

Image as the organization's communicated meaning and attribute

KEY WORDS

organization image, organization identity, public relations, internal communication

ABSTRACT

Various types of complex organizations, with complicated motives and heterogeneous structures are present in different spheres of public life. These public institutional phenomena, tied in a network of relations systems and heading toward a specific goal, are broadcasters in the process of communication. It is said that organizations have image but it is not only their attribute, it is the meaning they communicate, the broadcast which may regard various aspects of the institution's functioning and which can reflexively influence those aspects. The article discusses the difference between the terms organization identity and organization image, including definition spheres of the latter. Moreover, it analyses the ontological status of the term image, its components and structure. The organization's "mental image" is described, one that often becomes that target of those who manage institutions, as an unexploited so far sphere of communication influence.

In modern day, communication and information technologies have an indisputable influence on institutional activity. Gone with the wind are paradigms of faith in a balanced system, stability, determined system dynamics and superiority of socio-cultural cohesion. Presently, inevitable globalization and galloping technological advancement leave us disillusioned. Today's world is a world of information overload. Many theoreticians¹ emphasize that effective organizations must constantly deal with changeability or even "environmental turbulence", their systems must be seen as dynamic, adaptable and with a complex and diversified structure. Modern organizations are complex institutions which, according to Mary J. Hatch, can be viewed as those possessing, "overlapping and interpenetrating technologies, social structures, cultures and physical structures present in a given environment"².

Organizations are not necessarily effectively working Newton machines but rather quasi-organic systems, unpredictable and alive, with a continuously building, via communication,

¹ On the topic, also worth noting are publications by W. Kwaśnicki, *Zasady ekonomii rynkowej*, Wrocław 2001; M.J. Stankiewicz, *Konkurencyjność przedsiębiorstwa*, Toruń 2002; P.M. Senge, *Piąta dyscyplina. Teoria i praktyka organizacji uczących się*, Kraków 2003.

² M.J. Hatch, *Teoria organizacji*, Warszawa 2002, p. 32.

system of meanings. Today's organizations, even those with centuries-old traditions, must adapt to "new economic" challenges³, react to changes in the environment, inform and shape relations with the environment and care about their reputation. Simple "existence" is not enough. Informing is all the more imperative and what is more – building relations and methodic analysis of perceived institution functioning, in view of new economic challenges and network society. Image is one factor which has become crucial in institutional management, especially regarding communication with employees and the outside world.

The article will discuss the difference between two terms often considered similar: organization identity and organization image. The terms relate to individual as well as to the organization level but so as to put the analysis into order both these terms will be discussed. Additionally, analysed will be the ontological status of the term "image". Following, discussed will be the structure of organization's "mental image".

Identity or, in other words, who are we?

Philosophical, psychological and sociological research⁴ on the subject shows how interdisciplinary the term 'identity' can be. A variety of research theories and paradigms indicates how complex and multi layered the issue is. Anthropologists Burszta and Kuligowski state, "ambiguity of the term, both on the individual as well as group level, seems to be a state not to be overcome"⁵. Scientists are increasingly intrigued by identity dialogueness⁶, understood as its polyphony and phenomenological ambiguity, identity is constantly being constructed and reconstructed in the created and ever changing relations. They notice individual as well as group efforts in order to maintain interior cohesion. According to Giddens⁷, the individual on his own must create and recreate his identity as a result of changeable daily life experiences but also

³ The phrase "old – new economy" is gaining supporters although not everyone agrees with the suggested division. (cf. R. Koch, *Wszechmocne prawa, Nauka sukcesu w biznesie*, Warszawa 2002). The term "new" may be interpreted as "better". A less evaluative term could be "network economy" after C. Shapiro and H.R. Marian in: *Information Rules: A Strategic Guide to the Network Economy*, Harvard 1998. M. Castells also analyses "network society" from a sociological perspective; M. Castells, *Spoleczeństwo sieci*, Warszawa 2007.

⁴ Among the newest publications on the topic there are: *Filozofia tożsamości*, ed. J. Kojkoł, Gdańsk 2007; *Tożsamość i jej przemiany a kultura*, ed. P.K. Oleś, A. Batory, Lublin 2008 and L. Dyczewski, *Tożsamość a komunikacja*, Lublin (in print).

⁵ W.J. Burszta, W. Kuligowski, *Sequel. Dalsze przygody kultury w globalnym świecie*, Warszawa 2005, p. 224.

⁶ According to K. Stachewicz (cf. K. Stachewicz, *Fenomenologia a dialog*; www.tezeusz.pl/cms/tz/index.php?id=2167 [accessed: 10.01.2011]) 20th century philosophy of dialogue focuses on the importance of inter-subject relations in order to build an identity through the "self". The author states that without interaction the "I" does not exist, it is the relation this constructs identity. Tadeusz Gadacz, editor of *Historia Filozofii XX wieku*, supports Martin Buber, one of the main 20th century dialogue philosophers, in his view of shaping identity through dialogue, "Man becomes I in contact with You. He appears and disappears, events from the relation thicken or become dispersed and in this alternation develops the consciousness of an unchanging partner, the I consciousness" (M. Buber, *Ja i Ty*, Warszawa 1992, p. 56).

⁷ A. Giddens, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość*, Warszawa 2007.

because of modern day institutions' tendency to fragmentation. Kojkoł goes even further, calling modern identity an emanation of what is personal and specific – “the lost essence of society”⁸. In this context, Magala states that, “maintaining identity and inspiring trust depend on equalizing influences of conservative tendencies and society convictions that it has maintained imperative elements of continuity and responsibility, that old tried and true values are still alive and guide us in our daily choices”⁹.

According to Gutowski, “logic is a natural state for understanding identity”¹⁰, and it delineates relations of identicalness. It is “a double-barrelled relation marked with an = sign, taking place between the subject and himself”. Worth mentioning at this point is Barbara Skarga, a renowned Polish philosopher's work *Tożsamość i różnica*¹¹, in which identity is a starting point to more in-depth deliberations on the condition of modern man, humanism.

Meanwhile, in academic analysis the issue of identity from a psychological point of view is not just about finding harmony with oneself but also about accenting one's otherness. “Having an identity means being one of a kind, meaning ‘there is no other like me’. From a phenomenological perspective, identity means finding some kind of subjective truth about oneself with a focus on internal authenticity”¹². It can be examined on two levels – object, as the organism's biological characteristics (DNA, finger prints) and subject – understood as self expression or psychological self cognition¹³. On the subject level, it is about a sense of identity¹⁴, or “a specific way of feeling as well as the entire emotional level accompanying identity and self narration”¹⁵. It is self knowledge in the form of scripts, consisting of self knowledge elements, i.e. forms of activity, important experiences, personal goals, ideals and relations with others. Relations with others make up one's social identity (introspective ties to other people). It is the next, after individual identity, subsystem of knowledge about the self. Following is group or organizational identity.

⁸ J. Kojkoł, *Wstęp*, [in:] *Filozofia tożsamości*, p. 7.

⁹ P. Magala, *Trzy światy uniwersyteckiej społeczności (badacze, nauczyciele, obywatele)*, [in:] *Uniwersytet – społeczeństwo – gospodarka*, ed. J. Chłopecki, Rzeszów 2006, p. 8.

¹⁰ P. Gutowski, *Analityczne a narracyjne podejście do zagadnienia tożsamości osobowej w kontekście logicznego pojęcia identyfikacji*, [in:] *Tożsamość i jej przemiany...*, p. 13.

¹¹ B. Skarga, *Tożsamość i różnica*, Kraków 2009.

¹² P.K. Oleś, *O różnych rodzajach tożsamości*, [in:] *Tożsamość i jej przemiany...*, p. 42.

¹³ On self-recognition M. Straś-Romanowska, *Tożsamość w czasach dekonstrukcji*, [in:] *Oblicza tożsamości: perspektywa interdyscyplinarna*, ed. B. Zimoń-Dubownik, M. Gamian-Wilk, Wrocław 2008.

¹⁴ The term “sense”, typical of psychology, implies reflection and the subjective aspect in determining identity. According to Jarymowicz, fundamental to the individual system of information about the self includes a sense of continuation (despite change in time), a sense of cohesion (despite changeability from situation to situation), and a sense of uniqueness (despite similarities to other people), cf. M. Jarymowicz, *Psychologia tożsamości*, [in:] *Psychologia. Podręcznik akademicki*, ed. J. Strelau, Gdańsk 2000, vol. 3.

¹⁵ P.K. Oleś, *O różnych rodzajach...*, p. 43.

Identity as the subject's individual characterisation which enables its recognition was initially applied to the individual but with time it was adopted by social psychologists and management and communication theoreticians to studies on organization¹⁶. It is a function of identity to identify and recognize a given "I"¹⁷ by "others"; as a concept it combines what is personal with what is social, including, however, the element of choice. According to psychologists¹⁸, personality cannot be chosen while identity can be shaped to a degree, or rather one can admit to it or not, avoid it or manifest it in social context.

It should be noted that there are theoreticians¹⁹ who, aside from identity and image, introduce the term *corporate personality*. In 1970s it was Olins²⁰, an advocate of the marketing approach in organizational theory, who put forward a comprehensive study of the concept of corporate personality. As Wilczak notes, "corporate identity is a set of characteristic features and values which an organization uses in its activity [...]. This includes its intellectual potential and specific managerial as well as employee skills"²¹. It seems that this term creates additional terminological chaos because not only does it 'personalize' the organization but it includes such different concepts as employee skills, the organization's values and strategy. Controlled personality is to generate organizational identity. The question is whether personality can be controlled. In case of individuals, it can lead to unethical behaviour, therefore therapists and consultants are not allowed to 'take control' over personality²².

Organizational identity

Organizational identity is also known as corporate identity, in public relations these terms are used interchangeably. Hatch and Schultz attempted to find taxonomic differences between the two types of literature. Authors from the organization theory trends use the adjective "organizational" while marketing specialists use the term "corporate". "Corporate identity differs from organizational to a degree that it is a conceptualization of leadership function and via its

¹⁶ A key work on the subject by D. Bernstein, *Corporate Image and Reality. A Critique of Corporate Communication*, Eastbourne 1984.

¹⁷ Self psychology is part of personality psychology, considered part of humanistic psychology.

¹⁸ M. Kofta, *Osobowość i różnice indywidualne*, [in:] *Psychologia...*, t. 2.

¹⁹ For more on personality see: B. Rozwadowska, *Public relations – teoria, praktyka, perspektywy*, Warszawa 2002 and A. Wilczak, *Budowanie wizerunku przez organizację – prawda czy mit?*, Warszawa 2003.

²⁰ W. Olins, *The Corporate personality: An Inquiry into the Nature of Corporate Identity*, London 1978.

²¹ A. Wilczak, *Tożsamość – wizerunek – reputacja organizacji. Analiza wzajemnych relacji*, [in:] *Pracownicy i media w procesie komunikacji*, ed. D. Tworzydło, T. Soliński, Rzeszów 2007, p. 209.

²² For more on ethics in the context of identity, J. Brzeziński, *Standardy dla testów stosowanych w psychologii i pedagogice*, Warszawa 1985.

focus on the visual aspect”²³. Corporate identity is tied to leader management and is directly related to company strategy, while organizational identity is a product of organization study, its focus point are employees and their relations within the organization. Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail²⁴ describe organization identity as a collection of its members’ beliefs on what is central and distinctive in their organization.

Organizational identity can be communicated different ways; intentionally via visualization in advertising, a dress code or official client policy. Initially organizational identity was a synonym for corporate nomenclature, logo or visual identification (graphic design). With time, the term has gained broader meaning and presently it differs from the one-dimensional, purely definitive classification. Today, it encompasses such broad concepts as corporate ethos, goals, values and organizational uniqueness which make it stand out on the market. Some academics at the International Corporate Identity Group (ICIG) and at the Strathclyde and Harvard Business School avoid a uniform definition of organizational identity. Instead, they call it an interdisciplinary paradigm, the so called *corporate identity mix*²⁵.

Rozwadowska distinguishes four types of organizational identity: formal (intended, created by management), informal (fluid and dependent on individuals), perceived (to be analysed) and illusory (subconscious)²⁶. Similarly to individual identity (i.e. national), organizational identity cannot be fully controlled by the *self*, management or community member influences. What we are and to which organization we belong is not always entirely our conscious choice and we often involuntarily communicate our affiliation. Hence, that it why it is so difficult to entirely and successfully design organizational identity as well as its proliferation strategy.

Organizational identity design can be compared to an operation on one’s own organism, where one is confident of superior rightness and full control over an object. Identity ontological status, direct ownership of subject, naturalness and self-determination enable ‘management’ of organizational identity from the inside. We should be aware of manipulation, from a psychological point of view, analogous to an individual deceiving himself²⁷.

²³ M.J. Hatch, M. Schultz, *Relations between organizational culture, identity and image*, “European Journal of Marketing” 31 (1997), No. 5, p. 357.

²⁴ J.M. Dutton, J.E. Dukerich, C.V. Harquail, *Organizational images and member identification*, “Administrative Science Quarterly” No. 39 (1994).

²⁵ C.B.M. van Riel, J.M.T. Balmer, *Corporate identity: the concept, its measurement and management*, “European Journal of Marketing” 2007, No. 5/6.

²⁶ B. Rozwadowska, *Public relations...*, p. 194.

²⁷ “Organization shadow” theory (cf. M.L. Bowles, *The Organization Shadow*, “Organization Studies” Vol. 12 (1991), No. 3, p. 387–404) in connection to Jung’s works, on “grey spheres” of organizational life and examples of unethical management in this sphere. Such “manual steering” of identity can be as a result of certain defense mechanisms, characteristic to man, also member of an organization (motivated by influence on the group “self” or by avoiding threatening stimuli).

Concluding, a change in organizational identity (what the organization is) is not fully possible but its correction can have an influence on the organization's image. Identity is a possession of the subject and image is perception of this possession (more on this below). In literature on the subject we can find opinions that organizational identity is a communicated instrument for influencing image²⁸. At the same time, emphasized is the need for concordance of organizational identity with desired image. What is image then and how does it differ from organizational identity? Differentiating between these two terms is imperative for clarity of this publication. Identity should not be confused with image²⁹. "These terms, even though they may be used interchangeably, mean completely different things"³⁰, says Rozwadowska, a PR and communication theoretician.

Image definition spheres

According to Rozmus, the interdisciplinary nature of image is the reason why "researchers and theoreticians have not yet come up with a clear-cut definition"³¹. In literature on the theory of organization present are numerous definitions of image. Worth noting is a publication by Arpan, Raney and Zivunska³² which offers a comprehensive overview of the term's modern definitions, at the same time emphasizing "the term's fleetingness". According to the authors, organizational image may include:

- associations with the organization's name,
- psychological profile constructed for the organization by the individual,
- idiosyncratic representation regarding the corporation,
- a sum of attitudes towards the organization,

Each of the above focuses on a different element of image: nominal, person's internal feelings (described above subject identity) or attitudes toward the object (subject and relation character). In view of established image structure, imperative seems to be the definition by Treadwell and Harrison which states that image of a given organization as perceived by individual is "a

²⁸ For more on this see L. Holtzhausen, L. Fourie, *Communicating to a diverse workforce. Employees' perceptions of symbolic corporate identity elements*, "Corporate Communications: An International Journal" Vol. 13 (2008), No. 1.

²⁹ The term *image* is from Latin *imago* (symbol, picture), *imaginatio* (likeness, idea, notion), from: W. Kopaliński, *Słownik wyrazów obcych i zwrotów obcojęzycznych*, Warszawa 1988.

³⁰ B. Rozwadowska, *Public relations...*, p. 194.

³¹ A. Rozmus, *Wizerunek uczelni niepaństwowej – empiryczne studium na temat postrzegania i oceny niepublicznego sektora usług edukacyjnych w Polsce*, [in:] *Uniwersytet...*, p. 150.

³² L.M. Arpan, A.A. Raney, P. Zivunska, *A cognitive approach to university image*, "Corporate Communication. An International Journal" Vol. 8 (2003), No. 2, p. 97.

combination of the organization's perception, including beliefs and attitudes as well as a collection of impressions regarding organizationally imperative behaviours"³³. A definition constructed this way is important as it includes all the different components of the discussed concept. It includes cognitive and emotional elements as well as the term "attitude". The above psychological components will be discussed below in the section on image structure. In order to comprehensively present image definition spheres, we first need to examine what public relations literature says on the subject.

Organizational image in public relations

In public relations, a characteristic element of defining image is the term "audience", used both to describe internal and external organization broadcasts. In practice, it means consumers, delivery people, employees but also politicians, local authorities and many other people from the organization's surroundings. Each of these groups has got their own information needs and other expectations towards the organization. From a PR point of view, understanding these differences seems to be key to successful PR activity, that is strategically planned organizational communication with the organization's environment.

"Image is the organization's overall perception belonging to external auditorium" write Markwick and Fill³⁴. Is that all? It is always either an image of something or of somebody. Positive and negative judgment of a particular organization is based on its image, which is undoubtedly dependent on a characterization of the individual perceiving a given object (the organization). In social research (tied to psychological, PR and organizational theory), we need not forget the most important – man. It is man who, as an individual or part of a group, should be the centre of analysis. Organization members need to be asked about the image of the organization they are part of. Auditorium analysis is crucial for successful control and shaping of image, especially audiences key to the organization's functioning. This way of thinking is directly related to Lasswell's classic theory of the communication process³⁵: broadcaster – transmission – recipient. In this context it is: organization – image as the subject of organizational activity – audience. Also Barańska³⁶ deliberates on image as part of the organization's overall process of communication. Based on foreign research (by Stoner, Freeman and Gilbert) she analyses the influence of style and way of internal communication on the

³³ D.F. Treadwell, T.M. Harrison, *Conceptualizing and assessing organizational image. Model images, commitment, and communication*, "Communication Monographs" Vol. 61 (1994), p. 66.

³⁴ N. Markwick, C. Fill, *Towards a framework for managing corporate identity*, "European Journal of Marketing" Vol. 31 (1995), p. 398.

³⁵ In case of image, it is about the communication of meaning.

³⁶ B. Barańska, *Relacje między komunikacją wewnętrzną a wizerunkiem*, [in:] *Pracownicy i media...*

organization's image and vice versa. "The essence and predominant goal of communication is mutual understanding between the broadcaster and recipient regarding the message", states Baranska³⁷, referring to her research carried out among employees in the Silesia voivodeship on the influence of broadcasted information on the organization's image. The author emphasizes the role of setting meaning between the broadcaster (organization) and recipient (employees) in the process of communicated organizational image.

Moreover, discussion of recipient status is key in order to highlight the difference between organizational identity and image. What, according to organization members, is constant, central and key, that is organization's outstanding attributes (basic values, organization culture, products) is defined as organizational identity. Meanwhile, image (in other words interpreted external identity) is also what organization members think about public opinion about the organization (others' perception). The question is how does internal audience rate external audience attitudes towards the organization.

Rozwadowska distinguishes four organizational image perspectives, depending on who views this mental image:

- internal perspective (organization's perception in the eyes of its members),
- market perspective (image in the eyes of its contractors, clients),
- socio-political perspective (image of public opinion),
- investor perspective (image in the eyes of shareholders and investors)³⁸.

Present here is a clear division into internal and external audiences, with additional variables. Even from an internal perspective, organization members may have information about the organization's market functioning. "It should be noted that a good image is not made up of objective facts but predominantly of impressions of people who have been exposed to these facts, states Hope, a public organization communication theoretician³⁹. Because organizations have numerous stakeholders as well as internal and external audiences (from various backgrounds and with different goals), it is difficult to create one uniform and constant image for each of these groups. Depending on exposure to stimuli as well as own needs and specific attitudes of a particular audience that is the organization's image in the eyes of that auditorium.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 167.

³⁸ B. Rozwadowska, *Public relations...*, p. 56.

³⁹ E. Hope, *Public relations instytucji użyteczności publicznej*, Gdańsk 2005, p. 4.

Image is a product of organizational identity, communicated image and image perceived by a given audience. As Kobus notes, “for communication management, identity is at the beginning of the path while image is the goal”⁴⁰.

It is a complex concept. In the 1960s, in the early days of studies on image, Boorstin emphasized, “Image is not uniform. It fluctuates between imagination and reason, between expectations and reality”⁴¹. In view of such fragmentation and fleetingness, imperative although difficult for positive reception of preferred image of the organization is professional image management.

Image refers to how an organization presents itself, both intentionally (via PR activity) and unintentionally (via spontaneous employee comments in media). How *stakeholders*⁴² perceive signals sent by the organization is how image is shaped in their minds. It is the net result of all interaction, experiences, beliefs, feelings and knowledge which the public has about the organization”⁴³.

According to Kotler, a key marketing theoretician, image is a collection of perceptions, impressions and thoughts about a given object, be it a company, product, brand, place or person⁴⁴.

Wojcik is one of the first to write about image in Polish literature on public relations, “it is perception that an individual or a group audience have about a person, company or an institution; it is not a real image which is precisely delineated but rather a mosaic of fragmentary and random details with vague differences”⁴⁵.

Rozwadowska provides a more concise definition, “organizational image is the common opinion about a company”. She stresses that this term needs not to be confused with organizational identity. “In contrast to image which reflects opinion, identity is something objective because it is made up of different types of elements through which an organization is identified (i.e. logo, colours, behavior, norms, etc.). It can be said that identity is a collection of certain specific stimuli while image is the way in which they are deciphered.”⁴⁶

⁴⁰ P. Kobus, *Droga od tożsamości do wizerunku marki*, “Świat Marketingu” June 2005, www.swiatmarketingu.pl/index.php?rodzaj=01&id_numer=852813 [accessed: 10. 01.2010].

⁴¹ D. Boorstin, *The image. A guide to pseudo-events in America*, New York 1961.

⁴² The term *stakeholder* was introduced by the Stanford Research Institute in 1963 meaning a person or another subject interested in an organization’s activity because they can be affected by its actions. In contrast to *shareholders*, mainly interested in the firm’s profit, this group is much broader, including employees, clients, creditors, delivery people and also local society. In public relations, also referred to as audiences, but it means more involvement.

⁴³ D. Bernstein, *Corporate Image...*, p. 125.

⁴⁴ P. Kotler, *Marketing. Analiza, planowanie, wdrażanie i kontrola*, Warszawa 1994.

⁴⁵ K. Wojcik, *Public Relations od A do Z*, Warszawa 1997, p. 44.

⁴⁶ B. Rozwadowska, *Public relations...*, p. 55.

Since image is organizational identity as interpreted by internal and external audiences, it cannot be either constant or static. There are numerous kinds of elements which influence perception. Image is a multidimensional concept and there are several types of it. Rozwadowska distinguishes four kinds of image: regular (how an organization is viewed from the outside), mirror (how it is perceived internally), desired (how it wishes to be seen) and optimal (most favourable at a given moment as a result of a compromise between goals and capabilities)⁴⁷.

Wilczak, as well, introduces different types of image:

- image as a true – false picture,
- strong (coherent, distinctive) – weak (amorphous, intangible) image,
- positive – negative image,
- internal (how it is seen by organization members) – external (how it is viewed from the outside, or “what do they think of us?”),
- present (at the moment) – desired (planned)⁴⁸.

Organizations always deal with numerous images, more precisely, with a series of interpenetrating and interfacing images. Image is not something constant and it changes just as opinions and preferences change. What is more, it can evolve regardless the will or intentions of interested parties such as PR people or management. Consequently, image needs to be monitored.

Tworzydło is another academic who deals with the issue of image in public relations⁴⁹. According to him, image is, “the opinion of a group of people about a person, organization, product, etc. or the *idea of mind* which stays in people’s heads about something or somebody.” Tworzydło has come up with a series of image goals which can be used in order to assess the activity of PR, so as to prevent crisis situations and to delineate direction of change, as well as image spheres which require correction. He introduces the term “image void” which is to mean “the gap between the organization’s ideal state and its perceived state”⁵⁰. Referring to Rozwadowska’s work, it can be said that he puts forward a measurement between optimal and desired image. He also suggests that this void can be calculated between internal and external image. Determining the image gap can help delineate required spheres for change and indicate the necessary direction for organizational activity, helpful in achieving image success.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 57.

⁴⁸ A. Wilczak, *Tożsamość...*, p. 212–213.

⁴⁹ D. Tworzydło, *Macierz celów wizerunkowych w procesie oceny efektów public relations*, Rzeszów 2008.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 130.

Ontological status of image

Having introduced image definitions from a PR and organizational perspective, worth while would also be a deliberation on what image is in its nature; that is to present its ontological status. Besides the study of cognition (epistemology) and the study of value (axiology), ontology is the third major branch of philosophy⁵¹. It focuses on the essence of being, its nature and structure⁵².

What is the ontological status of image? It is the internal (possessed by the individual) picture of a given object (organization) but it could also be the communicated (independently) attributes of that object. What is the difference? In the first case, image is “a subjective record of experienced sense, not a direct copy of the actual experienced but a projection, a more or less constant reading of a given image”, as noted by Alvesson, a renowned Swedish communication in organization researcher⁵³. In other words, it is a decoded broadcast.

On the other hand, the word “image” means a sign, a reflection of the object, a collection of meaning full of various emotional impressions experienced by the audience. This way, image is the communicated meaning of the “I – object” and its attributes, not necessarily present in the recipient’s mind. In this case, image is a broadcast⁵⁴ and it remains “itself” even when it hasn’t been read.

Hence, image has got two dimensions which Alvesson calls *sense image* and *communicated image*; it is in between what the essence of a given object is (close to identity), what is communicated (intentionally or not) and what is received. It is a kind of mental instrument, encompassing impressions of a given object whose characteristic trait is a holistic approach to perception of the subject.

As far as the organization, image is partly created for the needs of the institution it serves but it can also be fabricated. In most cases, though, it is the result of natural processing of information about the organization by individuals (or groups) and in this sphere it is independent of the organization’s intentional communication activities. It is difficult to study image without reference to people and their perception. In this context, Alvesson’s *sense image* remains abstract, just a philosophic tool used to describe its ontological status without a practical dimension. It is impossible to research something this virtual. For this reason, postulated is

⁵¹ W. Tatarkiewicz, *Historia filozofii*, Warszawa 2001, vol. 1.

⁵² Plato explains what exists perfectly, describing it “existing being”, cf. H. Schnadelbach, *Podstawowe problemy filozoficzne*, [in:] *Filozofia. Podstawowe pytania*, ed. E. Martens, H. Schnadelbach, Warszawa 1995, p. 69.

⁵³ M. Alvesson, *Organization: From Substance to Image*, “Organization Studies” 11 (1990), 3, p. 357.

⁵⁴ A renowned media studies expert, Stuart Hall, proved that reception does not have to take place as the broadcaster preferred, on the contrary, it can be interpreted quite differently or the opposite to what the sender intended. (cf. M. Mrozowski, *Media masowe – władza, rozrywka i biznes*, Warszawa 2001).

organizational image research and analysis rather than organizational identity. Basing on the interpretative paradigm⁵⁵, it can be said that there is no objective, constant social reality. Taking that into consideration, identity research would be methodologically difficult. However, we can empirically research how people perceive the world and, at the same time, how they view organizational image.

To conclude the above analyses, it can be said, after Bernstein and Alvesson, that image is a phenomenological fact, a specific type of concept in the minds of people and the subject of organizational activity. This view combines the two dimensions discussed above (*sense and communicated image*); image on its own and perceived “received” image. Only the latter can be analysed empirically and it can be the goal of management activity. Image, it needs to be emphasized, is to be the subject of activity. One reason for such activity is that it is imperative to audiences of a given organization. It is a kind of organizational resource. Being important to stakeholders, at the same time it has an influence on the functioning of the institution. Hence, image is an element of organizational management and strategic planning.

Image structure

To begin with, it needs to be noted that image has got a complex structure. Wilczak states that it includes beliefs, impressions and knowledge⁵⁶. Image is a perceived picture of the organization and such perception is not only limited to cognitive processing of information about the institution but also includes one’s emotional stance, meaning one’s evaluative feelings regarding the organization. For example, people can think that an organization is professional but, at the same time, not like it (i.e. tax revenue offices). Social life is full of emotions. Winkielman and Niedenthal introduce the term “embodied emotional social mind”, emphasizing that “emotions are an integral part of our perception, thinking and behaviour”⁵⁷.

Image is the outcome of subjective perception of an organization; it includes cognitive and emotional elements which are a result of organized in time sequences of changes and states coming one after another. Psychology divides these psychological processes into instrumental and disposition. The first include reception (reception of stimuli on the pre-conscious level), perception (reception on the conscious level), memory and attention. Among disposition processes, there is motivation and emotions. The latter are part of image structure. They are all,

⁵⁵ For more on research paradigms in organizational analysis see M. Kostera, *Antropologia organizacji*, Warszawa 2005.

⁵⁶ A. Wilczak, *Tożsamość...*, p. 212.

⁵⁷ P. Winkielman, P.M. Niedenthal, *Ucieleśniony emocjonalny umysł*, [in:] *Psychologia poznania społecznego*, ed. M. Kossowska, M. Kofta, Warszawa 2009, p. 83.

conscious and subconscious, processes of valuing received stimulation⁵⁸. Emotions are manifested via passion reactions (i.e. crying) and/or assessment reactions (verbalized evaluative judgments based on available evidence) as a result of received stimuli, either sensory (i.e. nice touch) or symbolic (i.e. moving play). It needs to be added that emotions result from different sources: temporary (at a specific moment in time), memory, or can be anticipated (positive emotions can be felt based on imagery stimulation, i.e. dreaming about sunny holidays in tropics or a pay raise at work make us smile). Perception of stimuli and their emotional evaluation are processed separately, as proven by research by LeDoux⁵⁹. Information from the outside world processed in the brain core travels via synapses to the amygdala where an emotional reaction takes place. Long years of experiments by LeDoux⁶⁰ have shown that when the work of the intermediary organ (amygdala) is suspended, people lose the ability to assess emotionally, even though they receive stimuli. What is more, experiments with subliminal reception of stimuli have shown that subconscious assessment of an emotional stimulus can precede its conscious processing by perception systems. In other words, we may feel anxiety without knowing why. These classic examples show that cognition and emotion most often come in twos, although not necessarily. Hence, when discussing image structure, it is imperative to examine all its elements.

As mentioned above, besides perception and emotions, image is also tied to attitude. “A person’s attitude toward a random object (thing, events, idea, person) is how he views, positively or negatively, that object, states Wojciszke⁶¹. Attitude has got three determinants: cognitive, emotional and behavioral. According to Bohner and Wanke⁶², a basic utilitarian function of attitude is to organize knowledge about the world, as a result of which the reaction is either to come closer or to distance oneself from a given object. Another imperative function of attitude, “serving higher psychological needs”, is expression, i.e. expressing or defending our outlook on life or cultural identity⁶³. Attitudes have different intensity, they represent a point on the object’s assessment continuum. A constant opinion about X lies on the positive-negative continuum.

Image as well, even though it exists on many different dimensions, is linearly placed between the plus and the minus.

⁵⁸ P. Ekman, R.J. Davidson, *Natura emocji. Podstawowe zagadnienia*, Gdańsk 1998.

⁵⁹ J.E. LeDoux, *Mózg emocjonalny. Tajemnicze podstawy życia emocjonalnego*, Poznań 2000.

⁶⁰ It should be noted that the experiments were carried out in order to answer a key psychological question, what is first – emotion or cognition? Aside from Le Doux, others taking part in the research were psychologists such as R. Zajonc, A. Damasio, and in Poland M. Jarymowicz.

⁶¹ B. Wojciszke, *Człowiek wśród ludzi. Zarys psychologii społecznej*, Warszawa, 2003, p. 180.

⁶² G. Bohner, M. Wanke, *Postawy i zmiana postaw*, Gdańsk 2004, p. 20.

⁶³ B. Wojciszke discusses in more detail orientation function, instrumental function, function of expressing values and socio-adaptation function and ego defense function.

It should be noted that a particular attitude as well as emotional reaction is a product of the perceived object's traits as well as the viewer's traits, his personal characteristics, expectations and attitudes toward the nature of the world.

In conclusion, it can be said that image may include cognitive components (knowledge, beliefs, opinions, observations), impressions (emotional judgments) and attitude (constant beliefs) toward an organization. This structural triad is consistent with the earlier mentioned Treadwell and Harrison's definition of image.

Image is a picture, a deciphered message broadcasted by an organization and evaluated by the recipient (from the inside or the outside world). Psychological phenomena such as a person's outlook on life and his world view influence human behaviour, including organizational behaviour. Image, a product with a specific ontological status and structure, is one of these phenomena. Cognitive representations of the world in an individual's mind have an influence on the quality of his functioning within social institutions. It is how we learn about the world and how we exchange our perceptions with others that we develop an inter-subjective view of an organization. The way we view reality is via common social opinion compared with "other views" of the world as seen by people from our closer and more distant environment⁶⁴.

Image is one way through which organizations communicate, one of its symbolic messages used to get to know it and manage it effectively. It has not only a communication function but also a utilitarian one, since it can be used in public relations activity. But that is a whole another story.

⁶⁴ This phenomenon, known as "looking glass self" was described by Charles Cooley (cf. Ch.H. Cooley, *Jaźń społeczna – znaczenie „Ja”*, [in:] J. Mucha, *Cooley*, Warszawa 1992).