providing crucial insight for starting to gain understanding on

how identity signals coming from a firm’s own organizational identity expressions can affect the perceptions of external stakeholders. This dissertation therefore draws on both streams of literature and combines the insights and theories from organizational identity expressions as well as from perception management to gain more understanding into how organizational identity expressions can be effectively managed in order to influence the perceptions and behavioral reactions of external stakeholders.

In the second part of this dissertation, the three empirical studies are discussed. The conceptual framework for these studies is depicted in Figure 2–1.

In an attempt to fuse both types of research fields, chapter three starts with an empirical study in which I test the extent to which organizational identity expressions influence the perceptions and behavioral reactions of two types of important stakeholders: potential investors and potential job candidates. This study serves as an important introductory study to the two main studies that focus on the primary research question: how can organizations effectively express their organizational identity in order to manage positive perceptions and subsequent behavioral reactions among external stakeholders? This research question is first addressed in the second, qualitative, study that is described in chapter four. Based on this study, four expressiveness principles are identified that appear to be crucial for managers in the oil industry to express their organizational identities to external stakeholders. In the third study, the effect of these expressiveness principles is quantitatively tested on stakeholders’ perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward an oil company. This final study is described in chapter five, followed up by a general discussion of the three studies in chapter six.

**Figure 2–1 Conceptual Framework**





## **Part II**

### **HOW TO EFFECTIVELY EXPRESS THE ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY IN ORDER TO MANAGE STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF AND BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS TOWARD THE COMPANY.**

The first part of this dissertation discussed that external stakeholders become increasingly more inquisitive in organizations and that as a result, managers and scholars struggle with the question how to express their organizational identity to manage the perceptions of external stakeholders. It was argued that, despite this growing concern, organizational identity scholars have empirically under-explored the role of such expressions in managing external stakeholders' perceptions. Perception management scholars, on their part, have examined how to manage stakeholders' perceptions but usually escaped from devoting attention to the role of organizational identity expressions in managing such perceptions.

Chapter two discussed existing literature on organizational identity expressiveness on the one hand and perception management on the other. It showed that, despite their different foci, both fields of research have common starting points: the key role of similar types of identity-related information. Hence, this dissertation combines the insights from both fields to gain a deeper understanding on how organizational identity expressions can be managed to affect external stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward a company.

The next part discusses the three empirical studies of this dissertation. Chapter three describes a study in which I tested the extent to which organizational identity expressions matter to two types of important stakeholders: potential applicants and potential investors. Chapter four discusses the findings of an extensive qualitative study from which I identified four principles of expressiveness that seem to be important for managers of oil companies to express their identity effectively. The final study, in chapter five, experimentally tests the extent to which these identified principles impact stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward an oil company.



### 3 Study One: To What Extent Do Organizational Identity Expressions Matter to External Stakeholders?

“Once people begin to act, they generate tangible outcomes in some context, and this helps them discover what is occurring, what needs to be explained and what should be done next [...] *people* keep forgetting that it is what they do, not what they plan, that explains their success” (Weick, p. 55; italic word added).

To provide more insight into the role of organizational identity expressions in managing stakeholders’ perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward a company, this chapter will turn to the first research question as posed in chapter one: To what extent do organizational identity expressions influence stakeholders’ perceptions of and subsequent intentions toward a company? Specifically, this chapter pays attention to the effect of organizational identity expressions on two types of stakeholders, namely potential applicants and potential investors. Since potential applicants’ and potential investors’ behavior toward the company directly affects the success of a company, I believe that more knowledge on how to effectively express to these stakeholders is welcome. To test whether organizational identity expressions really matter to these two groups of stakeholders, I have investigated the extent to which organizational identity expressions in addition to just recruitment information (for potential applicants) or financial information (for potential investors) matter to these types of stakeholders.

Several prior studies have looked at the extent to which specific organizational identity signals can impact potential applicants’ or potential investors’ responses (Higgins & Gulati, 2006; Judge & Bretz, 1992; Walker, Feild, Giles, Bernerth, & Jones-Farmer, 2007). However, these studies did not explicitly study the impact of these organizational identity characteristics in case they derive from a firm’s broad array of organizational identity expressiveness efforts. For example, Judge and Bretz (1992) investigated how organizational work values in recruitment information affect potential applicants’ attractiveness toward a firm, but only looked at the differential effect of a small set of values. They were thus not concerned with how potential applicants react to the more complex nature of organizational identity expressions in and of

itself. In a financial investment context, Higgins and Gulati (2006) demonstrated that information about the top management backgrounds can affect investors' decisions. However, their examination drew on accessible databases and thus did not focus on the effect of organizational identity signals that derive from a company's own expressiveness efforts. This chapter attempts to provide insight into this question.

Drawing on theories used in the field of organizational identity expressiveness as well as perception management, hypotheses will be developed that address the influence of organizational identity expressions in addition to recruitment or financial information on potential applicants and investors, respectively. The findings show that organizational identity expressions beyond just recruitment or financial information have an additional value for both types of stakeholders, although each of them differ in how they use the content of these expressions in forming their perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward a company.

### **3.1 Theoretical Perspective**

Two different theoretical streams are valuable in understanding why organizational identity expressions can be fruitful in managing external stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward an organization. The first stream can be synthesized under the header of 'information processing' theories and has traditionally been more of a concern to perception management scholars (Berens, Van Riel, & Van Bruggen, 2005; Fischer & Reuber, 2007; Forehand & Grier, 2003; Higgins & Gulati, 2006). Generally, information processing theories concentrate on the question how people process information about subjects, objects or issues at hand (for an overview see Meyers-Levy & Malaviya, 1999). The second strand is known as 'social identity' theories and organizational identification and has traditionally been an insightful theory for organizational identity scholars (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Pratt, 1998). Social identity theories are particularly concerned with why persons feel attracted to and want to identify with certain groups (e.g. organizations) in their social environment. Both theories are an insightful conceptual lens for formulating the hypotheses regarding the effect of organizational identity expressions on stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward a company.

### **3.2 Information Processing Theories**

A first important theory that contributed to scholars' insights on information processing is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), originally developed by Petty &

Cacioppo (1986; 1981; 1986) but in a later stage studied by various other scholars (see for example Chen, Shechter, & Chaiken, 1996; Hutchinson & Alba, 1991).

The model proposes two different ways in which people may process a message in order to make a judgment. Which of the two routes of information processing are taken depends on motivational and capability factors that influence the cognitive efforts that a person devotes to processing the information. The first manner of processing is called the 'central route processing'. This extensive approach of information processing occurs when people are motivated to form an accurate view regarding a certain object or issue (Chen, Shechter, & Chaiken, 1996), are also able to do this and have more than enough opportunity to process the messages extensively and critically (Zuckerman & Chaiken, 1998). In this case, the likelihood of elaboration of the message is high and people attend to the message arguments, attempt to understand them and then evaluate them in order to make a judgment with regard to the object or issue at hand (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). However, if people's likelihood of elaboration is low as a consequence of little motivation, ability or opportunity to process the message, people are apt to process the message through the 'peripheral' route. This yields that people form a judgment based on 'heuristic cues' such as the attractiveness of the music in a television commercial or a celebrity endorser within a print advertisement. While this theory helps us to predict whether people are likely to process a message more extensively or more heuristically, only considering the processing route that a person is likely to take limits the theory in predicting the persuasive impact of a message (Meyers-Levy & Malaviya, 1999). A better understanding of message persuasion requires consideration of other important factors as well.

To predict when people use certain pieces of information, Feldman & Lynch (1988) introduced the accessibility-diagnosticsity theory. This theory describes how people select their pieces of information when multiple information sources are available. That is, the likelihood that a certain piece of information is used depends on) the accessibility of the information, 2) the accessibility of other pieces of information, and 3) the perceived diagnosticsity of the information. Information is diagnostic to the degree that a person believes that a specific piece of information would accomplish his or her decision goals (e.g. in terms of overall evaluation of a company, buying products/shares from the firm or applying for a job at the company). Thus, persons are more likely to use a certain piece of information over others when it is accessible to them, when other information is less accessible and when the information is perceived to be useful for the judgment or decision making process at hand. When people are highly motivated to search for information, they may take the 'central route of processing' in which their



diagnosticity threshold level is relatively high (Lynch, Marmorstein, & Weigold, 1988). They keep on processing information until they have reached their threshold in accumulating diagnostic information (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Lynch, Marmorstein, & Weigold, 1988; Simmons, Bickart, & Lynch, 1993)

Information seeking theory suggests that people's search for information in certain decision making processes is determined by several factors (Atkin, 1973; Beatty & Smith, 1987; Newman, 1977). One of these factors is the risk that people perceive in a decision process. Specifically, if people feel a considerable degree of risk in a particular decision making process, their uncertainty regarding the decision making process increases and, as a result, they are motivated to search for information that may help them to reduce this uncertainty (Atkin, 1973; Gemünden, 1985; Moorthy, Ratchford, & Talukdar, 1997; Srinivasan & Ratchford, 1991). As pointed out by Gürhan-Canli and Batra (2004), people search for diagnostic information that may reduce their uncertainty with regard to their decision making object or issue at hand. As previously discussed, if diagnostic information about the object or issue is found, people are likely to arrive at more favorable judgments of the object or issue at hand than if diagnostic information is not found (Baker & Lutz, 1988; Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Meyers-Levy & Malaviya, 1999).

### **3.3 Social Identity Theories and Organizational Identification**

The social identity theory posits that in defining their sense of self, people often go beyond their personal identity and develop a desired social identity (Leary, 1983; Schlenker, 1986). They do so by identifying themselves with or categorizing themselves in a social context such as a political party, one's profession or one's sports team. The characteristics of the social context in which the person perceives his or her membership are used to develop his or her social identity (Brewer, 1991; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Put more simply, a person defines himself by classifying him into a certain group ("I am a European").

Based on this social identity theory, several authors started to analyze why people identify with organizations in particular (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Pratt, 1998). Organizational identification has been viewed as a process in which an individual's beliefs about an organization become self-referential or self-defining (Pratt, 1998). That is, their beliefs about the organizational identity are comprised in their own social identity. In other words, a person defines himself by cognitively classifying himself in a certain organization (E.g. "I'm a McKinsey guy").

As explained by Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail (1994), the degree to which a person tends to identify with a company depends on the attractiveness of the firm's organizational identity for fulfilling three basic self-definitional needs. First of all, an identity becomes more attractive if it matches people's own sense of who they are. In that way, it helps them to fulfill their inner need to maintain a stable and consistent sense of self over time and across situations. Second, people have a strong preference to distinguish themselves from others in social contexts. Distinctive organizational identities are, therefore, more attractive because they provide themselves with a sense of distinctiveness. Finally, if a company's identity is based on features related to high-prestige, people are likely more attracted to the firm's identity because associating with a high prestige company enhances their self-esteem (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Pratt, 1998).

Although identification research has originally focused on employees' identification with the company that they work for, increasingly more scholars note that external stakeholders can identify with an organization as well. For example, Turban and Greening (1997) found that job seekers are more attracted to firms showing positive corporate social performance. They reason that job seekers likely expect to have more positive self-concepts when they work for such a company that engages in socially responsible actions. In a consumer context, Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) studied when and why consumers identify with a certain organization. They for example argue that consumers need knowledge about the firm's organizational identity to decide whether or not the company is attractive enough to identify with. Their degree of identity knowledge is determined by how much they learn through a firm's communication efforts about its organizational identity. This implies that positive organizational identity information through a firm's communication efforts can positively influence consumers' attraction toward a firm. Along similar lines in the employment image literature, Cable and Yu (2006) have demonstrated that the perceived richness of an organization's information source positively influences job seekers' beliefs of the specific organization.

These arguments suggest that organizational identity expressions play an important role in managing stakeholders' perceptions of and subsequent identification processes with regard to a company.

### **3.4 Hypotheses Development**

Because the performance of a share is likely to affect an investor's financial situation, it is expected that investors consider the decision process of buying shares from a particular

company as considerably risky and relevant (cf. Fischer & Reuber, 2007). It is likely that they will, therefore, be strongly motivated to search for and to elaborate on diagnostic information to reduce their uncertainty regarding the risk that the share will not fulfill their needs. Given that the performance of a share is very much intertwined with the intangible assets of a company such as its vision, mission, values, beliefs, people, programs and activities, I further suspect that information on those organizational identity characteristics serves as diagnostic information in making their decisions to buy shares from a specific company. Assuming that organizations generally express their identities in a rather positive than negative way, receiving such diagnostic information may therefore positively affect their evaluations of the organization.

*Hypothesis 1a:* When potential investors receive (positive) organizational identity expressions in addition to (positive) financial information, their evaluations of the company are higher than when they only receive (positive) financial information.

Theories on social identity and organizational identification suggest that people generally want to work for an organization that may help them fulfilling their self-definitional needs such as self-esteem or self-distinctiveness (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Turban & Greening, 1997). In order to decide whether identifying with a specific organization may fulfill these needs they are likely in search for diagnostic information about who the organization is and what it stands for; the organization's identity.

In a similar line as with hypothesis one, I therefore suspect that if potential job applicants receive (positive) diagnostic information about the organization's identity they generate more positive evaluations of the firm than when they only receive information about the specific job vacancy.

*Hypothesis 1b:* When potential job applicants receive (positive) organizational identity expressions in addition to (positive) information about the job, their evaluations of the company are higher than when they only receive the (positive) information about the job.

Empirical studies within different research streams of perception management have supported the notion that positive perceptions of a company affect people's intentions toward

the company. For example, within the reputation management literature it has been found that companies with a better reputation are able to attain a stronger position on the financial market (Roberts & Dowling, 1997; Srivastava, McInish, Wood, & Capraro, 1997), sustain superior financial performance (Roberts & Dowling, 2002) and even attract better qualified job applicants (Cable & Turban, 2003; Collins & Han, 2004; Rynes, 1991). The latter is also corroborated by recruitment researchers who have shown that application decisions are highly affected by applicants' overall evaluation of a company (Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993; Rynes, 1991; Turban & Greening, 1997). Moreover, as described earlier, social identity theory indicates that people have a desire to identify with organizations that they perceive as attractive, because this attractiveness may act as a positive halo on their personal self-esteem (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994), implying that potential applicants tend to search for jobs at companies that they perceive positively.

Consistent with this literature, it is proposed that positive judgments regarding a company due the availability of organizational identity expressions, positively affects stakeholders' intentions toward the firm. In other words, I predict that the influence of organizational identity expressions on stakeholders' intentions toward a firm is mediated by their overall judgment of the firm.

*Hypothesis 2a:* The impact of organizational identity expressions on potential investors' intentions to buy shares from the firm is mediated by their evaluations of the company.

*Hypothesis 2b:* The impact of organizational identity expressions on potential applicants' intentions to apply for a job at the firm is mediated by their evaluations of the company.

## **3.5 Method**

### **3.5.1 Manipulation**

I used an experimental design to be able to control for potential threats to internal validity. With the help of several financial and recruitment experts, four types of corporate brochures were developed of a fictitious Norwegian company ("Odin") in the coating industry. A fictitious company was used so that existing knowledge about the company could not affect respondents' reactions. The reason for choosing a company in the coating industry is that I felt

that the coating industry produced considerable neutral feelings among respondents, so that extremely negative or positive feelings with regard to the type of industry did not affect their reactions toward Odin. Since the respondents were students from The Netherlands, the brochures were written in the Dutch language.

The four types of brochures consisted of two variants of recruitment brochures and two variants of financial brochures. For both brochures, one variant included additional organizational identity information and one did *not* include organizational identity information.

The recruitment brochures were created for potential applicants that are to begin their working career. This was done to create involvement among the respondents who were Dutch graduate students in Finance. Both variants started with a page of general information about the firm's business activities, the location of the firm's headquarter and the consolidated revenues of the company. Additionally, each variant consisted of four pages of information related to the attractiveness of working at Odin. Specifically, information was provided about 1) a management trainee program that a potential employee would be following, if it would start his or her career at Odin, 2) potential growth opportunities to a management function, 3) international working opportunities, 4) primary and secondary working conditions and finally 5) different types of functions that a potential applicant could fulfill at Odin. Regarding the latter, four different types of functions were described of which one or more were likely to be attractive to the respondents. The recruitment brochure without additional organizational identity information is depicted in Appendix A-I.

The recruitment brochure with additional organizational identity information was manipulated by extending the above-described recruitment information with three pages including information about the firms' 1) strategic abilities (the firm's market opportunities, its mission, research and development and a short notice that the company is financially healthy), 2) institutional identity characteristics (the company's social responsibility activities) and 3) personality (history, past and present CEOs, its people). Recall that I conceptualized these three types as being the information pillars of organizational identity expressions (see section 2.1). The additional organizational identity information is depicted in Appendix A-III.

Similar as with the recruitment brochures, the two variants of financial brochures started with a page of general information about the firm's business activities, the location of the firm's headquarter and the consolidated revenues of the company. In addition, each variant consisted of information about 1) the firm's financial results in 2003 -compared to 2002- and its financial results of the first half year of 2004, 2) its share performance from 2001 until 2004 and

3) the firm's dividend policy. One of both variants was extended by the same three pages of organizational identity information as in the extended recruitment brochure (see Appendix A-II for the financial brochure without organizational identity information and Appendix A-III for the additional organizational identity information). The brochures were colorful, included visuals and provided contact information in order to make the brochures as realistic as possible.

### **3.5.2 Pretest**

A pretest was conducted among approximately 10 students of the Erasmus University in order to search for possible confounding effects in the relatively large amount of text in the brochures. The students were requested to read the brochures after which they were interviewed immediately. Specifically, I asked them whether specific features in the text or the lay-out of the brochure struck their attention. Subsequently, they were asked to explain why this particular feature grasped their attention. This resulted in elimination of several photos that were considered as being too attractive, including some texts that were either unclear or elicited unwanted feelings. I also asked the students whether they thought that the brochure was realistic. After interviewing 10 students I felt that I had reached a satisfactory level in eliminating as many confounding factors as possible.

### **3.5.3 Procedure of Main Experiment**

One hundred and seventy graduates of the Erasmus University, enrolled in a financial course, participated in the experiment. The four types of brochures were randomly assigned to the students. Participants were requested to read the corporate brochure carefully, after which they were asked to fill in a questionnaire. Students were allowed to look back in the brochure while answering the questionnaire. The whole experiment took approximately twenty minutes.

#### *3.5.3.1 Measures*

Table 3-1 provides an overview of the different measures used. All measures were based on a 7-point scale.

Overall Company Evaluation was measured by asking respondents about the favorability of their overall perception of the company. The scale was adapted from Brown and Dacin's (1997) study who, similar as in my study, asked respondents to provide an overall opinion of a fictive company based on the company information that they were given during the experiment.

In order to measure the intention to apply for a job at Odin, respondents were asked to choose one function in the brochure which appeared to be most attractive to them. Next, they were told to imagine that they were interested in such a job in the coating industry. Subsequently, they were requested to answer one item concerning their attraction to the company as a place to work (Luce, Barber, & Hillman, 2001; Slaughter et al., 2004) and three items on their intentions to apply for a job at the company (The likelihood that they would: 1) request additional information about the job offer, 2) apply for the job and 3) accept an employment offer (Schwoerer & Rosen, 1989)). The ratings for the four questions were averaged to form the 'Intention to Apply for a Job' variable.

For the variable 'Intention to Buy Shares', I constructed items that were similar in nature to the intention items in the recruitment brochure. Specifically, respondents were told to imagine that they unexpectedly received an amount of € 100 000 and that they would decide to use it for buying a package of shares. Based on this information they were asked to fill in questions that measured 1) their attraction to the company as a firm to buy shares from, 2) the likelihood that they would request additional information about the shares and 3) the probability that they would use a part of the € 100 000 to buy shares from the firm. Again, the three questions were averaged.

To measure the main independent variable 'Additional Organizational Identity Expressions', three items were used. Specifically, in the questionnaire related to the recruitment brochure, I have included the following items: 1) In addition to the career opportunities at Odin, I have also knowledge about the organization Odin, 2) the brochure provides me with sufficient information about the organization Odin, 3) the information in the brochure gives me a good impression of the organization Odin.

Table 3-1 Overview of the Measures

Construct	Items	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Overall Company Evaluation	1. My overall impression of Odin is...(Very negative - Very positive)	
Intention to Apply for a Job	1. Odin seems an attractive company to work for (Totally disagree – Totally agree) 2. The chance that I would gather more information about this job at Odin is...(Very small - Very big) 3. The chance that I would accept an offer for this job at Odin is...(Very small – Very big)	.85
Intention to Buy Shares	1. Odin seems an attractive company to buy shares from (Totally disagree – Totally agree) 2. The chance that I would gather more information about shares from Odin is...(Very small - Very big) 3. The chance that I would use part of the €100,000 to buy shares from Odin is...(Very small - Very big)	.82
Additional Organizational Identity Expressions	1. In addition to the career opportunities at Odin, I have also knowledge about <u>the organization</u> Odin (Totally disagree - Totally agree) <sup>1</sup> 2. The brochure provides me with sufficient information about the organization Odin (Totally disagree - Totally agree) 3. The information in the brochure gives me a good impression of the organization Odin. (Totally disagree - Totally agree)	.86
	<sup>1</sup> For the financial Brochures similar items are used, except for item 1: "Besides financial information, I have ...."	.81



Construct	Items	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Perceived Relevance	<i>Recruitment brochure:</i> Choosing a first job is a (Very irrelevant decision) - (Very relevant decision) <i>Financial brochure:</i> Making a selection out of shares from different companies is a (Very irrelevant decision) - (Very relevant decision)	
Perceived Risk	<i>Recruitment brochure:</i> Choosing a first job at an unknown company is: (Not risky at all) - (Extremely risky). <i>Financial brochure:</i> Buying shares from an unknown company is: (Not risky at all) - (Extremely risky).	

Note: All items were measured on a 7-point scale.

The questionnaire related to the financial brochure included similar items: 1) Besides financial information, I have also knowledge about the organization Odin, 2) the brochure provided me with sufficient information about the organization Odin, 3) the information in the brochures gives me a good impression about the organization Odin. The measures for the independent variable were also used to test the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation.

Finally, I also included an item that tested whether my assumptions regarding people's high perceived relevance of buying shares or applying for a job were confirmed. ("Making a selection out of shares from different companies is a very irrelevant decision – very relevant decision"; "Choosing a first job is a very irrelevant decision –very relevant decision" (Kapferer & Laurent, 1986)). Respondents' perceived risk of applying for a job at a company or buying shares from a company was measured by including the following items: ("Buying shares from an unknown company is: not risky at all– extremely risky"; "Choosing a first job at an unknown company is: not risky at all– extremely risky" (Jacoby & Kaplan, 1972).

### 3.5.3.2 *Manipulation Check*

The manipulation check indicated that the degree to which respondents felt that they had received organizational identity information besides recruitment/financial information was significantly higher for respondents exposed to the brochures with organizational identity information than for the respondents exposed to the brochures without organizational identity information (Recruitment brochure with organizational identity information = 4.14, Recruitment brochure without organizational information = 3.42,  $F = 9.96$ ,  $p < 0.00$ ; Financial brochure with organizational identity information = 3.83, Financial brochure without organizational identity information = 2.96,  $F = 11.26$ ,  $p < 0.00$ ).

## 3.6 Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations between all the variables in the model are provided for each type of brochure in Table 3-2 to Table 3-5.

The scores on the items that assessed respondents' perceived risk and relevance support my assumptions that potential applicants and potential investors perceive applying for a job / buying shares as risky and relevant (Perceived relevance of buying shares on a 7-point scale: 6.10; Perceived relevance of applying for a job on a 7-point scale: 6.14; Perceived risk of buying shares on a 7-point scale: 5.32; Perceived risk of applying for a job on a 7-point scale: 4.30).

Since the second hypothesis suggests that the relationship between additional organizational identity expressions and intentions toward the company is mediated by people's evaluation of the company, I conducted hierarchical regression to test these mediation hypotheses. The four-step procedure recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986) was used to assess the mediating effects.

To test the mediation hypotheses, I first needed to test whether a significant relationship between the independent variable Additional Organizational Identity Expressions and the mediator Overall Company Evaluation exists. The analysis shows that, for both types of brochures, Additional Organizational Identity Expressions is positively and significantly related to people's Overall Company Evaluation of the company (see Table 3-6). These findings support hypotheses 1a and 1b regarding the influence of organizational identity expressions in addition to recruitment / financial information on potential applicants' and potential investors' overall evaluation of the company.

Second, there should be a significant influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable Intention to Apply for a Job/Buy Shares. For both types of brochures, I found that the influence of Additional Organizational Identity Expressions on Intention to Apply for a Job at /Buy Shares from a Company was significant.

Third, I tested whether the mediator, Overall Company Evaluation, influenced the dependent variable Intention to Apply for a Job/Buy Shares. Table 3-6 indicates that for both the financial brochure as well as the recruitment brochure, this relationship was significant. Last, the mediator must influence the dependent variable Intention to Apply for a Job/Buy Shares, in case the variables Additional Organizational Identity Expressions and Overall Company Evaluation are both included as independent variables into the model. The results show that Overall Company Evaluation is for both brochures positively related to Intention to Apply for a Job/Buy Shares.

Moreover, the effect of Additional Organizational Identity Expressions on Intention to Apply for a Job dropped from a significant .26 to -.03 (ns), indicating complete mediation. Likewise, the effect of Additional Organizational Identity Expressions on Intention to Buy Shares dropped from .27 to .15 (ns), also indicating complete mediation. These findings support hypotheses 2a and b that the influence of organizational identity expressions in addition to recruitment information / financial information is mediated by people's overall evaluation of the firm. However, when comparing the potential investors' and potential applicants' intentions with each other, it appears that the mediating effect of Overall Company Evaluation is much

**Table 3-2 Recruitment Brochure with Organizational Identity Expressions**

	Descriptive Statistics		Correlations		
	Mean	St. dev.	1	2	3
Additional Organizational Identity Expressions	4.14	1.07		.38*	.30
Overall Company Evaluation	5.32	0.77			.59**
Intention to Apply for Job	4.91	0.75			1

**Table 3-3 Recruitment Brochure without Organizational Identity Expressions**

	Descriptive Statistics		Correlations		
	Mean	St. dev.	1	2	3
Additional Organizational Identity Expressions	3.42	1.10		.46**	.19
Overall Evaluation	4.83	1.10			.57**
Intentions to Apply for Job	4.70	1.20			1

**Table 3-4 Financial Brochure with Organizational Identity Expressions**

	Descriptive Statistics		Correlations		
	Mean	Std. Dev.	1	2	3
Additional Organizational Identity Expressions	3.83	1.21		0.29	0.19
Overall Evaluation	5.46	0.66			0.37*
Intention to Buy Shares	4.12	1.18			1

**Table 3-5 Financial Brochure without Organizational Identity Expressions**

	Descriptive Statistics		Correlations		
	Mean	Std. dev.	1	2	3
Additional Organizational Identity Expressions	2.96	1.10		0.46**	0.31*
Overall Evaluation	4.81	0.96			0.30
Intention to Buy Shares	3.91	1.22			1

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Table 3-6 Results for Both Types of Brochures

Recruitment Brochure	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Step 1: Effect of Additional Organizational Identity Expressions on Overall Company Evaluation	.47**			
Step 2: Effect of Additional Organizational Identity Expressions on Intention to Apply for Job at Company		.26**		
Step 3: Effect of Overall Company Evaluation on Intention to Apply for Job at Company			.58**	
Step 4: Effect of Additional Organizational Identity Expressions on Intention to Apply for Job at Company				-.03(ns)
Effect of Overall Company Evaluation on Intention to Apply for Job at Company				.60**
N	91	91	91	91
R square	.22	.06	.34	0.34
Financial Brochure				
Step 1: Effect of Additional Organizational Identity Expressions on Overall Company Evaluation	.47**			
Step 2: Effect of Additional Organizational Identity Expressions on Intention to Buy Shares from Company		.27**		
Step 3: Effect of Overall Company Evaluation on Intention to Buy Shares from Company			.33**	
Step 4: Effect of Additional Organizational Identity Expressions on Intention to Buy Shares from Company				.15(ns)
Effect of Overall Company Evaluation on Intention to Buy Shares from Company				.26**
N	78	78	78	78
R square	.22	.07	.11	0.12

\*\*p<0.05.

stronger for potential job applicants' intentions (.60) than for potential investors' intentions (.26). In the following section, possible underlying reasons for these differences are discussed.

### **3.7 Discussion**

The results of this study provide some first empirical evidence that organizational identity expressions can make a difference in the extent to which stakeholders perceive and respond to organizations. By drawing on theoretical insights common to organizational identity expressiveness literature on the one hand and perception management scholars on the other, the findings show that organizational identity expressions influence the perceptions of two important stakeholders: potential investors and potential applicants. Moreover, their positively formed perceptions as a result of these organizational identity expressions in turn influence their intentions to buy shares from or apply for a job at the company. These are welcome insights, because scholars until so far lacked insight in whether stakeholders are indeed sensitive to organizational identity expressions. Such expressions generally constitute of a complex and interrelated constellation of traits, features and behaviors of a company. Expressing those to stakeholders may be a challenging process, not only because stakeholders may not always care for so much information, but for an important part because stakeholders may have cognitive difficulties with paying attention to and comprehending them. Although prior studies have looked at the effect of single types of identity signals (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Judge & Bretz, 1992; Turban & Greening, 1997), little to no studies had examined the effect of identity signals coming from the broad nature of a company's organizational identity expressions.

An interesting additional finding is that the influence of organizational identity expressions on potential applicants' intentions to apply for a job at the company is to a much larger degree mediated by their overall company evaluation than the effect of organizational identity expressions on potential investors' intentions to invest in the company. This finding seems consistent with my earlier discussed theoretical assumptions. That is, I used the social identity theory to argue that potential applicants generally want to work for a company whose organizational identity matches or even enhances their personal identity in terms of attractiveness or prestige. They are, therefore, motivated to search for diagnostic information that provides them insight in who the company is; the company's organizational identity. Given that the organizational identity expressions are often

considerably positive, I therefore presumed that organizational identity expressions in addition to just job information may have a positive influence on their evaluations of the company and subsequent intentions to apply for the company. In line with these theoretical notions, the relatively strong mediation effect of overall evaluation with potential applicants indicates that potential applicants are a great deal concerned with evaluating the attractiveness of a company before they decide whether they would like to work for the organization. Thus, they use organizational identity expressions to form an overall evaluation of the company before they decide to apply for a job at the firm. Regarding potential investors, I argued that organizational identity information such as the company's mission, vision, values, programs and skills can be of diagnostic value for making overall judgments of the firm and, inherently, of the shares of the company. I therefore predicted that organizational identity expressions in addition to just shareholder information positively enhance stakeholders' overall perceptions of the firm, and subsequently their intentions. The findings support these arguments but also indicate that, when it comes to making investment decisions, investors do not necessarily first make an overall evaluation of the company based on the additional identity expressions. They also appear to use the additional amount of identity expressions *directly* to make investment decisions. A possible explanation for this is that they use the additional identity expressions as a risk reducing signal, in and of itself, which directly influences their investment decisions. This relationship links to prior literature suggesting that investors prefer shares of companies with greater information precision, because more detailed information may serve as a signal for less systematic risk of the company, even when the overall evaluation of the company would be the same (Frieder & Subrahmanyam, 2005; McAlister, Srinivasan, & Kim, 2007). The question then, remains whether investors really attend to and process the additional identity information, as I expected at the outset of this study, or just use the additional information as a simple heuristic, thereby associating more detailed company information disclosure with being less risky companies. For example, prior literature argues that people can use simple rules of thumb when making decisions under uncertainty (Tversky & Kahneman, 1982). Future research would be necessary to shed more light on this question.

### 3.8 Conclusion

To serve the broader scope of this thesis, study one investigated whether organizational identity expressions matter to two types of stakeholders: potential applicants and potential investors. The results show that expressions about a firm's organizational identity indeed matter to stakeholders, but different types of stakeholders appear to attend to, process and use the content of these expressions differently. While potential applicants largely use the organizational identity expressions to make an overall evaluation of the company before they decide to apply for a job at the company, investors also seem to use the expressions as a risk-reducing signal which directly determines their intentions to buy shares from the firm. As such this study adds to the emerging literature in which researchers point to the growing importance for organizations to be more open to their stakeholders about who they are, what they stand for, what they are doing and why; i.e. about their organizational identity (Cheney & Christensen, 2000; Fombrun & Rindova, 2000; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004). Researchers had until so far argued this point in a conceptual way, but have taken little efforts to empirically investigate the effects of organizational identity expressions on stakeholders' responses toward a company. The here reported study has been a first attempt to do so.





## **4 Study Two: Towards Principles for Effectively Expressing the Organizational Identity**

“Many scientific discoveries initially appeared to their authors in the guise of intuition; the history of science is full of global, intuitive understandings that, after laborious verification, proved to be true. So plausibility, and intuition as the underlying basis for it, is not be sneered at (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 217).”

Chapter three addressed the first research question: to what extent do organizational identity expressions influence stakeholders’ perceptions and intentions toward a company? In doing so, I investigated the effect of organizational identity expressions on two important types of stakeholders: potential applicants and potential investors. The findings demonstrated that organizational identity expressions can positively influence potential applicants’ perceptions of a company and their subsequent intentions to apply for a job at the company. Moreover, organizational identity expressions also appear to positively influence potential investors’ perceptions of a company and their subsequent intentions to buy shares from the company. These results indicate that organizational identity expressions can indeed matter to stakeholders and, therefore, lay foundation for the main research question of this thesis: How can organizations effectively express their organizational identity in order to manage positive perceptions and subsequent behavioral reactions among their stakeholders?

The literature review in chapter two discussed that organizational identity scholars on the one hand and perception management scholars on the other, have until so far escaped from devoting attention to this research question. To fill this void, the in this chapter presented study draws on both types of literatures and takes a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to develop a framework that identifies concrete principles of an organization’s identity expressions that may affect stakeholders’ perception of a company. In doing so, this study focuses on the oil

industry, because the social, political and economical sensitive nature of oil companies' activities has often forced them to put much effort in managing their expressions effectively. The framework that has resulted from this inductive study delineates how organizations in the oil industry orchestrate their organizational identity expressions according to four distinct principles: *distinctiveness*, *consistency*, *transparency* and *sincerity*. In an attempt to gain a deeper understanding why these four principles appear to be important, I cross between sensemaking theories, increasingly used within the field of organizational identity expressiveness, and other socio-cognitive theories such as the attribution theory, which are common to the perception management literature. The study also has a more practical aim, as for each expressiveness principle concrete tactics are specified that may guide managers to orchestrate their messages along the four principles.

This chapter starts with a short description of the oil industry in section 4.1, in order to illustrate the communication challenges that this industry has faced during her more than 100 years of history. Section 4.2 is devoted to a succinct foreshadow of the theoretical perspective that I gradually started to take during the research process (cf. Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Section 4.3 describes the grounded theory approach that was taken, followed up by the findings described in section 4.4. Section 4.5 provides a discussion of the findings of the study. The chapter is concluded in section 4.6.

## **4.1 The Oil Industry**

To provide the reader with some additional insight into why the oil industry is a representative case for studying my research question, this section provides a brief overview of some of the communication challenges that the oil industry has faced during its more than 100 years of history.

The history of the oil industry starts in 1859 on a quiet farm country in Pennsylvania, where one man, Edwin Drake, after numerous useless efforts succeeded in drilling first oil (cf. Yergin, 1991). Since then, oil has always been surrounded with the struggle for economic wealth, political power and institutional demands. This natural commodity quickly became a concern to many parties such as oil-rich countries, presidents and premiers, foreign and finance ministers, investors, the ordinary consumer and, in particular, to oil companies. Oil companies were booming everywhere, hungry for making profits out of this new commodity. During that time, oil companies were already

coping with the stakes, concerns, interests, scrutiny and critique from a broad variety of stakeholders. Although not necessarily labeled as 'corporate communication', 'public relations' or 'organizational identity expressiveness', communicating, explaining and negotiating with these different types of stakeholders has always been a crucial part of their business.

These communication challenges became firstly evident with the oil company Standard Oil, established in 1870. The company, owned by the American industrial John D. Rockefeller, rapidly became the most powerful company in America, gaining almost complete control of all oil production in this country. The company's monopoly position raised public antipathy across the country and led to a drumbeat of criticism from different corners in the American society, such as competitors, the government and the media who accused the company of unfair practices. A central opinion leader during these times was the American author and journalist Ida M. Tarbell. Her revealing publications about the Standard Oil company fueled harsh attacks on Standard Oil and on monopolies in general.

Many other stakeholders have been of a critical concern to oil companies. For example, while oil companies for a long time dictated the international oil production and prizes, the oil exporting countries increasingly started to demand more influence on this. By joining forces in OPEC, they gradually started to force oil companies to invite them to the international negotiation processes on the production and prizes of oil. In addition, besides the earlier described Shell crises, incidents such as The Exxon Valdez<sup>3</sup> spill in 1989 or the oil crises in the 1970's touched of a firestone of protest from NGOs, politicians and consumers. For example, during the oil crises many consumers believed that the oil companies artificially created the oil shortages to drive up prices. To address these public critics, Mobil Oil for example utilized 'corporate advocacy' advertising through which they sought to gain support and confidence from the public (Cheney & Vibbert, 1987). Exxon's efforts to apologize for what happened during the Exxon Valdez incident only seemed to worsen their reputation as these were judged by external parties as being overtly delayed, clumsy and contradictory (Delehunt, 1989). Other oil companies like Chevron, Statoil and Petrobras have faced similar crises which have challenged their communications toward critical and influential stakeholders. For example, holding on to the 'Not in My BackYard (NIMBY)' principle, community

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<sup>3</sup> On March 24, 1989, a tanker of Exxon hit a reef in Prince William Sound, Alaska, resulting in some 11 million gallons of oil spilling into the waters of the Alaska shore.

members have increasingly started to powerfully oppose against (oil) companies' operations in their neighborhoods.

Also the new millennium has been characterized by the volatility surrounding oil. Increasingly high oil prices accompanied with rapidly growing revenues and profits for oil companies, dwindling oil reserves, geo-political tensions, and the anxiety around global warming keep oil companies in a high gear when it comes to communicating, expressing, explaining and negotiating. For example, Shell's oil reserves crisis in 2004, where it had to announce that it had overestimated the size of its proved oil reserves by 20%, brought them to engage in all forms of communication practices in order to repair their reputation among their shareholders and other important stakeholders. Moreover, in shareholder meetings, oil companies increasingly have to deal with social activist groups who are buying a stake in these companies in order to be able to increase their say on environmental, social or ethical issues (cf. Economist, 2007).

Thus, due to the economic, political, social and environmental sensitive issues surrounding the oil industry, its communication activities have been considerably broad and complex of nature. While it would be single-minded to suggest that these communication challenges can all be approached from an 'organizational identity expressiveness' perspective, the volatility of this industry makes it a suitable and interesting context for investigating how organizations express their organizational identity in order to manage positive perceptions among their stakeholders.

## **4.2 Theoretical Perspective**

Literature concerned with the cognitive constructs of organizations have often conceptualized organizations as social systems of which different constituencies seek to make sense in order to create enough predictability to make attitudinal and behavioral decisions toward the organization (Louis, 1980; Pfeffer, 1981; Weick, 1995). Sensemaking is often defined as "the act of constructing interpretations of ambiguous environmental stimuli", such as persons, events or organizations (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006, p. 433; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Weick, 1995). It is in an organizational context often argued that it is the task of management to *give* sense to these constituencies by informing and explaining the organization's goals, principles, structures and activities in a way that is compatible with their own preferred definition of the organization as well as with the emergent expectations and demands in their society (Ginzel, Kramer, & Sutton, 1993;

Pfeffer, 1981). As defined by Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991, p. 442): “sensegiving is concerned with the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred (re)definition of organizational reality”. As such, organizations can positively manage the perceptions that stakeholders have of their company.

One way of providing meaning of an organization is by articulating the organizational identity of the organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). These types of sensegiving efforts often occur through expressiveness modes such as language (Daft & Wiginton, 1979), rhetoric, symbolism or rituals (Pondy, Frost, Morgan, & Dandridge, 1983). As earlier described, this dissertation is concerned with how organizations express their organizational identity through their rhetorical efforts. During the research process I started to adopt the view that organizations seek to give stakeholders sense about their organizational identity through organizational expressiveness efforts that are orchestrated along the principles of distinctiveness, consistency, sincerity and transparency. Each principle appeared to have its own role in giving stakeholders sense about the expressed organizational identity and in stimulating them to confidently attribute the expressed identity to the company rather than to ulterior motives such as window dressing. For each conceptualized expressiveness principle, I explain how it may affect stakeholders’ sensemaking of the expressed identity and / or their confidence in attributing this expressed identity to the company, both ultimately in order to manage positive perceptions of organizations.

### **4.3 Method: A Grounded Theory Approach**

I took a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to inductively unfold principles that describe how organizations express their organizational identity to influence stakeholders’ perceptions of a company. The grounded theory approach involves a constant comparison between evolving theory and empirical data in which the evolving theory directs attention to previously established important dimensions (such as the four expressiveness principles in my study) and the empirical data in turn assess the theory’s suitability as a frame for conceptualizing the collected data (Isabella, 1990). Such a comparative process results in a framework that is fairly neatly grounded in the data while simultaneously guided by theoretical notions.

#### 4.3.1 Data Sources

I focused on six key players in the oil industry (BP, Chevron, Exxon, Petrobras, Shell and Statoil) who have historically faced considerable scrutiny from different types of stakeholders and have, therefore, been compelled to manage their expressions effectively. In this sense, my sample meets the criteria for an ‘extreme case’; one that reflects a broad array of representative data that may help me to generate my theoretical framework (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pettigrew, 1990). To provide some background information on these six companies, Table 4-1 provides a short overview of several of their performance indicators.

The model that has unfolded from the study has been built on three main data sources: 1) a broad array of corporate messages selected from the corporate websites, annual and social reports of the six companies, 2) semi-structured interviews with the corporate communication or reputation managers of these companies and 3) archival data such as news articles, presentations, business cases, books, reports, presentations and the additional corporate communication materials that I received from the reputation and communication managers that were interviewed. I refer to Table 4-2 for an overview of the different data sources.

The corporate messages that I selected from the corporate websites, annual and social reports covered information on a broad array of organizational identity-related aspects such as the organization’s mission, vision, values, business principles, strategy, goals and activities, social responsibility, workplace environment and stakeholder engagement activities. I also included the organization’s corporate advertisements, CEO letters and several press releases. As I was mainly interested in the *rhetoric* aspects of an organization’s expressions, I did not focus on logos, pictures or colors. Graphs and visuals that substantially corroborated the text were however included. This resulted in 305 primary documents varying from 1 to 10 pages each. From these documents I collected a total of 1394 quotations. I also documented 196 ‘memos’ in which I wrote down the insights that were gained during the process and that could act as springboards to new theorizing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In total, I interviewed 9 Corporate Communication or Reputation managers of the six companies that were studied. I interviewed two managers of BP, three managers of Shell, one manager of Exxon, two managers of Petrobras, one manager of Chevron and one manager of Statoil. The specific purpose of the interviews was to learn as much as possible about how the

Table 4-1 Corporate Performance Information of the Six Oil Companies

	Revenues (2006)	Profits (2006)	Profits (2006)	Number of Employees	Number of Countries Present	Country of Origin	Established	Global 500 Ranking <sup>4</sup>			Global RepTrack <sup>5</sup> (0 – 100)
								'07	'06	'05	
BP	274	22	8	97	>100	UK	1908	4	4	2	61.7
Chevron	201	17	9	63	± 180	US	1879	7	6	11	56.0
Exxon	347	39	11	106	>200	US	1870	2	1	3	46.5
Petrobras	72	13	18	62	± 27	Brazil	1953	65	86	125	74.0
Shell	319	25	8	108	>130	The Netherlands	1907	3	3	4	63.6
Statoil	66	6	10	25	± 34	Norway	1972	78	70	95	74.4

Sources: Websites of the six oil companies, Fortune ([www.fortune.com](http://www.fortune.com)) and The Reputation Institute ([www.reputationinstitute.com](http://www.reputationinstitute.com))

<sup>4</sup> The Fortune Global 500 ranking lists the 500 largest companies in terms of revenues ([www.fortune.com](http://www.fortune.com))

<sup>5</sup> The Global RepTrack measure is a composite score of the perceptions that the general public of each company's country has about six key reputational dimensions: 1) the company's products and services, 2) innovation, 3) workplace, 4) governance, 5) citizenship, 6) leadership and performance. The scores range from 0 – 100 and are standardized to compare them across the different countries.



Table 4-2 Data Sources

Corporate Messages		Interviews		Archival Data <sup>6</sup>
Data Sources:		Number of Interviewees:		News Articles:
• Corporate Websites		• BP:	2	• The Economist (1989; 1994; 1995; 2001; 2003; 2004a; 2004b; 2005a; 2005b; 2005c; 2005d; 2005e; 2005f; 2006a; 2006b; 2007a; 2007b; 2007c)
• Corporate Advertisements		• Chevron:	1	
• Annual Reports		• Exxon:	1	• Fortune (1997; 2003; 2004a; 2004b; 2005; 2006a; 2006b)
• Social Reports		• Petrobras:	2	• Business Week (2001; 2002a; 2002b; 2004a; 2004b; 2004c; 2005a; 2005b; 2006a; 2006b)
• Press Releases		• Shell:	3	
		• Statoil:	1	• Others (Internationale Spectator, 2006a, 2006b)
				• Electronic articles (Gunther, 2007; Hoyos & Maitland, 2006; Labohm, 2004a, 2004b, 2005; Slingerland & Geuns, 2006; Yergin 2005)
Types of Information:		Types of Content:		Presentations:
• Vision/Mission		• Verbatim transcribed		• ‘Geopolitics and International Oil Markets’ (Van der Linden, 2006)
• Values & Business principles		interviews, conducted		• ‘RepTrack Pulse 2006: Oil industry’ (ReputationInstitute, 2006)
• Strategy		according to semi-		• ‘International Reputation Management: Exxon versus Shell’ (Novik, Kujashvili & Chang, 2004)
• Goals and activities		structured protocol (see		
• Social responsibility		Appendix B)		
• Workplace environment				
• Stakeholder engagement				

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix E for a reference list of the archival data.

Corporate Messages	Interviews	Archival Data <sup>6</sup>
<b>Amount of Data:</b> Quotations: 1394 Memos: 196	<b>Amount of Data:</b> Quotations: 385 Memos: 57	<b>Harvard Business Cases:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statoil (Wesley &amp; Lanc, 2005)</li> <li>• Shell (Klein &amp; Greyser, 1997; Moldoveanu &amp; Paine, 2006)</li> <li>• Exxon (Delehunt, 1989; Langford &amp; Greyser, 1992)</li> </ul> <b>Books, Reports and Dissertation:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dissertation on Corporate Communication of Shell: 'Effective business unit communications' (Kapinga, 2007)</li> <li>• 'Trends / Good Practices in Corporate Reporting' (Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2003; 2005)</li> <li>• Global Reporting Initiative report (GRI, 2002)</li> <li>• The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power (Yergin, 1991)</li> </ul> <b>Additional corporate material received from managers of the six oil companies:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal corporate magazines</li> <li>• Corporate Brochures</li> <li>• 3-parts book edition about history of Shell 1890-2007 (Howarth, Jonker, Van Zanden &amp; Sluyterman, 2007)</li> <li>• Topic cards</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix E for a reference list of the archival data.

interviewees managed and orchestrated their corporate messages in order to create and maintain positive perceptions among their stakeholders.

The interviews were guided by a set of open-ended questions. I first asked managers to explain how their communication department is organized and what their specific role is within the department. I then asked them to explain their view on the critical success factors of their corporate communication for managing their organization's reputation. For each mentioned factor, I asked them to provide concrete examples in the form of realistic anecdotes or concrete expressions in their various corporate messages. The latter were examined in addition to the messages in the content analyses in order to stay open for new insights that were not evident from the content analyses. The length of the interviews varied between 60 and 90 minutes and were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. From the interviews I collected 385 quotations and 57 memos. Appendix B depicts the interview protocol.

#### **4.3.2 Analyses**

I analyzed the corporate messages and the interview transcripts by means of an 'interpretative content analysis', which has been proposed by Kolbe and Burnett (1991) to be a suitable research technique for describing or characterizing data in order to enhance theoretical developments. The content analysis program Atlas 5.0 was used to do the actual coding. This program is a powerful tool for the systematic qualitative analysis of large, complex bodies of text (Muhr & Fries, 2004). It offers the opportunity to import the selected corporate information and a coding scheme into the program. In doing so, coders can read the text from their computer screen and code the text by dragging codes from the code scheme to selected quotations. A quotation can consist of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, tables or graphs that mirror any of the codes in the coding scheme.

The complete data analysis emerged from a set of reiterative steps, which allowed me to have enough freedom to re-conceptualize emerging expressiveness principles and to let my theoretical interpretation of the data mature.

*Step 1: Development of an initial set of categories.* As the idea behind an inductive research approach is to let the theoretical model emerge from the data rather than from deductive logic, I started my study theoretically open minded. However, to be able to systematically filter the

“staggering volume” of rich data without being tempted to capture everything (Eisenhardt, 1989 , p. 540), I started with a focus group among 18 communication experts working at large Dutch companies. This focus group was aimed at getting first-hand information on what managers do in their expressions to create favorable impressions among stakeholders. The 18 communication experts were members of a Dutch communication platform who were invited to the University and asked to bring corporate messages of the company they worked for. During the focus group session, they were asked to exemplify identity expressions in their corporate messages that they used to manage favorable impressions among their stakeholders. They were probed to explain carefully and in their own terminology why they thought that their examples were essential in managing favorable impressions. From the findings of the focus group I discerned a preliminary set of categories in preparation for step 2.

*Step 2: Applying the set of categories as a first conceptual lens.* I took this rough set of categories as a first conceptual lens through which the corporate messages of a preliminary set of five large companies, operating in different industries, were analyzed. In doing so, I adhered to systematic and objective content analysis techniques, such as 1) the usage of two coders to prevent subjective judgments from only one interpreter, 2) translating the initial categories into a code scheme so that both coders analyze the messages according to consistently applied rules and 3) testing the agreement of both coders when processing the same communication material (Kassarjian, 1977; Neuendorf, 2002). To maximize the coders’ familiarity with the coding scheme, I produced a coding guide and held a thorough training session.

The actual coding procedure went as follow: myself and an independent coder read the corporate messages of one company at a time and coded quotations that (1) reflected any of the initial categories in the code scheme, (2) provided suggestive evidence to refine, change or re-conceptualize the existing category or (3) appeared to characterize a newly emerging expressiveness category. During this process memos were used to explain motivations for adding, changing or refining certain categories. After analyzing one company, the degree of consensus among both of us coders was tested. Disagreement was solved through discussion and the code-scheme was refined accordingly. With the updated code scheme based on the analysis of one company, we analyzed the messages of the next company. See Appendix C for an example of the coding scheme. This first analyses eventually generated 72 codes, which were collapsed into 12 categories that we started to

label as 'expressiveness tactics'. For example, the quotations that were coded as 'The organization clearly outlines its vision' or 'concretely documents its strategic performances' were categorized under an expressiveness tactic that we labeled 'providing comprehensive information'. Thus, each expressiveness tactic was grounded in concrete expressions that the organization used.

*Step 3: Analyses of the corporate messages of five of the six oil companies.* Based on the refined code scheme that resulted from step 2, we tapped into the corporate messages of five of the six oil companies: BP, Chevron, Exxon, Shell and Statoil. We held on to a similar coding procedure as in step 2 while we again allowed ourselves to be reeducated by new things we did not expect to find (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Consistent with the previous step, changes and refinements were made to the coding scheme after each coding session. The next organization was analyzed on the new scheme and previously analyzed organizations were re-analyzed on the newly emerged categories. All reasons behind these changes were carefully documented through the memos. During this phase, the four overarching expressiveness principles roughly emerged and a continuous cycling between theory and the data gave birth to my first hunches about why these emerging principles are theoretically relevant for managing stakeholders' perceptions.

*Step 4: Interviews.* The interviews that I conducted and analyzed in step 4 enabled me to 'unfreeze' from my earlier developed assumptions and to look at the emerging model from a refreshing perspective. Although I coded each interview sentence by sentence with the previously emerged expressiveness principles as a rough guideline, I loosened the previously developed coding scheme. This allowed me to interpret the information that I had collected from my informants as objectively as possible. In so doing, the new data from the interviews provided me with the first suggestions to consider the four aspects to be important for 'giving sense' to stakeholders. Additionally, I compared the newly emerged tactics with the initial findings from step 3 and kept on adding, eliminating and re-conceptualizing categories until I felt I had enough evidence to identify a constantly recurring theme to be an element of my framework (Elsbach, 1994).

*Step 5: Re-analysis of the corporate messages.* Based on the new insights from the interviews and the consulted theories, I decided to do a final re-analysis of the corporate messages of the oil companies in my sample. At this point, I also included Petrobras into the sample. The reason for doing so was that during the research process some peer colleagues advised me to have a look at Petrobras since the company appeared to have made rapid developments in becoming one of the

global players within the oil industry. In line with these strategic developments, their corporate communication department had undergone major re-organizations which were reflected back in the intensity of their organizational expressions. Hence, I discovered that Petrobras could provide me with rich and insightful data on how oil companies express their organizational identity.

I pursued the same coding procedure as in step 3. To prevent myself from being too much captivated by my theoretical convictions and assumptions instilled throughout the process, I used a different second coder than in my first analyses. This detached coder analyzed the data more objectively and challenged me in my thoughts and interpretations. After this final coding procedure, I felt that I had reached a stage of saturation. The results from this coding process enabled me to evaluate the degree of evidence for each identified expressiveness principle as indicated by the number of quotations that were coded in my analyses. Borrowing from Elsbach's (1994) systematic analysis approach, evidence for a specific expressiveness tactic was denoted when: 1) the majority of the companies used the tactic in their expressions, 2) every interviewee stressed the importance of a specific tactic or 3) at least three of the six organizations heavily used or expressed the relevance of a specific tactic.

#### **4.3.3 Intercoder Reliability**

Although a grounded theory approach requires that researchers have the freedom to create, change, refine and eliminate constructs from their data in order to give rise to new theoretical notions, it is necessary to build in some systematic objectivity in order to prevent the researcher from making judgments about the data based on subjective interpretations. As previously described, I adhered to systematic coding procedures to do so. In addition, to be able to continuously monitor the degree of objectivity during the research process, I tested the level of agreement between both coders after having analyzed the expressiveness material of one company. To do so, Cohen's Kappa (1960) was used to measure the intercoder reliability. Cohen's Kappa is a popular and frequently used measurement of intercoder reliability, especially because it recognizes the likelihood of chance agreement between judges and makes adjustments for this (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991; Neuendorf, 2002). Like any other measure, Cohen's Kappa has also been criticized, especially for being too conservative, giving credit only to agreement beyond chance (Perreault & Leigh, 1989). Although alternative measures have been proposed, Cohen's Kappa still appears to be the most widely used

reliability coefficient (Neuendorf, 2002; Perreault & Leigh, 1989). Cohen's Kappa is calculated as follows:

$$k = (F_0 - F_c) / (N - F_c)$$

where N is the total number of units coded by both coders,  $F_0$  is the number of codings on which the coders agree, and  $F_c$  is the number of codings for which agreement is expected by chance.  $F_c$  is calculated as:

$$F_c = (1/N) (\sum pm_i)$$

Where  $pm_i$  is the product of the total of times that each coder used a specific code of the coding scheme.

In order to calculate Cohen's Kappa, a reliability measurement tool was developed in Excel. After each coding session, the results were exported from the coding program Atlas to Excel, which in turn calculated the Cohen's Kappa according to the above-depicted formula (See Appendix D for an example of this tool). I calculated the intercoder reliability for each company before and after discussion between both coders. Codes that we did not agree on after discussion were eliminated from the data.

Table 4-3 reports the Cohen's Kappa's for the six oil companies. Although there is no general agreement on what constitutes an acceptable level of intercoder reliability, there are certain rules of thumbs to make sound judgments of reliability. In line with Hooghiemstra (2003), I adhered to Landis and Koch's (1977) criteria for assessing the goodness of the Cohen's Kappa's.

**Table 4-3 Intercoder Reliability of the Content Analyses**

First round (step 3)	Cohen's $\kappa$	
	Before Agreement	After Agreement
BP	.84	.98
Chevron	.82	.98
Exxon	.73	.96
Petrobras	Not coded	Not coded
Shell	.78	.95
Statoil	.81	.98
<b>Second round (step 5)</b>		
BP	.59	.98
Chevron	.80	1.00
Exxon	.69	.96
Petrobras	.94	.99
Shell	.67	.98
Statoil	.80	1.00
Landis and Koch (1977) criteria for Cohen's $\kappa$ : .00 = poor agreement; .00-.20 = slight; .21-.40 = fair; .41-.60 = moderate; .61-.80 = substantial; .81-1.00 = almost perfect.		

## 4.4 Findings

The oil companies that were studied appeared to orchestrate their organizational expressions around four principles that I labeled 'distinctiveness', 'sincerity' 'consistency', and 'transparency'. For each expressiveness principle, the organizations used concrete tactics to manage their expressions according to these principles. Table 4-4 provides evidence for the four expressiveness principles and underlying tactics. Table 4-5 illustrates concrete examples of the evidence that emerged from the content analyses and the interviews.

### 4.4.1 Distinctive Organizational Expressions

The first expressiveness principle that managers appear to focus on was in particular aimed at clearly articulating how their organizational identity characteristics are distinctive in their industry. While these attempts fit with social identity theory contending that (groups of) people feel a need to distinguish themselves from others (Brewer, 1991), the managers in my study explained that his need came primarily forth out of their strategic objectives to get access to their critical resources. By convincing the stakeholders on whom they depend for their resources what their distinctive



advantages are compared to others in the competitive space, they aimed to become the preferred partner to work with (Barney, 1991; Deephouse, 1999).

**Table 4-4 Evidence of Each Expressiveness Principle and Underlying Tactics**

	BP	Chevron	Exxon	Petrobras	Shell	Statoil
<b>Distinctiveness</b>						
Formulating a thought-leadership message	I, C	I			I	I
Proactive messaging of thought-leadership	I, C	C	I, C	I, C	I	
<b>Sincerity</b>						
Proving integrity of organization's identity	I, C	I, C	I, C	I, C	I, C	I, C
Displaying authenticity	I, C	I, C	I, C	I, C	I, C	I
Expressing self-reflectively	I, C	I, C	I, C	I, C	I, C	I, C
<b>Consistency</b>						
Formulating key expressiveness themes that are tailored to the different messages	I, C	C	I, C	I, C	I, C	I, C
Linking internal with external messages	I, C	I	I, C	I	I, C	I
Maintaining dynamic consistency over time	I	I	I	I	I	I
<b>Transparency</b>						
Framing and explaining who the company is and what it stands for	I, C	I	I		I	
Disclosing comprehensive information on activities and performances	I, C	I, C	I, C	C	C	C
Eliciting a dialogue	I, C	I, C	I, C	I, C	I, C	I, C
Sources of evidence: I = the tactic was heavily emphasized by the interviewees, C = the tactic was heavily grounded in the data of the content analyses. A total of 1779 quotations were analyzed in this study.						

Table 4-5 Examples of Evidence from the Content Analyses and Interviews

Expressiveness Principles	Examples
Distinctiveness	
Formulating a thought-leadership message	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>BP's provocative standpoint on global warming as clearly formulated in their CEO's speech at the Stanford University, California on May 19<sup>th</sup> 1997: <i>"It is a moment when, because of the shared interest I talked about, we need to go beyond analyses to seek solutions and to take action. It is a moment for change and for a re-thinking of corporate responsibility. [] We have a responsibility to act [] and BP accepts that responsibility and we are therefore taking some specific steps:...."</i></li></ul>
Proactive messaging of thought-leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Change of BP's company's name from British Petroleum to Beyond Petroleum and advertisement taglines such as "It's time to turn up the heat on global warming".</li><li>Advertisements of Shell expressing its leadership position on Liquefied Natural Gas: "LNG is one of the key sources for the future and Shell is the world's leading private supplier."</li></ul>

Expressiveness Principles	Examples
Sincerity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cases that describe how the organization integrates its vision, mission or values into practice (E.g. Shell: “Making it happen: How we are making our commitment to sustainable development an every day part of the way we work”)</li> </ul>
Proving integrity of identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Real employees are used in commercials (E.g. Shell’s commercial featuring a technician whose sole purpose was to “make hydrogen work”) and corporate messages to explain what the organization’s values mean for employees’ day to day practices (E.g. Statoil provides a slide show in which they reveal “A day in the life of a tanker driver”).</li> <li>Advertorials showing how they backed up their expressed promises: (E.g. one of Exxon’s advertorials: “All together, our recent energy-saving initiatives have reduced emissions by an amount of equivalent to taking well over a million cars off the road, every year.”)</li> </ul>

Expressiveness Principles	Examples
Sincerity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Historical tidbits of information (E.g. Shell explaining the origins of their company name: “In 1833 Marcus Samuel opened a small shop in London, selling sea shells to Victorian natural history enthusiasts. It soon became a thriving import-export business”).</li> <li>Metaphorical phrases that subtly pinpoint on the authenticity of the company’s identity: “This balance is in our lifeblood”; “These fundamental beliefs and values form the backbone of our business approach”.</li> </ul>
Displaying authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP expresses her authenticity through an engaging story on their website, wrapped up by the line: “The spirit of enterprise, which led to BP’s birth in 1909 is still very much alive today”.</li> </ul>
Expressing self-reflectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Upfront in the social report BP, clearly outlines the challenges it faces. E.g.: “We have made good progress in many areas in 2004 but there is no room for complacency. There will be many challenges as we continue to develop our businesses around the world: [...]”</li> <li>Shell openly reveals positive but also negative feedback from stakeholders: “I am demanding that Shell clean up their pollution and stop forthwith the continuous degradation of the environment of the Niger Delta. Please repair the damage that your oil exploitations have caused, and restore the balance to the areas that your destructive operations have affected, including the mangrove forests and local communities in the Niger Delta”.</li> </ul>

Expressiveness Principles	Examples
Consistency	
<p>Formulating key expressiveness themes that are tailored to the different messages</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different corporate messages consistently refer back to the organization's vision, values and business principles (E.g. Chevron emphasizes its 'safety' value in the letter of the CEO "We accomplished all of this while having our safest year ever - a core value at ChevronTexaco".)</li> <li>• Through their metaphorical slogan ("Challenge is our energy") and through sponsoring ads for the Olympics ("We supply the energy to transform handball in a strong Olympic category"), Petrobras consistently emphasizes its historical role wherein it forged Brazil toward a state of self-sufficiency of energy.</li> </ul>
<p>Linking internal with external messages</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exxon disperses 'topic cards' to internal members on how the organization stands towards various crucial issues. These can be used as a quick reference in case family, friends or acquaintances have questions about the organization.</li> <li>• Shell's internal magazine "Shell World – Giving Shell people a global perspective" and BP's news magazine "Horizon – The global publication for BP people".</li> </ul>

Expressiveness Principles		Examples
Consistency		
Maintaining dynamic consistency over time		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exxon's tiger initially symbolized the 'power' of the fuel brand (e.g slogans such as "Put a tiger in your tank"). Nowadays the company still uses the tiger to symbolize its identity but places the meaning of the tiger into a framework that serves to address issues such as social responsibility (e.g. quotation from its corporate story: "When Exxon's romance with the tiger began almost a century ago, some 100,000 of these majestic beasts roamed wild and free. Today there are fewer than 7,500 tigers in the wild. In 1995, Exxon joined with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to help save the tiger from extinction").</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The meaning of the company name 'BP' has changed from British Petroleum into Beyond Petroleum.</li> </ul>
Transparency		
Framing and explaining who the company is and what it stands for		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exxon's continuing efforts in explaining the reasons behind its standpoints in order to break down negative stereotypes that outsiders have of the organization.</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chevron used ads, commercials, e-cards and banners to encourage stakeholders to view issues on energy from different angles (E.g. "To power a city the size of Paris it would take a wind farm 10 times the size of Paris - Got room in your backyard?" or "It took 125 years to use the first trillion barrels of oil. We'll use the next trillion in 30 - So why should you care?").</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP's re-labeling of being an 'oil company' to a 'heat, light and mobility' company.</li> </ul>

Expressiveness Principles	Examples
Transparency	
<p>Disclosing comprehensive information on activities and performances</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The organizations use their annual and social reports to outline goals, report performances, outline future targets and actions, show figures, graphs or tables that support performance accountings, compare their performances against previous years and with industry-competitors. (E.g: Statoil adopts clear visual formats to outline its goals for 2004, its performance regarding these goals and its future targets for 2005)</li> </ul>
<p>Eliciting a dialogue</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chevron invites stakeholders and other interested parties to join the debate on global warming on its online forum 'Willyoujoinus.com'.</li> <li>• Shell offers the 'Tell Shell Forum' where stakeholders have an online opportunity to engage in a dialogue with the firm and other stakeholders about various kinds of issues or concerns regarding the company's organizational operations. Besides opening up a dialogue through this forum, Shell's social report reveals the reactions that the company receives from stakeholders, whether the feedback is positive or negative.</li> </ul>

As one of my informants put it:

Corporate communication has a great deal to do with getting access to energy for the future. Through communication we help our critical stakeholders (for example governments in the Middle East) to understand what it is that companies like us have that makes it interesting to get us involved in developing their oil and gas resources. And for that part, I think there are differences in the oil companies on particular areas of technology development. Shell for example focuses very heavily on their 'Gas to Liquids' technology as a way of getting access to some of the gas reservoirs and resources. So that's to be able to demonstrate that you have a proven technology that countries will need in order to develop their resources. And if you look at Shell's corporate communication, a lot of it is indeed around gas and positioning themselves as a sort of major gas plant.

Two expressiveness tactics appeared to be used to convey a distinctive organizational identity: 1) formulating a thought-leadership message and 2) proactive messaging of this thought-leadership.

#### *4.4.1.1 Formulating a Thought-Leadership Message*

The informants that I spoke with were convinced that to create a distinctive position it is essential to have a vision that moves forward from the existing norms and expectations in the industry. A case in point from my study is BP's provocative and pioneering standpoint on global warming that they have started to take from the 1990's. While nowadays the organizational expressions of many companies center on climate change, in these days BP's CEO moved forward from the industry by publicly stating that BP considered the global warming problem as one of their mayor business responsibilities (Browne, 1997). As one of my informants of Shell remarked about BP's thought-leadership:

The whole industry was dwelling around in a sort of issue denying and BP just took distance from this and took a completely different position. BP was the first who publicly stated, "Climate change is a real problem. We acknowledge that and we see it as our problem, and we are going to do something about that."



BP not only took a forward moving standpoint on an issue that is of mayor significance to their social, economical and political environment, they also claimed that they would turn the global warming program into a business opportunity. This was a novel and surprising message because until then no other organization had taken such a provocative step forwards in the industry. In my view, these surprising ‘thought-leadership’ messages have had a significant impact on organizations’ attempts to give sense to their stakeholders because “Discrepant events or surprises, trigger a need for explanation, or post-diction, and, correspondingly, for a process through which interpretations of discrepancies are developed” (Louis, 1980 , p. 241). In a similar vein, socio-cognitive theories suggest that information that is inconsistent with persons’ prior cognitive schemas set off a process of thinking in order to interpret the novelty. When persons are able to re-interpret the novelty in familiar terms, they are not only more likely to remember the newly acquired information but also to respond to it more positively than less deeply processed information (Berlyne, 1970; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Mandler, 1982). The suggestion that such cognitive processes have been elicited among stakeholders through BP’s thought-leadership messaging is corroborated by the widespread press coverage that their corporate messages elicited. For example, the Wall Street Journal typified BP’s stance as “a maverick position in their oil industry” and the Los Angeles Times wrote: “a break as stunning as that which shook the tobacco industry...when the Ligett Group acknowledged that smoking causes cancer and heart disease” (Reinhardt & Richman, 2001, p. 9). Indeed, the provocativeness and meaningfulness of their message positively attracted media attention leading to even more stakeholder attention and positive responses (cf. Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006).

While most informants in my interviews seemed to be convinced that BP was the thought-leader in their industry, informants of other companies also stressed the importance of creating a thought-leadership position for their organization:

Within Shell Hydrogen I had to set up a ‘thought leader’ strategy, which was the basis of my communication strategy. My strategy was to communicate “We are doing the most on renewable energies within the whole industry and, more importantly, we already think ahead about how we can make renewable energies very big.” In doing so, you become a ‘mental leader’.

#### 4.4.1.2 *Proactive Messaging of Thought-Leadership*

Although the formulation of a strategic thought-leadership position was regarded to be very essential for creating a distinctive position, it only appeared to come to fruition by the intensity of the organization's expressiveness efforts of this thought-leadership message (cf. Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). To this purpose, the communication managers were convinced that they had to put much effort in proactively nurturing their thought-leadership by means of an assertive messaging strategy. As two informants of Shell explained independently from one another:

BP just stated very big "Climate change is a big problem". And of course..Shell has said this also, but Shell's approach was much more scientific, technologically grounded and communicated about this more carefully. BP took a much more commercial approach, much more marketing-related. Of course, BP also has its technicians and they have also done their research but they just say "BANG...Big problem...and I take a position in that". And that's indeed the question: How much do you open up the volume button?

You know, the content of the message might be all there 100% but within the company you have to have willingness for people to go out there proactively and live that message and talk about it. I think the key would be 'proactive'. Not waiting for someone to say "Okay, so what is Shell all about?", but really communicate that. In a way, BP has done that very strongly with their, let's call it green hill. So, have the thought-leadership but also communicate that proactively to the external world. Why should I do it, how do I do it, who is going to do it? How often do I do it? You have to be very assertive.

Proactive messaging tactics that organizations appeared to use to nurture their thought-leadership position were the constant use of press releases to inform about new strategic milestones, inviting journalists to project sites to experience and learn about new projects and providing audiovisual presentations on their corporate websites that educate interested stakeholders on innovations or break-through technologies. In this way, the organizations aim to stimulate stakeholders to cognitively categorize their organization as distinct from other organizations in the

same industrial league. In addition, symbolic taglines such as 'Beyond Petroleum' and advertisements stating "It is time to turn up the heat on global warming" were used to stimulate stakeholders to grasp the distinctive meaning behind the organization. This fits literature on organizational symbolism claiming that symbols, wordplay or metaphors can facilitate our understanding of the world around us (Daft & Wiginton, 1979; Frost & Morgan, 1983).

#### **4.4.2 Sincere Organizational Expressions**

Prior organizational literature has argued that organizations should find a strategic balance point where the benefits of competitive differentiation are offset by the costs of legitimacy challenges that arise from their institutional environment (Deephouse, 1999; Glynn & Abzug, 1998). In a similar way, from the perspective of a firm's organizational expressiveness, my findings indicate that managers find themselves caught between staking out with a clear distinctive identity, on the one hand, while assuring stakeholders of the sincerity of their expressed distinctive position, on the other. My informants felt that the more they try to be different from their competitors, the more likely it is that stakeholders such as the media or NGOs turn a vigilant eye toward the sincerity of their expressions. As one informant remarked:

BP has with her thought-leadership delivered a heavy shock to the industry. But that still doesn't say that their approach is the right one...there is a chance of a boomerang effect in the sense that if they cannot deliver on their expressed promises, people will say skeptically: "What about Beyond Petroleum? You are still way under the ten percent with alternative energy production!" So it is very much about ambition on the hand and matters of reality on the other hand...and how far do you let the gap grow? Some stay closer to the existing reality, others take steps further.

Indeed, if stakeholders perceive a discontinuity between an expressed vision and the vision or related activities actually held, the organization is regarded as insincere (Forehand & Grier, 2003). In more general notions related to attribution theory (e.g. see Eagly, Wood, & Chaiken, 1978; Kelley, 1971), if the sincerity of the source is in question, the source is likely to be discounted, lowering the chance that stakeholders will discern the expressed identity and attribute them to the

company's disposition (Sjovall & Talk, 2004). The managers that I spoke with were aware that it is especially complicated after crises, accidents or other negative events to regain stakeholders' trust in their organizational expressions. As one informant put it:

You know...within Shell we had several crises and issues. The reserves crisis has been the last one. So, what happens there is that from a leadership point of view people are very hesitant to go out there and shout from the rooftops "We are the best", because it might just bite you in the tail. And then what? You know, you then look like a complete idiot.

In order to manage the perceived sincerity of their expressions, the organizations appeared to use three tactics to prove to their audiences that their messages can be regarded as trustworthy sources of information (cf. Newell & Goldsmith, 1997). These tactics were labeled 1) proving integrity of identity, 2) displaying authenticity and 3) expressing self-reflectively.

#### *4.4.2.1 Proving Integrity of Identity*

The organizations in my study were putting enormous effort in assuring their stakeholders of their integrity by showing how the firm's espoused visions, values and principles are continuously followed up by concordant actions:

There is an accusation on oil companies that they are just saying all this, but there is no real substance behind it. It's just 'green washing' or whatever you call it. And I think that is where it comes back to reputation, because reputation is not just about advertising and communication. Actually, reputation has to start with what you do. And I think that is something that we believe very strongly, that in terms of being a responsible company, then most of that needs to focus on what you have control over. It is very easy to 'talkinize' a story, but actually you need to be really focused on what are the things you control.

By showing real actions and performances organizations convey that they did not just espouse their visions, values or promises for public consumption, but actually adhere to these in their business conduct. These findings fit literature contending that to create legitimacy,

organizations should combine their impression management tactics with references to their substantive actions to support their claims and improve their credibility (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Elsbach, 1994).

While these continuous efforts were often aimed at proving their integrity around social and institutional issues, organizations also resorted to these tactics to show the integrity of their espoused business objectives. For example, managers expressed the benefits of showing real business cases to convince stakeholders that they really made progress on accomplishing their espoused vision:

We were very much occupied with solar energy until our only factory in the country had to be closed. That was a huge disappointment for us because now we didn't have this representative case that backed up our whole solar energy vision.

Throughout their corporate messages, organizations seek to maintain their perceived integrity in various ways. For instance, corporate advertorials include concrete proof points that back up their advertisement claims. Corporate websites offer business or CSR cases that explain how they translate their vision or values into real projects (e.g. "Making it happen: How we are making our commitment to sustainable development an every day part of the way we work", Shell). Moreover, employees explain on the corporate website and in annual reports what the organization's values imply for their day to day activities (e.g. Statoil offers a visual slide show called "A day in the life of a tank driver of Statoil".)

#### 4.4.2.2 *Displaying Authenticity*

To convince stakeholders of the sincerity of the firm's organizational expressions, the organizations in my study attempt to prove that their expressed identity characteristics are authentic, in other words, that they really capture the *essence* of the company (Van Rekom, Van Riel, & Wierenga, 2006). The organizations often used their expressions to signal how well the organizational characteristics are intimately interwoven in the historical roots, strategic goals or employees of the organization. To illustrate, in the late 1990's Shell – originally a very technically oriented company - used an advertising campaign in which it communicated its commitment to the technical development of renewable energies by starring one of their employees - a technician

whose work was purely dedicated to hydrogen. The story evolved around his passion and commitment to the development of hydrogen as a car fuel. The employee appeared to be a purely technically research-oriented guy who -as quoted from one of my interviewees with Shell- "woke up and went to bed with this sole purpose in his mind: making hydrogen work". By giving him a central role into this short movie, Shell expressed a story that truly reflected the company's vision, values and culture, because this particular employee was an exemplification of many more of such technical 'wiz kids' working at Shell, driven by an enthusiasm to realize Shell's vision of a world of renewable energies.

More subtle tactics to convey the authenticity of the organization's identity were scattered across the corporate messages. For instance, historical tidbits of information or metaphorical phrases such as "these fundamental beliefs and values form the backbone of our business approach" are placed into the organization's messages to create an aura of authenticity. By expressing the authenticity of the organizational characteristics, organizations seek to ensure stakeholders that the expressed identity is not just a temporary fad but an integral part of the firm's identity.

Moreover, by expressing the organization's historical roots in an emotionally appealing story, managers attempt to effectively attract audiences toward the organizational identity. This is illustrated by one of the informants of Petrobras whose company's history appears to be an important explanation behind the popularity in their country of origin, Brazil:

Petrobras' history communicates more than any communication campaign. To understand that, I have to explain a little bit more about an important aspect of Petrobras' history. Petrobras was founded after a popular movement at the end of the 1940s aiming to defend our country from foreign companies coming to Brazil and exploring our natural resources, specifically oil. People went to the streets defending "The oil is ours". They demanded that the state fosters the national production, but ....there wasn't even an oil drop to produce. This was an enormous challenge! Well, in response to this movement, Petrobras was erected and from then on it was a history of challenge. Challenge to discover oil. So this history explains the emotional connection of Petrobras with the country and the Brazilian people. And nowadays, you see that we have that history that

simply tells a good, beautiful story using the best media and communication techniques that we have.

Although I recognize that Petrobras' appealing historical identity also centers on the fact that the company's history plays into the Brazilian public's own personal history, the powerful role of authenticity crafted in emotional appealing stories fits scholars' arguments that people are susceptible to authentic stimuli (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003; Rose & Wood, 2005) and that stories are an important mechanism through which people make sense of situations (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Martin et al., 1983). Since a story "holds disparate elements together and is easy to remember" (Weick, 1995, p. 61), it may be an important expressiveness tool to encourage stakeholders to cognitively grasp the authentic characteristics of the organization and attribute them to the company rather than to external situations.

#### *4.4.2.3 Expressing Self-Reflectively*

The communication directors that I talked with expressed the importance of being self-critical regarding improvements their company should make or challenges it still has to face. Also, in case of internal failures or organizational misdeeds, they were convinced that the best way to approach stakeholders is to admit mistakes and take responsibility for what happened. As such, companies move beyond negative processes of accusations and assigning blame and work toward a more positive impression management (Elsbach, 1994).

For example, Petrobras believed that their reputation was able to recover from two large oil spills in 2000 because their CEO went to the place of accident immediately and expressed full responsibility:

The oil spill that we had in the bay in Rio de Janeiro in 2000 was one of the worst ecological disasters in Petrobras' history. The company was being hit everywhere. And what saved the company at that moment is that the crew from the refinery went to the bay in Rio de Janeiro and that the CEO admitted blame and responsibility on television.

The content analysis' findings revealed various expressions of self-reflection. Some organizations clearly outline the challenges that they are facing and how they are going to tackle

these. Others include the positive as well as negative reactions that the organization has received from critical stakeholders or openly reveal the comments of independent auditors about the aspects that the organization needs to improve. In so doing, companies do not just employ a one-sided window dressing strategy but attempt to provide a sincere picture of the company by signaling that the firm turns a critical eye to itself and works on improving aspects that have less flair.

#### **4.4.3 Consistent Organizational Expressions**

The third expressiveness principle that I uncovered through the present study was aimed at managing a state in which the organization's identity expressions coalesce into stable, meaningful connections (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Consistency appeared to be the hallmark here. By aiming for the portrayal of a consistent identity, the companies that I examined managed not only to enable stakeholders to discern the central characteristics of the organization (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003) but also to increase stakeholders' confidence that the characteristics are really part of the company (Sjovall & Talk, 2004). This process resembles theoretical arguments of Kelley's co-variation model (1972) suggesting that if a certain characteristic consistently occurs with the person or object at hand, persons are more likely to attribute the characteristic to the disposition of that person or object than to external circumstances. That consistency is an important factor that may facilitate a person's impression forming, is a common understanding in well-established socio-cognitive literature (Festinger, 1957; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Srull & Wyer, 1989). Moreover, consistent expressions can furnish a strong cognitive schema or framework from which future organizational information or actions can be consistently placed and interpreted (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988). I discerned three fundamental expressiveness tactics by which organizations managed to create such consistency: 1) formulating key expressiveness themes that are tailored to the different messages, 2) linking of internal and external messages and 3) maintaining dynamic consistency over time.

##### **4.4.3.1 *Formulating Expressiveness Themes that are Tailored to the Different Messages***

In creating consistency across their messages, the organizations that I studied have often started with the formulation of several key expressiveness themes. These key themes were often a



logical derivation from the firm's distinctive, central and enduring identity characteristics and were used as the basic content from which further messages were communicated:

With respect to our communication strategy, we clearly formulate a set of key messages. Our key messages are for example, 'Meeting the Energy Challenge' and 'Technology & Innovation'. Then, our issue portfolio is orchestrated around these core themes. For example, we are currently doing tests to inject CO<sub>2</sub> into the fragile oil-bearing rocks in order to bring more oil to the surface. This issue then reflects back to our key message of 'Meeting the Energy Challenge' and 'Technology and Innovation'.

While these message themes were the roots from which their various messages were constructed, the managers stressed the importance of having leeway in adapting the content of the messages to the appropriate situations or stakeholders.

So, these are the higher-level messages that we use at a corporate level in media interviews, briefings, for analysts, to position our business as such. But they are too high level for stakeholders such as the gas and resource holders and joint venture partners. If we would say "I have fantastic technology", they will say, "Well, Exxon has too, so what is in it for me? So what?"

So, to tailor our messages more to the specific stakeholders it is very important to get input and involvement from the internal members that deal with the external stakeholders very early on. To really understand what they face on a day to day basis, what it is that their stakeholders expect to hear from us.

Evidence of this consistent enactment of the firm's expressions were found throughout the firms' corporate websites, reports and advertisements and generally consist of multiple referrals to the organization's vision/mission, values and slogan. For example, CEO letters and press releases consistently refer back to the organization's vision, values and business principles (e.g. as is reflected in the following quotation from one of Chevron's CEO letters: "We accomplished all of this while having our safest year ever - a core value at ChevronTexaco"). In addition, through its metaphorical slogan ("Challenge is our energy") and through its sponsoring ads for the Olympics ("We supply the

energy to transform handball in a strong Olympic category”) Petrobras consistently emphasizes its historical role wherein it challenged Brazil toward a self-sufficient state of energy.

#### 4.4.3.2 *Linking Internal with External Messages*

A second expressiveness tactic for creating consistency was aimed at matching the content of the messages toward external stakeholders with that of messages that are dispersed within the organization. The managers that took part in my interviews described how their organizational setting evolves toward more open organizational systems where the interactions amongst internal and external parties are often unpredictable (Rowley, 1997). According to my informants, it is especially in these changing environments that a consistency between internal and external communications is essential. One informant illustrated how the benefits of internal and external consistency even became fruitful in the most unpredictable settings:

So the employees, when they are going down to the pub or a café, and they are sitting with their mate and their mate is saying “God, you must be in a lot of money, because your company is making a lot of money. And why isn’t your company doing more of this and more of that?”. It is actually quite a lot of effort for the employee to defend what he is doing. Now, if you go out with a good expressive communication campaign to the outside world, when the employee is down the pub with some of these opinion leader/former friends, they say “Oh, I saw your communication about lower carbon emissions”. And the employee says: “Oh yeah, I would like to tell you about it”. Because our internal communication is linked to our external communication, the employee is being given some information and he can say “Well yeah...this institute is going to do this and what we mean by bio-fuel is this.” Just enough and then they will go off to the football or the weather. But then it makes the employee much more confident and happy that they can go and defend what they do as an individual for a job so there are lots of benefits. The employee comes to work happier and the environment is also happier.

To link the internal to external messages and to help employees to understand and be able to talk about their organization consistently, organizations employ various expressiveness devices.

For example, town hall meetings are organized where CEOs articulate the organization's preferred organizational identity. Corporate reports are dispersed to both external and internal members and internal magazines are published frequently to provide employees, contractors or interested parties a better insight into the what, how and why of the organization's characteristics and activities. In addition, handy 'topic cards' on how their organization stands towards various issues are dispersed to internal members as a quick reference in case family or friends have questions about the organization.

#### *4.4.3.3 Maintain Dynamic Consistency Over Time*

To survive in an ever changing and increasingly competitive environment, the organizations appeared to balance continuously between retaining a consistent image and keeping abreast of changing beliefs, values and norms in society. On the one hand, they had to take account of the fact that consistent images are precious goods that companies earn over time. On the other hand, they were aware that quickly changing environments forced them to refrain from dogmatically adhering to their once defined identity. One informant asserted:

This consistency over time can be a good thing and a bad thing. If you are boring and not innovative, and not distinctive in your thinking, you become old. That's why companies re-brand. Because sometimes people become so familiar with it, they think you are not changing and not innovative; you are not at the forefront. So sometimes you have to change, it's purely psychological but somehow you have to do that.

This is illustrated by how organizations re-frame the meaning behind their logos along the changing values, norms and beliefs of today's environment. While Exxon's tiger initially symbolized the 'power' of the fuel brand (as represented by slogans such as 'Put a tiger in your tank'), nowadays the company still uses the tiger as a symbol of its identity but has placed the meaning of the tiger into a broader framework that serves to address issues such as social responsibility (e.g. Exxon erected a 'Save the Tiger Fund'). BP's re-branding of British Petroleum into Beyond Petroleum is another example of how the meaning behind expressions are shaped and molded to keep up with the changing environment. These kind of adaptive practices towards expressing the organizational

identity link with the earlier discussed dynamic notion of organizational identities (see section 1.1). Related to that, Gioa, Schultz and Corley's (2000, p. 79) coined the term 'dynamic consistency', arguing that 'the strategic concern of management is no longer the preservation of a fixed identity but the ability to manage and balance a flexible identity in light of shifting external images'.

#### **4.4.4 Transparent Organizational Expressions**

As described in chapter three, theories on information processing suggest that in making decisions or pursuing their personal goals, people search for diagnostic information that may help them to accomplish these decisions or goals. People keep on processing information until they have reached some threshold of diagnostic information wherein they feel they have enough certainty and predictability of the situation at hand (Lynch, Marmorstein, & Weigold, 1988; Simmons, Bickart, & Lynch, 1993).

From my findings it was evident that organizations respond to such information processing and sensemaking activities on the part of their stakeholders by leveling the transparency of their expressions with stakeholders' threshold for diagnostic information. To this purpose, the organizations appear to use three expressiveness tactics: 1) framing & explaining who the company is and what it stands for, 2) disclosing comprehensive information on activities and performances and 3) engaging in dialogues.

##### *4.4.4.1 Framing and Explaining Who the Company Is and What It Stands For*

Categorization theories (Mandler, 1982; Rosch, 1978) suggest that people form cognitive categories that guide them in organizing and understanding the informational environment around them. In the context of this study, stakeholders may cognitively order a group of companies with similar activities under one category. When stakeholders are confronted with information about such a prototypical company, their initially formed categorizations help them to know what schema they need to apply to understand the company. A specific type of categories are so-called 'stereotypes' and represent a form of (over) simplified categorizations of certain subjects or groups of people (Vinacke, 1957; Williams, de la Cruz, & Hintze, 1989). These are often formed and used by people in order to be able to economize their mental efforts while still permitting a basis for forming impressions and expectations about a specific situation at hand (Macrae, Bodenhausen, &

Milne, 1995). Although such stereotypes may enable people to cope with their social environment more efficiently, they are also prone to leave distorted perceptions on the subject or situation at hand.

Stereotyping was an important managerial concern that the organizations that I studied had to cope with. As one of my informants explained:

We have for a long time been confronted with stereotypes about our company that did not reflect who we really are as an organization. We are not some kind of machines, but a group of people. We had to carry this out more clearly so that people gained more knowledge and understanding about who we are.

The organizations in my sample seek to break down these stereotypical preconceptions that people have of their organization by putting much effort in explaining their standpoints as nuanced as possible in order to stimulate people to interpret their standpoints in a preferable way for the organization. This is illustrated by a quotation from a press release of Exxon in response to a campaign that Greenpeace held against the company:

“Opposition to Kyoto does not equate to a lack of concern about the environment nor the issue of climate change. In fact, it’s quite the contrary. ExxonMobil has taken, is taking and will continue to take tangible actions to reduce emissions in our operations as well as in customer use of our products, and to better understand and prepare for the risks of climate change. Like many others, we do not believe Kyoto is the right approach. We fear it would impose dramatic economic costs in the developed world, while doing little to achieve its goals of addressing climate change since developing nations, which require most of the world’s increased needs for energy to grow economies, have no comparable commitments. A global solution is needed.”

BP took effort to reframe stakeholders’ conventional perceptions of their organization, by labeling the identity of their organization in a new way. As one of my informants of BP explained in reaction to me referring to ‘oil companies’:

It is interesting that you refer to it as an oil company. One of the communications that we are trying to put over is that whether we are oil or gas or hydrogen or coal, it doesn't matter. What we are actually trying to provide is heat, light and mobility and the source that we use to do that will change. We like to refer to a heat, light and mobility company because that is actually what we enable. If you take that as your mindset, your whole perception could possibly change. If you think of us as oil and gas, you think of a certain set of baggage that comes with that. But if you think of us in terms of the outcome of what we do...I actually believe that people should be going around with a heart on their shoulder: "I love the energy companies" and not "I hate the energy companies", because we actually enable those things.

By linguistically reframing the organization's identity into a 'heat, light & mobility' BP tries to alter the perceptual filter through which stakeholders interpret current and future organizational information in a desirable way for the organization (Dutton & Jackson, 1987; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988). This aimed purpose fits prior literature suggesting that the type of conceptual filters by which people interpret their environment plays a dominant role in how they subsequently scan, notice and process information in the same environment (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Miles, Snow, Meyer, & Coleman, 1978).

My content analyses revealed various other ways through which organizations explain and frame their identity characteristics. For example, Chevron's advertisement campaign through print ads, commercials, ecards and banners encouraged audiences to view the current energy issues from different angles (E.g. "To power a city the size of Paris...it would take a wind farm 10 times the size of Paris...Got room in your backyard?" or "It took 125 years to use the first trillion barrels of oil..We'll use the next trillion in 30...So why should you care?"). Organizations also carefully integrate their vision and values into speeches or interviews that are conducted with CEOs or into pre-packaged stories ready to submit to the media. Through these efforts, they attempt to infuse stakeholders' understanding of the company's organizational identity.

#### 4.4.4.2 *Disclosing Comprehensive Information on Activities and Performances*

Besides giving sense about the organization's organizational identity characteristics and related standpoints, organizations were very much occupied with disclosing comprehensive information about their activities and performances. This managerial exercise appeared to be crucial in order to provide stakeholders with enough explanation and predictability on what the organization is doing and how it impacts their personal circumstances or goals (cf. Weick, 1995). Sensemaking questions such as "What is this project about?", "Why is it important to me?" or "How does it affect my environment?" were anticipated by providing comprehensible information. This is illustrated by one of my informants who explained how they attempt to create support from different kind of stakeholders for building a floating LNG terminal in the middle of Long Island Sound:

The project itself is very controversial. You can imagine what the reaction would be from people who live around Long Island, "well...what about safety? What happens if this thing is likely to explode any time, what about terrorist attacks? What about pollution? How is this going to look in the middle of Long Island having this ugly thing there? What is happening?" So you can imagine that there is a lot of resistance. Before people could even understand what it is, the answer would be "No" for a lot of stakeholders. So, the team there realized from the start that it would be really important to try and inform people. Not even try to persuade them that this is necessary but at least inform them of what it is, and why it might be a good idea.

The communication team had a whole plan to approach the stakeholders. Not with this arrogant attitude as "This is good for you". But really try to inform you about what it is. "What is this LNG business?" and "why might it possibly be good?". Not talking about why Shell is so fantastic, but why is energy important. And how might it be good for you. Would it perhaps reduce your energy prices, your costs, maybe it would give you a more secure source of energy coming in? And what about safety? Is it safe, is it risky? And really coming with facts based on external studies and trying to show people in that way: "We are not telling you to say yes or say no, but we are just asking you to understand what it is what we are trying to propose here". So from a very gentle approach, in that sense.

Forging stakeholders' understanding of such controversial projects often takes the company into a complex and laborious process in which it has to take into account a broad variety of informational demands. Organizations use their annual and social reports or complete websites to respond to stakeholders' informational requirements by disclosing factual information on aspects such as their strategic and social goals, their current performances on these goals and their future targets and actions with respect to these goals. Furthermore, benchmarks reveal how the organization performed against previous years or relative to industry competitors. Finally, figures, graphs or tables can visually support the information so that stakeholders can form a clear understanding of the goals and performances of the organization's business activities.

Aside from these types of information disclosures, organizations seek to give sense to stakeholders by inviting journalists, politicians or other interested stakeholders to one of their locations to actually experience the reasons behind strategic decisions, choices or activities. The following example illustrates how one informant attempts to explain to stakeholders the difficult aspects of locating wind turbines:

Currently, we are building an offshore wind park of 36 turbines. We invite the media to the park and explain to them how things work. Those 36 turbines can be located offshore, but imagine that we had to locate 36 of these turbines on fast soil! Where are you going to put these enormous mills? These are things that stakeholders often are just not aware of. By inviting the media to these offshores, we can tackle such communication challenges much easier.

#### *4.4.4.3 Eliciting a Dialogue*

The management of transparency does not only involve a one-way expressiveness process where organizations give sense to stakeholders solely. On the contrary, the managers that I spoke with were convinced that they needed to create dialogues with critical stakeholders to learn to understand their expectations and standards against which the organization is evaluated (cf. Fombrun & Rindova, 2000; cf. Heugens, Van Riel, & Van den Bosch, 2004). Neglecting such attempts of listening to and discussing with stakeholders is risky, because it can lead to situations where the organization's expressions only reinforce their own identity (Cheney & Christensen, 2000; Hatch & Schultz, 2002) but do not resonate with stakeholders' standards and expectations of the



organization, likening the chance that stakeholders de-legitimize and avert from the organization. Thus, transparency is needed from both directions in order to incorporate each other's viewpoints and establish a 'consensual' system of meaning on the part of the organization as well as the stakeholders (Fombrun & Rindova, 2000). These processes resemble earlier documented notions of "reciprocal sensemaking" (Ginzel, Kramer, & Sutton, 1993, p. 229) and the dual role of both managers and stakeholders in constructing the organizational identity of the organization (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Hatch & Schultz, 2004; Scott & Lane, 2000).

The organizations in my study used various platforms to establish meaningful dialogues with stakeholders that they critically depend on. For example, dinners, focus groups, panel discussions, or town-hall meetings are organized where they discuss various issues on a more intimate basis. To keep these dialogues transparent for other interested stakeholders, the results of these meetings are consistently reported on their corporate websites and in their social reports. Chevron has introduced an online forum where they invited stakeholders to join them in the debate around the finiteness of the world's oil supply. The campaign is called 'Will You Join Us?' and discusses the most important energy issues in order to create a better consensual understanding of them. As my informant of Chevron explained:

One of the things that we found in research was that people want more opportunity to bring people together who know about energy issues, who know about the technology, who know about what can be done, together with people who want to find out. We were worried that people might just see it as some form of window dressing, but in the research we found that people feel like "no, it really is helping to move people toward better education, toward better solutions".

## 4.5 Discussion

The grounded view developed in this study extends the literature on organizational identity expressions and perception management.

Scholars in the field of organizational identity expressiveness, on the one hand, have acknowledged the importance for organizations to express their organizational identity to external stakeholders (Cheney & Christensen, 2000; Hatch & Schultz, 2004; Rindova & Schultz, 1998).

However, there had until so far been little empirically grounded understanding on how organizations express their organizational identity to external stakeholders.

Perception management scholars, on the other hand, have focused on important informational signals that affect external stakeholders' perceptions (Elsbach, 1994; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Rindova, Williamson, & Petkova, 2005), but they have generally neglected the role that organizational identity expressions through rhetoric and language play in seeking to influence external stakeholders' perceptions. This study attempted to correct that imbalance by fleshing out four principles of organizational expressiveness that managers in the oil industry adhere to when managing their external stakeholders' perceptions.

This study has also been an attempt to extend this prior literature by seeking to understand *why* these expressiveness principles are used to manage the perceptions of external stakeholders. The findings provide evidence that the principles can have an important function in managers' attempts to give stakeholders sense of the organization's preferred organizational identity and in seeking to stimulate stakeholders' confidence to attribute the expressed identity to the company's disposition rather than to being an attempt of window dressing or other ulterior motives. More specifically, distinctive organizational expressions appear to be used by managers in an effort to capture stakeholders' attention regarding the organization's identity and to arouse their categorical thinking about who the company is in relation to other organizations. Consistency enables managers to stir the different corporate messages into meaningful connections in an effort to cognitively stimulate stakeholders to form a coherent and easy to interpret image of the organization. Moreover, consistent expressions can be crucial to influence stakeholders' confidence that the expressed characteristics can be really attributed to the company. Also sincerity appears to be a potent device for managers to attempt to increase the credibility of their organization's messages so that stakeholders will create sufficient confidence to ascribe the expressed identity to the company. Finally, transparency enables organizations to express their organizational identity in such a way that stakeholders feel they have received sufficient information to form a plausible understanding of the company.

## 4.6 Conclusion

This study contributes to an enhanced understanding on how organizations in the oil industry express their organizational identity to manage positive perceptions among external stakeholders. The analysis suggests that oil companies use four expressiveness principles to articulate their organizational identity to their stakeholders effectively: distinctiveness, sincerity, consistency and transparency. By integrating the evidence that derived from this study with literature on sensemaking and cognitive information processing, it was shown that these four principles are essential for organizations to give stakeholders sense about the organizations' identity and to increase their confidence that the expressed identity can be really attributed to the company.

By articulating these expressiveness principles and by shedding light on the cognitive psychological processes that they may elicit among stakeholders, I have tried to enrich our understanding on how organizational identity expressions can be a fruitful way to manage positive perceptions among stakeholders. Yet, despite these insights, we do not know whether the expressiveness principles indeed impact stakeholders' perceptions, behavioral reactions and underlying cognitive information processes. In the following chapter, the final study is described in which I partly test the here developed assumptions.

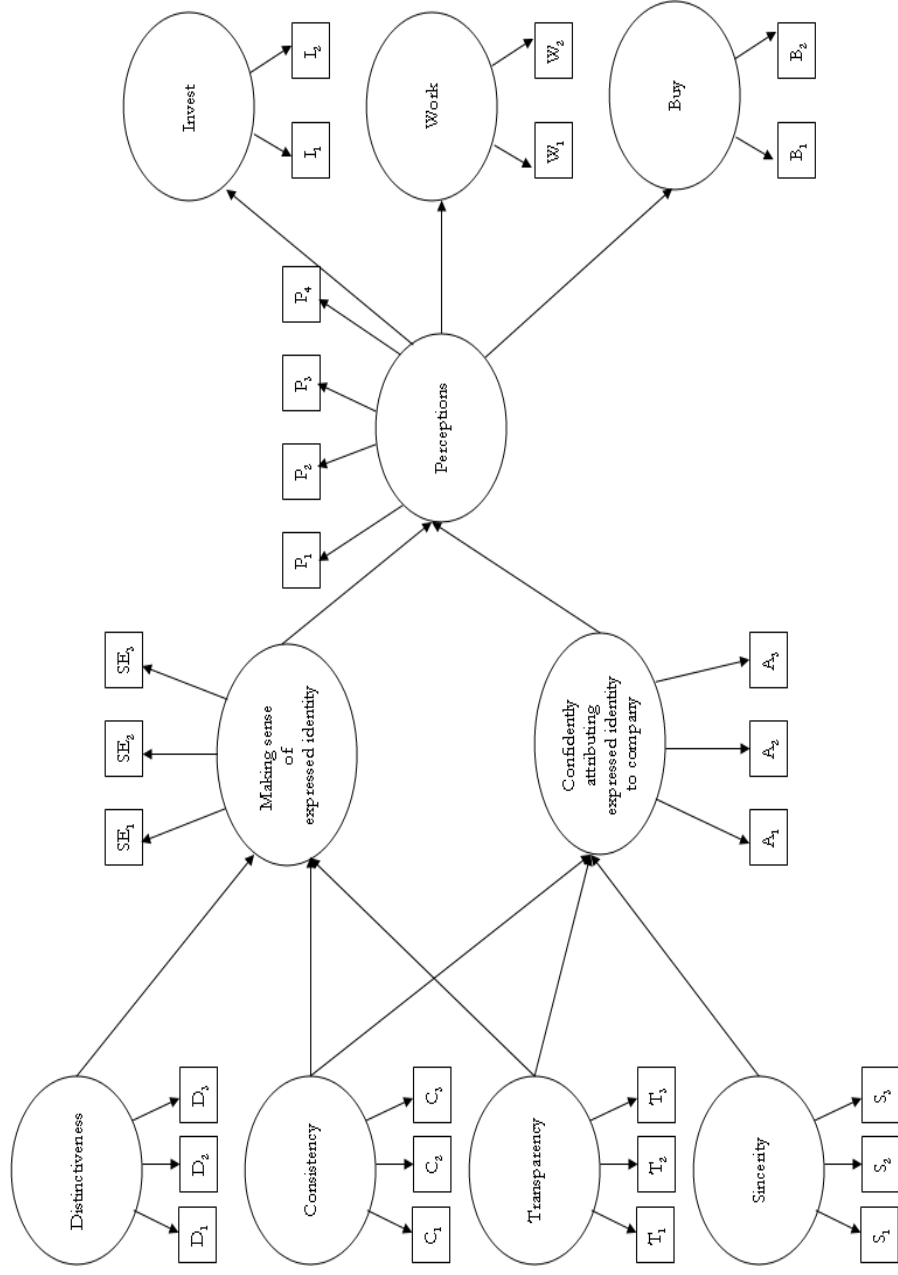
## **5 Study Three: The Impact of the Expressiveness Principles on Stakeholders' Perceptions of and Intentions toward an Organization**

“For ideas to evolve, scholars must both develop new frameworks for expressing ideas and empirically validate those frameworks. Thus, the advancement of scientific theory depends on a continual cycling between inductive research aimed at building theory and deductive research aimed at testing theory” (Elsbach, 1994, p. 77).

Study two empirically identified four expressiveness principles that appear to play an important role for managers in expressing their organizational identity to their stakeholders. The four expressiveness principles seem to be a guidance for managers to give stakeholders sense of their organization's preferred organizational identity. Moreover, they appeared to be essential for them to convince their stakeholders that the expressed identity can be really attributed to the company rather than to ulterior motives. In this chapter I link the findings of study two to theories on attribution (Kelley, 1967; 1972), sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and information processing (Atkin, 1973; Berlyne, 1970; Fiske & Taylor, 1991), in order to test a model that describes to what extent and how the four expressiveness principles influence stakeholders' perceptions of a company.

Section 5-1 first discusses some existing literature on sensemaking, attribution and other socio-cognitive theories of information processing. In section 5-2, I link these well-established theories and studies to the findings from study two and formulate hypotheses regarding the effect of each expressiveness principle on stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward a company. Section 5-3 describes the experiment that I conducted to test the hypotheses. Finally, the chapter is closed by presenting and discussing the results. The empirical model is depicted in Figure 5-1.

Figure 5-1 The Impact of the Four Expressiveness Principles on Stakeholders' Perceptions of and Intentions toward a Company



## 5.1 Theoretical Perspective

Based on the findings in study two, it was assumed that the identified expressiveness principles may impact stakeholders' perceptions of a company through the positive impact that they can have on how stakeholders make sense of and attribute an expressed identity to the organization. Before formulating hypotheses about these relationships, this section first provides some theoretically established insights on the nature and processes of sensemaking and attribution.

### 5.1.1 Making Sense of an Expressed Identity

To recap from chapter four: in the context of this study, *sensegiving* concerns the deliberate attempt of managers to shape the interpretation and meaning constructions of stakeholders about their organization (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). *Sensemaking* is an activity that exists among stakeholders who try, on their part, to construct meaning of and interpret the organization (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006, p. 433; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Weick, 1995). The antecedents and underlying cognitive mechanisms of sensemaking can be explained by means of socio-cognitive theories on information processing such as noticing, schemata and categorization. For example, scholars often contend that sensemaking can be divided into two cognitive processes (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Weick, 1995). The first process involves people's noticing of stimuli in their environment. In this cognitive activity, people scan their environment and separate signals from noise. As such they order their perceived worlds by classifying relevant signals from irrelevant ones. The other process involves the actual sensemaking or 'interpretation', where people attempt to give meaning to the data that they noticed. Although both activities often occur simultaneously, the distinction is relevant as noticing determines whether people can even make sense of something. As Starbuck & Milliken (1988) contend: "If events are noticed, people make sense of them; and if events are not noticed, they are not available for sensemaking" (p. 60).

Another important cognitive activity of people's sensemaking can be described by schema theories. A schema can be viewed as "cognitive structures that represent knowledge about a concept or type of stimulus, including its attributions and the relations among those attributes" (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). People develop schemas by combining the different associations that they have of a person, object or event into an abstractly organized configuration (Asch, 1946). Such developed

schemas allow them to make sense of something easily because the organized knowledge guides them in evaluating or assessing a certain person, object or event quickly (Fiske & Taylor, 1991, p. 98). However, when persons encounter information that is inconsistent with their schema, they try to reconcile the incongruity because people experience it emotionally disturbing, and hence, unpleasant to encounter inconsistent patterns in their daily lives (cf. Heider, 1946; Mandler, 1982). In case the person is not able to reconcile the inconsistency, the person is likely to experience negative emotions due to frustration or a feeling of helplessness in making sense of the incongruity (Mandler, 1982).

Yet, as commented by Fiske and Taylor (1991, p. 105), people “cannot apply a schema without having classified the person, object or event as fitting in a certain category”. I previously described that theories of categorization contend that people form cognitive categories of persons, objects or events that guide them in organizing and understanding the informational environment around them (Mandler, 1982; Rosch, 1978). In the context of my study, stakeholders may cognitively order a group of companies with similar activities under one category. When stakeholders are confronted with information about such a prototypical company, their initially formed categorizations help them to know what schema they need to apply to understand the company. However, when they are encountered with information about a company that does not fit in the category, a subcategory will be formed in which the distinctive information of this company are the defining characteristics of this new category (Mandler, 1982; Sujan & Bettman, 1989).

In this chapter, I build on these well-established theoretical notions and propose how the earlier identified expressiveness principles may affect stakeholders’ underlying cognitive information processing in order to make sense of and form perceptions about organizations.

### **5.1.2 Confidently Attributing the Expressed Identity to the Company**

The attribution theory is actually a collection of theoretical and empirical contributions that share several common concerns (for extensive reviews see for example Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Folkes, 1988; Mirzelski, Golden, & Kernan, 1979). The basic tenet in these theories is that in forming impressions of others, people make decisions about whether they should attribute a certain behavior or characteristic of a person to either personal/internal factors or to environmental/situational factors. While the theories have often served to understand how

individuals construct causal explanations for their own or others' behavior in forming impressions, the theory has also had strong explanatory value in the study of the formation of perceptions in an organizational context (Allen & Rush, 1998; Eastman, 1994; Sjovald & Talk, 2004; Staw, McKechnie, & Puffer, 1983). For example, findings of a study by Eastman (1994) suggest that employees' organizational citizenship behaviors that are judged to be the result of internal motives are rewarded more positively than those that seem to derive from external or instrumental motives (e.g. attempting to impress the boss or obtain a higher salary). Similar attribution processes have been suggested to occur when stakeholders form perceptions of an organization's corporate responsibility behavior. For instance, Sjovald and Talk (2004) contend that stakeholders will more likely attribute a firm's responsible behavior to be driven by a firm's external or instrumental motivation when a potential external cause co-occurs with the behavior than when no such external cause seems to be salient. For example, if an organization's responsibility behavior increases after a reputation damaging scandal, then the responsible behavior co-varies with the scandal and the behavior is attributed to the negative event rather than to a firm's internal motives to be socially responsible. Furthermore, Ellen, Webb and Mohr's (2006) study suggests that consumers respond positively to CSR efforts that they interpret as being driven by the company's values or strategic goals, because both reflect that the firm's CSR efforts are inherent in the existence of a firm. However, consumers respond negatively to CSR efforts that are attributed to motives that are driven by external pressures from stakeholders or by egoistically driven motives such as taking quick advantages out of the CSR activities. In these latter cases, the CSR efforts are not perceived to be a result of the firm's core – strategic – reasons of existence and are, therefore, perceived more negatively.

Apart from making attributions about organizations' behaviors or actions, stakeholders may also make decisions about whether they should attribute a firm's expressed *identity characteristics* to either to the company or to other motives such as an attempt to spruce up the company's image (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Drumwright, 1996). Expressed identity characteristics that are a true reflection of the company are often judged more favorably than expressed identity characteristics that are perceived to be a result of external or instrumental motives (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004; Van Rekom, Podnar, Jacobs, & Rotteveel, 2006). In anticipation of these attribution processes that stakeholders seem to use in forming perceptions about a company, companies likely want to express their organizational identity characteristics in a way that stimulates stakeholders to attribute these



identity expressions to the company. In line with these theoretical notions, the following section formulates hypotheses on how several of the previously identified expressiveness principles may influence stakeholders to attribute the expressed identity characteristics to the company rather than to external circumstances, which in turn may enhance their perceptions of the company and their behavioral responses toward the firm.

## **5.2 Hypotheses**

### **5.2.1 The Impact of Distinctiveness on Stakeholders' Company Perceptions**

It has been commonly recognized that novel or surprising stimuli are more salient and, therefore, easier noticed than less extreme cues in a perceivers' environment (Berlyne, 1970, , 1976; Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Also, such types of salient cues trigger a process of interpretation by which people attempt to attribute meaning to the surprising or novel situation at hand (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967, , 1972; Louis, 1980). In addition to these theories, empirical studies have shown that distinctive information is processed more intensively and subsequently perceived more favorably than less distinctive information (Goodstein, 1993; Meyers-Levy, 1989; Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1993; Taylor, Wilson, & Miracle, 1994). Similar mechanisms may hold for distinctive organizational identity expressions. Organizational identity expressions that are perceived to be distinctive are likely to be noticed or to capture stakeholders' attention, making it easier for them to mentally process the distinctive characteristics and to ascribe meaning to the company's identity, which may positively influence their overall evaluations of the company. Also, distinctive identity expressions may elicit stakeholders' categorization processes in terms of placing this identity in a categorical scheme that is different from other organizations in the industry. As such, the distinctive identity expressions are likely to be processed and remembered more effectively than when no such categorization processes occur. Moreover, by means of these categorization processes stakeholders may derive a better understanding of the company by the virtue of defining the identity in contrast to identities of other companies in the industry (cf. Schultz, Antorini, & Csaba, 2005).

In the context of study two, the oil companies appeared to 'package' their organizational identity in a distinctive framework in order to allow their stakeholders to get a good understanding of 'what their organization is about' compared to other companies in their industry. By linking the

findings of study two to the above described theoretical notions, I propose that distinctive organizational identity expressions may impact stakeholders' ability to make meaningful perceptions about the organization's identity (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003, p. 81) because it enables stakeholders to effectively notice the expressed identity and to place this identity in a schema that is categorically distinctive from other companies in the industry. The following proposition is formulated:

*Hypothesis 3a:* Stakeholders exposed to more distinctive organizational identity expressions will be better able to make sense of a firm's organizational identity than stakeholders exposed to less distinctive organizational identity expressions.

Empirical studies have shown that distinctive information is often processed more intensively and subsequently perceived more favorably than less distinctive information (Goodstein, 1993; Meyers-Levy, 1989; Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1993; Taylor, Wilson, & Miracle, 1994). A possible explanation for this may be derived from Mandler's (1982) theory on schema congruity. He argues that objects, which are slightly incongruent from people's expectations regarding that object, create arousal. Arousal initially causes tensions, which motivates individuals to resolve the unexpectedness by engaging in greater cognitive elaboration. Success in the very process of resolving the incongruity causes pleasure, which may contribute to a resulting positive affect. A study by Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989) underscored Mandlers' (1982) theoretical assumptions in the context of new product evaluations. Their findings show that products that were moderately distinctive from what people would expect of such type of products were more positively evaluated than products that were congruent with people's expectations regarding such type of products. A study conducted by Taylor et al. (1994) likewise showed that when ads contained a message different from that expected, there were more favorable attitudes toward the ad and the brand and higher purchase intentions compared to ads with non-differentiating messages.

By analogy, I propose that when stakeholders succeed in making meaningful perceptions of the company as a result of the distinctive organizational identity expressions, they are more likely to generate positive perceptions of the company because their successful sensemaking processes of the company's 'incongruent' identity may result in an eventually positive affect toward the company.

I therefore test the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 3b:* The positive relationship between distinctive organizational identity expressions and stakeholders' perceptions of the company is mediated by their successful ability to make sense of the company.

### **5.2.2 The Impact of Consistency on Stakeholders' Company Perceptions**

Strull and Wyer (1989) found that inconsistency between the different associations that people have of a certain person lowers their confidence in forming more general, abstract schemas that summarize these different associations. To put this in the context of organizational identities, a person's overall attitude toward an organization's identity is for a great part determined by the extent to which the identity is composed of different associations that share meaning and content with each other (cf. Keller, 1993). Conversely, identities composed of associations that are inconsistent with each other -in terms of meaning or content- may lead to confusion, which inherently decreases consumers' favorability of the identity. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) have likewise argued that "consumers' understanding of a company's identity, including their ability to make identity-related judgments, is likely to be greater when the company's actions in disparate domains coalesce into stable, distinctive and meaningful connections among its defining characteristics than when no such underlying coherence is apparent" (p. 81).

In my qualitative study I revealed that by consistently aligning their different organizational messages to each other, companies attempt to orchestrate their organizational identity expressions around a coherent framework. In so doing they seemed to try to influence stakeholders' sensemaking of the company by handing them a coherent framework that can allow stakeholders to interpret the company in a comprehensible way. Based on these findings and on the above discussed prior theoretical assumptions I propose that consistent organizational identity expressions enhance stakeholders' ability to create a meaningful identity of the company. Conversely, inconsistent information about the company causes stakeholders to question what identity the company actually has and as such inhibits them to form a good understanding of the company. I test the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 4a:* Stakeholders exposed to more consistent organizational identity expressions will be better able to make sense of a firm's organizational identity than stakeholders exposed to less consistent organizational identity expressions.

Given that organizational identities are often perceived to be “complex and unwieldy” (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003, p 81), I argue in a similar line as assumed by Mandlars’(1982) ‘congruity’ theory that the very success of resolving these complex and unwieldy identity characteristics into a coherent picture may contribute to positive affects about the organization in question, thus enhancing stakeholders’ positive perceptions of the company. Based on this line of reasoning I test the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 4b:* The positive relationship between consistent organizational identity expressions and stakeholders’ perceptions of the company is mediated by their successful ability to make sense of the company.

While the above line of reasoning suggests that consistency positively impacts stakeholders’ perceptions of a company through its facilitating role in making sense of an organization’s expressed identity, the role of consistency can also be well explained by theories of attribution.

In assessing whether they should attribute a certain behavior or characteristic to personal or situational causes, people are sensitive to the consistency in which the observed behavior or characteristics exists over time and across situations (Kelley, 1972). People are more likely to attribute a specific behavior to a person if this person shows the particular behavior consistently over time and across different situations. However, if this person exemplifies a low consistency in the specific behavior, people are not certain whether this behavior specifically belongs to that person and they are less likely to attribute the specific behavior to the person’s personality. Several authors have applied these theoretical arguments to a corporate social responsibility context. They argue that the more that corporations show their social responsibility initiatives consistently across time and different types of social areas, the more likely it is that their perceived motives are attributed to their inherent commitment to the responsibility efforts rather than to exploitive motives (Drumwright, 1996; Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006; Sjøvall & Talk, 2004; Webb & Mohr,

1998). Similar assumptions are made in the context of this study. That is, when stakeholders experience a high level of consistency in a firm's organizational identity expressions, stakeholders are likely more confident to attribute these expressed characteristics to the company than when they experience a low consistency. The following hypothesis is tested:

*Hypothesis 4c:* Stakeholders exposed to more consistent organizational identity expressions will be more confident in attributing the expressed identity to the company.

Some prior literature suggests that expressed identity characteristics that are perceived as being a true reflection of the company are often judged more favorably than expressed identity characteristics that are attributed to be a motive for external or instrumental motives (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004; Van Rekom et al., 2006). By the same token, I test the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 4d:* The positive relationship between consistent organizational identity expressions and stakeholders' perceptions of the company is mediated by their confidence in attributing the expressed identity to the company.

### **5.2.3 The Impact of Sincerity on Stakeholders' Company Perceptions**

Theories of message persuasiveness suggest that people accept and are positively influenced by information sources if the information is perceived to be sincere (Eagly & Chaiken, 1975; Kelley, 1971). In the context considered here, sincerity is defined as the degree to which the expressions are true and honest about the organization's identity (cf. Eagly, Wood, & Chaiken, 1978; Erickson, 1995; Kelley, 1971; cf. Taylor, 2001).

The notion that sincere expressions are essential in managing favorable impressions has been a common premise in scholarly literature. For example in a consumer context, Aaker (1997) shows that the sincerity of a brand is the foremost dimension on which consumers' perceive a brand's personality. In a more recent study, Forehand and Grier (2003) found that consumers do not necessarily become skeptical when companies' CSR activities are economically driven, but they do become skeptical when they get the impression that the firm was not straightforward about this. Impression management scholars have also argued the importance of sincerity (Argenti, 2004;

Elsbach, 1994). Elsbach (1994) for example contends that sincerity has a positive impact on stakeholders' perceptions of the legitimacy of the company.

Although these scholars emphasize the importance of sincerity, there has to my best knowledge been no literature linking a company's sincerity to stakeholders' attribution processes around the expressed identity of a company. The findings from my qualitative study suggest that the oil companies put intensive effort in proving the sincerity of their expressions in order to convince their stakeholders that their expressed identity can be really attributed to the company's disposition rather than to ulterior motives such as window dressing. These findings and the established literature on the importance of sincere expressions in forming positive company perceptions, lead me to argue that sincere expressions are a positive precursor for stakeholders' perception formation processes of the company. That is, when stakeholders perceive the identity expressions to be sincere, they are more likely to have confidence in the credibility of the organization's messages, leading to higher confidence in attributing the expressed identity characteristics to the firm. Based on these findings and the here discussed literature, I hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 5a:* Stakeholders exposed to more sincere organizational identity expressions will be more confident in attributing the expressed identity to the company.

By the same logic as discussed with hypothesis 4d, I test the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 5b:* The positive relationship between sincere organizational identity expressions and stakeholders' perceptions of the company is mediated by their confidence in attributing the expressed identity to the company.

#### **5.2.4 The Impact of Transparency on Stakeholders' Company Perceptions**

Theories of information seeking suggest that in making decisions people are motivated to search for diagnostic information that may help them to accomplish their decision making goals (Atkin, 1973; Beatty & Smith, 1987; Meyers-Levy & Malaviya, 1999; Punj & Staelin, 1983; Srinivasan & Ratchford, 1991). If they have found sufficient diagnostic information about a certain object or issue, people are likely to arrive at more favorable judgments of the object or issue at hand than if

no sufficient diagnostic information is found (Baker & Lutz, 1988; Lynch, Marmorstein, & Weigold, 1988; Meyers-Levy & Malaviya, 1999). These theoretical notions suggest that in interpreting organizations, stakeholders search for diagnostic information which should help them in making sense of the organization in order to make subsequent behavioral decisions with regard to the organization. To the degree that the company is able and willing to satisfy stakeholders in accumulating their diagnostic information, stakeholders perceive them as more or less 'transparent' (Christensen, 2002; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004). In other words, perceptions of whether or not a company is 'transparent' are contingent on how well stakeholders believe that the company has satisfied their informational needs in order to form a meaningful impression of the company. The findings of my qualitative study show that organizations anticipate to such information processing and sensemaking activities on the part of their stakeholders by leveling the transparency of their expressions with stakeholders' threshold for diagnostic information. Based on these qualitative insights and the above arguments I hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 6a:* Stakeholders exposed to more transparent organizational identity expressions will be more able to make sense of a firm's organization identity than stakeholders exposed to less transparent organizational identity expressions.

Scholars have more and more suggested that opening the doors toward transparency enables the firm and its stakeholders to learn to understand each other's viewpoints and establish a consensual system of meaning (Christensen, 2002; Fombrun & Rindova, 2000; Swift, 2001) which leads to more favorable, long-lasting impressions of the company. I therefore hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 6b:* The positive relationship between transparent organizational identity expressions and stakeholders' perceptions of the company is mediated by their successful ability to make sense of the company.

Besides the argument that transparency may play a positive role on stakeholders' abilities to make a good sense of the company's identity, I also argue that higher transparency is a precursor of stakeholders' confidence in attributing the expressed identity to the company. Companies who

espouse a certain identity by carrying out attractive corporate identity campaigns, but who are reluctant or not able to take that extra step in explaining and discussing their organizational identity will likely elicit more confusion and distrust around the genuineness of their espoused identity than companies who are prepared and willing to help their stakeholders to make a meaningful picture of that company (cf. Christensen, 2002; cf. Fombrun & Rindova, 2000). I therefore argue that if stakeholders are receiving more opportunities to learn about the firm's identity through higher levels of transparency, they are more confident to attribute the expressed identity to the company. Accordingly, I test the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 6c:* Stakeholders exposed to more transparent organizational identity expressions will be more confident in attributing the expressed identity to the company.

By a similar line of reasoning as with hypotheses 4d and 5b, I also test the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 6d:* The positive relationship between transparent organizational identity expressions and stakeholders' perceptions of the company is mediated by their confidence in attributing the expressed identity to the company.

### **5.2.5 The Impact of Organizational Identity Expressions on Stakeholders' Intentions toward the Company**

As earlier described in section 3.4, empirical studies within different research streams have supported the notion that positive evaluations of a company affect stakeholders' intentions toward the company. For example, within the marketing literature it has been suggested that customers' intentions to buy the firm's products is contingent on how the customers evaluate the company behind the products (Gürhan-Canli & Batra, 2004; Keller & Aaker, 1998). Likewise, recruitment researchers have demonstrated that the application decisions of potential job candidates with respect to a certain company are highly affected by their overall evaluation of the company (Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993; Rynes, 1991). Moreover, in the first study in chapter three I found evidence that organizational identity information in addition to just financial



information or recruitment information increases potential investors' or potential applicants' evaluation of the company and subsequently their intentions to buy shares from or apply for a job at the company.

I draw on these findings and expect that distinctive, consistent, sincere and transparent identity expressions indirectly impact stakeholders' behavioral intentions toward the company. That is, I believe that each expressiveness principle has an indirect impact on stakeholders' intentions toward the company through the mediating paths that have been hypothesized above. I therefore test the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 7a:* The positive relationship between distinctive organizational identity expressions and stakeholders' intentions toward the company is mediated by their ability to make sense of the company and their subsequently formed perceptions of the company.

*Hypothesis 7b:* The positive relationship between consistent organizational identity expressions and stakeholders' intentions toward the company is mediated by their ability to make sense of the company, their confidence in attributing the identity to the company and their subsequently formed perceptions of the company.

*Hypothesis 7c:* The positive relationship between sincere organizational identity expressions and stakeholders' intentions toward the company is mediated by their confidence in attributing the identity to the company and their subsequently formed perceptions of the company.

*Hypothesis 7d:* The positive relationship between transparent organizational identity expressions and stakeholders' intentions toward the company is mediated by their ability to make sense of the company, their confidence in attributing the identity to the company and their subsequently formed perceptions of the company.

## 5.3 Method

Because my theoretical assumptions about the influence of distinctive, consistent, sincere and transparent organizational identity expressions are fairly new, I regarded it important to test the effects in a setting that controls for internal validity. I therefore chose to test the hypotheses by means of an experimental design.

### 5.3.1 Experimental Design and stimulus material

This experiment used a 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 design. As such, each expressiveness principle was manipulated by way of being highly or lowly present.

To manipulate the expressiveness principles, a corporate website of a fictitious Brazilian oil company was developed, named 'Brazbell'. In general, the corporate website provided fairly elaborate descriptions of who Brazbell is, what it stands for and what its values, programs and activities are. In addition, the website provided some performance information on the company's financial health and its social and environmental performance. Because I induced my framework from a qualitative study based on the oil industry, my research strategy was to begin with testing my hypotheses within the setting of this industry. It was also desirable to create material of a company whose organizational identity expressions would be significant to stakeholders. To this end, I regarded the oil industry to be an appropriate setting because an increasing number of constituencies have nowadays become more critical on the economically, environmentally and socially sensitive nature of oil companies' activities (e.g. see section 4.1). Reading organizational identity expressions from an oil company may therefore be more significant to respondents than a company associated with less sensitive issues. A fictitious company is used so that existing knowledge about the company could not affect respondents' reactions.

The four expressiveness principles of the fictitious website were manipulated by using the different types of tactics that were induced for each expressiveness principle in study two (see Table 5-1). For example, high distinctiveness was manipulated by formulating an either high (for the high condition) or low (for the low condition) thought-leadership message on the corporate website of the company. The high thought-leadership message was designed by formulating a corporate vision that clearly appeared to move forward from the industry. From the qualitative study, it was inferred

that oil companies' efforts to create a thought-leadership position are nowadays highly centered around expressing a vision on renewable energies (e.g. solar and wind). In accordance with these findings, I therefore included the following vision to manipulate the high thought-leadership message: "Brazbell aims to make a difference by stepping ahead of the industry and making alternative energies such as solar and wind as a major share of our business". The low thought-leadership message consisted of a vision that less profoundly positioned a 'forward-moving' vision on renewable energies: "At Brazbell, we aim to be an integrated energy company by engaging in oil, gas, chemicals and other resources to meet the world's growing demand for energy" [...] We recently also began with research in renewable energy resources." The latter sentence was included to control for the effect of the type of strategic activities (developing renewable energy sources) on stakeholders' responses. This is relevant since I was not interested in how a company's *activity* impacts stakeholders' perceptions, but how an organization's *way of expressing* influences stakeholders' perceptions of an organization.

Because distinctiveness is generally articulated in relation to a certain reference point (Berlyne, 1970; Einstein & McDaniel, 1989; Mandler, 1982; Nelson, 1979), before starting the actual website a statement was included that manipulated respondents' reference point for each condition. Specifically, the high distinctiveness condition started with a statement telling respondents that "Although many oil companies are still focusing on oil and gas, *only a few innovative firms* are active in renewable resources such as solar and wind". Low distinctiveness was manipulated by including the statement "In addition to resources such as oil and gas, *most energy companies* are nowadays active in renewable resources such as solar and wind." The manipulations for the other three expressiveness principles are described in Table 5-1. Appendix F provides an example of the corporate website including all high scenarios (high distinctiveness, consistency, sincerity and transparency) as well as an example of the corporate website including all low scenarios (low distinctiveness, consistency, sincerity and transparency).

The extent of reality and quality of the corporate website was assessed by a corporate communication manager of one of the six global oil companies that were interviewed in study two and a financial expert who has checked the reality of the financial figures on the website. In addition, my direct colleagues and a few external scholars in my field of research have commented on the reality and experimental quality of the website.

Table 5-1 Manipulations in Experiment

Distinctiveness	Manipulation	
	High	Low
Create thought-leadership	A website section where the company expresses a vision that goes beyond the traditional industry standards (“At Brazbell, we aim to make a difference by stepping ahead of the industry and making alternative energies such as solar and wind as a major share of our business.”)	A website section where the company expresses a vision that less profoundly emphasizes its vision on renewable energies (“At Brazbell, we aim to be an integrated energy company by engaging in oil, gas, chemicals and other resources to meet the world’s growing demand for energy [...] We recently also began with research in renewable energy resources.”).
Active messaging of thought-leadership	A website section that provides several links to various publications relating to the organization’s thought-leadership.	A website section that provides links to news releases covering general organizational information (e.g. resigning of president, quarterly press releases etc.), but <i>not</i> conveying any thought-leadership aspects.
<b>NB:</b> Because distinctiveness is generally articulated in relation to a certain reference point, respondents were -before exposure to the actual corporate website of Brazbell- exposed to a statement that manipulated their point of reference:		
<i>“Although many oil companies are still focusing on oil and gas, only a few innovative firms are active in renewable resources such as solar and wind.”</i>		
<i>“In addition to resources such as oil and gas, most energy companies are nowadays active in renewable resources such as solar and wind.”</i>		

	Manipulation	
	High	Low
<b>Consistency</b> Linkage of internal and external communication	The corporate website provides a link to one of Brazzbell's internal magazines wherein its values are consistent with those expressed on the corporate website	The corporate website provides a link to one of Brazzbell's internal magazines wherein its values are not consistent with those expressed on the corporate website
	Key themes consistently expressed across messages	Across the website, Brazzbell communicates values that are inconsistent with each other.
	Consistency evolving over time	A website section where Brazzbell explains how its corporate campaigns have consistently evolved over time. A 'timeline' reveals that the corporate values in their campaigns have been consistent over time.
<b>Sincerity</b> Expressions are in accordance with actual behavior	A section in which the company provides information on how it backs up its values with real behavior	A section in which the company just shows some important milestones. No assurance on how the company backs up its values with real behavior.
	Authentic identity expressions	A section in which the company explains how its values reinforce the value of its brand. No assurance on how the company's values were rooted in its history.

Manipulation		
	High	Low
Self-critical in expressions	A section in which a company provides an overview of improvements that it still has to make and challenges that it still faces	A section in which the company only elaborates on successes that it has booked. No overview of improvements that it still has to make or challenges that it faces.
Transparency		
Clear explanation of company's standpoints regarding important issues	A section where the CEO and other executives explain their view on important energy issues.	A section where only some background information of each member within the Executive Team is provided. No clear view on how they stand toward energy issues.
Providing concrete information	A clear performance table in which the company's results regarding its financial and social performance are outlined.	A section where stakeholders can only get access to the company's annual report after they have filled in their identity and purposes of reading the company's annual report. No accessible performance information.
Open for a dialogue	A section in which the company enables stakeholders to have a dialogue with the firm.	A section that provides some (not so relevant) additional information. No opportunity to have a dialogue with the firm.

### 5.3.2 Pilot Study

I conducted a qualitative pilot study among 12 respondents<sup>7</sup> in order to test the manipulations within the corporate website. The respondents were asked to read the material on the corporate website and to fill out several manipulation check measures after reading the content on the corporate website. The subjects were interviewed right after filling out the manipulation check measures.

I first let subjects elicit their first thoughts and feelings about the corporate website and questionnaire. This resulted in responses regarding their attitude toward the content of the corporate website, their attitude toward the company and the readability of the corporate website. I probed further on aspects that seemed to be either too favorably or unfavorably perceived or that did not make sense to them. I also asked for their thoughts about the layout of the corporate website, the reality of the corporate website, and their perceived amount of effort that they had to deliver for reading the information on the website.

Next, I discussed each manipulation check measure separately by letting them explain what specific parts of the corporate website helped them in forming their answers for each manipulation check measure. In doing so, I took a reiterative approach: after interviewing one subject, I changed the materials accordingly and went on with testing the new material on another subject. As such, it was possible to identify potential confounding effects before the main experiment was conducted. After interviewing 12 subjects I felt to have reached a satisfactory level in eliminating as many confounding factors as possible.

### 5.3.3 Procedure Main Experiment

Since the experimental material was written in English, it was desirable to collect a sample of which I could be sure that all respondents were able to read English. Hence, the respondents for this study were selected from a large UK online panel. An online panel was regarded to be a practical solution for collecting the large amount of respondents that was needed to cover each of the 16 experimental groups in the 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 design. The respondents were randomly assigned to one of the 16 experimental groups. Each experimental group consisted of an average of 57 persons,

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<sup>7</sup> The 12 respondents varied from students to working professionals in different areas. Their degree of knowledge about and familiarity with the oil industry varied widely.

resulting in a total of 907 participants. Survey Sampling International, a research firm specialized in conducting online panels was enlisted to help with the data collection.

Members of this online panel were approached by e-mail and directed to a website on which further instructions for the experiment were provided. They were informed that the purpose of this study was to examine the usefulness of corporate websites. Further, they were told that they were about to enter a website of a fictitious oil company named ‘Brazbell’ and were requested to read the information on the website carefully. After reading the content of the website, they were directed to some questions regarding the corporate website. While answering the questions, they were free to go back to Brazbell’s website. The whole procedure took by average 15 minutes of their time.

**5.3.4 Measures**

I assessed stakeholders’ overall perceptions of the company by using the reputation measurement as developed by the Reputation Institute (see Table 5-2). This measurement has been repeatedly used to assess the reputation of companies across a broad range of different countries and has been recognized as a reliable and valid measure of stakeholders’ perceptions of a company (Fombrun, Gardberg, & Sever, 2000). One item measures respondents’ overall feeling toward the company and three items assess the degree to which stakeholders like, trust and respect the company. A seven-point scale was used, ranging from ‘Totally disagree’ to ‘Totally agree’.

**Table 5-2 Stakeholders’ Perceptions of the Company**

---

1. The information on Brazbell’s website gives me a good feeling about the company
2. The information on the website gives me the impression that I can trust Brazbell
3. Based on what I have read about Brazbell, I respect the company
4. Based on what I have read about Brazbell, I admire the company

---

Because processes of sensegiving and sensemaking have often been studied from a qualitative, grounded-theory approach (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Isabella, 1990; Maitlis, 2005), prior literature did not allow me to use an existing quantitative measure of stakeholders’ ability to make sense of an organization. I therefore used the knowledge that I had gained on this construct during my research process and constructed a measure that could tap into



the construct of stakeholders’ ability to ‘Make Sense of the Expressed Identity’ (from here on labeled as MSEI). During the development of this measure, I incorporated the advice of colleagues and several other experts in the research field. By means of a reiterative approach, I pre-tested the developed measures among the 12 subjects in my pilot study and refined the measures accordingly. This resulted in a 7-point measurement scale (Totally disagree – Totally agree) that is depicted in Table 5-3.

**Table 5-3 Ability to Make Sense of the Company (MSEI)**

1.	Based on the information on Brazbell’s website, I find it easy to understand what their values are
2.	Based on the information on Brazbell’s website, I have a clear sense about Brazbell’s vision
3.	Based on the information on Brazbell’s website, I find it easy to grasp what Brazbell exactly claims to stand for

Some prior studies have measured stakeholders’ attribution processes by measuring what motives consumers attribute to a firm’s particular behavior (Barone, Miyazaki, & Taylor, 2000; Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006; Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Braig, 2004). In these measures, a distinction was often made between self-centered motives (e.g. a company puts effort in CSR activities in order to make profits) and other-centered motives (e.g. a company puts effort in CSR activities as a result of the company’s real commitment to the community).

I considered to use these existing measures of attribution, but believed that my research intention was to tap into a somewhat different and perhaps narrower form of stakeholders’ attributions than these previous studies. While these prior studies focused on consumers’ attached *motives* to a company’s *activities*, I was not so particularly interested in stakeholders’ attached motives to the company’s activities, behavior or expressions but rather in stakeholders’ *confidence* in attributing a certain expressed organizational meaning -captured in a so-called ‘identity’- to the company. I therefore adopted the similar measurement development strategy as with the above-described MSEI construct and developed the measures as depicted in Table 5-4 in order tap into stakeholders’ ‘Confidence in Attributing the Expressed Identity’ to the organization (from here on labeled as CAEI). Similar to the previous measures, a seven-point scale was used (‘Totally disagree’ - ‘Totally agree’).

**Table 5-4 Confidence in Attributing the Expressed Identity to the Company (CAEI)**

- 
1. I believe that Brazbell's expressed identity can indeed be attributed to Brazbell
  2. I think that Brazbell's values are really rooted in the company
  3. I am confident that their expressed vision is truly embedded in the company
- 

The developed measures for MSEI and CAEI were followed up by measurements of respondents' intentions to 1) invest in Brazbell, 2) apply for a job at Brazbell and 3) buy fuel from Brazbell. Similar as with the measurement perceptions, the intention measures scales of the Reputation Institute were used. I considered using the 4-item scale for measuring intentions as used in study two. However, given that the respondents in the here presented experiment had to assess their intention on three types of behavior, I was concerned that including three 4-item measurement scales would considerably fatigue the respondents and, therefore, affect the quality of their responding. The intention measurement scales of the Reputation Institute have proved to be a reliable and valid measurement instrument while only using two items (see also Newburry and colleagues (2005) who used similar items to assess stakeholders' intentions to work for a company). To ensure sufficient variance among the intention items, a 9-point measurement scale was used. Intentions to invest in Brazbell were assessed by means of the following items:

**Table 5-5 Intention to Invest in Brazbell**

- 
1. If I had the opportunity I would invest in Brazbell
  2. If I had the opportunity, I would recommend to invest in Brazbell
- 

Job intentions were assessed by first asking respondents to assume that they would like to work for a company in the oil industry and that Brazbell is situated in the UK. Then, they were asked to fill out the following two items.

**Table 5-6 Intention to Work for Brazbell**

- 
1. If I had the opportunity I would like to work for Brazbell
  2. If I had the opportunity, I would recommend Brazbell as an employer
- 

Their intentions to buy from Brazbell were assessed by first exposing them to a hypothetical scenario in which their employer would offer them a lease car of which the fuel costs would be included. They would be able to choose one out of two fuel cards; either from the service

stations of Brazbell or from a competitor. The service stations of both companies were told to be identical when it comes to prices, services and density in the UK. Based on these assumptions, they filled out the items below (see Table 5-7). In an attempt to trigger respondents' thoughts about this hypothetical situation, the items of this scale were reworded.

**Table 5-7 Intention to Buy from Brazbell**

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1.	I would never choose the fuelcard of Brazbell
2.	I would never recommend the fuel card of Brazbell to colleagues

---

Manipulation check measures for each expressiveness principle followed the intention measurements. The four 3-item scales to assess respondents' perceptions of each manipulated expressiveness principle were similar to the ones that I used in my pilot study and reflect each expressiveness tactic identified in chapter four. The measures are depicted in Table 5-8 (7-point scale: Totally disagree – Totally agree).

**Table 5-8 Perceived Distinctiveness, Consistency, Sincerity and Transparency**

---

<b>Distinctiveness</b>	
1.	Brazbell communicates distinctively about what it stands for
2.	Brazbell's communications set the company apart from the crowd in its industry
3.	Brazbell's communications about its identity seem unique
<b>Consistency</b>	
4.	Brazbell conveys consistent messages
5.	Brazbell is communicating coherently about its identity
6.	Brazbell's different communications match with each other
<b>Sincerity</b>	
7.	Brazbell communicates sincerely about its real identity
8.	Brazbell appears genuine about what it says
9.	Brazbell's communications about its identity are authentic
<b>Transparency</b>	
10.	Brazbell is transparent in its communications
11.	Brazbell is open in expressing its identity
12.	Brazbell communicates openly with stakeholders

---

### 5.3.5 Analyses

An initial screening of the data let me to delete 17% of cases that seemed to be outliers or that showed a potential common method bias. This resulted in a sample size of 748 cases.

Next, I tested whether the intended manipulations significantly discriminated from one another. Although I was able to obtain evidence in favor of the convergent validity of the manipulation of distinctiveness, sincerity and transparency, the convergent validity of consistency was not significant ( $p=.134$ ). Also, I was not able to establish a discriminant validity between all four separate manipulations. Concretely, the distinctiveness manipulation did also significantly impact stakeholders' perceptions of the sincerity and transparency of the expressions that they were exposed to ( $p = .019$  and  $p = .026$  respectively). In addition, the sincerity manipulation significantly impacted stakeholders' perceptions of the distinctiveness, consistency and transparency of the expressions that they were exposed to ( $p=.00$ ;  $p=.00$ ;  $p=.03$  respectively). Since I was not able to disentangle the separate manipulations from one and another, the experimental design did not give me sufficient legitimacy to test my hypotheses as originally intended. I therefore decided to pursue my analyses by including the manipulation check measures as independent variables in my model.

I analyzed my data using structural equations modeling with Lisrel 8.80. I performed a confirmatory factor analyses in which I loaded the indicators on their appropriate constructs. For the constructs distinctiveness and transparency I each deleted one item (question 1 and 10 in Table 5-8, respectively) because of evidence of high cross-loadings on one or more additional constructs in the model. The remaining items loaded well on the intended constructs. In addition, I used the criteria recommended by Fornell & Larcker (1992) in order to assess the composite reliability and average variance extracted of the 10 constructs in the model. Although most constructs appeared to possess discriminant validity, I was not able to obtain discriminant validity between Sincerity and Transparency. Concretely, the average variance extracted for the Transparency construct was .72, which is less than its shared variance with the relationship Sincerity (.85), suggesting that both constructs should not be included separately when the structural model is tested (cf. Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Netemeyer, Johnston, & Burton, 1990). Consequently, I combined both constructs and re-ran my model. A confirmatory factor analyses for the new construct resulted in deleting one more item (question 8 in Table 5-8) because of a low loading on the construct and an inherently

high error variance. Model fit for the new measurement model was good<sup>8</sup> ( $\chi^2 = 825.79$ ,  $df = 239$ ,  $p < .01$ ; RMSEA = .057; CFI = .99; NNFI = .99; SRMR = .92) (Zablah, 2005), indicating that the measures are unidimensional (Anderson, Lepper, & Ross, 1980). As is summarized in Table 5-9, the resulting constructs appeared to exhibit strong composite reliabilities, average variances extracted and discriminant validities, providing evidence that the facet measures are satisfactorily reliable and distinguishable from each other in order to test the structural model.

I labeled the newly composed construct as Sincerity. My reasons for doing so is that the (sparse) literature discussing the concept of sincerity has claimed 'openness' (being closely related to my concept of transparency), as a feature of sincerity (Aaker, 1997; Carter, 1996). Since the here combined construct taps into both aspects of sincerity and openness, I felt confident to draw on these existing conceptual suggestions and to label the new construct as Sincerity.

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<sup>8</sup> Hu and Bentler (1999) offer a combinational rule for evaluating model fit, suggesting that a SRMR  $\leq .08$  and either a CFI  $\geq .95$  or RMSEA  $\leq .06$  are indicative of good model fit.

Table 5-9 Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations for Variables in the Model

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
(1) Distinctiveness	4.46	1.52	0.92	0.85	—								
(2) Consistency	5.00	1.34	0.91	0.78	0.77	—							
(3) Sincerity	4.77	1.41	0.94	0.80	0.80	0.80	—						
(4) Making Sense of Identity (MSEI)	5.12	1.36	0.93	0.82	0.68	0.79	0.78	—					
(5) Confidence in Attributing Identity to Company (CAEI)	4.82	1.36	0.93	0.81	0.74	0.78	0.85	0.78	—				
(6) Perceptions	4.78	1.45	0.96	0.85	0.77	0.75	0.87	0.74	0.82	—			
(7) Invest	4.50	2.32	0.95	0.90	0.65	0.64	0.73	0.65	0.71	0.76	—		
(8) Work	5.37	2.31	0.94	0.89	0.64	0.65	0.72	0.65	0.71	0.74	0.84	—	
(9) Buy	6.62	2.13	0.91	0.83	0.37	0.40	0.40	0.38	0.37	0.40	0.39	0.43	—

## 5.4 Results

To test the hypotheses, I tested two models: a full and a partial mediation model. For each model, the results are described below.

### 5.4.1 Full Mediation Model

The full structural model after combining the constructs of Transparency and Sincerity showed a reasonable fit ( $X^2 = 1409.86$ ,  $df = 262$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $RMSEA = .077$ ;  $CFI = .99$ ;  $NNFI = .99$ ;  $SRMR = .054$ ) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Table 5-10 presents the standardized path coefficients (SPC) and associated t-values for the hypothesized relationships. Figure 5–2 presents all significant paths graphically.

I predicted in hypothesis 3a that Distinctiveness would exert a positive influence on MSEI. Contrary to my expectations, the relationship was not significant ( $SPC = -.01$ ;  $t = -.24$ ). It was also predicted that Consistency would positively affect MSEI (H4a).

The results reported in Table 5-10 support this hypothesis ( $SPC = .45$ ;  $t = 9.04$ ). In addition, the results significantly established a relationship between Consistency and CAEI ( $SPC = .25$ ;  $t = 6.30$ ), providing evidence for hypothesis 4c.

Because Transparency and Sincerity were collapsed into one construct, hypotheses 5a and b, 6a-d and 7c and 7d were not tested in the way originally intended. Yet, since it was predicted that Transparency would impact MSEI and CAEI and Sincerity would impact CAEI, I tested the new construct Sincerity on both MSEI and CAEI. Sincerity appeared to positively influence MSEI as well as CAEI. Moreover, MSEI ( $SPC = 0.26$ ;  $t = 7.50$ ) and CAEI ( $SPC = .67$ ;  $t = 17.57$ ) both affected Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Company, indicating that the effect of Sincerity on Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Company is mediated by both MSEI and CAEI. This also provided support for a significant mediating relationship of MSEI and CAEI between Consistency and Stakeholders' Perceptions of a company (H4b and H4d, respectively). Furthermore, hypothesis 3b suggests that the influence of Distinctiveness on Stakeholders' Perceptions of a Company is mediated by MSEI. Since I could not establish a significant relationship between Distinctiveness and MSEI (H3a), hypothesis 3b could not be supported.

**Table 5-10 Standardized Path Coefficients and T-values for both Tested Models**

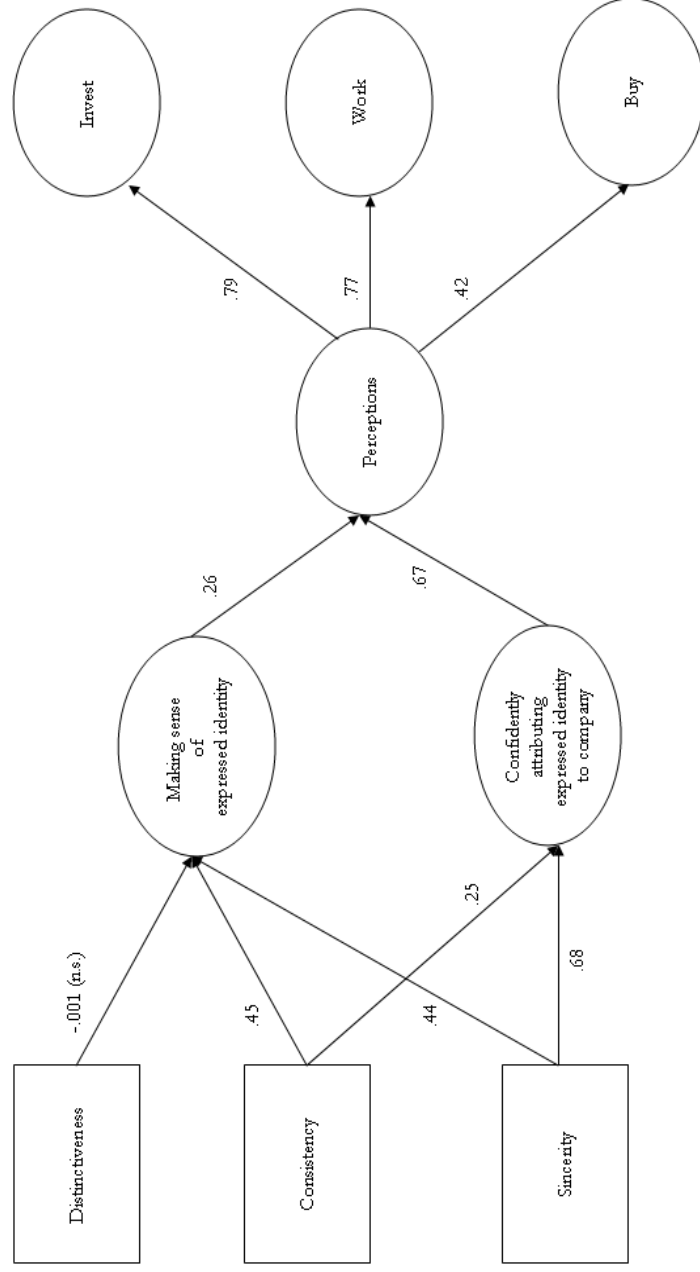
<b>Structural Model Statistics</b>		<b>Full Mediation Model</b>		<b>Partial Mediation Model</b>	
X2		1409.86		1238.20	
d.f.		262		259	
RMSEA		.077		.071	
CFI		.99		.99	
NNFI		.99		.99	
SRMR		.054		.041	
<b>Path</b>	<b>Path Estimate</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>Path Estimate</b>	<b>t-value</b>	
Distinctiveness -> MSEI	-.01	-.24	-.02	-.38	
Consistency -> MSEI	.45	9.04*	.46	9.15*	
Sincerity -> MSEI	.44	8.31*	.43	8.08*	
MSEI -> Perceptions	.26	7.50*	.08	2.22*	
Consistency-> CAEI	.25	6.30*	.27	6.42*	
Sincerity -> CAEI	.68	15.37*	.65	14.14*	
CAEI -> Perceptions	.67	17.57*	.23	5.21*	
Perceptions -> Invest	.79	26.52*	.79	26.57*	
Perceptions-> Work	.77	24.92*	.77	24.94*	
Perceptions -> Buy	.42	10.70*	.42	10.77*	
Distinctiveness -> Perceptions			.14	3.69*	
Consistency -> Perceptions			.01	.29	
Sincerity -> Perceptions			.50	8.08*	

\*p<.01 Notes: n=847; MSEI = Stakeholders' ability to Make Sense of Expressed Identity; CAEI = Stakeholders' Confidence in Attributing expressed Identity to Company



Figure 5-2 Standardized Path Coefficients for Fully Mediated Model

$\chi^2 = 1409.86$ ,  $df = 262$ ,  $p < .01$ ; RMSEA = .077; CFI = .99; NNFI = .99; SRMR = .054



Finally, the paths from Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Company to Intentions to Invest (SPC = .79;  $t=26.52$ ), Work (SPC = .77;  $t = 24.92$ ) and Buy (SPC = .42;  $t = 10.70$ ) were all three significant. As demonstrated in Figure 5–2, Consistency (H7b) and the new construct Sincerity both affected stakeholders' intentions to Invest, Work and Buy through MSEI, CAEI and Stakeholders' Perceptions of a Company. Remarkably, the path from Stakeholders' Perceptions of a Company to Intentions to Buy was considerably weaker than the paths from Stakeholders' Perceptions of a Company to Intentions to Invest and Work, suggesting that consistent and sincere expressions play a larger role for stakeholders when making decisions about investing in or working for a company than when they make buying decisions toward the company.

In order to get a better insight into the extent to which MSEI and CAEI play a mediating role in the relationship between the organizational expressiveness principles and Stakeholders' Perceptions of and Intentions toward the Company, I estimated a partial mediation model that allowed for direct effects of the three expressiveness principles on Stakeholders' Perceptions of a Company in addition to the effects mediated by MSEI and CAEI.

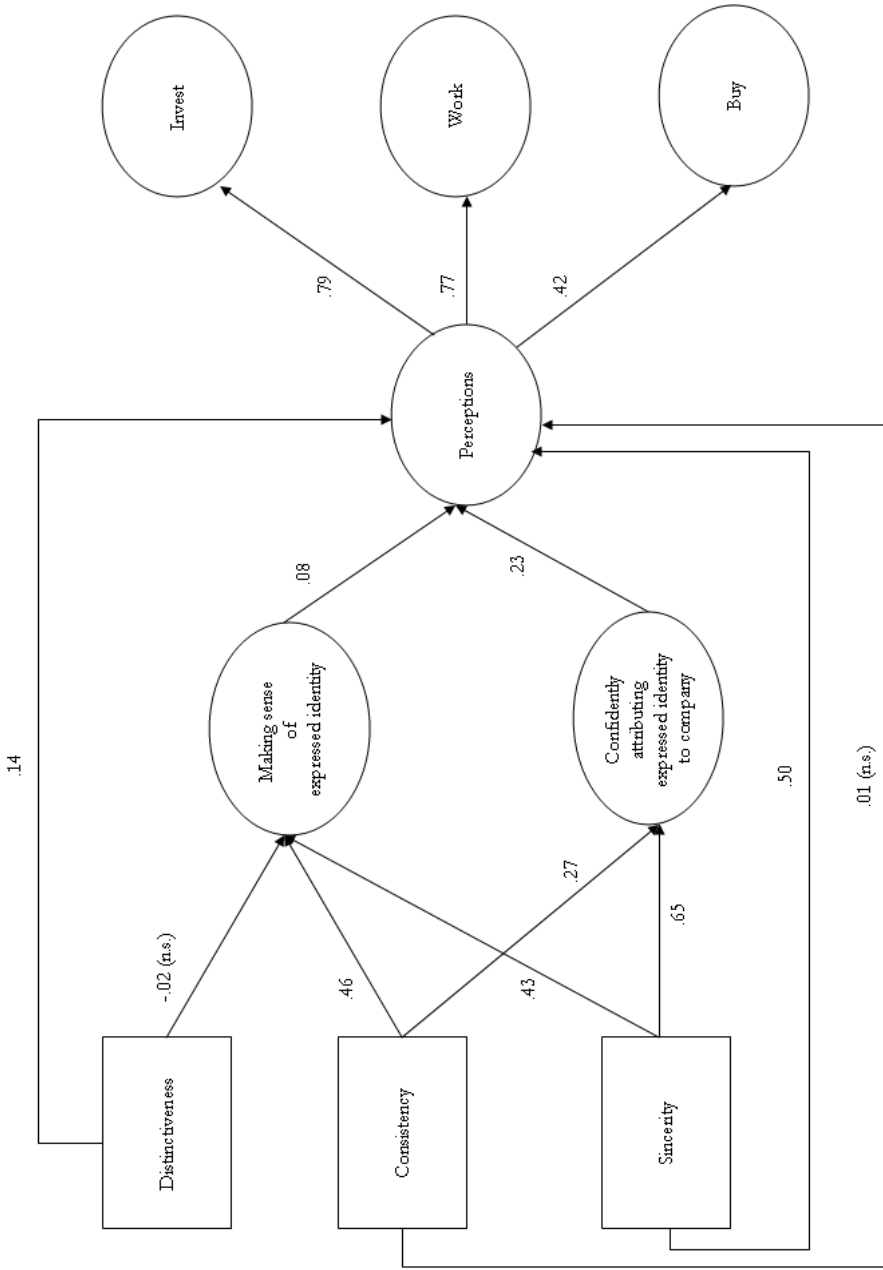
#### **5.4.2 Partial Mediation Model**

The model is presented in Figure 5–3 and the associated standardized path coefficients and  $t$ -values are reported in Table 5-10. The overall fit of the model was better ( $X^2= 1238,20$ ,  $df = 259$ ,  $p < .01$ ; RMSEA = .071; CFI = .99; NNFI = .99; SRMR = .041), thus addition of the direct links from Distinctiveness, Sincerity and Transparency to Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Company significantly improved the model.

While many of the relationships remained from the full model, some changed relationships are noteworthy. The direct effect of Distinctiveness on Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Company was significant, indicating that Distinctiveness does play a role in stakeholders' formations of Perceptions of the Company, albeit not mediated by MSEI. The direct link from Consistency to Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Company was not significant, suggesting that the effect of Consistency on Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Company was fully mediated by MSEI and CAEI. In other words, consistency in an organization's expression do impact stakeholders' perceptions of a company, but only because more Consistency leads to higher MSEI and CAEI.

Figure 5-3 Standardized Path Coefficients for Partially Mediated Model

$\chi^2 = 1238,20$ ,  $df = 259$ ,  $p < .01$ ; RMSEA = .071; CFI = .99; NNFI = .99; SRMR = .041



Although the impact of MSEI on Perceptions remained significant, the effect became remarkably low ( $SPC = .08$ ;  $t = 2.22$ ). Apparently, the positive influence of Consistency and Sincerity on Stakeholders' Perceptions of a Company has less to do with MSEI than with CAEI. Yet, the impact of Consistency and Sincerity on MSEI is remarkably high, indicating that consistent and sincere expressions do play a significant role in helping stakeholders to make sense of an expressed identity.

The results showed that both the indirect path from Sincerity to CAEI and from CAEI to Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Company on the one hand and the direct path from Sincerity to Perceptions on the other were significant, indicating that the effect of Sincerity is only partially mediated by CAEI.

In sum, my results indicate a partial mediating role of MSEI and CAEI. More specifically, while Distinctiveness seems to exert a purely direct effect on Stakeholders' Perceptions of a Company, the effect of Consistency appears to be fully mediated by MSEI and CAEI and the impact of Sincerity is partly mediated by these constructs.

## **5.5 Discussion**

The present study empirically demonstrates that distinctively, consistently and sincerely perceived organizational identity expressions influence stakeholders' perceptions of and responses toward an organization. Relating this to study two in chapter four, while the findings of study two reported that managers use four principles along which they create their organizational identity expressions, the here presented study shows that stakeholders appear to perceive them as mainly three aspects of an organization's expressions. That is, stakeholders in this study perceived transparency and sincerity as being one characteristic of the organization's expressions. As previously described, I labeled this composite construct as 'sincerity', relating to prior literature that views openness (which links to the concept of transparency) as an integral aspect of being sincere (Aaker, 1997; Carter, 1996).

Moreover, when comparing the three expressiveness principles, sincerely perceived identity expressions have the strongest impact on stakeholders' perceptions and subsequent intentions of a firm, closely followed by the perceived consistency of an organization's identity expressions. Stakeholders appear to attach the least importance to the perceived distinctiveness of an

organization's expressions in forming perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward a company. This higher importance of sincerity and consistency could be explained in terms of what has been earlier discussed at the outset of this paper. That is, organizational identity expressions are often targeted to critical stakeholders with often rival interests and concerns. Sincerity and consistency are perhaps due to their credibility enhancing nature more suitable for expressing to these demanding stakeholders, than distinctiveness is.

The results also provide some explorative insight in the cognitive perception formation processes that stakeholders go through as a result of having perceived distinctive, consistent or sincere expressions. At first, consistently and sincerely perceived organizational identity expressions both appeared to affect stakeholders' perceptions of a company through 1) (although marginally) stakeholders' ability to make sense of an organization's identity expressions as well as 2) their confidence in attributing the expressed identity to the specific company.

Second, sincerity also appears to exert a direct influence on stakeholders' perceptions of a firm. A possible explanation for this is that the virtue of being sincere may exert a halo effect on stakeholders' overall evaluation of the firm, because sincerity may elicit sympathy toward the company. This is consistent with cognitive psychological literature arguing that emotional responses can fore- or overshadow a firm's rational judgments (Murphy & Zajonc, 1993; Niedenthal, 1990; Zajonc, 1968).

Third, distinctively perceived perceptions only appeared to have a direct impact on stakeholders' perceptions of a company. This direct effect of distinctiveness on perceptions is interesting. In alignment with theories of schemata, noticing and categorization, it was assumed that distinctiveness positively affects stakeholders' perceptions of a company because it may help stakeholders to notice, grasp and mentally categorize the organization's identity and as such to make a good sense of the identity. However, the findings suggest that a different explanation may account for the effect of distinctiveness on stakeholders' overall perceptions of a company. A plausible explanation may be that distinctively perceived organizational expressions elicit an emotional appeal toward the company which directly enhances stakeholders' overall perceptions of the organization. This would resemble extant literature suggesting that distinctiveness elicits emotional appeal which may subsequently influence people's cognitive appraisals and behavioral responses toward a company, person or object (Escalas & Stern, 2003; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004; Rindova, Pollock, &

Hayward, 2006; Zajonc, 1980). A rival explanation could derive from a social identity theory perspective. As previously argued, social identity theory posits that the degree to which a person tends to identify with a company depends on the attractiveness of the firm's organizational identity for fulfilling three basic self-definitional needs: self-esteem, self-continuity and self-distinctiveness (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). In the context of my findings, the distinctively perceived identity expressions may have elicited positive perceptions because stakeholders see the company as a distinctive company that they would like to identify with in order to enhance their own personal distinctiveness and even self-esteem. Since this study did not tap into these social psychological mechanisms, future research is necessary to empirically investigate this explanation.

This study also examined the influence of the expressiveness principles on stakeholders' intentions to invest in, work for or buy from a company. The findings show that stakeholders' perceptions as a result of organizational identity expressions have a larger impact on their intentions to invest in and work for a company than on their intentions to buy from a company. While these findings supports prior literature (Berens, Van Riel, & Van Bruggen, 2005; Brown & Dacin, 1997) claiming that stakeholders do incorporate their overall judgments of an organization in their buying decisions, they apparently do so to a lesser degree than when they have to make investment or working decisions regarding the company. A reasonable explanation is that investment and working decisions are probably perceived to be more risky and significant than buying decisions, tying into the first study in chapter three where it was reported that potential applicants and potential investors perceive applying for a job / buying shares as considerable risky and relevant.

An additional contribution of this study is the development of a measurement that is able to capture the structure of stakeholders' perceptions about an organization's identity expressions. Confirmatory reliability as well as discriminant validity tests showed that the measurement is able to capture stakeholders' perceived distinctiveness, consistency and sincerity of an organization's expressions. Although future research would be necessary to further work on the robustness of the measurement, the development of a measurement of expressiveness perceptions is a valuable step toward moving beyond the current largely conceptual work on organizational identity expressiveness.

All in all, the results of this study show that distinctively, consistently and sincerely

perceived organizational identity expressions can through different routes of information processing exert a positive impact on stakeholders' perceptions and subsequent intentions of a company.

## 5.6 Conclusion

This study advanced the earlier qualitative study that suggested that (oil) companies use four expressiveness principles to articulate their organizational identity to their stakeholders effectively: distinctiveness, consistency, sincerity and transparency. By integrating literature on sensemaking with theories on attribution and cognitive information processing, a conceptual model was developed and quantitatively tested to help explain to what extent and how these four expressiveness principles influence stakeholders' perceptions of and intentions toward a company. Overall, the study's results reveal that stakeholders' perceptions of a company are influenced by the degree of their perceived *distinctiveness*, *consistency* and *sincerity* of a firm's expressions, where stakeholders' perceptions about sincerity also encompass their perceptions of the firm's transparency. Moreover, the findings reveal the different roles that the three expressiveness principles may play in affecting stakeholders' perceptions of and intentions toward a company. While distinctively perceived identity expressions appeared to have a direct positive impact on stakeholders' perceptions of a company, consistently perceived expressions only affected stakeholders' perceptions through its positive (although marginal) influence on how easy stakeholders make sense of an expressed identity and its effect on how confident they are in expressing this identity to the company. Perceptions about the sincerity of the organizational identity expressions appeared to exert a direct influence on stakeholders' perception of a company, but also played a positive role in stakeholders' ability to make sense of the expressed identity and their confidence in expressing this identity to the company, both subsequently influencing stakeholders' perceptions of a company.

Finally, all three perceived expressiveness principles appeared to have an indirect effect on stakeholders' intentions to invest in, work for or buy from a company. These findings provide a first step toward understanding how organizational identity expressions can be a fruitful way to manage positive perceptions and responses among stakeholders.

## **Part III**

### DISCUSSION

The previous part of this dissertation described three empirical studies that were conducted to investigate how organizations can effectively express their organizational identity in order to manage external stakeholders' perceptions of and reactions toward a company. The last part of this dissertation offers a brief summary of the three studies discusses the theoretical and managerial relevance of their findings and puts them in the light of the limitations of this dissertation. Finally, I provide some directions for future research.





## 6 Discussion

“The pattern of ideas is somewhat like an imperfectly woven blanket – it has gaps and dangling threads. This is the nature of social science at the moment: it, too, is far from perfect. Yet, it is progressing steadily, offering much in the way of understanding as it constantly seeks to improve our knowledge of people. Since a blanket with holes is better than none at all, though, we’ll process” (Schlenker, Barry 1980; p 10)

Recall the Brent Spar incident of Shell that was discussed at the beginning of this dissertation. The example illustrated the growing importance that organizations attach to expressing who they are as an organization in order to manage external stakeholders’ perceptions. In the light of this growing concern, this dissertation was aimed at increasing our understanding of how such organizational identity expressions can impact external stakeholders’ perceptions of and subsequent behavioral reactions toward a company.

In this chapter, a summary of the main findings is given and their theoretical relevance is discussed. This is followed up by the managerial implications and the limitations of this dissertation. I conclude this chapter with suggestions for future research.

### 6.1 Summary of Main Findings

The overall research question of this dissertation was: How can organizations effectively express their organizational identity in order to manage positive perceptions and subsequent behavioral reactions among their stakeholders? I defined organizational identity expressions as the broad range of rhetorical efforts of an organization that explain who the organization is, what it stands for, what it does and why.

In order to answer this overall research question, three separate albeit interrelated research

questions were addressed:

1. To what extent do organizational identity expressions influence stakeholders' perceptions of and subsequent intentions toward a company? (study one)
2. According to what kind of principles do companies orchestrate their organizational identity expressions in order to manage positive stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward their organizations? (study two)
3. To what extent do the expressiveness principles that organizations use to express their organizational identity influence stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward a company? (study three)

The main findings of each research question are discussed below.

### **6.1.1 Findings Study One**

To provide more insight into research question one, an experimental study was conducted in which I studied the extent to which organizational identity expressions matter to two types of important stakeholders: potential investors and potential job applicants. It was demonstrated that:

1. Organizational identity expressions have an important role in managing the perceptions of external stakeholders, in this study potential applicants and investors. Moreover, positive perceptions as a result of these organizational identity expressions subsequently impact stakeholders' intentions toward a company.
2. With regard to potential applicants, the influence of organizational identity expressions on their decisions to work for a company is strongly mediated by their overall evaluation of the company. This indicates that organizational identity expressions are important to potential applicants because they provide them with a diagnostic informational source that enables them to form overall evaluations of the firm in order to judge the attractiveness of the company to work for.
3. With regard to potential investors, the influence of organizational identity expressions on their decisions to invest in the company is mediated by their overall evaluation of the

company, but also has a considerable direct effect on their decisions to invest in the firm. This finding suggests that organizational identity expressions serve as a diagnostic information source that enables them to form overall evaluations of the firm in order to decide whether they want to invest in the company. Yet, the mere presence of more detailed organizational identity information also seems to operate as a risk reducing signal in and of itself, as such directly affecting stakeholders' decisions to buy shares from the firm.

These findings suggest that organizational identity expressions are important for managing the perceptions and subsequent intentions of external stakeholders, something that had been suggested on a conceptual level but rarely been empirically investigated. How to manage organizational identity expressions in order to affect external perceptions and subsequent behavioral intentions, has been addressed in study two.

### **6.1.2 Findings Study Two**

To provide insight in the second research question, I took a grounded theory approach to systematically analyze the organizational identity expressions of six oil companies. This study delineated four principles that these organizations seem to use in their organizational expressions to manage their stakeholders' perceptions of and reactions toward their company. The following main conclusions can be drawn from this study:

1. Organizations in the oil industry express their organizational identities along four principles: distinctiveness, consistency, sincerity and transparency. These principles appear to be essential to managers' attempts to give their stakeholders a good sense of their organizational identity and to increase stakeholders' confidence that the expressed identity can be really attributed to the company. In specific:
  - a. Distinctive organizational expressions are used to attract stakeholders' attention toward the organization's identity expressions and to encourage their categorical processing about who the organization is in comparison to other companies in the industry.
  - b. Consistency is aimed to facilitate stakeholders' interpretation processes by forming a coherent picture of the organization as well as to enhance stakeholders' assurance of

the credibility of the organization's expressions so that they will use them as a reliable source to attribute meaning to the organization.

- c. Similar as with consistency, sincere organizational expressions are essential in enhancing stakeholders' confidence in the credibility of the organization's messages so that stakeholders are likely to attribute the expressed identity to the company.
  - d. Finally, transparent organizational identity expressions allow managers to express their preferred organizational identity in such a way that it satisfies stakeholders' informational needs for constructing a good enough understanding of the company.
2. Organizations in the oil industry use concrete managerial tactics to orchestrate their organizational expressions along these four expressiveness principles. In specific:
- a. Distinctive organizational identity expressions are managed by: 1) formulating a thought-leadership message that clearly explains how the organization's identity stands out from its industry and 2) proactively messaging this thought-leadership to the organization's different stakeholders.
  - b. Consistency is managed by 1) formulating key expressiveness themes that clearly reflect the organizational identity and that can be easily tailored to the organization's variety of messages, 2) continuously relating the internal identity messages with the messages that are directed externally and 3) seeking to maintain 'dynamic consistency' by preserving consistent identity messages over time but also adapting them to the changing norms and beliefs in the company's environment.
  - c. Sincerity is aimed for by 1) constantly proving the integrity of the organizational identity in terms of showing that the organization backs up its expressions with substantive behavior, 2) displaying the authenticity of the identity by showing that the identity has been part of the company for a long time and 3) expressing self-reflectively by willing to admit mistakes and take responsibility in case of negative events and improvements that have to be made.
  - d. Transparency is created by: 1) constantly framing & explaining who the company is and what it stands for, 2) disclosing comprehensive information on activities and performances and 3) engaging in ongoing dialogues with external stakeholders.

### 6.1.3 Findings Study Three

To answer research question three, an experiment was conducted to investigate the extent to which and how the earlier identified expressiveness principles are effective in positively managing stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward a company. In doing so, this dissertation also worked toward a measurement to capture stakeholders' perceptions about a firm's organizational identity expressions. The main conclusions of this study are:

1. While managers seem to orchestrate their organizational identity expressions along four expressiveness principles, stakeholders seem to perceive them as mainly three separate aspects of a firm's organizational expressions. That is, while the findings from study two suggest that managers make a managerial distinction between transparent and sincere expressions, study three suggests that stakeholders view transparency and sincerity as one characteristic of a firm's expressions. In this dissertation, the combined construct was labeled as 'sincerity'.
2. Stakeholders' perceptions of and subsequent intentions to buy from, invest in or work for a firm are most profoundly impacted by how sincere they perceive the organizational identity expressions of a company, although their perceptions of consistency also have a strong influence. Perceptions of distinctiveness seem to play the least important role in forming their perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward a company.
3. Each perceived expressiveness principle has its own unique role in stakeholders' perception formation processes of a firm:
  - a. Distinctively perceived identity expressions have a direct positive impact on stakeholders' perceptions of a company, subsequently influencing their behavioral intentions toward the firm.
  - b. Consistently perceived expressions affect stakeholders' perceptions and behavioral reactions through its positive (although marginal) influence on how easy stakeholders make sense of an expressed identity and its positive effect on stakeholders' confidence in attributing this identity to the company.
  - c. Sincerely perceived organizational identity expressions exert a direct influence on stakeholders' perceptions of a company, but also play a strong positive role in stakeholders' ability to make sense of the expressed identity and their confidence in

expressing this identity to the company, both subsequently influencing stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward a company.

## **6.2 Theoretical Relevance**

This dissertation makes several contributions to the existing literature on organizational identity expressiveness and perception management.

First, the findings provide a first step toward linking the contributions of organizational identity expressiveness and perception management literature to produce a model of how organizational identity expressions can affect external stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral responses toward a company. Although scholars have started to advocate for more integration of both research streams in order to understand how organizational identity expressions can affect external stakeholders (Cheney & Christensen, 2000; Cornelissen, Haslam, & Balmer, 2007), little to no studies had to my best knowledge taken up the challenge to do so empirically.

With regard to the organizational identity expressiveness literature, by providing empirical evidence to what extent and how organizational identity expressions matter to external stakeholders, this dissertation moves beyond the until so far mainly observational and descriptive work on the role of organizational identity expressions (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004; Hatch & Schultz, 2004; Rindova & Schultz, 1998). Indeed, my findings provide evidence that organizational identity expressions, especially when orchestrated along the principles of distinctiveness, consistency, sincerity and transparency, matter to external stakeholders. These insights had until so far been suggested on a conceptual level, but were never thoroughly grounded in empirical data.

Regarding the perception management literature, this dissertation extends prior studies that have examined the effect of different types of identity signals on external stakeholders' perceptions and subsequent behavioral reactions (Berens, Van Riel, & Van Bruggen, 2005; Brown, 1998; Elsbach, 1994; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990), but did not provide insight into the role of the complex nature of organizational identity expressions in signaling identity-related information. This dissertation extends these prior studies in perception management by explicating how organizational identity expressions affect external stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward organizations. That is, this dissertation not only identifies four specific expressiveness principles through which external stakeholders' perceptions can be managed, but also provides insight in the

underlying cognitive mechanisms through which external stakeholders form perceptions as a result of these principles. Specifically, stakeholders positively pick up on these four principles in the sense that they perceive organizations' expressions as more distinctive, consistent and sincere (whereby stakeholders seem to view transparency and sincerity as one construct). While distinctive expressions create a positive overall attraction toward organizations, consistency and sincerity are especially important to enable stakeholders to make sense of the expressed identity and attribute this to the company in a sensible and confident manner, which subsequently influence their perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward a company. As such, these findings may also contribute to earlier studies on organizational sensemaking (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006) and attribution processes regarding organizations (e.g. Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006; Sjovald & Talk, 2004). Although these studies have looked at underlying processes through which organizational members make sense of or attribute things to an organization, they have not focused on specific antecedents (in the form of organizational identity expressions) of stakeholders' organizational sensemaking or attribution processes.

On a related note, this dissertation also speaks to organizational perspectives where scholars have proffered language as a crucial source of organizational sensemaking (Daft & Wiginton, 1979; Weick, 1995), but have not examined how such language can effectively affect people's sensemaking processes. My findings show how organizational language, in the form of organizational identity expressions, can assist managers to communicate the preferred meaning of their often complex and equivocal organizational world with nuance and subtlety. Questions on the part of stakeholders' sensemaking activities such as "What is important to notice about your organization in order to understand what your company is about?", "Which framework should I apply to interpret the actions of your firm?" or "What meaning should I attribute to your company and not to other companies?" can be explained with language by expressing the organization's identity along the principles of distinctiveness, sincerity, consistency and transparency.

Second, the findings of this dissertation support earlier notions that point to the interplay of two different perspectives underlying organizational identity work: the social actor viewpoint on the one hand and the social constructionist perspective on the other (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Advocates of the first perspective argue that organizational identities are constructed through 'identity claims' available to organizational members who can then form stable and enduring



perceptions of themselves as an organization (Czarniawska, 1997; Whetten & Mackey, 2002). Proponents of the social constructionist perspective proffer that organizational identity should be seen as a dynamic concept that is not just constructed through identity claims in order to embed some static self-perceptions among organizational members but through a reciprocal negotiation process between internal members as well as external stakeholders in order to create a shared understanding of the organization (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Hatch & Schultz, 2002; 2004; Scott & Lane, 2000). The findings of this dissertation can provide insight in some of the mechanisms through which both types of perspectives function within organizations. That is, while the four expressiveness principles on the one hand support the social-actor perspective by showing how organizations can manage their 'identity claims' in order to give stakeholders sense about the organization, they may on the other hand enable the organizational identity to be dynamic, supporting the social-constructionist perspective. For example, sincere expressiveness efforts entail that the organization critically reflects on its current identity, allowing it to be open for change or refinement of its identity. Transparency, especially by means of a dialogue, can open the doors for different interpretations and renegotiation about the organization's identity. Thus, my findings may add to this combinational view of both perspectives (e.g. see Ravasi & Schultz, 2006) by providing insight in some of the mechanisms through which each perspective can simultaneously operate within organizations.

Third, while this study was focused on expressing the organization's identity to external stakeholders, it may also shed light on how organizational expressions may enhance internal members' sensemaking of and subsequent identification with an organization (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Pratt, 1998). As external and internal messages become increasingly blurred (Cheney & Christensen, 2000), the distinctive, sincere and consistent organizational expressions targeted to influence outsiders' perceptions of the organization may also be the road by which internal members gain understanding of their organization's distinctive, central and enduring characteristics, respectively (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). Additionally, parallel with prior literature suggesting that organizational members learn to understand their organizational identity by reflecting on the perceptions that external members have of the organization (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991), it could be argued that transparency in terms of dialogues may become part of the currency through which internal members ascribe externally perceived organizational characteristics

to themselves. Moreover, micro-theories on identity suggest that people value distinctiveness, consistency and integrity of their own personal characteristics (Brewer, 1991; Gecas, 1982; Steele, 1988). If the distinctive, consistent and sincere organizational expressions targeted to external stakeholders may make insiders believe that outsiders think the organization's identity is distinctive, consistent and sincere, this may also be the means through which internal members identify with the organization, because these positive external images may enhance their self-concept of distinctiveness, consistency and integrity (cf. Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994).

### **6.3 Managerial Implications**

I discuss three managerial implications of this research: first the strategic benefits of organizational identity expressions to different types of stakeholders, second the importance for managers to understand that organizational identity expressions can be systematically managed and third the importance to understand that the quality and effectiveness of it can be measured.

Concerning the first, by showing that organizational identity expressions matter to three important types of stakeholders (potential investors, applicants and customers), this dissertation urges managers to be aware of the strategic benefits that organizational identity expressions can have for attracting essential stakeholders.

With regard to investors, a news article of the Financial Times (2004) described that leading European institutional investors are challenging the investment banking and broking industries to provide more research on 'non-traditional' aspects of companies' corporate performance such as overall strategy, corporate governance, human capital management and environmental management. As was argued by an agent of one of the participating investors: "intangible issues should get more attention than they receive nowadays because they play a crucial role in long-term performance - and we are long-term investors" (Financial Times, 2004). Yet, disclosing such 'non-traditional' aspects has in the corporate world been a shift in mindset. Especially for organizations themselves, the critical concern has been that expressing such intangible identity-related information is not only money and time-consuming, it may also put the organization in a more vulnerable position because more openness may also lead to more critique from the outside world. The findings of this dissertation suggest that organizations should, despite these concerns, consider putting managerial

efforts into disclosing identity-related information, because identity expressiveness efforts targeted to potential investors pay off more than probably assumed.

With regard to potential applicants, the critical consideration for recruitment managers is how to attract and retain highly potential employees. They may attract such employees based on job-related incentives such as high salaries or attractive secondary working conditions, but the question remains whether such types of information are in the end the primary motivator for potential applicants to work for and to stay with a firm. My findings suggest that managers should go beyond such job-related information and put stronger emphasize on expressing attractive organizational identities. An in this dissertation provided explanation for this is that people's motivation to work for a company is often triggered by how the company can support them in satisfying their self-definitional needs of being attractive, prestigious or distinctive. Attractive organizational identity information may signal that the company's identity can be beneficial in fulfilling their self-definitional needs. Hence, intermingling job-related information such as salaries, work opportunities or secondary working conditions with organizational identity information may be a powerful way to attract new applicants. Moreover, expressing such organizational identities may in the end also be the way to retain these new employees, because positive external images as a result of a firm's attractive organizational identity expressions may be picked up by employees who in turn define their own identity based on what they think that external stakeholders think of them (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Such positive perceptions of themselves as a result of being a member of an externally perceived attractive company may induce them to stay with the company, because leaving the company would imply that they have to cognitively disconnect with this perception of themselves.

Regarding the second implication, my findings urge organizations to strategically manage their organizational identity expressions according to the principles of distinctiveness, consistency, transparency and sincerity. These principles may allow organizations to openly express a distinctive but truly held identity that is able to manage stakeholders' interpretation, understanding and ultimately acceptance of the organization while at the same time being able to reflect on their identity by staying open for the expectations and beliefs that these same stakeholders have regarding the organization. Moreover, managers can use concrete tactics to orchestrate their expressions along these four principles. Although these expressiveness tactics are the outcome of a study in the oil

industry, managers operating in other industries can use these tactics as an inspirational guide to the development of tactics that are important in the context of their business. The expressiveness principles and underlying tactics are at the same time a helpful tool to monitor whether their often dispersed expressions over different divisions, countries and messages are consistently orchestrated along the four principles.

A third and final managerial implication of this dissertation is that the quality and effectiveness of organizational identity expressiveness can be measured. This implication is important for managers to recognize. That is, the emerging field of organizational expressiveness is still in its infancy mainly because there is still a limited understanding to what extent and how organizational expressions can impact a company's performances. While financial officers possess well-established financial performance measures such as the EBITDA or ROI, communication or reputation departments are scarce on such quantifiable measures in order to assess the impact of a firm's organizational expressions on for example a firm's reputation, sales or financial performance. As a result, board executives often still do not take the efforts of these departments seriously enough, because it is difficult for them to translate allocated communication budgets to substantive benefits. The in this research identified principles and underlying tactics can be a contribution toward more systematic performance measure systems in the field of organizational expressiveness and reputation management. While some agencies (such as The Reputation Institute) have started to develop quantitative measurements for assessing a firm's reputation, this dissertation offered a measurement for assessing the distinctiveness, consistency and sincerity of a firm's expressions. The latter can be used by organizations to measure the perceived quality of their organizational expressions and to investigate the extent to which this impacts the reputation of the company.

## **6.4 Limitations**

The findings of this dissertation should be considered in the light of its limitations.

Regarding the first study, I pointed out in chapter three that the first study served as a stepping stone toward the main research question. That is, before investigating how organizational identity expressions can be effectively orchestrated to manage positive perceptions and behavioral reactions among stakeholders, I first needed more empirical insight into the extent to which organizational identity expressions matter to external stakeholder in the first place. Thus, for the

purpose of the main research question I investigated the impact of organizational identity expressions on two important types of stakeholders, potential applicants and potential investors. Although the findings confirmed the importance of organizational identity expressions, they did so for two types of stakeholders of which I assumed that they are motivated to search for information in order to fulfill their goals with regard to the company. However, in reality, the effects of organizational expressions are likely to be much more complicated. For example, how would other types of stakeholders such as customers, media or NGO's respond to organizational identity expressions? Would they care? Would they be skeptical? Or would they be overwhelmed by the information? To shed more light on such questions, I could have started with a more nuanced research question where I had examined the effect of organizational identity expressions in different types of situation. However, this would have led to a more complex research design where I had to take into account multiple scenarios and considerably larger sample sizes. Considering the practical boundaries that I faced in setting up more complex scenarios and the fact that the goal of this study was foremost to serve the central research question, I chose to restrict myself to a more straightforward testing of the extent to which organizational identity expressions matter to two important types of stakeholders. Despite these limitations, I do believe that the here presented experiment is an important empirical effort in starting to create more understanding in the impact of organizational identity expressions, something that had until so far been under-explored. Future research is welcome to extend these findings to different conditions and to different research settings.

Furthermore, due to the fairly novel focus of this research, I decided to set up this first study in a laboratory setting so that I was able to control for internal validity. This implied that the hypotheses were tested among students. While these students were suitable subjects for taking a role of potential applicants, they were perhaps less suitable to take the role of potential investors. Since most of these students are probably not experienced in making investment decisions, it is likely that the perceptual lens through which they judge a company's attractiveness to invest in is different from that of people who are more experienced in investments. However, it should be noted that since the students were following a Masters in Finance, they were not laypersons in financial matters.

Regarding the second study, to keep the research process within the boundaries of what was manageable, I chose to analyze the organizational expressions within one single industry, the oil industry. The advantage of this choice was that I was able to tap into the depth and richness of the organizational expressions of this industry. This allowed me to identify expressiveness principles that were firmly grounded in the expressions of these companies. The obvious disadvantage of this single-industry approach is that these insights are less easy to generalize to other types of industries. For example, the expressiveness principles that I uncovered were based on an industry that routinely faces pressures from the external environment to explain who the company is, what it does and what it stands for. It remains to be investigated whether these principles also apply to industries of which external stakeholders are less anxious to know the ins and outs of the company. One could, for example, think of the consumer goods- or the IT-industry; the activities of such industries are often less affective to social, environmental or political issues and thus elicit less critical attention from their external environment. However, the findings may be generalizable to industries that do face similar 'expressiveness demands' as the oil industry. For example, companies in the pharmaceutical or the tobacco industry continuously have to deal with vigilant constituencies who routinely demand explanations of their controversially perceived activities.

I am sensitive to the fact that the six oil companies that I focused on are all pretty much characterized with a Western ideology. As a consequence hereof, the expressiveness principles in this research were born out of this Western thinking paradigm. We should, therefore, be hesitant to generalize these principles to oil industries in for example underdeveloped or Eastern countries. Take China as an example. While western countries take prudent steps toward more social responsibility and full information disclosure to their stakeholders, China's thirst for oil and economic growth currently goes hand in hand with an indifference to such issues. Future studies may want to focus on the validity of the here identified expressiveness principles across countries, industries and over time.

With regard to the third study, the intended manipulations in the experiment were not significantly discriminant from one another. While this limitation was overcome by using the manipulation check measures as independent variables in my model, the initial intention to test whether direct exposures to each of the different expressiveness principles impact stakeholders' perceptions was not accomplished. Additional studies could investigate each expressiveness

principle in isolation, so preventing the manipulation of the different expressiveness principles to influence each other. Nevertheless, by manipulating the expressiveness principles according to their underlying tactics I was able to trigger respondents' mental thoughts about the company's expressiveness in a laboratory environment, allowing me to control for undesirable threats to internal validity. Thus, despite the here discussed limitations, by testing the effects of respondents *perceived* distinctiveness, consistency and sincerity, it was still possible to demonstrate to what extent and how these expressiveness principles matter to stakeholders.

A finding of my research that deserves future investigation is that although managers in study two appeared to orchestrate their organizational identity expressions along four expressiveness principles, stakeholders in study three seemed to perceive them as mainly three separate aspects of a firm's organizational expressions. That is, although managers view transparency and sincerity as two separate guiding principles in managing their organizational expressions, stakeholders perceive them as one characteristic of an organization's expressions. I argued that a likely explanation for this relates to some prior literature, suggesting that people perceive transparency as part of being sincere. However, a rival methodological explanation should be taken into account as well. It could be that the measures used in this study just did not succeed in sufficiently disentangling both constructs from one another. For example, prior research suggests that respondents often have difficulty discriminating between conceptually-related constructs. As noted by Zablah (2005), while the dimensions of a certain construct may be conceptually distinct, they may - in practice - be operationally inseparable. A similar explanation may be applicable to my measurements of the constructs transparency and sincerity. Further research is necessary to clarify this issue.

Although the influence of stakeholders' ability to make sense of the expressed identity on their subsequent perceptions was significant, the impact was not very strong. This is remarkable, because it seems unlikely that stakeholders will form positive perceptions when they are barely able to make sense of a firm's identity expressions. An explanation for this finding may be that the differently manipulated scenarios in this study were all sufficiently understandable for respondents, leading to insufficient variation in how well the different respondents were able to make sense of the expressions. Too little variance in stakeholders' sensemaking abilities may thus have led to a weak relation between stakeholders' sensemaking abilities and their subsequent perceptions of the company. Future studies are needed to shed more light on this.

Finally, although I manipulated the expressiveness principles with their underlying tactics, I did not study the effect of each of these tactics in and of themselves. Future research should pay attention to this, so that we can provide a deeper understanding of the specific managerial tactics that are most beneficial for a manager to use in creating distinctive, consistent, transparent and sincere expressions.

## **6.5 Agenda for Future Research**

The in this dissertation conducted research has pointed directions to various avenues for future research. Before closing this chapter, I discuss a few of these.

On a first note, much more research is welcome to investigate the different conditions under which the here identified expressiveness principles are beneficial. For example, how does sincerity play out when a company has standpoints that are controversial within its environment? Think for example of Exxon. Exxon's standpoints on global warming have been deviant from the generally held view in society. How much respect, trust and likeability do they earn by being sincere about their less acceptable standpoints on this? A starting point for investigating this question could be an experiment in which several types of expressiveness material are manipulated: one in which an organization is sincere about its deviant standpoints, one in which the organization seems to hide its deviant standpoints and one in which the organization appears sincere about its conforming standpoints.

Second but related to this first suggestion, future studies would want to investigate whether the effect of the different expressiveness principles may be moderated by personal factors such as stakeholders' initial prior attitude toward the (oil) industry, their level of involvement in the industry or even their support for CSR activities. As an example, it may be conceivable that sincere expressions have a stronger effect among stakeholders who have a skeptical attitude toward the oil industry than among stakeholders who have a moderate or even positive attitude toward the company. Also, as mentioned previously, additional research is welcome that investigates whether the expressiveness principles may have different impacts among different types of stakeholders such as shareholders, customers or employees.

Third, as earlier discussed in chapter two, prior literature has observed that external stakeholders seem to mentally organize their associations of a firm's organizational identity into



either 'corporate ability' or 'corporate social responsibility' associations (Berens, Van Riel, & Van Bruggen, 2005; Brown & Dacin, 1997). An avenue for additional research would be to investigate to what extent the expressiveness principles distinctiveness, consistency and sincerity impact each of these associations. For example, it could be argued that distinctiveness may impact stakeholders' corporate ability associations because distinctive organizational identity expressions may signal that the company has certain (strategic) characteristics that other companies do not have, which may enhance stakeholders' association that this specific company is probably more able to feature this (strategic) characteristic than other companies. Sincerity could potentially have an impact on CSR associations because stakeholders may think that if a company is sincere, it may by the same virtue also be socially responsible. These specific links between a firm's different types of organizational expressions, on the one hand, and stakeholders' specific types of associations of the company, on the other, are a fruitful topic for future research.

From a strategic balance theory perspective (Deephouse, 1999), it could also be argued that distinctiveness and sincerity are two forces that organizations should balance in order to solve the tension between the need to be different (and thus competitive) on the one hand and to be institutionally conforming (and thus legitimate), on the other. That is, distinctive organizational expressions may exert a symbolic function to convince stakeholders of the strategic differentiation of the firm, while the sincerity of the organizational expressions may at the same time balance this nonconforming or distinctive position by assuring stakeholders that the company conforms to social and institutional norms as well (cf. Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Handelman & Arnold, 1999; Suchman, 1995). Linking this to Brown & Dacin's (1997) two types of corporate associations, the here identified expressiveness principles may have an important function in order to shape stakeholders' associations of corporate ability or strategic differentiation on the one hand and their associations of social responsibility or legitimacy on the other. Future research may want to investigate these assumptions.

In order to test the effectiveness of the specific tactics that were uncovered for each expressiveness principle, a survey can be set up among corporate communication managers to ask about the extent to which they use such expressiveness tactics to manage their organizational expressions. The results of this survey can be linked to reputation measures as well as other performance assessments of their organization (e.g. sales, or financial performances). This would

enable scholars to test the extent to which the specific expressiveness tactics can have an impact on a company's reputation or on other types of company performance, such as sales or financial performance.

Stakeholders' reactions toward a company are generally formed through a diverse set of organizational expressions that have been exposed to them over a period of time. To tap into the effects of such continuous and various types of organizational expressions, a simulation study can be an appropriate research approach. Students could for several months play the role of a consumer, investor or job applicant of a fictive company. Through e-mails they can be frequently directed to new organizational identity expressions of the company such as updates on its website, the release of the annual report, recent corporate advertisements or news releases. Assuming that these directions are online, it can be investigated how much they pay attention to these identity expressions, what types of expressions they particularly focus on etc. After a certain period of time, stakeholders' perceptions and behavioral reactions of the company can be measured. As such, we can get more grip and understanding of how different types of stakeholders in different situations attend to and use the various types of expressions of an organization over a longer time period.

Finally, an interesting research approach would be to look at organizational identity expressions from a stakeholder network perspective. How do organizational identity expressions travel through the company's different types of stakeholders? What is the role of the media in picking up on their expressions? How do journalists form and mold these expressions and how do other stakeholders, such as business analysts or NGO's, pick up on that? Which types of stakeholders have the most influence in passing through a firm's organizational expressions? Large-scale interviews could be conducted with these different types of stakeholders in order to map out this force field between them.

## **6.6 Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, although prior literature has proffered that expressing the organizational identity has become of an increasing managerial concern, there has been little empirically grounded insight into the role of such expressions in managing external stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward a company. The primary goal of this dissertation was, therefore, to systematically start to piece together how organizational identity expressions can impact

stakeholders' perceptions of and their behavioral reactions toward a company. Based on three studies I have tried to demonstrate that 1) organizational identity expressions are an effective way to manage stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward a company, 2) managers try to increase the effectiveness of these expressions by orchestrating them along four principles: distinctiveness, consistency, transparency and sincerity and 3) stakeholders positively pick up on these principles. That is, these principles enable them to 1) make sense of the expressed identity, 2) enhance their confidence to attribute the expressed identity to the organization and 3) elicit more positive perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward the company. Given the increased importance of managing the complex and often tumbling stream of organizational identity expressions, future research attempts are essential to elucidate the – conditional - range of potentials of them.

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## Appendices





Productent en leverancier van vercoatings



**De Odin Groep**



**Odin produceert vercoatings en is hierin leider op de internationale markt. Odin maakt voornamelijk verf voor de bouw-, woon- en industriële sector. Zo produceert Odin vercoatings voor grote nieuwbouwprojecten en worden de coatings gebruikt voor het onderhoud van bruggen, oprijbare kunstobjecten of publieke parkvoorzieningen zoals fontainen en hekken. Aan de woonsector levert Odin verproducten voor zowel de doe-het-zelver als de professionele schilder. De vercoatings voor de industriële sector beschermen en verfraaien onder meer mobiele telefoons, meubilair, fietsen en bouwwerktuigen.**

**De onderneming, met het hoofdkantoor in Noorwegen, telt ongeveer 64.300 medewerkers in meer dan 40 landen. In 2003 bedroeg de geconsolideerde omzet \$ 11 mrd.**

**In Europa plaatst Odin jaarlijks ongeveer 100 starters op diverse functies. Zij richt zich daarbij op academici en HBO'ers met **minder dan 1 jaar werkervaring.****

**Lees in deze brochure meer over Odin en haar loopbaanmogelijkheden en bepaal zelf of een startfunctie bij Odin iets voor je is.**

Loopbaan		Mogelijke functies bij Odin	
	<p>Jaarlijks start een selectief aantal afgestudeerde academici en HBO'ers hun loopbaan binnen Odin. Odin is op zoek naar de meest talentvolle mensen die sterke managementvaardigheden weten te combineren met een flinke dosis nieuwsgierigheid. De selectie vindt plaats op basis van de Odin managementcompetenties, waardoor wordt vastgesteld of je voldoende loopbaanpotentie hebt.</p> <p>Startende HBO'ers en academici beginnen in het Young Executive Programme (YEP). Het YEP is een traject waarin je start in een functie met direct je eigen verantwoordelijkheden. Zie pagina 3 voor de typen startfuncties die Odin te bieden heeft.</p> <p>Samen met andere starters volg je gedurende twee jaar een aantal modules in het kader van competentie ontwikkeling. Naast enkele algemene modules volg je speciale modules die relevant zijn voor jouw specifieke functie. Na twee jaar wordt aan de hand van je getoonde competenties gekeken of doorgroei naar een managementfunctie mogelijk is.</p> <p>Bij Odin is er de mogelijkheid om voor langere tijd ervaring op te doen op een van onze vestigingen in het buitenland. Hiervoor is het wel vereist dat je minimaal drie jaar werkervaring bij Odin hebt opgedaan.</p>		<p>Odin zoekt talentvolle afgestudeerden voor een diversiteit aan functies. De hier beschreven vacatures zijn nog maar een greep uit de type functies waarvoor je bij Odin zou kunnen solliciteren. Neem voor meer informatie contact op met Odin's recruitment manager (zie pagina 6) of kijk op de website <a href="http://www.odin.com">www.odin.com</a>.</p> <p><b>Junior Product Marketeer</b></p> <p>Zoveel landen zoveel culturen. Dat geldt zeker voor de markt. Daarom vertaalt de productmarketeer internationale marketingstrategieën naar de plaatselijke markt. In deze functie ontwikkel je samen met meer ervaren productmarketeers een nationaal marketingplan en verzorg je de implementatie daarvan: opzetten van campagnes, investeren in branding, zorgen voor trainingen en veel rond de tafel zitten met je klanten. Een veeleisend functiegebied waarin de vier p's: product, prijs, plaats en promotie, alles van je vragen op het gebied van marktinzicht en commercieel talent.</p> <p><b>Junior Accountant</b></p> <p>Wat je als accountant zoal te wachten staat bij Odin? Je bent verantwoordelijk voor controles, verslagleggingen, het samenstellen van financiële verantwoordingen en het beoordelen van de administratieve organisatie. Maar bij Odin kun je als accountant nog veel meer. Zo stel je prognoses op, bied je ondersteuning middels diverse bedrijfseconomische analyses en adviseer je bij acquisities of reorganisaties binnen Odin. Het zijn juist deze bijkomende werkzaamheden die jouw loopbaan bij Odin extra boeiend maken.</p>

Mogelijke functies bij Odin		Arbeidsvoorwaarden	
  	<p><b>Assistent-projectmanager</b></p> <p>Ben jij een geboren projectmanager? Dan ben je bij Odin aan het juiste adres. Bij Odin kun je op verschillende gebieden starten als assistent-projectmanager. Stel je voor: binnen enkele bedrijfsonderdelen vindt een reorganisatie plaats met het doel de organisatie efficiënter en effectiever te laten verlopen. Samen met collega's zullen je activiteiten gericht zijn op het in kaart brengen van overlappende activiteiten en het implementeren van een nieuw organisatie-model.</p> <p>Een andere mogelijkheid is dat je assisteert bij de inkoopprocessen. Je zoekt uit wie de beste leveranciers zijn op basis van criteria als kosten, kwaliteit en flexibiliteit, je houdt je bezig met voorraadbeheer en de meest ideale inkoopmomenten. Uitdagende jobs als je beschikt over een goede dosis organisatie-talent.</p>	  	<p>Odin stelt hoge eisen. Odin wil haar klanten de beste producten en service bieden. Dat kan alleen gerealiseerd worden met collega's die getalenteerd, ambitieus en enthousiast zijn. Maar worden ook goede arbeidsvoorwaarden tegenover gesteld. Op dat gebied wil Odin zich kunnen meten aan andere werkgevers in Nederland.</p> <p>Je kunt rekenen op een goed aanvangssalaris met veel groeimogelijkheden. Odin heeft een aantrekkelijk bonussysteem voor mensen die uitzonderlijke prestaties leveren.</p>
  	<p><b>Nog meer functies</b></p> <p>Naast de hiervoor beschreven startfuncties zijn er ook andere mogelijkheden bij Odin. Zo is Odin continu op zoek naar starters met een technische achtergrond die zich graag bezig houden met het produceren van coatings, het verbeteren van productiemethoden of het opzetten van nieuwe kleurmeetsystemen. De afdeling Research and Development is geregeld op zoek naar starters met een laboratoriumopleiding die zich willen bezighouden met de ontwikkelingen en verbetering van Odin's coatings. Ook kun je solliciteren voor meer Sales of Human Resource gerelateerde functies.</p>	  	<p>Je startsalaris is gebaseerd op een fulltime werkweek (40 uur). Je krijgt als starter 25 vakantiedagen per jaar.</p> <p>Odin biedt een vergoeding voor woon/werkverkeer. Als je functie dit vereist is een lease-auto beschikbaar.</p> <p>Tevens biedt Odin de mogelijkheid keuzen te maken in arbeidsvoorwaarden door het ruilen van de ene arbeidsvoorwaarde tegen de andere. Een voorbeeld hiervan is, dat tegen een aantal vrije dagen een fiets verkregen kan worden.</p>



**Hebben we je interesse gewekt voor een carrière bij Odin?**  
Neem dan contact op met onze recruitment manager voor meer informatie of stuur een online sollicitatie (zie onze website: [www.odin.com](http://www.odin.com)).

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Odin produceert vercoatings en is hierin leider op de internationale markt. Odin maakt voornamelijk verf voor bouw-, woon- en industrieel. Zo produceren Odin verfsystemen voor grote nieuwwoningen en worden de coatings gebruikt voor het onderhoud van bruggen, openbare kunstobjecten of publieke parkvoorzieningen zoals fontainen en hekken. Aan de woonsector levert Odin producten voor zowel de doe-het-zelfer als de professionele schilder. De verfsystemen van Odin worden gebruikt voor de afwerking van meubels, maar ook voor mobiele telefoons, meubilair, fietsen en bouwverfugen.

De onderneming, met het hoofdkantoor in Noorwegen, telt ongeveer 64.300 medewerkers in meer dan 40 landen. In 2003 bedroeg de geconsolideerde omzet \$ 11 mrd. Hieraan hebben de divisies Industrieverf, Woonverf en Bouwverf respectievelijk \$ 4 mrd., \$ 4,07 mrd. en \$ 2,53 mrd. bijgedragen.

Doel van deze halfjaarlijkse brochure is onze aandeelhouders, beleggers, analisten en andere financieel geïnteresseerden kort en bondig op de hoogte te houden van Odin's meest recente financiële prestatie.

Voor meer achterliggende informatie verwijzen wij u naar onze website [www.odin.com](http://www.odin.com).

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## Financiële prestaties Odín 2003/2004

## Vergelijking kerncijfers 2003 met 2002



### 2003: moeilijke tijden

Ondanks de zwakke wereld economie leverden onze divisies Bouwverf en Woonverf goede prestaties. In onze divisie Industriefervier ging het minder goed waardoor onze resultaten als geheel negatief beïnvloed werden. De divisie Industriefervier had een bedrijfsverlies van \$ 203 miljoen. De voornaamste oorzaken hiervan zijn verminderde volumes bij veel van onze contracten en operationele moeilijkheden in verband met de integratie van de verschillende acquisities uit voorgaande jaren. Deze omstandigheden hebben geleid tot een te lage bezettingsgraad van activa waardoor we in het derde kwartaal gedwongen waren eenmalig af te boeken op goodwill van \$ 183 miljoen en activa van \$ 8 miljoen.

Ondanks de moeilijke tijd in 2003 bleef het kasstroom genererende vermogen van de groep sterk.

De halfjaar cijfers van 2004 laten zien dat herstel in zicht is (zie pagina 4).

Kerncijfers	2003		2002		Verandering	
	\$ mln	\$ mln	\$ mln	\$ mln	in %	in %
Omzet	11.866	11.782			0,7%	
Bedrijfsresultaat (EBIT) <sup>1</sup>	767	1.058			-27,5%	
Resultaat na belastingen	359	599			-40,1%	
Vrije kasstroom	629	623			5,3%	
Winst per aandeel	0,63	1,26			-50%	

<sup>1</sup> Earnings before Interest and Taxes<sup>1</sup>; het bedrijfsresultaat voor rente en belasting.

## Koersinformatie 2003



### Koersinformatie

Sinds 4 januari 1980 worden onze aandelen verhandeld. Vanaf 1998 zijn we overgestapt van de Oslo Stock Exchange naar de New York Stock Exchange. De aandelenkoers van Odín verloopt analoog aan de ontwikkeling van de New York Stock Exchange: een gestaag stijgende lijn, na de enorme val in de tweede helft van 2002, als reactie op de algehele economische terugval wereldwijd.

Ondanks de verslechterde resultaten van 2003 ten opzichte van 2002, heeft Odín 2003 afgesloten met een koers van \$ 16,57, een stijging van 20% ten opzichte van vorig jaar (zie de tabel onderaan).

Koersontwikkeling 2001 - 2004



Koers aandeel	2003		2002	
	\$	\$	\$	\$
Hoog	19,34	25,08		
Laag	11,71	14,98		
Slot	16,57	15,45		
Nettowinst per geplaatst aandeel	0,63	1,26		
Koerswinst verhouding	29,41	12,26		
Aantal uitgegeven gewone aandelen	480.259.522	480.259.522		
Geplaatst aandelenkapitaal (in \$ mnd)	8.823	7.420		

## Kerncijfers eerste half jaar 2004

Dividend beleid

Positieve resultaten eerste half jaar 2004

De laatste drie jaren heeft de gemeente Ooststellingwerf een aantal efficiënte bedrijfsvoering en het nieuwe kostenbesparingsprogramma. Dit heeft geleid tot een dalende trend in de kosten van de gemeentelijke behoeftende. De behaalde Odn in het eerste half jaar een uitstekend bedrijfsresultaat. De stijging bedroeg 19,3% ten opzichte van dezelfde periode in het voorgaande jaar. Dit kan worden toegeschreven aan de efficiënte werkwijze van de afdelingen, bij een omzetgroei van 3,3%. De divisies Bouwwerk en Woonwerk zagen hun respectievelijke marges stijgen tot recordhoogten. Bij de divisie Industrieveer loopt het eerste half jaar een tekort, met een vermindering van het operationele bedrijfsresultaat ten opzichte van het eerste half jaar van 2003. Met deze verbeterende vooruitzichten kan Odn met toenemend vertrouwen voorstellen dat in 2004 goede verbeteringen van het bedrijfsresultaat en de netto winst gerealiseerd gaan worden.

Kerncijfers	1 <sup>e</sup> half jaar 2004	1 <sup>e</sup> half jaar 2003	Verandering
	in mln	in mln	in %
Omzet	6.043	5.853	3,2%
Bedrijfsresultaat (EBIT) <sup>1</sup>	605	507	19,3%
Resultaat na belastingen	351	303	15,8%
Vrije kasstroom	297	296	0,3%
Winst per aandeel	0,74	0,60	24,0%

<sup>1</sup> Earnings before Interest and Taxes<sup>1</sup>, het bedrijfsresultaat voor rente en belasting.

<sup>1</sup> 'Earnings before Interest and Taxes': het bedrijfsresultaat voor rente en belasting.

fen stijgende lijn in de koersontwikkeling van 2004 is duidelijk zichtbaar.

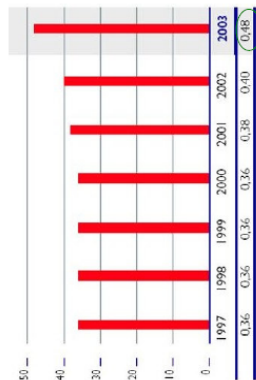
	1e kw. 2004	2e kw. 2004
<b>Goedontwikkeling</b>		
Goers aandeel		
Hoog	\$ 15.74	\$ 17.62
Laag	\$ 13.53	\$ 14.83
Gemiddeld dagelijks volume (in aandelen)	1,242,102	1,404,351

5

Dividend beleid

Om deze reden zijn interim- en slotdividenden in contanten uit. Tot voor kort werd de dividend pay-out ratio tussen 30% en 35%, van de netto winst (met een minimum uitkering of 0,36 per gewoon aandeel per jaar). Bij de bekendmaking van de halfjaarcijfers over 2003 maakte Odin bekend van gewenste hebben om op termijn de dividend pay-out ratio voor de houders van gewone aandelen te verhogen naar circa 40% van de netto winst. Aan de eerste stap werd het interimdividend voor 2003 verhoogd met 20%. (Vergelijken met het interim-dividend over 2002) tot € 0,18 per gewoon aandeel. Wij verhogen de dividend pay-out ratio om de versteviging van onze kasstroom uit operationele activiteiten weer te geven, voornamelijk gestuurd door een beter beheer van het werkkapitaal. Dit dividendbeleid zal afhankelijk zijn van de resultaten van Odin in een zal jaarlijks worden beoordeeld. Onze pay-out ratio van circa 40% van de gecorrigeerde netto winst ligt binnen de grenzen van wat andere ondernemingen in onze sector aan dividenden uitkeren.

Odin's jaarlijkse dividend uitkering in Dollars



5

Contact



Website Odin

Voor de meest recente, alswel de gearchieverde persberichten, financiële presentaties, de meest actuele koers, online jaarverslagen en andere financiële informatie verwijzen we u naar onze website [www.odin.com](http://www.odin.com). Deze site biedt ook uitgebreide informatie over onze corporate governance.

Heeft u nog vragen?

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De Odin Groep		Over Odin	
			
<p>Odin produceert verfoatings en is hierin leider op de internationale markt. Odin maakt voornamelijk verf voor de bouw-, woon- en industriesector. Zo produceert Odin verfoatings voor grote nieuwbouwprojecten en worden de coatings gebruikt voor het onderhoud van bruggen, openbare kunstobjecten of publieke parkvoorzieningen zoals fontein en hekken. Aan de woonsector levert Odin verfoatings voor zowel de doe-het-zelver als de professionele schilder. De verfoatings voor de industriesector beschermen en verfraaien onder meer mobiele telefoons, meubilair, fietsen en bouwwerktuigen.</p> <p>De onderneming, met het hoofdkantoor in Noorwegen, telt ongeveer 64.300 medewerkers in meer dan 40 landen. In 2003 bedroeg de geconsolideerde omzet \$ 11 mrd.</p> <p>In Europa plaatst Odin jaarlijks ongeveer 100 starters op diverse functies. Zij richt zich daarbij op academici en HBO'ers met <b>minder dan 1 jaar werkervaring</b>.</p> <p>Lees in deze brochure meer over Odin en haar loopbaanmogelijkheden en bepaal zelf of een startfunctie bij Odin iets voor je is.</p>		<p><b>Ontstaansgeschiedenis Odin</b></p> <p>Odin is aan het begin van de 20<sup>e</sup> eeuw ontstaan uit een klein Noors familiebedrijf onder leiding van Odd Gleditsch. In 1920 begon Gleditsch met de distributie van verf voor grote schepen in de walvisindustrie. In de daaropvolgende 10 jaar floreerde de walvisindustrie. Hierin zag Gleditsch groeilansen en hij besloot om de verf zelf te gaan produceren. In 1926 nodigde Gleditsch aandeelhouders uit om zich in te schrijven voor het nieuwe bedrijf. Met een aandelenkapitaal van NOK 60.000 (± 9360 dollar) werd Odin in 1926 opgericht.</p> <p>Gedurende de Tweede Wereldoorlog braken er voor Odin moeilijke tijden aan. Het verkoopvolume daalde en ruwe materialen werden steeds moeilijker verkrijgbaar. De wederopbouw na de Tweede Wereldoorlog bood voor Odin echter kans om haar markt uit te breiden als gevolg van de drastische vraag naar verfoatings voor nieuwe gebouwen. Later breidde Odin haar markt ook uit naar de Industrie- en Woonsector.</p>	
		<p><b>Odin Management</b></p> <p>Gleditsch bleef CEO tot 1960, waarna de Noor Alf Bjørcke zijn activiteiten overnam. Tegenwoordig breiden Odin's plannen zich nog steeds uit onder leiding van de Noorse 'opondernemer 2003' Knut Almestrand.</p>	

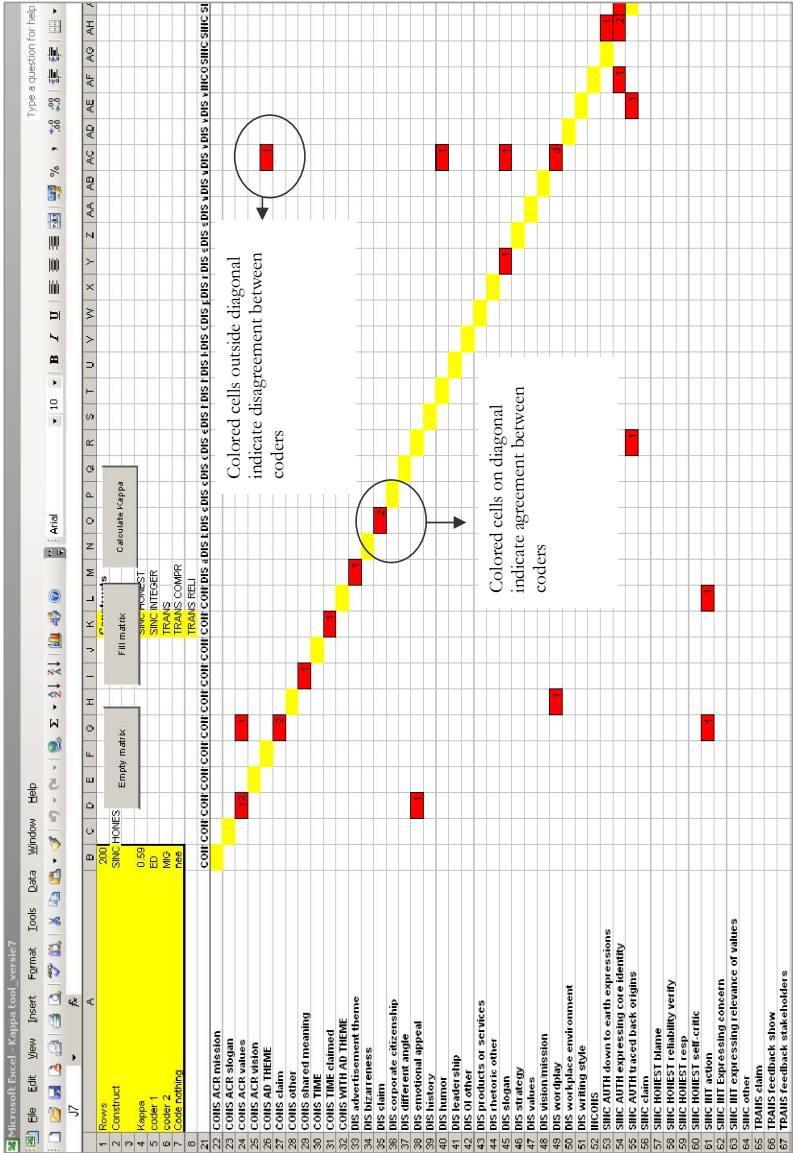
Over Odin	Over Odin
	
<p><b>Odin's missie</b></p> <p>De missie van Odin is om absolute marktleider te zijn op het gebied van vercoatings door zowel in Research &amp; Development als in de productieprocessen zeer intensief samen te werken met de specialisten die Odin's verproducten moeten toepassen (zoals specialisten in de bouw, architectuur en de consumentenindustrie).</p>	<p><b>Odin en de maatschappij</b></p> <p>We begrijpen dat de wereld niet alleen draait om zakendoen. Wij zijn ervan overtuigd dat het internationale bedrijfsleven een belangrijke rol kan spelen bij het oplossen van maatschappelijke problemen. Daarom beschouwt de onderneming de ondersteuning van activiteiten op het gebied van onderwijs als haar maatschappelijke verantwoordelijkheid. Zo hebben onze medewerkers in 2003 \$ 1.033.635 bijeengebracht, dat genoeg is om 27.000 kinderen uit de Derde Wereld landen naar school te laten gaan.</p>
<p><b>Marktkansen</b></p> <p>Een toenemende vraag naar vercoatings in de Aziatische landen als gevolg van de groeiende investeringen in bouwprojecten biedt goede marktkansen voor Odin. Odin is goed gepositioneerd om een voorraantstaande rol te spelen in deze belangrijke markt. En dat is zij ook van plan te doen. De verwachting is dat in 2010 10% van Odin's omzet afkomstig zal zijn van de Aziatische landen.</p>	<p><b>Odin's werkomgeving</b></p> <p>Odin's mensen, met al hun verschillende capaciteiten en ambities, zijn het hart van de onderneming. Er is iets fundamenteels dat ze verenigt: het zijn professionele, creatieve mensen die graag initiatief nemen en die plezier hebben in hun werk.</p> <p>In januari 2004 noemde het Amerikaanse blad <i>Fortune</i> Odin "een van de tien meest aantrekkelijke werkgevers in Europa". De bedrijven werden geselecteerd op basis van interviews met medewerkers.</p>
<p><b>Kwaliteit en Innovatie</b></p> <p>Om de hoge kwaliteit van Odin's producten te waarborgen, beschikt de onderneming op het gebied van coatings over één van de grootste particuliere onderzoeksorganisaties ter wereld. De organisatie heeft vestigingen in Nederland, Noorwegen, Engeland, Duitsland en de Verenigde Staten en biedt werk aan circa 2.500 mensen. Met 7,3% van haar omzet besteedt Odin in vergelijking met branchegenoten veruit het meest aan onderzoek en ontwikkeling.</p> <p>Geïsignaleerde klantbehoeften worden iedere dag weer gecombineerd met eigen ideeën en nieuwe technologische ontwikkelingen om zo tot de meest innovatieve producten te komen.</p>	<p><b>Odin's financiële positie</b></p> <p>Odin is een financieel gezond bedrijf met een huidige geconsolideerde omzet van \$ 11 mrd. Door Odin's gezonde en stabiele financiële positie heeft zij een lange termijn vertrouwen gewonnen van haar klanten, medewerkers en leveranciers.</p>

Time (in minutes)	
<b>I INTRODUCTION</b>	
	<p>Good morning/afternoon; First of all, thank you for your cooperation on my research. I'm doing this PhD. research on behalf of the Corporate Communication Centre of the Rotterdam School of Management.</p> <p>My study focuses on how oil companies communicate with their stakeholders in order to create a good reputation. The interview will approximately last 60-90 minutes. I will ask you several questions about your organization and your Corporate Communication and Reputation Management.</p> <p>Do you have any objections against recording the interview? Do you have any questions before we start? Then I would like to begin.</p>
<b>II HOW THE COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT IS ORGANIZED</b>	
	<p>Could you tell me about how your communication department is organized?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How many people are working for your communication department? How many employees are working for the firm's communication department globally?</li> <li>- Does your communication department operate on a centralized or decentralized level?</li> <li>- What are the most important groups to which you target your communication?</li> </ul>
<b>III THE ROLE OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATION AND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT WITHIN THE ORGANISATION</b>	
	Then I would like to discuss the role that Corporate Communication (CC) and reputation management play within your organization.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- From your viewpoint, what is the value for your company of a good reputation?</li> <li>- How does this influence the manner in which you manage your CC?</li> </ul>
<b>IV CRITICAL FACTORS FOR CORPORATE COMMUNICATION</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What are according to you essential requirements for the CC of your company to build and manage a good reputation?</li> <li>➤ <i>For each mentioned requirement:</i></li> <li>- Could you explain why this requirement is important? How do you design your CC specifically to fulfill this requirement? Are there any specific examples in your corporate messages that you can show me in this regard?</li> </ul>
<b>V FINAL</b>	
	<p>I am about to finish the interview. Before doing so, I would appreciate some of your input that may be useful for my following interviews.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Has there been a question that you missed in this interview?</li> </ul> <p>Are there any persons within your organization of which you think that I should talk with?</p> <p>We have finally come to the end of this interview. Do you have any further questions or remarks?</p> <p>I would like to thank you very much for your time and cooperation on this research.</p>

Distinctiveness (18 codes)			
Distinctive rhetoric		Distinctive organizational identity characteristics	
[DIS humor]	[DIS emotional appeals]	[DIS values]	[DIS workplace environment]
[DIS wordplay] (metaphor, allegory)	[DIS bizarreness]	[DIS vision/mission]	[DIS history]
	[DIS different angle]	[DIS products or services]	[DIS corporate citizenship]
[DIS writing style]	[DIS rhetoric other]	[DIS strategy]	[DIS claim]
[DIS ad theme]	[DIS slogan]	[DIS leadership]	[DIS OI other]
Transparency (18 codes)			
Comprehensive information		[TRANS visual supported]	
[TRANS STR strategy outlined %1] = without concrete (quantifiable) targets [TRANS STR strategy outlined %2] = with concrete (quantifiable) targets		[TRANS STR consist %1] = compared to 1 year [TRANS STR consist %2] = compared to more years	
[TRANS STR strategy performance %1] = not compared against targets [TRANS STR strategy performance %2] = compared against targets		[TRANS SO consist %1] = compared to 1 year [TRANS SO consist %2] = compared to more years	
		[TRANS benchmark %1] = against industry [TRANS benchmark %2] = against specific competitor in industry	
[TRANS STR future targets %1] = non-quantifiable [TRANS STR future targets %2] = quantifiable		[TRANS well-structured] = reported information is extra-ordinarily well-structured	
[TRANS STR future targets action %1] = abstract [TRANS STR future targets action %2] = concrete		[TRANS other] = other form of transparency that is not included in the code scheme	
[TRANS SO goals outlined %1] = without concrete (quantifiable) targets [TRANS SO goals outlined %2] = with concrete (quantifiable) targets		Dialogue	
		[TRANS dialogue]	
[TRANS SO performance %1] = not measurable [TRANS SO performance %2] = measurable [TRANS SO performance %3] = compared against target		[TRANS feedback stakeholders]	
		Timely responses	
[TRANS SO future targets %1] = non-quantifiable targets		[TRANS timely response]	

Appendix C Example of Coding Scheme

[TRANS SO future targets %2] = quantifiable targets				
[TRANS SO future targets action %1] = abstract [TRANS SO future targets action %2] = concrete		[TRANS claim]		
Sincerity (14 codes)				
Integer		Honest		
[SINC INT value guid %1] = states behavior is guided by vision, values. [SINC INT value guid %2] = shows behavior is guided by vision, values.		[SINC HONEST' self-critic ]  [SINC HONEST' blame]		
[SINC INT action %1] = abstract [SINC INT action %2] = concrete		[SINC HONEST' resp]  [SINC other]		
[SINC INT Expressing relevance of values]		[SINC HONEST' reliability verify]  [SINC CLAIM]		
Authentic		[SINC HONEST' reliability report %1] = Just mentions that it makes use of general reporting standards [SINC HONEST' reliability report %2] = Shows detailed info on which general reporting standards are used and which not		
[SINC AUTH emphasizing core of identity]				
[SINC AUTH Down to earth expressions] = The identity expressions are down-to-earth, not overstated or pretentious [SINC AUTH traced back heritage]		[SINC HONEST' relevance %1] = mentions that performance indicators are developed in cooperation with stakeholders [SINC HONEST' relevance %2] = provides insight in how performance indicators are developed in cooperation with stakeholders		
Consistency (10 codes)				
[CONS ACR vision]	[CONS ACR mission]	[CONS ACR slogan]	[CONS ACR values]	[CONS other]
[CONS TIME]	[CONS TIME CLAIMED]	[CONS WITH AD THEME]	[CONS CLAIM]	[INCONS]



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## Introduction



The aim of this study is to examine the usefulness of corporate websites. To this purpose, you will see a short version of a corporate website of an oil company from Brazil.

We would like you to read the information on the corporate website and complete a number of questions. It will take you about 15 minutes to complete this study. Before you start, please make note of the following:

- Please read all the information on the corporate website.
- Feel free to browse through the website if you would like to read a specific page more than once.
- For the convenience of the study, several links have been disabled.
- After reading the corporate website, please answer all questions.
- Your answers will be kept confidential.

Thank you for cooperating with this study!




[Start with study](#)

**High distinctiveness**  
(Manipulating reference point for distinctiveness)

The oil industry is on the move.....

Although many energy companies still focus on oil and gas, only a few innovative firms are active in renewable resources such as solar and wind.

Enter the website of the oil company 'Brazbell'



**Low Distinctiveness**




The oil industry is on the move.....

In addition to resources such as oil and gas, most energy companies are nowadays active in renewable resources such as solar and wind.

Enter the website of the oil company 'Brazbell'



**High Distinctiveness**  
(Formulating thought-leadership and communicating proactively)



[Our vision](#) [Our values](#) [History](#) [Living by our values](#) [Publications](#) [Performance](#) [Our executive team](#) [Stakeholder dialogue](#)

### A different vision

**At Brazzbell, we aim to make a difference by stepping ahead of the industry and making alternative energies such as solar and wind as a major share of our business.**

**A different view on energy**  
One thing is clear: the era of easy oil is over. Although companies in our industry agree on this, they still mainly focus on the exploitation and production of oil. We believe it is time to take a significant step ahead and turn alternative energies into a substantial part of our business.

**Wind, solar and... yes, oil too**  
Of course, oil is nowadays still the predominant source of the world's energy supply. It would therefore be unrealistic to stop exploiting oil and gas for our customers. However, our conviction is that solar and wind will be making a significant contribution to our quest for energy.

**Office Brazzbell**  
Avenida República do Chile 1 - 10  
20090-003 Rio de Janeiro  
RJ, Brazil  
Phone: +55 21 2517 3300  
Fax: +55 21 2518 1469

### Thought-leadership

We at Brazzbell strongly value our ability to develop innovative perspectives regarding the development of renewable energies. In this section you can download publications on topics related to our vision on these alternative energy resources.

**Columns by industry experts**

Daniel Davos on the costs and benefits of wind energy  
[More](#)

**News**

Brazzbell opens "House of the Future"  
[More](#)




**Thought-leadership Publications**

Brazzbell's Global Scenarios Plan: "Where does society stand on renewables in 2025?"  
[More](#)

**Interview with CEO**

CNN Interview with brazzbell's CEO on the development of solar, wind and oil  
[More](#)

**Low Distinctiveness**



[Our vision](#) [Our values](#) [Milestones](#) [Our brand](#) [Publications](#) [Performance](#) [Our executive team](#) [Additional information](#)

### Our vision

**At Brazzbell, we aim to be an integrated energy company by engaging in oil, gas, chemicals and other resources to meet the world's growing demand for energy**

**Our view on energy**  
Brazzbell's goal is to work towards efficient solutions, to explore new resources and to exploit them in an economically and environmentally viable way. Brazzbell is committed to growth in the activities of finding, producing, transporting, transforming and marketing oil and gas; we closely analyze emerging technologies in order to provide energy in efficient ways. We recently also began with research in renewable energy resources.

**To achieve Brazzbell's objectives we rely on the managerial and technical capabilities of our workforce. The result: an increasingly lean and entrepreneurial organization.**

**Office Brazzbell**  
Avenida República do Chile 1 - 10  
20090-003 Rio de Janeiro  
RJ, Brazil  
Phone: +55 21 2517 3300  
Fax: +55 21 2518 1469

### Latest news

In this section you can find Brazzbell's latest news on diverse topics.

**Businesses**

Brazzbell and ABFOil form joint venture to develop new refining capabilities  
[More](#)

**Exploration and production**

Brazzbell has sent Commercial Viability Statements regarding 19 new areas  
[More](#)

**Laws and regulations**

Brazzbell announces LDPE licensing agreement for Barton Real  
[More](#)


**Miscellaneous**

CNN Interview with brazzbell's CEO on oil and gas  
[More](#)

**High Distinctiveness**

(By saying that values are 'alternative'.

Also default page for manipulating high consistency across values)




[Our vision](#) **[Our values](#)** [History](#) [Living by our values](#) [Publications](#) [Performance](#) [Our executive team](#) [Stakeholder dialogue](#)

### Brazzbell's Values

Our values are a little 'alternative' for a major energy company. However, we believe that they help us to step 'beyond' the industry to work towards future energy sources.


**Challenge**

We set the standard on a global scale by continuously challenging ourselves toward higher performance deliveries that go beyond financials. These include growth, customer and employee satisfaction and safety and environmental performance.




**Imagine**

At Brazzbell, Imagine is an invitation to dream and do things that you did not know you could do. Through innovative technologies we can work towards future energy solutions.




**Mutual benefits**

At Brazzbell, we believe that social and financial responsibility go hand in hand. Our businesses are driven by providing value to our shareholders, employees, customers, society and other stakeholder groups



**Low Distinctiveness**




[Our vision](#) **[Our values](#)** [Milestones](#) [Our brand](#) [Publications](#) [Performance](#) [Our executive team](#) [Additional information](#)

### Brazzbell's Values

Our values help us to do successful businesses.


**Challenge**

We set the standard on a global scale by continuously challenging ourselves toward higher performance deliveries that go beyond financials. These include growth, customer and employee satisfaction and safety and environmental performance.




**Imagine**

At Brazzbell, Imagine is an invitation to dream and do things that you did not know you could do. Through innovative technologies we can work towards future energy solutions.




**Mutual benefits**

At Brazzbell, we believe that social and financial responsibility go hand in hand. Our businesses are driven by providing value to our shareholders, employees, customers, society and other stakeholder groups



**High Sincerity**  
(Displaying authenticity of identity)



[Our vision](#) [Our values](#) **History** [Living by our values](#) [Publications](#) [Performance](#) [Our executive team](#) [Stakeholder dialogue](#)

### Our values are strongly rooted in our history

Our values are not just a temporarily response to environmental demands. They are originated in the early days of our history and still guide us in today's decisions and actions.

**Challenge**

The story of Brazzbell is a story of challenges. In the beginning of the 1900's Brazil was faced with a severe power shortage. One man, Jose Barros, who had dedicated his heart to his country, took up the challenge of achieving a national interest – a country self-sufficient in energy. With no guidelines on how to set up an oil company Mr Jose de Barros formed Brazzbell in 1909, after many negotiations and planning. From then on, maintaining sustainable self-sufficiency has always been a challenge for Brazil and, thus, Brazzbell.

**Imagine**

In Brazzbell's challenging battle for sustainable self-sufficiency, Mr Barros was ahead of his time in developing innovative solutions to provide his country with the necessary energy resources for the long term. As early as 1935, in a pamphlet titled TRY REALITY, he urged the Brazilian governments and fellow industrialists to assist him in setting up a learning space for bright engineering students to work on new innovations for the oil industry. Although business leaders and the media thought his ideas to be overly ambitious, the learning space was erected in 1940 and is today a recognized innovation center in Brazil.

**Mutual benefits**

Mr Jose de Barros was an entrepreneur. Yet, an entrepreneur who believed that he could combine his entrepreneurial goals of building a profitable company while fulfilling a social responsibility by investing in education and life quality programs for the poorest communities in Brazil. This philosophy of mutual benefits is still the driving factor behind the people of Brazzbell. Over the past 100 years we have shown that social and environmental responsibility can be integrated with our commitment to the growth and profitability of the business – mutual benefits!

**Low Sincerity**



[Our vision](#) [Our values](#) **Milestones** [Our brand](#) [Publications](#) [Performance](#) [Our executive team](#) [Additional information](#)

### Important milestones of the last decade

On many front, we have achieved great success. The following highlights represent some of the company's most important milestones during the last 25 years.

**1965** – Brazzbell strikes new oil in commercial quantities at the Northeastern coast of Brazil.

**1989** – The Lubnor Refinery is commissioned and placed into service. Throughout the 1980s, Brazzbell continues to grow as a diversified energy company, operating in refining, marketing and natural gas-related services.

**1991** – Brazzbell enters the West Coast market of Latin America when it acquires ABG Oil's refinery "Denocio". It includes a widespread retail distribution chain and 60 company-operated retail sites.

**1994** – Brazzbell begins exploring crude oil in deepwater areas. The first commercial offshore well is drilled in 1996 at São Mateus.

**1996** – Brazzbell announces an agreement to merge its natural gas-related services with Refap Corporation. In conjunction with this merger, the company spins off its refining and marketing operations, forming a new independent company. In the same year, the company acquires Basis Petroleum, Inc.

**2002** – Boosted by the average annual growth of the Gross Domestic Product at rates higher than 10% p.a., Brazzbell reformulates its investment structure in order to meet the home demand for byproducts.

**2005** – With every segment in the sector open to competition, the company seeks to create new businesses, form partnerships with the national and international sector, and create a stronger presence worldwide. The company's aim is to become one of the top international energy companies while fulfilling its social responsibility by investing in education and life quality programs for the lower socio-economic groups in Brazil.

[Other milestones before 1965](#)

**High Sincerity**  
(Proving integrity of identity and being self-reflective)



[Our vision](#) | [Our values](#) | [History](#) | [Living by our values](#) | [Publications](#) | [Performance](#) | [Our executive team](#) | [Stakeholder dialogues](#)

How we make our values an every day part of the way we work.

### 'Values into Action' 2006

To stimulate our people to incorporate the Brazzbell values in their everyday practices, Brazzbell introduced an annual 'Values in Action' award programme. Read about the winner of 2006.

**From 'imagine' to 'reality' – a step closer to solar energy**

Working closely with 'Solar Casa', Francisco Gros from our Renewables department invented a solar panel system that collects more energy per square meter than any conventional panels currently in production. "This is an important step", noted the award committee, "When most people think of solar panels, they picture something that is bulky and expensive. Because the new solar system is more compact and still collects more energy than before, using solar panels can become a more attractive practice to private households." [Read more](#)

[Values into action 2005](#)  
[Values into action 2004](#)


### Improvements for 2007

Our values help us to make progress in many areas. However, there is no room for complacency. Below we summarize the improvements that still need to be made and the challenges we face.

**Greenhouse gas emissions (GHG)** As our production rises and our business grows, we face the ongoing challenge of managing GHG emissions. In 2006, we just missed our target for lowered emissions. Independent auditors have reviewed the operations in our plants and have provided concrete guidance to further decrease our GHG emissions, thus allowing us to reach our initial target. [Read on](#)

**More on improvements:**  
[Solar and Wind](#)  
[Climate Change](#)

**Low Sincerity**



[Our vision](#) | [Our values](#) | [Milestones](#) | [Our brand](#) | [Publications](#) | [Performance](#) | [Our executive team](#) | [Additional information](#)

Our brand success proves we had the right branding strategy!

While we had great plans to enhance our brand equity, none of us could have ever envisioned the tremendous growth and success that would result from our activities. Read on to see how we benefit handsomely from our branding strategy.

### Our brand success in 2006

In 2006, we took many strategic initiatives to reinforce our brand in the market.

**Brazzbell's brand roll-out on the highway** With distributors clamoring for the brand, Brazzbell has kept up a breakneck pace of expansion in visibility. In 2006 alone, we added over 560 branded wholesale sites

**Making the world a better place** In 2006 we showed that our brand is also strongly associated with social and environmental responsibility by contributing to charities and other social and environmental causes.

[Brand successes in 2005](#)  
[Brand successes in 2004](#)

### More to come in 2007!

Our branding initiatives in 2006 have helped us to bolster our brand. In 2007, we continue to invest strategically and aggressively to leverage the visibility and attractiveness of the Brazzbell brand.

**Linking the Brazzbell brand to social causes**

We keep on contributing to social and environmental charities in the communities that we operate so that Brazzbell is seen as a decent company that cares for society.

**Brazzbell's sponsorship**

In 2007, The Brazzbell brand will be featuring at an increasing number of sporting events. The company will highly increase the presence of its brand in the major sporting events of racing, golf and soccer.

**More branding initiatives**  
[Multimedia](#)  
[Sponsoring concerts](#)

**High Consistency**

(Same values in internal and external messages, and over time)



[Our vision](#) [Our values](#) [History](#) [Living by our values](#) **[Publications](#)** [Performance](#) [Our executive team](#) [Stakeholder dialogue](#)

### How Brazzbell communicates internally



[Archive of our magazines](#)

### Our ad campaigns over the past ten years

1996

Launch of corporate identity campaign emphasizing our group values **'Challenge, Imagine, Mutual benefits'**.  
[View Print and TV ads](#)

2000

With the announcement of a new CEO, a campaign was launched to emphasize the continuing importance of our values.  
[View Print and TV ads](#)

2006

After a fruitful strategic reorganization, Brazzbell launched a campaign explaining our new organizational structure built on our core pillars: **'Challenge, Imagine, Mutual benefits'**.  
[View Print and TV ads](#)

[Archive campaigns before 1996's](#)

**Low Consistency**



[Our vision](#) [Our values](#) [Milestones](#) [Our brand](#) **[Publications](#)** [Performance](#) [Our executive team](#) [Additional information](#)

### How Brazzbell communicates internally



[Archive of our internal magazines](#)

### Our ad campaigns over the past ten years

1996

Launch of corporate identity campaign emphasizing our group values **'Enterprise, cutting costs and innovativeness'**.  
[View Print and TV ads](#)

2000


With the announcement of our new CEO, we launched a campaign emphasizing Brazzbell's new values **'Challenge, Imagine, Mutual benefits'**.  
[View Print and TV ads](#)

2006

After a fruitful strategic reorganization, we re-introduced the initial values of **'Enterprise, cutting costs and innovativeness'** into our campaigns.  
[View Print and TV ads](#)

[Archive campaigns before 1996's](#)

**High Consistency**  
(Across messages)


[Our vision](#) [Our values](#) [History](#) [Living by our values](#) [Publications](#) [Performance](#) [Our executive team](#) [Stakeholder dialogue](#)

**"The value for our shareholders, employees, customers and other stakeholders lies at the heart of what we do"**


Dear shareholder,

Brazbell has performed well in 2007. The Company ended the year with a gross operating revenue of \$ 153.6 billion and a net income of \$13.1 billion. Brazbell's total investments reached \$ 8.1 billion and we had a shareholder equity of \$50.8 billion.

Brazbell's ability to meet our business objectives are heavily guided by our values: **challenge, imagine and mutual benefits**. The value for you as a shareholder and simultaneously for our employees, customers and other relevant stakeholders, lies at the heart of what we do.



Carlos Moreira  
Group CEO




**Our values:**

**Challenge**

**Imagine**

**Mutual benefits**

**Low Consistency**


[Our vision](#) [Our values](#) [Milestones](#) [Our brand](#) [Publications](#) [Performance](#) [Our executive team](#) [Additional information](#)

**"Shareholder value lies at the heart of what we do!"**


Dear shareholder,

Brazbell has performed well in 2007. The Company ended the year with a gross operating revenue of \$ 153.6 billion and a net income of \$13.1 billion. Brazbell's total investments reached \$ 8.1 billion and we had a shareholder equity of \$50.8 billion.

Brazbell's ability to meet our business objectives are heavily guided by our values: **competition, cutting costs and improving profitability**. The value for you as a shareholder lies at the heart of what we do.



Carlos Moreira  
CEO



**Our values:**




**Competition**

**Cutting costs**

**Improving profitability**




**High Transparency**  
(Disclosing comprehensive information on performances)

		 	
<a href="#">Our vision</a>	<a href="#">Our values</a>	<a href="#">History</a>	<a href="#">Living by our values</a>
<a href="#">Publications</a>	<b><a href="#">Performance</a></b>	<a href="#">Our executive team</a>	<a href="#">Stakeholder dialogue</a>
<b>Business performance indicators 2006</b>		<b>Social indicators 2006</b>	
<b>Net earnings (billion)</b> \$ 153.8	<b>Exploration</b> 64 rigs (42 offshore)	<b>Social responsibility</b>	<b>2005</b> <b>2006</b>
<b>Net income (billion)</b> \$ 13.1	<b>Reserves</b> 11.77 billion barrels of oil and gas equivalent (boe)	<b>Environmental responsibility</b>	69 72
<b>Investments (billion)</b> \$ 8.1	<b>Daily production</b> 2.3 million barrels per day (bpd) of oil and 0.6 million barrels per day of gas equivalent (boe)	<b>Profitability</b>	74 74
<b>Shareholder equity (billion)</b> \$50.8		<b>Ethics</b>	69 71
		<b>Safety</b>	70 72
		<b>Product quality</b>	86 86
		<small>* Scores (0 to 100 points) are based on international stakeholder surveys (including NGO's, customers, business analysts, the general public etc.), conducted by the independent research agency SSC International</small>	
<b>More financial performance information:</b> <a href="#">Shareholder information</a> <a href="#">Quarterly results</a> <a href="#">Dividend information</a> <a href="#">Share price</a> <a href="#">Other</a> <a href="#">Download full financial report</a>	<b>More specific performance data:</b> <a href="#">Human rights</a> <a href="#">Climate Change</a> <a href="#">Safety</a> <a href="#">Sustainable development</a> <a href="#">Other</a> <a href="#">Download full social report</a>		

**Low Transparency**


		 	
<a href="#">Our vision</a>	<a href="#">Our values</a>	<a href="#">Milestones</a>	<a href="#">Our brand</a>
<a href="#">Publications</a>	<b><a href="#">Performance</a></b>	<a href="#">Our executive team</a>	<a href="#">Additional information</a>
<b>Access to our annual report</b>			
Due to regulations designed to protect investors, specific sections of our annual report are only available to certain groups of stakeholders. Before obtaining access to the available sections, please provide us with your name, e-mail address, the purpose of your request for our annual report and/or what type of investor you are.			
Name: _____			
E-mail address: _____			
Type of investor: _____			
Purpose: <input type="checkbox"/> Media purposes <input type="checkbox"/> Investing <input type="checkbox"/> Research <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____			
<input type="button" value="SUBMIT"/>			

**High Transparency**  
(Explaining who the company is and what it stands for)

 [Our vision](#) [Our values](#) [History](#) [Living by our values](#) [Publications](#) [Performance](#) **[Our executive team](#)** [Stakeholder dialogue](#)


**Our view on important issues**

We believe it is important to share with you our views and beliefs regarding current issues facing the energy industry. Below, members of the executive committee explain how Brazzbell views important energy topics of today.




**Carlos Moreira, on new energy resources:**  
"New energy resources are very important to us and our society. It is therefore in our belief that we should keep on focusing on activities to develop alternative energy solutions that are viable, practical and economical." [Read on](#)

President and CEO  
[Read personal profile](#)



**Ana Almeida on Brazzbell and society:**  
"People often see us as separate from the society. Yet, when our people come through the door into work every morning, they don't leave their convictions and sense of responsibility behind." [Read on](#)





Director Manufacturing  
[Read personal profile](#)



**Eraldo Carneira on the rising of oil prices :**  
"The price of oil raises much debate and emotion. We need to be clear on how these prices are built and why it is not so easy to lower the prices at the pump." [Read on](#)


Chief Financial Officer  
[Read personal profile](#)

**Read the views of other directors**




Director Exploration and Production    Director Downstream    Director Gas and Energy International    Director

**Low Transparency**


 [Our vision](#) [Our values](#) [Milestones](#) [Our brand](#) [Publications](#) [Performance](#) **[Our executive team](#)** [Additional information](#)

**The Executive Team**


The Executive Team manages the Company's businesses. It is made up of the president and CEO and six directors elected by the Board of Directors to three-year terms, with re-election permitted.



**Carlos Moreira, CEO and President**  
Mr. Moreira earned a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering at the University of Rio de Janeiro before joining Brazzbell in 1979 as a Production Engineer. After an assignment coordinating Brazzbell business in the United States he became Managing Director of Brazzbell Brazil. [Read on](#)







**Ana Almeida, Director Manufacturing**  
Ana Almeida joined Brazzbell in São Paulo in 1980, having graduated from the University of Belo Horizonte in Brazil. She worked for Brazzbell in Houston in a variety of technical and managerial positions until 1998 when she moved to Rio de Janeiro. [Read on](#)




**Eraldo Carneira, Chief Financial Officer**  
Eraldo Carneira graduated in business administration from the University of São Paulo in 1982. From August 1982 to March 2002 Eraldo was employed by Brazzbell International in a variety of finance and business roles. [Read on](#)

**Profiles of other directors**



Director Exploration    Director Downstream    Director Gas and Energy International    Director

**High Transparency**  
(Eliciting a dialogue)



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## Samenvatting (Dutch Summary)

Externe belanghebbenden (stakeholders) in een organisatie zijn in de afgelopen jaren steeds kritischer geworden ten aanzien van organisaties en hun activiteiten. Organisaties spelen hier in toenemende mate op in door expressiever te zijn over de identiteit van de organisatie, in termen van wie ze zijn als organisatie, waar ze voor staan, wat voor bedrijfsactiviteiten ze uitvoeren en waarom deze worden uitgevoerd. Alle communicatieve inspanningen van een organisatie waarin ze haar identiteit toelicht, worden beschouwd als de identiteitsexpressies van een organisatie. Deze identiteitsexpressies zijn het onderwerp van deze dissertatie.

Het managen van zulke identiteitsexpressies is voor managers vaak een lastig proces waarbij ze een constellatie aan identiteitskenmerken moeten communiceren en toelichten via een variëteit aan communicatieboodschappen, naar allerlei typen stakeholders die vaak verschillende interesses en belangen hebben ten aanzien van de organisatie. Een prangende vraag voor wetenschappers en managers is daarom hoe zulke complexe identiteitsexpressies zo goed mogelijk gemanaged kunnen worden.

Twee belangrijke onderzoeksstromen kunnen hier meer inzicht in verschaffen, namelijk de literatuur over 'organisatie identiteit' aan de ene kant, en wat in deze dissertatie aangeduid wordt als de literatuur over 'perceptiemanagement', aan de andere kant. De literatuur over 'organisatie identiteit' is geïnteresseerd in de rol die identiteitsexpressies *binnen* een organisatie spelen. De gevestigde logica binnen deze stroming is dat medewerkers zich in hun houding en gedrag binnen de organisatie laten leiden door hun percepties over de identiteit van hun organisatie. Om de percepties van medewerkers over deze identiteit in een wenselijke richting te beïnvloeden, gebruiken managers allerlei identiteitsexpressies om de gewenste identiteit naar hun medewerkers te projecteren. De literatuur over organisatie identiteit heeft echter weinig aandacht besteed aan hoe zulke expressies naar stakeholders *buiten* de organisatie gemanaged kunnen worden.

De perceptiemanagement literatuur is voornamelijk geïnteresseerd in de beïnvloeding van de percepties van externe stakeholders en hun daarop volgende gedragsintenties ten aanzien van

een bedrijf. Er is voornamelijk gekeken naar het effect van verschillende typen ‘signalen’ over een bedrijf. Het behalen van een kwaliteitscertificaat is bijvoorbeeld een signaal dat de organisatie een expert is binnen haar industrie. Een organisatie die in een communicatiecampagne laat weten dat zij geld geeft aan een goed doel, kan daarmee een signaal afgeven dat ze maatschappelijk verantwoordelijk is. Echter, er zijn geen studies die specifiek hebben gekeken naar de manier waarop het brede scala aan identiteitsexpressies van een organisatie een effectieve rol kan spelen bij het overbrengen van belangrijke signalen over de identiteit van de organisatie.

Onderzoekers van beide onderzoeksstromen pleiten steeds meer voor integratie om op die manier te werken naar een vollediger beeld van de rol van identiteitsexpressies bij het beïnvloeden van externe stakeholders. Tot nu toe is dit op empirisch vlak vrijwel nog niet gebeurd. Deze dissertatie is hiertoe een eerste empirische stap en neemt beide onderzoeksstromen als vertrekpunt om inzicht te verschaffen in de rol van identiteitsexpressies bij het zo effectief mogelijk managen van de percepties en gedragssintenties van externe stakeholders.

Om dit te onderzoeken heb ik de volgende onderzoeksvraag geformuleerd:

*Op welke wijze kunnen organisaties hun expressies rondom hun organisatie identiteit effectief managen om zo de percepties en gedragssintenties van externe stakeholders in positieve zin te beïnvloeden?*

Deze onderzoeksvraag is opgedeeld in drie subvragen:

- 1. In hoeverre zijn de identiteitsexpressies van een organisatie voor externe stakeholders van belang in het vormen van hun percepties over en gedragssintenties ten aanzien van een organisatie?*
- 2. Wat voor principes houden managers aan bij het managen van hun organisatie identiteitsexpressies naar externe stakeholders?*
- 3. In welke mate en hoe zijn deze principes daadwerkelijk van invloed op de percepties en gedragssintenties van stakeholders ten aanzien van een bedrijf?*

Deze subvragen heb ik onderzocht middels drie studies: 1) een experimentele studie naar de mate waarin identiteitsexpressies van belang zijn voor externe stakeholders, 2) een kwalitatief onderzoek naar de principes die oliebedrijven aanhouden bij het creëren van hun

identiteitsexpressies, en 3) een experimentele studie die onderzoekt in welke mate deze principes effectief zijn bij het managen van de percepties en gedragsintenties van externe stakeholders.

Om op de eerste plaats inzicht te verschaffen in de vraag of identiteitsexpressies er voor externe stakeholders werkelijk toe doen, onderzoekt studie één het effect van identiteitsexpressies op twee belangrijke stakeholders: potentiële sollicitanten en investeerders. Met de bevindingen toon ik aan dat de identiteitsexpressies van een organisatie een essentiële rol spelen voor beide typen stakeholders in het vormen van hun percepties over, en hun daarop volgende intenties om te werken voor of aandelen te kopen van, de organisatie. De bevindingen geven hiermee een eerste empirisch bewijs dat de identiteitsexpressies van een organisatie belangrijk zijn voor het managen van de percepties en opvolgende gedragsintenties van externe stakeholders.

Met de bevindingen van de tweede studie, gebaseerd op een grootschalige kwalitatieve content analyse en interviews met de Corporate Communicatie managers van zes oliebedrijven, toon ik aan dat oliebedrijven hun identiteitsexpressies managen langs vier principes: distinctiviteit, consistentie, authenticiteit en transparantie. Voor elk principe zijn concrete tactieken geïdentificeerd die managers gebruiken om hun expressies systematisch volgens deze vier principes op te bouwen.

Deze vier expressiviteitsprincipes blijken voor managers van belang te zijn om 1) externe stakeholders een goed begrip te geven over hun organisatie identiteit en om 2) het vertrouwen van stakeholders in de expressies te vergroten zodat ze de gewenste identiteitskenmerken ook daadwerkelijk aan de organisatie toeschrijven.

Distinctieve identiteitsexpressies worden door managers gebruikt om de aandacht van stakeholders naar de organisatie te trekken en te verduidelijken wie de organisatie is, in vergelijking tot branchegenoten. Op tactisch niveau blijkt het distinctiviteitsprincipe niet slechts gericht te zijn op het uiten van een unieke organisatie identiteit, maar richten oliebedrijven zich voornamelijk op de specifieke standpunten die ze innemen aangaande de heersende sociaal-politieke kwesties binnen de olie industrie (bijvoorbeeld hoe de organisatie zich opstelt ten aanzien van het probleem van de klimaatverandering). De oliebedrijven proberen in hun expressies een duidelijke voorwaartse visie neer te zetten om op die manier een ‘mentaal leiderschap’ binnen hun industrie op zulke sociaal-politieke kwesties te claimen. Echter, de managers zijn zich er duidelijk van bewust dat, om een

duurzame reputatie op te bouwen, distinctiviteit gepaard moet gaan met de andere drie principes: consistentie, authenticiteit en transparantie.

Consistentie blijkt essentieel te zijn om het interpretatieproces van stakeholders rondom de organisatie identiteit te vergemakkelijken. Consistentie is voor de onderzochte organisaties ook belangrijk om de geloofwaardigheid van de expressies te vergroten, zodat stakeholders met genoeg vertrouwen de geuite identiteitskenmerken aan de organisatie kunnen toeschrijven. Op tactisch niveau wordt consistentie nagestreefd door, op basis van de centrale identiteitskenmerken van de organisatie, duidelijk te formuleren wat de centrale expressiviteitsthema's van de organisatie zijn. Vervolgens gebruiken managers deze thema's als een centraal uitgangspunt voor al hun verschillende communicatie-uitingen naar hun verschillende typen stakeholders. Door de centrale expressiviteitsthema's continu als startpunt te houden, proberen ze de variëteit aan hun uitingen zo consistent mogelijk te managen. Tot slot streven managers naar 'dynamische consistentie'. Hierbij is het de crux om bij het creëren van consistentie over de tijd, tegelijkertijd flexibel genoeg te zijn om de geuite identiteitskenmerken mee te laten ontwikkelen met veranderingen in de industrie.

Authenticiteit wordt door de organisaties als essentieel beschouwd om stakeholders ervan te overtuigen dat de geuite identiteitskenmerken niet louter onderdeel van een PR-techniek zijn, maar *echt* bij de organisatie horen. Authenticiteit wordt op tactisch niveau nagestreefd door op zoveel mogelijk manieren toe te lichten hoe de organisatie haar geclaimde identiteitspositie naleeft en door oprecht te communiceren over de mate waarin ze hierin slaagt en waar verbeteringen nodig zijn. Daarnaast proberen organisaties de authenticiteit van hun identiteitsexpressies te vergroten door aan te geven hoe hun identiteitskenmerken geworteld zijn in de geschiedenis van het bedrijf.

Transparantie, het vierde principe, moet ervoor zorgen dat stakeholders genoeg inzicht in de organisatie hebben om zo vertrouwen in de identiteitsexpressies te krijgen. Bovendien is transparantie voor managers een belangrijk principe om eventuele onjuiste stereotype percepties van stakeholders over de organisatie te kunnen doorbreken. Op tactisch niveau proberen managers hun transparantie te vergroten door hun identiteitskenmerken zo te 'framen', dat stakeholders ze op de juiste manier interpreteren (bijvoorbeeld: "We preferen onszelf te zien als een 'warmte-, licht- en mobiliteitsbedrijf', niet als een 'oliebedrijf'"). Daarnaast wordt transparantie gemanaged door op zoveel mogelijk manieren informatie te verschaffen over onder meer de visie, standpunten, activiteiten en resultaten van de organisatie. Tot slot streven de organisaties naar het creëren van

dialogoog met hun stakeholders. Hiermee trachten de organisaties niet alleen het inzicht van stakeholders in de organisatie te vergroten, maar daarbij ook hun eigen inzicht in de belangen en behoeften van stakeholders ten aanzien van hun organisatie.

Studie drie onderzoekt de mate waarin en hoe deze vier expressiviteitsprincipes inderdaad de percepties en intenties van externe stakeholders ten aanzien van een organisatie beïnvloeden. Ik beargumenteer op basis van de bevindingen in studie twee, dat deze vier principes essentieel zijn voor het beïnvloeden van twee cognitieve processen die stakeholders' ondergaan bij het vormen van hun percepties over een organisatie: 1) hun begripvorming over de organisatie identiteit en 2) hun oordeel over de geloofwaardigheid van de identiteitsexpressies, zodat ze de geuite identiteit ook daadwerkelijk aan de organisatie toeschrijven. Ik test in studie drie de mate waarin deze twee cognitieve processen als mediators fungeren tussen de vier identiteitsexpressies enerzijds, en de percepties van stakeholders en hun daarop volgende gedragintenties anderzijds.

De bevindingen tonen het volgende aan. Allereerst valt op dat hoewel managers in studie twee hun identiteitsexpressies langs vier principes orchestreren, stakeholders ze percipiëren als slechts drie aspecten. In volgorde van belang zijn dit: authenticiteit, consistentie en distinctiviteit. Het blijkt dat ze het vierde principe, transparantie, als een onderdeel van authenticiteit ervaren. Met andere woorden, identiteitsexpressies die als authentiek worden gezien, worden ook als transparant ervaren, en vice versa. Ik heb voor deze samengevoegde principes het label 'authenticiteit' aangehouden.

Ten tweede blijkt dat de mate waarin identiteitsexpressies als authentiek gepercipieerd worden, een doorslaggevend effect heeft op de begripvorming van stakeholders over de geuite organisatie identiteit alsmede op de mate waarin ze erop vertrouwen dat de identiteitsexpressies ook daadwerkelijk aan het bedrijf toe te schrijven zijn. Beiden zijn op hun beurt weer van invloed op de perceptievorming en gedragintenties van stakeholders ten aanzien van de organisatie. Hiermee laat ik zien dat deze twee cognitieve processen inderdaad een mediërende rol spelen tussen enerzijds authentieke identiteitsexpressies, en anderzijds de percepties van stakeholders en hun daarop volgende gedragintenties ten aanzien van een organisatie. Opvallend is echter dat expressies die als authentiek gepercipieerd worden ook een noemenswaardig direct effect hebben op de percepties van stakeholders ten aanzien van een bedrijf. Een aannemelijke verklaring hiervoor die aansluit bij



de bestaande cognitief-psychologische literatuur is dat authentieke identiteitsexpressies een sterke emotionele aantrekkelijkheidscomponent met zich meedragen. In andere woorden, de authentieke expressies kunnen een op emotie gebaseerd oordeel over de organisatie gecreëerd hebben.

Ten derde dragen ook identiteitsexpressies die als consistent gepercipieerd worden positief bij aan de begripvorming van stakeholders over de organisatie identiteit alsmede aan hun vertrouwen om de geuite identiteit ook daadwerkelijk toe te schrijven aan de organisatie. Beide cognitieve processen hebben op hun beurt weer invloed op de perceptievorming van stakeholders en hun gedragsintenties ten aanzien van een bedrijf.

Uit de vierde en laatste bevinding blijkt dat distinctieve identiteitsexpressies niet zozeer bijdragen aan een betere begripvorming over wie de organisatie nu daadwerkelijk is. Ze hebben daarentegen wel een direct positief effect op de percepties van stakeholders en de daarop volgende gedragsintenties ten aanzien van een organisatie. Een soortgelijke verklaring als bij het authenticiteitsprincipe is hier aannemelijk; in de bestaande cognitief-psychologisch literatuur wordt beargumenteerd dat naast authenticiteit ook distinctiviteit een sterke emotionele aantrekkingskracht kan hebben. Een andere verklaring, afkomstig van de sociale identiteit literatuur, is echter noemenswaardig. De sociaal-psychologische literatuur beargumenteert dat individuen een sterke behoefte hebben om distinctief (ofwel 'anders' of 'uniek') te zijn ten opzichte van hun sociale omgeving. Om deze vorm van persoonlijke distinctiviteit na te streven, identificeren ze zich graag met groepen die distinctief zijn, om zo hun eigen gepercipieerde identiteit te ontleen aan de identiteit van de specifieke groep. Dit proces kan ook een onderliggende verklaring zijn voor het effect van distinctiviteit op de percepties van stakeholders over, en hun gedragsintenties ten aanzien van, de organisatie in mijn studie. Vervolgonderzoek zou hierin meer inzicht kunnen verschaffen.

Een belangrijke implicatie van de bevindingen uit deze dissertatie is dat identiteitsexpressies niet alleen belangrijk zijn voor het managen van de medewerkers binnen een organisatie, maar dat ze tevens een belangrijke rol vervullen voor het managen van de percepties van externe stakeholders, mits ze systematisch gemanaged worden langs de in dit onderzoek geïdentificeerde expressiviteitsprincipes. Door inzicht te geven in deze expressiviteitsprincipes enerzijds, en de cognitieve processen die stakeholders naar aanleiding van deze principes ondergaan anderzijds, is een eerste empirische brug geslagen tussen twee belangrijke onderzoeksstromen: de organisatie identiteit literatuur en de perceptiemanagement literatuur. Het integreren van deze twee

onderzoeksstromen is een belangrijke stap voorwaarts naar het verkrijgen van een vollediger en genuanceerder beeld van hoe identiteitsexpressies niet alleen een rol spelen voor medewerkers, maar ook voor het managen van externe stakeholders. Tot slot bieden de geïdentificeerde expressiviteitsprincipes en onderliggende tactieken managers tevens een concreet en systematisch houvast voor het managen van hun dagelijkse identiteitsexpressies.

## Biography



Mignon van Halderen was born in Velp (Gld), The Netherlands, on May 31st 1978. In 1996 she received her Atheneum diploma at the Frederik Hendrik College in 's-Hertogenbosch. She moved to Enschede to enroll in the Master of Communication Studies at the University of Twente. As a student, she was, among other things, chair of the editorial committee of a student magazine and she was on the board of an organizing committee that set up the first National Conference for Communication Studies, which is now held annually. She received her Master's degree in 2000 after which she travelled through Australia and New Zealand for three months. Back in The Netherlands, she worked for one and a half year at the Corporate Communication department of Cap Gemini, The Netherlands. In 2002, she returned to the academic field and enrolled in the doctoral program. During her PhD she taught several classes in the Full- and Part-time Master programs of Business Administration at the Rotterdam School of Management. She also spent a semester at the marketing department of the Spears School of Business in Oklahoma, United States. She presented her research at international conferences. In 2005, one of her papers was nominated for top paper at the Interactive Paper Session of the International Communication Association. In 2006, she won the Best Presentation Award at the International Conference on Corporate and Marketing Communications. In 2007, one of her papers was published in the Best Paper Proceedings of the Annual Academy of Management Meetings. Mignon's research focuses on reputation management, corporate communication, organizational identity expressions and perception management of stakeholders.

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## Organizational Identity Expressiveness and Perception Management

It is especially during the past decade that stakeholders have become extremely heedful of organizations and their activities. A dominant organizational response of companies to this development is to express their organizational identity, in terms of who they are, what they stand for, what they do and why they do it. Expressing an organizational identity is a difficult process in which organizations have to explain a myriad of identity characteristics through various messages and to a variety of stakeholders, all with different and sometimes conflicting interests in the organization. This dissertation addresses the question of how to manage the complexity of these expressions as effectively as possible. Based on three empirical studies, insight is provided into how organizational identity expressions can play a role in managing external stakeholders' perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward an organization. Three main research findings emerge. First, stakeholders do value organizational identity expressions – the findings show that stakeholders who are exposed to organizational identity expressions form more positive perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward a company than stakeholders who are not exposed to such expressions. Second, managers can increase the effectiveness of their expressions by orchestrating them along four principles: Distinctiveness, Consistency, Sincerity and Transparency. Concrete tactics are offered that can be used to manage each of the four principles. Third, stakeholders positively pick up on these principles because they enable them to 1) make sense of an organization's identity expressions, 2) enhance their confidence in attributing the expressed identity to the organization and 3) elicit positive perceptions of and behavioral reactions toward the company. These findings enrich scholars' understanding of how and why organizational identity expressions are important for external stakeholders – something that scholars had so far hinted at, but had hardly investigated empirically. Managers may benefit from this study because it offers concrete principles and tactics that they can use in managing their organizational identity expressions effectively.

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