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Consultants Toward Corporate Identity Programs**

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TOWARD CORPORATE IDENTITY PROGRAMS

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INTRODUCTION

Although much attention has been given to the importance of developing and using corporate and brand identity programs (from hereon essentially combined and referred to as CI), in the business literature in contrast academic treatment is less abundant and in particular there is little research on their actual implementation. In Asia in particular CI has enjoyed enormous popularity among business ever since the concept was imported from the United States into Japan (Far Eastern Economic Review 1987, Asian Business 1991). Recently CI has become an important growth area in South Korea. While accurate statistics are not available, casual observation would indicate that the top 50 chaebols (Korean conglomerates) have commissioned a CI program. The more visible examples of this trend would be the well known cases and new logos of Samsung and Lucky Goldstar, now known as LG. This growth can be easily understood in these chaebols' attempts to reengineer and reorganize their operations and in so doing reflect a "new face" to the various external publics including their international consumers.

While the motivation for the emergence of CI is easily understood, what is not clear is how effective these programs are after implementation. In this paper we focus on two communities responsible for the creation and implementation of identity programs, the clients and the designers. Even within client corporations of CI programs confusion still remains over what these programs are and why they are needed (Marketing 1988). This problem will be more accentuated in countries like Korea because identity programs have had a very short history. One of the major sources for this confusion may be the wide scope of CI. A well known guru of CI, Wally Olins argues that CI encompasses not only marketing but also behavior, communications, strategy,

structure, advertising, and public relations. In that context different people in different parts of the organization may be looking at limited aspects of CI. It could be the proverbial problem where various blind men are touching different parts of the elephant and concluding different things. Moreover, outside the organization people are exposed to only the visible results of the CI, namely the logo and signage. They may easily conclude that the costs associated with these programs are excessive without realizing that the process of research and creative development is long and that there are much material costs involved (Marketing 1989). Conversely, clients sometimes complain that designers are not sensitive enough about the marketing and strategic issues related to CI. Mistrust and misconception, therefore, may exist on both sides of the user-designer relationship. We propose in this paper that these perceptual barriers inhibit the effectiveness of the CI implementation. Do the clients and design consultants agree on what makes a good CI program? This is what we aim to determine in this study.

What is corporate identity? In its present nomenclature this discipline sounds esoteric and mysterious which adds to its appeal but also contributes to its misunderstanding. Olins (1989) keeps it simple:

In order to be effective every organization needs a clear sense of purpose that people within it understand. They also need a strong sense of belonging. Purpose and belonging are the two facets of identity. Every organization is unique, and the identity must spring from the organization's own roots. its personality, its strengths and its weaknesses. This is true of the modern global corporation as it has been of any other institution in history, from the Christian church to the nation state. The identity of the corporation must be so clear that it becomes the yardstick against which its products, behavior and actions are measured. This means that the identity cannot simply be a slogan, a collection of phrases: it must be visible, tangible and all-embracing. Everything that the organization does must be an affirmation of its identity..... Identity is expressed in the names, symbols, logos, colors and rites of passages which the organization uses to distinguish itself, its brands and its constituent companies.

We see from the above description that while corporate identity does include visible elements which we can call the "design," nonetheless corporate identity is firmly rooted in the essential individuality of the organization. In fact the description of identity above is very consistent with the concept of "corporate mission" found in marketing and in this context lacking an identity just like lacking a mission leads companies to make poor strategic decisions such as "make inappropriate acquisitions, diversify into blind alleys, make inferior copies of other companies' products" (Olins 1989). The relationship between corporate identity and portfolio of business can be understood with the General Electric example where to make the design and name were modified to GE and a new logo to reflect the wider spectrum of businesses. At the level of the brand identity is very consistent with brand equity (Schmitt and Pan 1994) and brand positioning.

Given the relevance of corporate and brand identity to business and especially to marketing, it is somewhat surprising then that there is limited academic research in this area. A recent computer-aided search of the business literature listed very few academic studies related to corporate identity in the last 4 years. Part of the lack of the interest may stem from the common perception that “identity” and “image” are interchangeable concepts. Kotler (1994) categorizes symbols such as logos and signs as “image differentiation” which is one of his main positioning strategies. While image is certainly part of identity, the term suggests a more restrictive boundary than the identity process described above. Moreover, it puts more emphasis on the visible and creative aspect of identity management. This is analogous to the division in advertising agencies between “creative” people and marketing managers. Moreover, once a discipline becomes tagged with the “creative” label, managers and even academics seem to distance themselves from it perhaps because of their different background training. In a different context, such a interdisciplinary gap may be observed in high technology-intensive companies between managers and R&D personnel (Gupta et al., 1986). Recent managerial interest in cross-functional cooperation (e.g. Parker, 1994) suggests that the resolving interdisciplinary differences leads to better organizational performance.

The objective of this paper therefore is to empirically examine the perceptions of two disciplines or “communities” involved in CI. One community are the clients of CI who we define as the “client” and within this classification we include top, middle, and entry level managers belonging to the strategic planning and marketing departments. As mentioned above, the

application of these programs is very broad but we limit the analysis to these two primary clients. The other community are the designers of CI who we define as "design consultants" which include top managers, project directors, and entry level designers. Thus within each community we have a fairly homogeneous group which is differentiated within only by managerial position. Between the two communities we have a differentiation in terms of not only corporate affiliation but also disciplines, the client being managerially oriented whereas the consultants are design oriented.

The use of such a dyadic approach is common in organizational buying behavior research in marketing. Other areas employing this method has been in the policy sciences area (Caplan, Morrison, and Stambaugh 1975) where information use and perception were demonstrated to be significantly different between social scientists, the information producer, and policy makers, who were the information users. Because the two groups operated in different subcultures with different norms and reward systems this divergence lead to a mutual mistrust and a resultant lower information usage by the policy makers. A marketing application of such a "two-communities" framework is found in the area of marketing research. Deshpande and Zaltman (1984) compared the factors affecting researcher (information producer) and manager (information user) perceptions of market research use. They established that the factors perceived as influencing use of market research information was different between researchers and users. For researchers the most important influences were, in order or priority, interaction between researchers and managers, political acceptability, exploratory research purpose, technical and presentation quality of research report, confirmatory research purpose and actionability, surprise, and stage of product life cycle when the research was conducted. In comparison for managers the influences were

degree of formalization of organizational structure (inversely related), technical quality of the research, extent of researcher-manager interaction, surprise, exploratory research purpose, and degree of centralization (inversely related). Among the notable differences was the political acceptability of the research findings which was perceived as being more instrumental by the researchers. Because researchers assume the position of information suppliers they realize that the results will impact either favorably or unfavorably the corporate commitment to products. This is a relevant issue to CI (and more specifically to BI). The negative perceptions for the organizational variables of formalization and centralization are also relevant in Asian companies given the more rigid hierarchical structure in these cultures.

A related literature for this topic is the conceptualization of market orientation. Kohli and Jaworski (1990, 1993) argue that despite the frequency in which the word "market orientation" is used, a commonly accepted definition, theory development, and empirical research on the concept is lacking. This implies that even though CI clients may complain that designers do not have a market orientation this presupposes the client's own orientation is comparatively higher and moreover that the concept is well established. Combining a review of extant theory with field-based research Kohli and Jaworski (1990) posit that market orientation can be operationalized as "the organization wide generation of market intelligence pertaining to current and future customer needs, dissemination of the intelligence across departments, and organization wide responsiveness to it." The definition is relevant to CI since the need for both entail elements of customer need/trends analysis, interdepartmental dissemination, and organization-wide response. The paper also points to the antecedents of market orientation as being senior management factors,

interdepartmental dynamics, and organizational systems. Again all of these constructs and many of their specific measures can be linked with CI. For example one of the measures of the first factor is risk aversion. Changing the CI certainly entails a great deal of risk for a company especially when the existing market situation is positive. Nevertheless a "face-lift" may be recommended by designers in view of the likely future environment forecasted for the company. Another measure which is related to interdepartmental dynamics is interdepartmental conflict. If this is high it is plausible that not only market intelligence dissemination will be negatively impacted but also the dissemination and implementation of CI programs.

A third area of literature inquiry is the existing work on national culture and corporate culture. National culture is relevant to the extent that symbolism, a key component of identities, is subjective and somewhat culture-bound. For example, Schmitt and Pan (1994) demonstrate the uniqueness of Asia-Pacific languages and cultural characteristics which necessitates adjustments in corporate and brand identities. For example, monolithic identities are instances where a corporation uses one name and visual style (e.g. IBM). Olins (1989) argues that while monolithic identities are not unique to Japanese companies, nevertheless the acceptance of them are higher in Japan even though the range of activities and products are sometimes quite varied. One example cited is Mitsubishi whose products include aircraft, automobiles, a bank, and tinned salmon. Also corporate culture is important because it is synonymous with corporate identity as used by both academics and practitioners. This notwithstanding, examination of culture, especially corporate, in the marketing literature has been relatively limited as compared to the organizational behavior fields. Some of the few studies in marketing are those by Deshpande and Webster (cf. 1989,

1990) who examined the concept of corporate culture in the non-marketing fields and defined it as "the pattern of shared values and beliefs that help individuals understand organizational functioning and thus provide them with the norms for behavior in the organization." Given the many paradigms of culture they selected one of them, labeled organizational cognition which views organizations as knowledge systems and uses a managerial information processing perspective. In that context it is consistent with the market intelligence approach used by Kohli and Jaworski (1990). An application of this framework is Deshpande et al (1993) where the authors examined the effect of corporate culture, customer orientation, and innovativeness in various Japanese firms on business performance. While the body of such studies are still limited, nevertheless, they suggest the need to study corporate identity in context-specific domains.

Research on corporate culture of Korean companies, especially that in English, is fairly limited. The few studies which do exist (e.g. Steers et al 1989) discuss characteristics which are common to Korean conglomerates also known as "chaebols:" family control and management, paternalistic management, centralized planning and coordination, the wide range of business activity sometimes which are unrelated, a high entrepreneurial orientation, close business-government relations, and school-ties in hiring. Lee's (1989) survey of these companies found similar ideological themes: harmony and unity, family, sincerity and diligence, creation and development, business credibility, productivity and quality, work responsibility, progressiveness, social responsibility, scientific management, and sacrifice and service. A comprehensive work by Janelli (1993) is an ethnographic approach to study one of the largest chaebols in Korea disguised in the book as "Taesong." The author uses the term "bourgeois ideology" as the corporate culture prevailing in

this large corporation. Some of the themes repeated in the work are: Korean corporations' emphasis on sales maximization (as opposed to profit maximization), the corporate cultural emphasis of harmony, and the linkage of corporate success to national success (evocation of patriotism). The most interesting suggestion offered by the book is that there is great dissonance between the cultural norms and actual employee attitudes. Some of the notable ones are company's emphasis on the company as a family and the employees resistance to it, maintaining harmony by obscuring public expression of conflict, the negative general attitudes held by entering employees about the economic concentration of the chaebols, and disapproval of owner family management. These findings are tempered, as alluded to by the author, by changes taking place in Korean corporations in recent years which suggest new generations may be different from those described in the study. Although it is beyond the scope of this present paper, some interesting linkages between Korea's national and corporate culture may be attempted to CI management. For example, does the unrelated nature of many Korean conglomerates make achieving a single identity more difficult? Does the family ownership structure facilitate or impede effective CI implementation? These and other issues may be studied in future research.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the lack of research on the integration between identity management with marketing, this study is exploratory in nature and aims to guide future research which will be more formalized and theory based. Given the review of the literature above, the main research questions to be asked and empirically examined are essentially fourfold:

1. Are CI clients and designer consultants in agreement with respect to the

usefulness of these programs?

2. Are there differences between companies in terms of their perceptions and attitudes toward CI?
3. What is the relationship between organizational characteristics such as corporate culture, centralization, formalization, interdepartmental relations and CI attitudes?
4. Are prevailing CI attitudes related to perceived CI effectiveness in the client firms?

METHOD

For the empirical examination of clients and design consultants of CI we administered a survey to two groups of respondents. The first group consisted of CI client managers in selected companies which recently implemented CI programs. These managers were selected from the marketing and strategic planning departments. Because of the potential for different perspectives by managers at different levels of the organization, a sample was drawn from the top, middle, and entry-levels as indicated by their job titles. The second group consisted of CI design consultants from three top firms which specialize in corporate and brand identity development programs. For comparison purposes, we collected a sample for top, middle, and entry-level designers. The questionnaire was developed by using and modifying existing scales to measure market orientation and some of its key organizational antecedents and consequences (Jaworski and Kohli 1993, Deshpande et al., 1994). We conducted field interviews to develop and refine a

complementary set of questions to measure attitudes toward CI and its implementation. The final usable sample for the clients was 160 and 60 for designers.

RESULTS

The Likert 5 point items used to compare perceptions of design consultants and managers and their respective group means are show in Table 1.

Table 1 about here

The surprising result of this study is that by and large there is a convergence between designers and clients in terms of their perceptions and attitudes toward corporate identity. We had expected greater disparity between the two communities but this was not empirically shown to be the case in our sample. We posit some possible explanations in the discussion section. Nonetheless some important differences between the two groups remain. The significant differences based on a paired T test at the .05 significance level (indicated by asterisks) are in areas such as the accounting of CI fees (items A8-A10). There is a general perception on the part of clients that CI is not worth as much as the fees charged would imply. Of course we would expect designers to have an opposing view of those perceptions. Also we see significant differences in the relative utility perceptions of foreign versus local design firms. Here again, clients perceive a higher utility of foreign firms, a view not shared by local design firms. In contrast, the justification of using

local firms, namely that they have a better feel for local aesthetics is not as strongly felt by clients. Both areas had emerged as important points of contention between clients and designers in the fact finding stage of the research. Thus these results confirmed those prior expectations.

To increase the parsimony of the analysis we reduced the data using principal components with varimax rotation.¹ This resulted in 6 factors which we named CI over-simplicity, CI corporate communication, CI process requirements, CI-related strategic benefits, designer-related negative perceptions, and CI cost perceptions. Using these 6 factors we compared the means of the three client organizations. As shown in Table 2, differences in perceptions were found only in CI over-simplicity and designer-related negative perceptions. Firm 2 is the most recent adopter of a new CI program, and therefore it is interesting to note that it has the highest perception that CI is a simple activity. The other significant difference is in the negative perceptions of CI which is the highest for Firm 3 and the lowest for Firm 2. At first glance the findings appear to be inconsistent since it would be reasonable to expect that companies which view CI in a simplistic way would also have generally negative perceptions about designers. That was, however, not the case here. One explanation might be that Firm 2 managers generally have a positive view of CI but within a limited range of uses. Also consistent with that could be that other firms who hold negative perceptions do so because they think the process of CI is too complex. There were no significant differences in the other three factors.

Table 2 about here

The third research question dealt with the relationship between the CI perceptions and attitudes and organizational characteristics. We show in Table 3 a correlation matrix of the 6 factors with the key organizational characteristics of centralization, formalization, interdepartmental conflict, and interdepartmental connectedness.

Table 3 about here

Because we only sampled three companies, the variation in these key variables were limited. The pairwise correlations between the factor scores and the organizational variables are generally low and insignificant. The only relationships that we see are between connectedness and corporate communications and also cost perceptions, and between formalization and corporate communications and also negative perceptions. Again some of these results are not intuitively clear. For example, the positive correlation between interdepartmental connectedness and cost perception is difficult to explain. Nevertheless, the other results such as the negative correlation between formalization and communication, and the positive correlation of formalization and costs perception are consistent with the findings of previous research (e.g. Deshpande and Zaltman 1985). Collectively they imply that CI is less likely to be adopted and communicated widely in firms which are highly formalized.

The last research question dealt with the relationships between CI perceptions/attitudes and perceived CI effectiveness. Table 4 shows the results of regressions of a composite CI effectiveness scale against the 6 factor scores of CI perceptions/attitudes and also the composite measure of market orientation.²

Table 4 about here

The results show that the overall perceived CI effectiveness is significantly predicted by only two variables, CI process requirements and customer orientation. The former implies that in order to have effective CI managers must also pay attention to the various procedural requirements of this activity. In other words, implementation must be strong to have an effective CI. Also the results suggest that it helps to have a strong customer orientation.

DISCUSSION

The motivation for this study was to examine whether differences in perception and attitudes existed between two important groups involved with an understudied area of marketing, namely corporate identity programs. Our results, while tentative, suggest that even though there are many similarities in the perceptions and attitudes between the two groups some differences do remain. We think these differences deserve attention since they emerged despite an upward bias

toward convergence between the two groups. We only included recent adopters of CI and therefore we expected managers to have more positive evaluations. The remaining disparities, however, underscore important points of contention between the two groups which are not necessarily general perceptions or stereotypes but, given the nature of the sample, related to specific aspects of CI procedures. Most specifically, the accounting of CI fees appears to be a major source of disagreement. It is imperative that CI firms work to instill a constructive perception of fees accounting on the part of clients. We also saw differences between client firms in the summarized factors. Most notably, the firm which most recently adopted a CI program had the most positive perspective of CI despite their perception that it is a simple activity. In this context we inferred that the negativity of CI can be abated by removing the mystery which sometimes masks the many benefits CI can actually provide. We attempted to relate the many perceptions and attitudes of CI to organizational variables. Given the lack of variation in the client sample we found very few significant correlations. Nonetheless, consistent with previous studies on market research use, we found formalization to be negatively related to internal CI communication and positively related to negative perceptions. This implies that CI will be adopted and implemented more effectively in informal organizations. The last point of inquiry was to determine potential predictors of a composite index of CI effectiveness. Here we found two significant predictors CI process requirements and market orientation. Collectively they suggest that companies have to strive to be fundamentally market-driven and within that context adopt and implement a consistent CI program. In short, cosmetic changes in something like a corporate logo will not be effective. Given the exploratory nature of this study, future work should elaborate on the influence of organizational characteristics on designers and clients interaction patterns.

NOTES:

¹Specific details of the factor analysis are omitted for sake of brevity but will be sent upon request.

²The composite scale used the items of (1) employees are generally aware of the new CI, (2) our CI is very special as compared to other CIs, (3) our CI reflects our company's essential characteristics, and (4) our CI reflects our company's long term vision.

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Table 1: Mean Scores for CI perceptions and attitudes

VARIABLE NAME	CLIENT	DESIGNER
A1 CI is a tool for adapting to environmental change	5.77	5.78
A2 CI must start with marketing analysis	4.99	4.73
A3 the creativity of the designer is most important for CI	4.39	5.00
A4 consumer is unable to discern the quality of CI	2.24	2.98
A5 the designer operates without soliciting client opinion	2.26	2.13
A6 CI must obtain approval from many people in the client's organization	4.64	3.70
A7 the most important consideration in CI is top managers' intention for the CI	3.55	3.56
A8 the value of design is difficult to measure	3.83	4.10*
A9 the cost of CI is groundlessly expensive	4.39	2.81*
A10 the measurement of CI fees is difficult	4.39	3.44*
A11 CI contributes to the enhancement of sales	5.15	5.69
A12 CI must begin with analysis of the corporate culture	5.69	5.50*
A13 CI unifies the minds and actions of corporate members	5.49	5.49
A14 if the intention of the CI is clear then the actual form of the CI is not important	2.80	2.30
A15 the CI logo can be made by anyone	2.84	1.92*
A16 the color of the corporation can be any color	2.40	1.69
A17 the corporate logo is most important and implementation is not as important	1.91	1.27*
A18 word logo is more effective than a symbol logo	3.25	3.33*
A19 10 years is a long time for a logo to last	3.11	3.32
A20 corporate logos should be changed frequently	3.06	3.06
A21 CI is related to corporate diversification strategy	5.28	5.72
A22 CI is related to corporate internationalization strategy	5.60	5.92
A23 foreign CI firms have better design sense vs local ones	4.53	3.41*
A24 Korean CI firms have better sense of local aesthetics	4.08	4.44*
A25 there should be no "political problems" with CI	5.35	5.06*
A26 CI must be consistent with the corporate mission	4.88	4.90
A28 the client must be able to understand the CI's concepts and terminology	6.01	5.20
A29 the rationale of the CI must be communicated widely within the client organization	6.30	6.07

Table 2: Factor Score Means of Perceptions Across Different Firms

	Simplicity	Corp. Comm.	CI Process	CI Strategy	Neg. Percept.	Costs
Firm 1	.014	-.089	.099	-.027	.080	-.165
Firm 2	.412	.101	-.178	-.001	-.290	.022
Firm 3	-.411	.015	.046	.042	.177	.185
F-Statistic 2, 138	8.021	.492	.978	.061	2.701	1.521
sig. level	.001	.643	.379	.941	.071	.222

Table 3: Correlations between Factor Scores and Organizational Variables

	Simplicity	Commun.	Process	Strategy	Negative	Costs
CENTRAL	.0265	.0843	.0076	-.0969	.0353	.0388
COMMIT	.1221	.0482	-.0377	.0802	.0917	.0113
CONFLICT	.1104	.0144	.0502	-.0438	-.0540	.0147
CONNECT	.1096	.1809*	.0151	.0486	.0000	.2131*
FORMAL	.1090	-.1419*	.0859	.0119	.2091*	.0198

Table 4: Regression of CI Effectiveness and CI Perceptions/Attitudes

Multiple R	.49595
R Square	.24597
Adjusted R Square	.20473
Standard Error	1.03914

Analysis of Variance

	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square
Regression	7	45.08736	6.44105
Residual	128	138.21657	1.07982

F = 5.96495 Signif F = .0000

----- Variables in the Equation -----

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
CUSTOMER	.648327	.121843	.443230	5.321	.0000
FAC1_4	.092195	.089923	.079441	1.025	.3072
FAC2_4	.026560	.092591	.022899	.287	.7747
FAC3_4	.162238	.090509	.138363	1.792	.0754
FAC4_4	.086659	.088572	.075193	.978	.3297
FAC5_4	-.078913	.092866	-.067423	-.850	.3970
FAC6_4	-.049784	.090081	-.042533	-.553	.5815
(Constant)	1.378671	.566814		2.432	.0164

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