8. Auditing Corporate Visual Identity management:

development and use of a qualitative research instrument

Corporate Visual Identity (CVI) management not only comprises the design of a CVI, but also the way the CVI is put into practice. Based on a model for assessing quality management, a qualitative research instrument was developed to audit CVI management, consisting of three methods: document analysis, a self-assessment meeting and in-depth interviews. The instrument was used to assess CVI management in three organizations in the Netherlands. The results underline the usefulness of the instrument as well as the comprehensiveness of CVI management. The value of this instrument is that it will help CVI managers to gain more insight into the organizational aspects of CVI management in their organization. With the results of the audit, CVI management can be developed in a structured and planned way.

Introduction

The corporate identity mix consists of symbols, communication and behavior (Birkigt and Stadler, 1986), which must all be in alignment to create a strong and unambiguous impression of an organization. Research on corporate identity may focus on the corporate identity mix (Van Riel and Balmer, 1997; Leitch and Motion, 1999; Balmer, 2001), the relationship between corporate identity – what the organization wants to be – and corporate image – how the organization is perceived – (cf. Markwick and Fill, 1997; Stuart, 1999), or the relationship between the actual and the ideal identity of an organization (cf. Balmer and Greyser, 2002; Illia, Schmid, Fischbach, Hangartner and Rivola, 2004). In theoretical frameworks for corporate identity (cf. Van Riel and Balmer, 1997; Stuart, 1999; Cornelissen and Elving, 2003) there is insufficient emphasis on managing corporate visual identity (CVI). Symbols such as the logo, name, typography,
color palette and graphics are primarily perceived as instrumental in expressing the identity of an organization (Schultz, Hatch and Larsen, 2000; Van Riel and Van den Ban, 2001). Nevertheless, many companies spend millions on developing or adjusting their CVI. Unilever, for example, invested ten million euros in developing and implementing a new logo. Considering the size of these investments, one may assume that the company considers it to be important that the CVI is effectively embedded in an organization after implementing the visual elements. Little is known on the return of investments in CVI. Studies in the area of CVI tend to focus on standardization by design (Melewar and Saunders, 1999; Melewar and Saunders, 2000; Melewar, Saunders and Balmer, 2000; Melewar, Saunders and Balmer, 2001) and the perceived impact on, amongst other things, sales, consumer goodwill, market share and executive recruitment (Melewar and Saunders, 1998). In chapter 5, we distinguished various CVI management measures and it turned out that the number of measures taken significantly influences the consistency of CVI. In chapter 6, we discovered that knowledge of the CVI strategy was an important predictor, and that this was influenced by the knowledge of the strategy of the organization as a whole. We also found that learning processes have a significant influence on CVI as well as on the use of tools and support.

This paper addresses the assessment of corporate visual identity using a “CVI management audit.” This audit is designed to shed light on relevant practices involving the use of CVI, and focuses on the way a CVI is managed and embedded in the organization. It is assumed that the causes of problems relating to the consistent use of a CVI can be found in the CVI management practices within the organization. The audit instrument was used to evaluate CVI management in three organizations. The results of these case studies shed light on the usefulness of the instrument.

First, we discuss the various approaches to auditing, in particular organizational auditing and audits of organizational communication and corporate identity. Then, the design and rationale of the CVI management audit instrument is outlined. After that, the use and results of the instrument in the three case studies is addressed. The paper
concludes with a discussion of the value of the audit instrument and suggestions for future research as well as the practical implications for CVI management that can be derived from the case studies.

**Auditing in organizations**

In general, audits are conducted to gather information about strengths and weaknesses within organizations and to provide a foundation for future developments. Auditing is a familiar phenomenon in a variety of fields and professions. Below, we briefly explore organizational audits, communication audits, corporate identity audits, and finally the visual audit.

The underlying principle in organizational audits is continuous improvement of the performance of these organizations. A key concept is quality management, which was originally developed in the context of manufacturing. One of the main frameworks for managing quality is Total Quality Management (TQM). Factors such as customer orientation, leadership commitment, employee participation and process orientation are measured to gain insight into the level of quality management in the organization. During an audit, the factors investigated are based on specific research objectives and the focus differs among authors (cf. Dale, Boaden Wilcox and McQuater, 1997; Jones and Ryan, 2002; Castka, Bamber and Sharp, 2003; Li and Yang, 2003; Llorëns Montes, Verdú Jover and Molina Fernández, 2003). Methods used are content analysis of documents, self-assessments, surveys and interviews. The advantages of a generic TQM model are its application longitudinally, the fact that it can be applied across business units, and the possibility to compare results among a variety of organizations (Silvestro, 2001; Lagrosen, 2003). The TQM framework has been used in various types of business – such as higher education, healthcare, local authority, e-business, hotel industry – and for studying various areas within the organization such as, for example, knowledge management and information and communication technology (ICT) management.
Communication audits focus on the internal and/or external communication of organizations. A communication audit, which is an assessment of an organization’s communication health, is designed to address the efficiency of communication and information management. It analyses formal and informal information flows and describes the communication climate and verbal and non-verbal communicative underpinnings of culture (Loughman, Fleck and Snipes, 2000). It helps senior management to coordinate tasks and responsibilities that are necessary for achieving the goals of the organization (Goldhaber and Rogers, 1979). The results of a communication audit provide a foundation for communication strategies, which should ultimately improve organizational effectiveness (Gray and Laidlaw, 2004). Problems in communication may lie in, for instance, a lack of information on tasks or strategy, poor upward communication, faulty channels and lack of visibility of senior managers. Questions such as who the organization should communicate with, what it should communicate about – and how – can be resolved with an audit. Audits can be used to determine the impact of new communication programs or organizational innovations, to identify the current organizational structure or key communication groups prior to restructuring, to gain insight into communication costs or to develop communication training to solve problems identified by the audit (Goldhaber and Rogers, 1993). Communication audits conducted in organizations undergoing change may generate knowledge that can be helpful in designing communication strategies for similar situations in the future (Quinn and Hargie, 2004). Methods used in communication audits include questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, communication logs, observation, network analysis and the critical incidents technique (cf. Hargie and Tourish, 2000; Downs and Adrian, 2004). Well-known is the communication audit of the International Communication Association (ICA), which was originally developed to obtain standardized procedures for assessing the communication system of organizations, and was intended to facilitate comparisons among organizations (Goldhaber and Rogers, 1979; Goldhaber, 2002).
Audits in the area of corporate identity focus on ways in which employees perceive the organization (cf. Van Rekom, 1998; Kiriakidou and Millward, 2000) or external stakeholders (cf. Dowling, 1993). The main methods used are surveys and interviews. Van Rekom (1998) developed an instrument for finding a concise representation of an organization. Via laddering-technique employees are being asked what they do and why it is important. A self-assessment tool for corporate identity was developed by Olins and Selame (2000): it is a survey containing questions about, for instance, how much internal and external stakeholders know about an organization, what its products and services are and what opinions and judgments different stakeholders have about the company. This audit is helpful in the analysis phase of designing a corporate identity program and to (re)define the corporate identity structure. For the latter, Olins (1989) distinguished three types. Where there is a monolithic identity, all activities carry the same brand. An endorsed identity has separate brands, developed for products and services, or parts of the organization; however a visual cue or a descriptor shows its connection with the parent organization. Finally, a branded identity has several brands without any visual or verbal connection to each other or to the parent. Reasons for conducting a corporate identity audit are acquisitions, mergers, diversifications, organizational changes or other types of structural, strategic or management change. Other reasons are misunderstanding of corporate values, or growth of the organization, which may have resulted in mixed messages about what the company is and stands for.

A limited assessment of corporate identity is a visual audit, which only focuses on the visual expressions of the organization and which is usually considered when an organization decides to design a new visual identity. The visual audit consists of an investigation and analysis of how various parts of the organization present themselves in nomenclature, heraldry and symbols, typefaces, uniforms and dress, stationery, publications, advertisements, signage and vehicles (Olins, 1995). Documents and photographs are collected and presented on a “wall of shame.” The idea is that various visual expressions of an organization will result in discussions – and decisions – on the
right or wrong way to go in CVI development. A visual audit may also be used as an instrument to give feedback on the materials produced by several departments in the organization and their use of the CVI.

As useful as a corporate identity audit and a visual audit may be in practice, neither focuses on the internal causes of inconsistencies in the CVI. Corporate identity audits focus on current perceptions of the organization and a visual audit merely shows inconsistencies in presentation; however, both can be very confrontational. The CVI management audit which we present in this paper focuses on the question why such deviations in CVI occurred. Auditing CVI management will be a combination of a visual audit and an organizational audit: the first shows deviations in the application of the CVI and the second is designed to reveal management practices in relation to the CVI which help or hinder applying it consistently. Conducting an audit for CVI management should result in 1) insight into the current situation – strengths and weaknesses in management practices – and 2) options for improvement.

The background of the instrument used to audit CVI management

Within organizational audits, TQM is one of the main frameworks for managing quality. The European Foundation of Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence model is a standardized method within the TQM approach (see www.efqm.org). This model consists of five attention areas related to organizational aspects, four attention areas to results and a feedback loop (for innovation and learning). The framework is flexible and may be used for auditing specific parts of the organization or specific subjects. We decided to adapt the model of EFQM into an instrument for auditing CVI management because: a) the attention areas in the model were applicable to CVI management practices, b) the model was familiar to many in a wide variety of organizations, c) it included strategic, tactical and operational aspects, and d) it can encompass both structural and cultural practices.
We resolved to focus on the attention areas in the organization part of the EFQM model when designing an instrument for auditing CVI management. In our view, these areas consist of enablers, which determine CVI management and thus the output of the corporate visual identity. The five attention areas in the organization section of the EFQM model are: 1) Leadership, 2) Policy & Strategy, 3) People, 4) Partnerships & Resources, and 5) Processes.

**Leadership**

Leadership refers to involvement and commitment by senior management, not only in the development phase of a new or adapted CVI, but also during maintenance and management. If they do not foster the CVI and neglect their function as a role model, this will have negative consequences. Managers have to set the right example. Otherwise, the authority of the department charged with implementing and maintaining the CVI will be undermined. Critical factors are vision on corporate identity (what is the organization and what does it stand for?) and corporate visual identity, the way leaders implicitly or explicitly preach about it, as well as their behavior in practice (applying the CVI guidelines). In chapter 5 we found that the behavior of managers has an effect on the consistency of a CVI.

**Policy & Strategy**

The goals of the organization should ideally be transformed into a clear policy and strategy, together with plans, budgets, and information and communication about it. There is a significant correlation between knowledge of CVI strategy and the consistency of a CVI (see chapter 6). The main issues in the strategy and policy of CVI management are: 1) to what extent has the positioning of the organization and the central idea of corporate identity been elaborated into a design strategy? 2) the definition of an identity structure (with possible subdivisions such as monolithic, endorsed and branded) and 3)
the development and maintenance of practical CVI guidelines for relevant application areas and carriers.

**People**

The attention area called People relates to the employees. Although a single department may be formally responsible for the development of CVI management, almost every staff member has influence on the outcomes of CVI. The optimal situation is when applying the CVI is perceived as a mutual responsibility and all employees know about the CVI guidelines. Socialization processes, such as formal learning by induction programs or informal learning by feedback or imitating managers, have a significant influence on the consistency of a CVI (see chapter 6). Earlier research in another field showed that employees not always put guidelines into practice (Van Gemert, 2003). When this is the case, it is important to know why not. Knowledge about the CVI should not be restricted to guidelines (how to use CVI), but also include the design strategy of the CVI and its relation to the organization (why use CVI and why it fits the organization).

**Partnerships & Resources**

Within the working environment, staff members need information and suitable instruments to apply the CVI. What technology is used to distribute information (for instance a digital manual on the Internet) and to support producing and ordering, for instance, technical tools? It is also helpful when staff can rely on selected preferred suppliers and partners who have the necessary knowledge and skills to apply the CVI standards and guidelines. Suppliers and partners may be design agencies or suppliers who produce, for instance, signage (inside and/or outside buildings) or apply the corporate visual identity on vehicles. Earlier research has shown that access to guidelines and preferred suppliers are important instruments for those managing the CVI (see chapter 5).
Processes

Processes comprise the division of tasks and responsibilities (who is in charge of developing, ordering and producing CVI items? How do departments work together and are their processes geared to each other? And how are processes monitored and improvements implemented? Within CVI management, the design of a process may depend on the application area. For example, the design of a leaflet or direct mailing can not be predetermined in detail. It will depend on the professionalism of the staff members who are responsible for producing these communication materials. For application areas such as signage for buildings and vehicles, on the other hand, there is a need for detailed standards and guidelines, and of preferred suppliers with knowledge of the CVI. In this case, procedures will be helpful in producing consistent CVI materials.

Critical factors when measuring the five attention areas in the CVI management audit are based on EFQM and adapted for CVI management, using knowledge gained from earlier studies. An exploratory study on managing the CVI distinguished several dimensions in the management of CVI, which were related to structure, culture and technology (Van den Bosch, 2000). Each dimension included characteristics and practices within the organization helping or hindering consistent use of the CVI. Subsequent empirical studies explored the influences of single measures in managing the CVI, and organizational characteristics and CVI management characteristics on the consistency of a CVI (see chapters 5 to 7). These studies offered some insight into the mechanisms of CVI management and the results were incorporated into the attention areas of the CVI management audit. Table 8.1 shows the critical factors in each attention area of the CVI management audit.

For the reason that the audit should result in improvement options, we adopted the Deming cycle, named after W. Edwards Deming. In the 1950s he proposed that continuous improvement could be analyzed with the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle. With regard to CVI management, Plan stands for the starting point of the CVI and the intended
CVI management practices, *Do* for actual practices, *Check* relates to the assessment of *Do* in relation to the Plan, and *Act* deals with adjustment and changes needed to make improvements, which should be described in the next version of the Plan. Adopting the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle should result in continuous improvement. In addition to critical factors when managing the CVI, we distinguished factors that affect continuous development, such as assessment practices, identifying suggestions for improvement and developments in each attention area (see Table 8.1).

Table 8.1: Attention areas, critical factors and continuous development in CVI management

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attention Area</th>
<th>Critical Factors</th>
<th>Continuous Development</th>
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| Leadership          | • Vision on corporate identity  
                      | • Involvement and commitment of CEO and senior management  
                      | • Management setting the example  
          | • Notification of organizational developments related to the CVI  
                      | • Involvement of management in CVI development  
| Strategy and Policy | • Design strategy of CVI and philosophy of CVI design  
                      | • Definition of identity structure  
                      | • CVI guidelines for relevant application areas and carriers  
                      | • Means available for implementing CVI (capacity and budgets)  
                      | • Assessment and planned development of CVI, identity structure and CVI management  
                      | • Monitoring environmental changes and validating their impact on the (use of) the CVI  
| People              | • Induction programs and information for new hires  
                      | • Investment in knowledge (organization and CVI strategy) and skills of specialists  
                      | • Knowledge of tools and information channels of CVI  
                      | • Structural and incidental feedback on use of CVI  
                      | • Encouragement of bottom-up communication related to the CVI  
| Partnerships & Resources | • Digital manual which is actual, accessible and applicable  
                      | • Instruments and technical tools to apply CVI, and order and maintain CVI carriers  
                      | • Help desk  
                      | • Selection of preferred suppliers  
                      | • Service Level Agreements with internal and external suppliers  
                      | • Regular updates in Digital Manual  
                      | • Monitoring helpdesk records  
                      | • Maintenance of CVI carriers  
                      | • Assessment and corrective actions towards preferred suppliers, based on Service Level Agreements  
| Processes           | • Organization for CVI development and management (tasks, responsibilities and skills)  
                      | • Regular consultation between corporate identity manager and key figures applying the CVI  
                      | • Procedures for purchasing CVI carriers  
                      | • Bottom-up investigation of problems and suggestions for improvement  
                      | • Assessment responsibilities and internal departments  
                      | • Project teams for improvement programs and implementing actions  |
Insight into critical factors and continuous improvement in each attention area should result in a comprehensive view of managing the CVI in an organization. For assessment, information is needed at a strategic, tactical and operational level.

**Auditing CVI management**

We distinguish three steps in the use of the research instrument to audit CVI Management: 1) defining the scope, 2) data collection, and 3) analysis and reporting.

**Defining the scope**

In the first step the scope of the audit must be defined. For instance, depending on the size and number of locations (including those abroad), a number of specific business units or locations can be selected. Another selection criterion may be the CVI applications. Problems may occur related to the use of CVI on printed materials, whereas the signage on buildings may not need auditing as this may be consistent with the guidelines. These choices have an impact on the selection of auditors. It may be that knowledge of specialized operational areas (for example, ICT issues, vehicles or buildings) is needed in the audit team.

Internal and external documents, such as websites, annual reports, strategy statements, customer documentation, internal and external newsletters provide insight into the business and structure of the organization. These documents also give an impression of how the organization presents itself, either in words or visually. The corporate visual identity handbook – whether printed or available in digital form – shows the CVI guidelines (logo or logos, color palette, typography, images, etc.), their applications and an indication of when the latest revision took place. An intake interview with the person who is responsible for CVI management provides an initial impression of good points as well as bottlenecks in managing the CVI. Information gathered from an
analysis of documents and the intake interview is structured into attention areas and critical factors and practices for continuous improvement (see Table 8.1).

The scope of the audit is defined. Key individuals and departments are identified to participate and suitable auditors are selected, depending on the scope.

Data collection

The data collection method consists of a self-assessment carried out by a focus group, a meeting to instruct interviewers, and interviews using a semi-structured questionnaire.

We developed a workbook to use in a self-assessment meeting. This was based on the self-assessment workbook of the Instituut Nederlandse Kwaliteit (INK), the Dutch equivalent of EFQM (see www.ink.nl), and adapted for CVI management. Self-assessment is perceived as a comprehensive and systematic review of an organization’s activities and results, which identifies strengths and areas in which improvements can be made (Balbastre Benavent, Cruz Ros and Moreno-Luzón, 2003). In the workbook assessment of CVI management, critical factors and factors related to the continuous improvement of each attention area (see Table 8.1) are presented as multiple-choice propositions about the performance of the organization. Participants choose the most applicable proposition: A, B or C. An A indicates limited attention to CVI in the organization and a C indicates the highest dedication to managing the CVI, underpinned by, for instance, co-operation between different departments and units, and structural attention to improvements in managing the CVI. The B choice represents an intermediate position. Table 8.2 shows examples of propositions in the various attention areas. The example in the attention area ‘People’ relates to continuous development.

The propositions are discussed in a self-assessment meeting with key figures of key departments and a moderator – an auditor. Visual materials, collected in advance, are used as an illustration of practical situations or to stimulate discussion. Assessing the visual materials is comparable with a visual audit. Pitfalls for focus groups are “groupthink” (Janis, 1982) or group polarization through a “risky shift” or a “cautious
shift” (Brown, 1986). To minimize these effects, participants first choose the propositions individually. Participants who have made extreme choices explain their reasons. Then, after some discussion, the final choice is determined. The results of the self-assessment are the choices of the group, which provide an initial indication of strengths and weaknesses in attention areas, and ‘blind spots’ of which the group is unaware, and areas that require further research. A choices indicate underdeveloped areas (weaknesses) and C choices indicate areas of CVI management which are fully developed (strengths). Information gathered in the self-assessment meeting is checked during in-depth interviews with other members of the organization.

Table 8.2: Examples of propositions in a variety of attention areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership: managers setting the example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(A) Managers do not pay much attention to CVI. It is the sole responsibility of the communication department.</td>
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<td>(B) Managers say that the CVI is important, but they fail to set an example themselves.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(C) Managers are aware in their role of setting an example. They encourage the use of the CVI and are critical when it is not applied.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Strategy and Policy: defining the identity structure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(A) The corporate identity structure has been developed in the past but we do not know the reasons for the choices made.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(B) Background information on the corporate identity structure has been described and can be found in &lt;to be addressed&gt;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C) Background information on the corporate identity structure has been described and can be found in &lt;to be addressed&gt;. Criteria for future development are also described.</td>
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<th>People: Incidental feedback (continuous development)</th>
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<tr>
<td>(A) Mistakes in applying the CVI are noticed, but nobody talks about them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(B) Mistakes in applying the CVI result in criticism. On the other hand nobody says anything when the CVI is applied correctly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(C) In our organization good use of the CVI is noticed. Mistakes are used to make future improvements.</td>
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<th>Partnership and resources: accessibility of CVI guidelines</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>(A) CVI guidelines are accessible to a select group of employees.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(B) CVI guidelines are accessible to the majority of employees.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(C) CVI guidelines are accessible to employees and for suppliers of our organization.</td>
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<th>Processes: consultation</th>
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<tr>
<td>(A) We do not have regular meetings with CVI on the agenda. Ad-hoc solutions are common.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(B) CVI is a subject on the agenda of meetings within the communication department.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(C) CVI is also a subject on the agenda in meetings with other departments at an operational level.</td>
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</table>
The semi-structured questionnaire for the interviews covers questions on issues in all attention areas (see Table 8.1). Each level (strategic, tactical and operational) has its specific focus. Organizational developments can be explored more fully in interviews at a strategic level, and interviews at a tactical and operational levels deal with issues such as familiarity with and usability of guidelines, preferred suppliers, information channels to get specific information, and the availability and usability of tools. Interviewees are asked to collect visual materials from their unit or department in advance. Interviews are the best method for gathering qualitative information using in-depth questions. Interviewees are able to refer the questions to others if they do not know the answer themselves, and the auditor can go into the process of a special issue: who made decisions on design, where did this person obtain the guidelines from, what was missing in the guidelines, who were involved internally and externally, who selected the supplier, what problems did they came across, and how did they deal with them? When the interviewer asks for a description of the process of producing specific materials, this provides insight into various critical factors in several attention areas.

Before conducting the interviews, the audit team is provided with information about the organization, the scope of the audit, the interviewees, why they were selected for the audit, and finally instructions for interviewing. For reason of accuracy the interviews are tape recorded (with the permission of the interviewee) and transcribed. To enhance the usefulness of data, every auditor is asked to identify areas, which need to be checked in other interviews (Quinn Patton, 2002). The transcript of the interviews has a fixed order: 1) information about the department, interviewer and relation to CVI management, 2) good points in CVI and CVI management within the organization, 3) wishes, requirements and improvements in CVI and CVI management, 4) influences inside and outside the organization which may have an impact on the CVI and CVI management in the near future and 5) information which should be checked in other interviews or in written documents. The report on 2) and 3) covers all the attention areas (see Table 8.1).
The data-collection phase delivers the results of the self-assessment meeting, which are checked in the interviews. Information gathered in interviews is cross-checked in other interviews or by written documents. Take for example CVI guidelines for specific applications. In interviews it is carefully checked whether interviewees know about the guidelines and how they were given instructions (in an induction program – suitable for the attention area People – or in a manual – suitable for the attention area Partnerships & Resources). When an interviewee mentions guidelines, it is checked whether the guidelines are put down in writing and put into practice. When an interviewee mentions the lack of guidelines, it is cross-checked whether these actually exist and whether the interviewee has in fact been shown them or could have knowledge of.

Analysis and reporting

The last step of the CVI management audit consists of analyzing the results of the self-assessment and the interview reports, a meeting with the auditors to discuss their findings and formulate conclusions and recommendations, and finally the delivery of an audit report. In preparations for the meeting, the results of the self-assessment are compared with interview reports. Is there a consistent result in critical factors and in practice in use for continuous development? If not, this needs extra attention in the discussion in the meeting with the audit team. Within the meeting, the analysis involves connecting and interpreting the data, qualifying what is more or less important, distinguishing between general findings and those just affecting some parts of the organization and between CVI (design) and CVI management. The meeting results in findings, conclusions and recommendations to improve CVI management. Although the CVI management audit mainly focuses on the organizational aspect, which is divided into the attention areas, results may also touch on the design of CVI or on identity issues. Therefore the recommendations may comprise:
**Identity:** These recommendations are related to the starting points of the design, the design philosophy and the development of the CVI in relation with organizational developments. For instance, new markets and strategic repositioning may need further exploration and strategic decisions about the CVI. The CVI management audit will not produce answers, but it will bring to light what needs to be studied in depth.

**Design:** Developing a CVI does not always imply introducing a new logo. It may be that typography or the color palette needs adjustments to modernize the CVI or to enhance the applicability of the CVI. Further development may be needed for some application areas.

**Organization:** There are various possible recommendations for managing the CVI, which are related to one or more of the attention areas covered by the instrument (see Table 8.1). These recommendations do not concern the design of the CVI, but rather the organizational perspective. What needs to be done within the organization to enhance the correct use of the CVI?

The final result is an audit report with findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Conducting a CVI management audit has some practical prerequisites. First, the composition of the audit team should reflect the scope of the audit. For instance, more specialized knowledge may be needed for the various applications of CVI, such as ICT, corporate wear, vehicles or signage on buildings. The audit team includes specialists on specific CVI applications as well as generalists with knowledge of organizational and managerial issues. This approach involves auditors working collaboratively with practitioners (see Jones, 2002). There is a risk of “interviewers’ belief”, in which interviewees seek for evidence of their own opinion. They must be objective, unbiased and have some knowledge about CVI applications. Each auditor needs to be trained to listen carefully, to interpret in an unbiased way, and to give good feedback and ask in-depth questions to bring the real issues to the surface.
Second, employees may feel the audit is designed to check whether they are doing things right. Therefore, a letter from someone at a senior level (preferably the CEO) should introduce the audit and ask for everyone’s co-operation. Above all, one should emphasize the fact that the most important objectives are to identify current best practice and directions for improvement.

Third, the self-assessment meeting may not be suitable for every organization, for instance because this type of meeting might previously have had some negative side-effects, it may take too much of the participants’ time (they may therefore not get permission from their managers to attend), or there may be frictions between departments. Research has shown that several approaches to self-assessment can be successful, but whatever approach is chosen, it must fit the organization and self-assessment must be considered from a holistic perspective to get the best results (Samuelsson and Nilsson, 2002). Without a self-assessment, extra interviews will be needed to gather sufficient qualitative information.

**Case studies**

The audit instrument was used to assess CVI management in three organizations in the Netherlands. Two were manufacturing organizations (profit) and one was service-oriented (nonprofit). To ensure anonymity, letters are used to describe the organizations. Table 8.3 provides an overview of the organizations, the scope of the audit and the methods used. We have limited the case descriptions to the main issues and recommended actions.
Table 8.3: Overview of the organizations, the scope of the audit and methods used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Scope</th>
<th>Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. A multi-utility company (among other things, supplier of energy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All business units</td>
<td>document analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loose ends in implementation of CVI</td>
<td>intake interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organizational issues</td>
<td>self-assessment meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13 persons interviewed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. A national pension fund</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organization of one of the two brands owned by the fund</td>
<td>document analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CVI (design)</td>
<td>intake interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organizational issues</td>
<td>self-assessment meeting</td>
</tr>
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<td>15 persons interviewed</td>
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<td>C. A pharmaceutical company</td>
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<td>Operations in the Netherlands</td>
<td>document analysis</td>
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<td>CVI (design)</td>
<td>intake interview</td>
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<td>Organizational issues</td>
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<td>9 persons interviewed</td>
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Organization A was the result of many mergers. In general, employees liked the CVI because of the design quality and its application on a range of carriers. The CVI had supported the integration process after the latest merger. Organization A was also the owner of many other (product and service) brands, which were inherited from previous mergers and acquisitions. The communication specialists in the business units lacked knowledge of these brands and how to use them in relation to the CVI. New products and services resulted in even more brands. A major organizational issue was a decision on a forthcoming change in the purchasing processes. A central facilities organization was set up to purchase CVI items such as stationery and signage for buildings and vehicles as well as arrange the maintenance of these carriers. Internal and external suppliers were therefore also interviewed and they were asked to record what went well and what could be improved and how.

The first recommendation concerned purchasing, maintenance and the service level agreements between internal departments as well as between the organization and external suppliers. Second, communication specialists needed to know about the identity structure of CVI – the core brand and its relationship to all the other brands (for products and services). A third recommendation of the audit concerned strategic decisions such as
acquiring and selling parts of the company. Negotiations about selling or liberalizing parts of the company also affect the CVI. The CVI carriers have to be adapted or neutralized. Neutralization is necessary to prevent, for instance, vehicles (in bad condition) still being found in the corporate colors after many years. Even when the logo has been removed, a vehicle with conspicuous colors will be recognized and connected to the company, which no longer owns the carrier.

Partly based on our findings, Organization A decided to restructure all their brands into a system of four quadrants, which made clear how prominent the corporate logo was, why and when. The first quadrant gave maximum visibility to the corporate (parent) brand, while in the fourth quadrant the corporate logo was not used at all. Over time, sub-brands may develop in one of these extreme directions. The system made clear what the core competences were and which activities were earmarked for sale.

This company conducted a second audit two years after the first one. This time, the focus was on the internal facilities department, which had become responsible for ordering CVI items and maintaining CVI carriers. Maintenance was divided into regular and incidental maintenance – for instance of signage and vehicles – as well as replacing carriers.

Self-assessment in Organization B resulted in awareness that there was a lack of cooperation among the various departments involved in the CVI. The communication department was responsible for the CVI, the ICT department for the templates and the facilities department for mailings to clients. Each department had problems, which could not be solved on their own. Co-operation among the departments would not only help to solve the problems and improve efficiency, but it would have a positive impact on the consistency of CVI as well. During the self-assessment the three departments took the decision to collaborate and work on a improvement plan. The self-assessment also revealed blind spots in the organization, such as the public affairs department, and other departments that needed further assessment, as they felt that they were applying the CVI
guidelines correctly. It turned out that the public affairs department simply went their own way and did not feel obliged to comply with the CVI guidelines distributed by the marketing department. Besides, they worked closely with the CEO, who was not sensitive to CVI issues. It turned out that the department that thought they did very well could not see the difference between a good and a wrong layout of a simple item such as a letterhead.

The audit resulted in recommendations and a plan of approach, in which a number of actions were defined. In the first year one employee was given responsibility for CVI development and, step by step, the corporate communications department got visibly involved in CVI management. Although CVI was not at the top of the management agenda, practical action plans and solutions – together with more efficiency (and cost-savings) – were helpful in showing the need for CVI management. There is still co-operation between the departments, which have experienced the value of working together to solve problems. Later the organization hired a corporate communication manager, who is a member of the management team, which is chaired by with the CEO. He is responsible for public affairs activities and there are plans to move CVI management from marketing to corporate communications.

Organization C had implemented an appealing CVI and all the employees were proud of it. The designer was still providing consultancy to this organization and especially the in-house studio, which was responsible for applying the CVI on marketing communication materials, such as direct mailings, and packaging. The self-assessment showed that few people knew how to use the CVI and that not every department had access to either the guidelines or the appropriate tools needed to apply the guidelines. For instance, the ICT department did not install the templates that were necessary to create correspondence and presentations according to the CVI guidelines. This was simply not defined in their working procedures. The in-house studio was responsible for archiving materials, but these were not accessible to others, as they worked with different computer systems.
Apple, whereas the other employees used computers with Microsoft Windows software. The marketing department wanted a more differentiated CVI for several markets and for special purposes. An operational CVI team discussed issues monthly, but there was a lack of decisiveness and clear actions to develop the CVI. They just discussed the guidelines and neglected organizational aspects. The CVI itself fitted the type of organization and was greatly appreciated by both the CEO and the staff. Everyone liked to talk about the design philosophy. However, the CVI was stuck at the level of design and was not developed further into guidelines for communication and marketing purposes. The in-house department did not have the knowledge and skills to make this step.

The recommendations we made consisted of a mixture of actions. A strategic CVI platform needed to be created for investigating and developing the CVI — together with external experts — for various markets and audiences. On a tactical level, look-and-feel sessions were recommended for the in-house design team — together with the designer — to extend their knowledge about practical applications. In the operational CVI team knowledge of organizational processes was needed as well as more decisiveness with clear action plans and service-level agreements between departments — for instance to set working procedures and ensure that employees would have the equipment and tools they needed to apply the CVI as well as access to CVI guidelines via the company’s intranet.

**Discussion and conclusions**

The objective of the audit was to develop an instrument for assessing CVI management. Its use should result in pinpointing strengths and weaknesses, as well as recommending actions to improve the management of the CVI. In the first part of this section, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the instrument, and in the second we discuss general findings and practical implications for managing the CVI.

The instrument for assessing managing CVI was based on the principles of the Dutch equivalent of EFQM. The advantage of the model was its approach, with areas for
attention, in which managing the CVI could be structured in specific practices. It turned out that the attention areas of the EFQM model were applicable for CVI management. Judging actual practices in relation to the Plan-Do-Check-Adapt cycle showed where continuous development was getting stuck and what might help to make improvements. Take for example an organization with outdated guidelines. According to the cycle, new developments may well be checked against the original plan, but when the guidelines have never been adapted (into a new plan), this will hinder continuous development.

The self-assessment brought various issues to light at a very early stage of the audit. Apart from illuminating areas for improvement, self-assessment provides an important cultural benefit because it encourages an ethos of continuous improvement, promotes a holistic perspective and allows people to gain a broader understanding of the business (Samuelsson and Nilsson, 2002). The case studies show that self-assessments may produce positive side effects, which are valuable for CVI management. In general, participants became aware of the reach of CVI management and their role in it. They realized that their view was a partial one and that many had neglected to look further than the boundaries of their own department. In one organization three departments decided to take immediate actions and collaborate. There is always a risk that a self-assessment meeting may generate what’s known as “groupthink” (Janis, 1982) or that group polarization may take place (Brown, 1986). For example, the participants may have a limited vision, the group may be highly selective in presenting information, or that the group may be over-confident about its ideas. We minimized such risks by arranging for propositions to be chosen individually. However, in the discussion afterwards, there is still a risk. Therefore, we had to crosscheck information from the self-assessment with in-depth interviews and additional documents. In one case, for instance, we found a biased self-image. The people in the department thought they were applying the guidelines correctly, but it transpired that they could not see the difference between a correct and faulty application of the CVI in a letter. In-depth interviews were of major importance to collect qualitative information. Crosschecking interviews resulted in more useful
information and an ongoing in-depth knowledge of management practices related to the CVI as well as past and upcoming developments in the organizations that would influence CVI and CVI management. Take for example a restructuring of the business, which may create the need for a change in the way CVI management is organized.

Practical issues may influence the results of an audit. Points to consider are the timing of the audit and the authority of the initiator of the audit. The contact person for the audit might not be respected within the organization, which will become apparent during the audit. In a period of organizational change participating departments are not always willing to provide information. There are two prerequisites for conducting a successful CVI management audit: it must be introduced and clearly supported by top management, and secondly, there must be a positive atmosphere. Furthermore, the organization should not be in the middle of a change process. If other processes are likely to interfere with the audit, it is better to postpone it.

The audit instrument is developed to gather qualitative information and make it possible to identify areas that are not covered as well as areas where people just pay lip service to the CVI, but don’t actually implement it. Areas can be distinguished that are partially implemented or widely and systematically implemented across the various departments in the organization. The question is whether findings related to managing the CVI could have been revealed in other types of audits. Another type of audit may touch on aspects of CVI management, just as the CVI management audit may touch on aspects of management practices in other areas. The characteristic of an audit is that it can be applied to a specific subject or to specific business units or departments in the organization. Applying the EFQM produced an instrument for assessing CVI management that was based on a standardized method. A CVI management audit can easily be included in other type of audits, which will result in a more comprehensive view of the organization.

Another important question is the usefulness of the instrument. Most of the critical factors and factors for continuous development have been studied in previous
research. However, more research needs to be done to assess the usefulness of the items in the attention areas. To acquire useful data, it was necessary to cross-check information among the methods used, and between interviewees. Occasionally we had to modify or refine the data with information from other sources. Multi-method triangulation and more auditors are necessary to judge the usefulness of the information gathered. Another way to check the usefulness of findings is a feedback presentation for members of the organization. They must be able to recognize their own organization in the findings. Longitudinal studies in the same organizations will enhance knowledge of the robustness of the instrument and the effects of carrying out recommendations.

Further development of the instrument may include other areas of the EFQM model. The audit instrument for CVI management which we developed and used was adapted from one part of the EFQM model: the attention areas of the organization. The other part of the EFQM model, which we did not use, was the result areas, which consisted of 1) employee-related results, 2) customer and supplier-related results, 3) societal results and 4) final results. In the CVI management audit, we assessed the results by producing visuals which provided insight into the presence and use of CVI guidelines. Although it may be difficult to study the result areas of the EFQM model with regard to CVI management, it may be worthwhile including three of them in the further development of the instrument. First, for employee results an employee satisfaction survey could include questions on, for instance, the appreciation of tools used to apply the CVI and the information available on the CVI. Second, customer and supplier results address two types of stakeholders. To gain more insight into customer results, a corporate identity audit (Olins and Selame, 2000) may be useful. To gather more information about supplier results, interviews with suppliers of the organization can be included. Finally, an attempt can be made to adapt the performance indicators of ‘societal results’ in the EFQM model into measurable indicators with respect to the visibility of the organizations corporate social responsibility and the contribution of the CVI to this. For instance, stakeholders can judge various aspects of corporate social responsibility, when the name
of the organization and the brand(s) are presented. Even when the involvement with products and services is low, associations with the corporate social responsibility of a corporate brand can be addressed (Berens, 2004).

In the second part of this section, we discuss some general findings and practical implications of managing the CVI. The case studies have shown that the cause of the problem should not always be attributed to the design of the CVI or unwillingness among employees, but that one should also investigate the conditions under which the guidelines are applied. There may be insufficient cooperation between departments, limited knowledge of the CVI, and poor access to information and tools.

Some authors do not view the management of the visual identity as the most important issue (Balmer and Gray, 2000; Gabrielsen, Kristensen and Hansen, 2000; Bromley, 2001). However, the results of the CVI management audits show that organizations became aware of the attention they need to pay to management practices related to CVI. The audit revealed the impact of strategic organizational developments on CVI and operational issues related to applying the guidelines. The case studies show that the reason why the CVI needed to be developed was often organizational or overdue maintenance of the CVI. Although most managers responsible for the CVI like to liaise with design agencies, most of the solutions must be found in the organization itself (Murphy, 1989). Implementing a new CVI will not work when management practices are weak.

The involvement of top management and their interest in CVI is essential to get manpower and budgets needed to invest in CVI management. Efficiency and effectiveness in communication may be good motivators, when whoever is responsible for CVI management detects limited interest in the subject among top management. And it is important that the departments responsible for CVI set an example themselves. Comparing the three organizations, we found differing levels of consistency. It seems that
expectations of a CVI are higher when it is more consistent and the quality of the CVI carriers is high.

It is widely acknowledged that CVI is a useful instrument for expressing organizational development and a reasonably easy asset to change (see for example Grunig, 1993; Van Riel and Van den Ban, 2001). Conducting a CVI management audit is a good start towards studying CVI in a broader perspective than just design and guidelines. The value of this instrument is that it will help CVI managers to gain more insight into the organizational aspects of CVI management and become aware of their role in managing it. The case studies have shown that the professionals in charge of managing the CVI need to have knowledge of strategic organizational developments – to monitor the fit between CVI and the new situation of the organization – as well as tools and processes applying CVI guidelines at the operational level.