Social Corporate Selves – Relational Identity Construction

Abstract

Within corporate communication corporate identity is assigned a boundary-spanning function between the organisation and its surrounding environment - creating and maintaining relationships with numerous stakeholders. As organisations engage in stakeholder relations, the consistency of their identities may be brought in to question as multiple relations may invite the construction of multiple social corporate selves. Within a social constructionist perspective, this paper addresses how one organisation’s corporate identity construction can be explored within relations to different stakeholders in a social media framework. Based on the assumption that relationships with multiple stakeholder groups suggest that identity is constructed as multiple identities rather than a single identity, the paper asks: how can such multiplicity be explored analytically? And what are the possible implications for the corporate identity concept?

Introduction

The central proposition is that corporate identity – often described as a coherent, consistent and constant expression of an organisation’s essence (van Riel 1995, Balmer & Grey 2000, Cornelissen 2004) - also can be viewed as socially constructed, fluid and multifaceted. Approaching identity as socially constructed is arguably in line with a stakeholder framework where organisations adapt or respond to different stakeholder interests (Cornelissen 2004) implying that multiple identities are constructed by way of the different social selves that emerge through numerous stakeholder relationships. Consequently, there is a potential discrepancy between mainstream corporate communication’s focus on a uniform corporate identity (Hübner 2007) and the simultaneous focus on stakeholder adaptation and dialogue: a discrepancy that calls for greater focus on relational identity perspectives. Within a social constructionist framework, relational identity can be
conceptualised as emerging in or through different discourses of identity articulated or narrated by both organisational and stakeholder representatives (Czarniawska 1997). Interest in relational identities may be heightened by an increased focus on social media such as networking sites (Facebook and MySpace), video sharing (YouTube) and weblogs or message boards that create and enhance social networks and relations around the organisation. The purpose of the paper is to address how relational corporate identity can be explored within a social media context. Thus, the dual contribution lies in establishing a tentative theoretical framework of relational identity and in exploring an analytical approach that may expand and compliment such framework.

Firstly, the theoretical framework details a relational view on corporate identity to be explicated by an analytical approach situated within discursive psychology. Through an explorative analysis of selected texts and message board postings on a LEGO website, the paper explores how the organisation constructs multiple identities when addressing different stakeholders by looking at the social selves (i.e. subject positions) evoked when addressing select stakeholders and how select stakeholders, in turn, participate in the construction process through the subject positions they assign to the organisation. The paper concludes by discussing how LEGO’s selves are articulated through multiple subject positions, the usefulness of the analytical approach in shedding light on identity construction processes, and potential, tentative implications for relational corporate selves.

Theoretical Framework

When studying identity within and around organisations one possible entry point is the two different approaches of organisational identity, rooted within organisation studies, and corporate identity, rooted within marketing studies (Hatch & Schultz 1997:2000). The two identity concepts not only differ in their disciplinary origins but also in their embedded assumptions about the ontology of identity. Within corporate identity, understandings characteristic of identity conceptualisation (e.g. van Riel 1995, Balmer & Grey 2000, Cornelissen 2004) are parallel to what Potter & Wetherell within social psychology refer to as “traditional images of the self” (1987: 95). Such understandings rest on the key assumption that self is an entity to be described in definite terms as a self that has “one true nature or set of characteristics waiting to be discovered” (op. cit.) i.e. one authentic organisational or corporate self.
Cornelissen & Harris list three perspectives that may serve useful in highlighting implications of an essentialist identity understanding: 1) corporate identity as an expression of the corporate personality drawing on an inner self 2) corporate identity as organisational reality and 3) corporate identity as all expressions of a company (2001:55). The two first perspectives view identity as a static entity to be expressed through communication, behaviour and symbolism (e.g. Balmer & Grey 2000, van Riel 1995). Consequently, identity is to be communicated as homogenously as possible reflecting or transmitting the true nature of the organisation. Communication is thus viewed as a process in which meaning is transferred through encoding and decoding as in Shannon & Weaver’s (1949) model of the communication process; i.e., meaning is encoded by the organisation (identity) and decoded by the stakeholders (image) with correspondence or alignment between the two as a primary goal. The third perspective presents a communicative or rhetorical alternative to the (essentialist) personality or reality driven approaches in that identity is viewed, with reference to sociologist Erving Goffman’s work on the presentation of self (Goffman 1959), as “something that emerges in enactment and social interaction” (Cornelissen & Harris 2001: 61). However, the implication is said to be that corporate identity can be “created, transformed and restructured by management” (op. cit). As such, the wider implications of socially constructed corporate selves as negotiated through communication processes are ignored as communicative identity is taken to mean that anything goes; as long as consistency is maintained. Consequently, whether corporate identity is viewed as an expression of a deeper rooted personality or reality (acting in character) or as emerging in communication or self-presentation (enacting a character), integration, coordination and harmonisation remain central tenants.

Whereas organisational identity studies also harbour essentialist assumptions (e.g. Albert & Whetten 1985), increasingly they approach identity from a social constructionist angle where identity emerges within interaction (e.g. Schultz & Hatch 1997, 2000 & 2004, Czarniawska 1997). By fusing or merging the two views, i.e. by introducing social constructionist understandings of organisational identity into corporate identity studies, it may be argued that corporate identity is fragmented, fluid and multifaceted rather than coherent, consistent and constant. Such understanding is found within relational views on identity rooted within organisational identity studies as promoted by e.g. Schultz & Hatch (1997, 2000 & 2004), Czarniawska (1997) and Brown (2006). The view rests within interactionist, social constructionist and post-modern identity understandings drawing on sociology and social psychology (i.e. Mead 1934, Goffman 1959,
Gergen 1985, Giddens 1996, Jenkins 2004) where multiple social selves are seen as constructed in and through interactions and relationships with others.

The social constructionist approach may thus propose a fourth (relational) perspective on corporate identity visible in Hatch & Schultz’s (2002) dynamic approaches to organisations and brands. By incorporating external views on the organisation (i.e. image) as an identity constructing factor, Hatch & Schultz emphasise the importance of stakeholder voices in articulating identity similar to the way that a person’s self is said to rise out of interaction with the surrounding society. This is especially pronounced in their organisational identity dynamics model (Hatch & Schultz 2002) which references George H. Mead’s approach to the self as arising in interaction between the I and the me (Mead 1934). Here identity is constructed through “a set of processes that continuously cycle within and between cultural self-understandings and images formed by organizational ‘others’” (Hatch & Schultz 2002:1004).

The relational perspective is also stressed in Czarniawska’s narrative approach to identity which emphasises (auto)biographical organisational (self)narration as articulations involving both organisation and stakeholders. Consequently, organisational self is seen “as a continuous process of narration where both the narrator and the audience are involved in formulating, editing, applauding and refusing various elements of the ever-produced narrative” (Czarniawska 1997: 49). Czarniawska’s work draws on social psychologist Kenneth Gergen’s view on identity as emergent, re-formed and redirected. Gergen suggests replacing the notion of self with one of relatedness arguing that it makes more sense to speak of us, rather than of you and I (Gergen 2000:156). Self is seen “as discourse about the self” and as “a narration rendered intelligible within ongoing relationships” (Gergen 1994: 185). Within such a narrative view, Gergen argues that even though “it is common practice to view each person as possessing ‘a life story’, if selves are realised within social encounters there is good reason to believe that there is no one story to tell” (1994: 202).

In a corporate context, debating the idea of a ‘life story’ brings into question the central tenants of integration, harmonisation or coordination. If no one story can be told, corporations may have

---

1 Self is understood as a process of ongoing and simultaneous synthesis of “(internal) self-definition”, understood as a dialogue between the I and the me, and “(external) definitions of oneself offered by others” in interaction (Jenkins 2004). Thus, it is possible to talk of selves rather than self as we enter into series of different relationships with different people and thus become “one thing to one man and another thing to another” (Mead 1934:142).
multiple selves emerging from the many stories narrated by and of them. When identity is socially constructed, i.e. relational, communication is seen as negotiation of meaning in a social setting rather than as transference of meaning from sender to receiver. Thus, communicative or narrative acts become arenas of identity co-construction (Czarniawska 1997:142). Brown (2006) also adopts the narrative view and discusses organisational identities as “discursive (linguistic) constructs constituted by the multiple, identity-relevant narratives that their participants author about them” (731). Boje (2001), alternatively, suggests approaching organisations as antenarrative (as opposed to narrative) networks. Antenarratives are dynamic and unfinished stories; i.e., a form of ‘improper’ storytelling that is fragmented, many voiced and collectively produced (op cit.). The stories or narratives that constitute corporate identity may not necessarily be characterised by plot, timeline or coherence in the story line, but rather emerge as unplotted, non-linear and incoherent (op cit.:1).

In sum, the relational identity perspective stresses the discursive or narrative co-construction of self within social interactions. The question is what implications such an understanding may hold for the corporate identity concept? The main argument being that relational identity has much to offer by way of stressing the interdependent nature of organisation and environment already incorporated into organisational identity and stakeholder studies. Questions of interest when approaching corporate identity in a relational perspective is which (ante)narratives are told by those participating in identity construction i.e. which understandings of the organisation are articulated in different situations by different narrators – and how can such (ante)narratives or articulations be explored? Rooted in the assumption that relationships with multiple stakeholders mean that identity is constructed as multiple identities rather than a single identity as suggested by e.g. Coupland and Brown (2004) and Brown (2006), the central questions addressed below are: how can relational identity be explored within a corporate context? Does an organisation which recognises the importance of multiple stakeholders attempt to create and maintain relations through multiple identities which position the organisation according to varying stakeholder interests? Do stakeholders articulate different identities from those articulated by the organisation? And what potential implications may multiplicity (and relationality) hold for the corporate identity concept? These questions will be explored by analysing selected texts from the LEGO website using the notion of subject positions (Davies & Harré 1990).
Data Generation and Analytical Approach

The LEGO company is chosen as the analytical focal point with reference to its active efforts to create and maintain relationships with multiple stakeholder groups. The company continuously seeks to involve its stakeholders both on- and offline by inviting them to participate in dialogues with the organisation as well as each other: adult LEGO fans are encouraged to share product inventions and constructions, parents are encouraged to share thoughts on LEGO play, children (of all ages) are invited to post their inventions and chat online on the LEGO message boards and educators are involved in using LEGO bricks to further creativity, learning and innovation.

According to Brown (2006), the identities of organisations are constituted by a totality of identity-relevant narratives told about them in the form of documents (reports and corporate stories), oral conversations and speeches, and electronic websites and e-mails. The LEGO website\(^2\) is chosen since websites are assigned a central position within communication between corporation and multiple stakeholders (Nielsen 2002). As such, they are condensed fora for corporate communication assumed to provide a good basis for analysing how the organisation in question constructs identity in relation to a variety of stakeholder groups. In order to analytically approach corporate identity from a relational point of view, examples of identity-relevant self-narration addressing different stakeholder groups are needed since it is assumed that organisations qua their multiple relationships construct different identities (through the use of different subject positions). In addition, identity-relevant narratives told or authored by the various stakeholder groups are included in order to explore the stakeholders’ construction of subject positions for the company. By selecting texts authored by the organisation and the stakeholders respectively, focus is placed on how both contribute to identity articulation.

The LEGO website addresses multiple stakeholder groups in multiple ways. However, the analysis centres on two stakeholder groups which are given high priority on the website; namely, children and parents who are addressed most frequently. A central issue raised in connection with the two key stakeholder groups, besides those of play, fun and creativity, is that of safety. Consequently, the analysis seeks to uncover which subject positions are assigned to LEGO by the company itself and by parents and children when addressing issues of (online) fun, creativity and safety.

\(^2\) The UK version of the LEGO website (http://www.lego.com/en-GB/default.aspx)
An initial glance at the LEGO website suggests that the product; the many different LEGO bricks, sets and themes, are placed centre stage as the home page contains the three main subcategories of *products*, *play* and *shop*. The *products* and *shop* sections present the various products and offer online purchase opportunities as well as a store locator. The centrality of the product is furthermore supported by the *play* section where games, downloads, message boards and social networking site is build upon and around LEGO characters. The site’s design targets children with its bright colours and large typeface. In addition to targeting children, the site contains sections targeted specifically at parents and educators. Educators are presented with the multiple learning solutions offered by LEGO whereas parents are offered information about appropriate products for children at different ages, about child development, about ways of introducing and using LEGO in family life and about the relationship between LEGO and society.

Amongst the various texts that explicitly address parents and children, the following have been selected for analysis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Texts authored by LEGO</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEGO Message Boards</td>
<td>LEGO Identity Crisis (authored by posters on the Message Board <em>Products</em> aimed at parents – but also used by children)</td>
<td>Children’s safety on LEGO.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My LEGO Network</td>
<td></td>
<td>My LEGO Network safety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several criteria form the basis for text selection. Firstly, the texts relate to the two social features of the website: LEGO Message Boards (where both children and parents can post messages and discuss LEGO related questions and issues) and My LEGO Network (a social networking site for children). Secondly, texts authored by both organisation and the two respective stakeholder groups are included. And thirdly, the texts singled out focus explicitly on fun, creativity and safety as they are central themes on the website.

The applied analytical framework draws on discursive psychology where emphasis is given to how identities come into existence, are negotiated and transformed in concrete social practices (Potter &
Corporate selves can thus be seen as emerging from different (ante)narratives voiced at both macro and micro levels. At a macro level, selves emerge from intertextual chains of ongoing public debates created by press releases, media coverage and other contributions whereas on a micro level, they emerge from conversations or dialogues between company and stakeholder as they unfold on e.g. a website. In order to explore the discursive or narrative construction of corporate selves, it may prove useful to apply Davies & Harré’s term subject position as an analytical tool since subject position is considered an appropriate term “with which to talk about the discursive production of a diversity of selves” (Davies & Harré 1990:48).

Davies & Harré argue (as do Czarniawska 1997 and Brown 2006) that the metaphor of an unfolding narrative can be applied to identity: “An individual emerges through the process of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate. Accordingly, who one is is always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the positions made available within one’s own and others’ discursive practices and within those practices, the stories through which we make sense of our own and other’s lives.” (Davies & Harré 1990:46) In the unfolding narrative, individuals may be constituted in one position or another, stand in multiple positions or perhaps negotiate new positions by refusing the ones that have previously been articulated (op cit.: 53). It is possible to argue that these different positioning possibilities may be transferred on to corporate identity and applied with the aim of understanding the construction of social corporate selves.

Positioning is approached as “the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations” (Davies & Harré 1990:48). A distinction is made between interactive positioning where a person’s utterance positions another and reflexive positioning where a person positions him or herself (op cit.). The analysis explores both the reflexive positioning of LEGO and the interactive positioning of the company by some of its key stakeholders: children and parents. According to Davies & Harré: “Positions are identified in part by extracting the autobiographical aspects of a conversation in which it becomes possible to find out how each conversant conceives of themselves and of the other participants by seeing what position they take up and in what story, and how they are then positioned.” (1990:48) In the analysis, the subject positions are identified by focusing on those textual elements that explicitly centres on the organisation.
The analytical framework proposes that relational corporate identity can be approached by exploring how the company is positioned by itself and by different stakeholders. The aim is not to explore the depth and width of LEGO’s identity or identities per se, but rather to discuss the applied method of analysis and its usefulness as well as limitations in exploring social corporate selves through an exemplary analysis.

**Analysis**

The analysis addresses firstly the subject positions taken by LEGO (reflexive positioning) when addressing children and parents respectively and secondly the subject positions offered by both children and parents (interactive positioning) when touching upon issues of (online) fun, creativity and safety.

Two texts of interests aimed explicitly at children (as users of the *play* section) are LEGO Message Boards and My LEGO Network. The LEGO Message Boards text introduces the boards as a safe and fun online community whereas My LEGO Network is presented as a social networking site built especially for children. In both texts, but especially in the text introducing the Message Boards, LEGO positions itself as a responsible company stressing how user safety is secured when participating in board debates and social networking. The subject position of a responsible company is achieved through statements such as:

“EVERY POST is reviewed by REAL PEOPLE before it goes live to the world” (Message Boards)
“It’s a safe environment that lets you create and control your own web page” (My LEGO Network)

The Message Board text also offers advice on online safety including “Play Safe” and “Don’t give out your real name or phone number!”.

In addition to the reflexive positioning as a responsible company, LEGO positions itself as a catalyst or facilitator of creativity in the My LEGO Network text through the use of the words “allows” and “lets” in the statements below:
“My LEGO Network allows you to create your very own LEGO Web page to show off your creativity to the whole wide world!”

“It’s a safe environment that lets you create and control your own web page”

In sum, LEGO positions itself as a company that inspires creativity in others while acting responsible to secure user safety. Consequently, LEGO takes up dual subject positions when addressing children on the website.

In the texts that explicitly targets parents, LEGO also positions itself as both a responsible company and a facilitator of creativity evoked by statements in My LEGO Network Safety and Children’s Safety on LEGO.com:

“The LEGO Group is dedicated to fostering creativity and learning in all its products and online experiences while committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of children of all ages.”

(Children’s Safety on LEGO.com)

“we have done our utmost to ensure a safe and fun experience for each child”

(My LEGO Network Safety)

The reflexive positioning as a responsible company also involves additional subject positions of LEGO as a protector of children arguing that the company understands the vulnerability of its users and as a benchmark when it comes to safety as expressed in the following extracts from Children’s Safety on LEGO.com:

“The LEGO Group recognizes the unique challenges inherent in developing web content for young audiences. Trusting and anxious to explore, kids often have limited abilities to evaluate information or to recognize other people’s intentions.”

“… LEGO.com as a benchmark in safe online experiences for children, even as we provide young fans from all over the world with inspiring opportunities to interact with each other and LEGO.”
The analysis shows that LEGO also uses multiple subject positions when reflexively positioning the company towards parents. Consequently, the four texts authored by LEGO articulate the following subject positions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject positions assigned by LEGO (addressing children)</th>
<th>Subject positions assigned by LEGO (addressing parents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A responsible company</td>
<td>A responsible company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A facilitator of creativity</td>
<td>A facilitator of creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A protector of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A benchmark (in safety)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When browsing through many of the several thousand postings on the LEGO Message Boards, it becomes apparent that the topics of discussion most often are product related. Users (on boards aimed at both children and parents) ask each other questions about: where to buy special or replacement bricks? Which set is the favourite? How to get bricks to stick together? How to get bricks unstuck? How to store bricks? However, from time to time, posters also discuss issues that are company related and thus may be considered identity-relevant narratives. The posts selected for analysis address LEGO as a company within the context of fun, creativity and safety.

There are twenty two message boards designated to child to child discussions. Most are dedicated to specific products such as Indiana Jones, Starwars or Clikits but some deal with more general issues such as LEGO.com and Message Boards. However, even though there are hundreds of threads and thousands of posts, there is little to suggest that the users discuss LEGO per se. However, children do also participate in discussions on the parents’ message boards where four boards are designated to parent to parent discussions: Products, Play Ideas, LEGO Personal Stories and Parent’s General Discussion. The posts selected for analysis are found in the Products board under a thread entitled LEGO Identity Crisis and critique LEGO’s new (thematic) product lines versus the old ones. In doing so, the posters question the subject position of LEGO as a facilitator of creativity by addressing the company’s own creativity:

“I was just wondering to what happened to Lego’s creativity…”

“Where is the Lego company’s creativity?”
“LEGO just keeps getting less creative…”

The basic argument voiced by the posters is that the new themes offered by LEGO (often inspired by the entertainment industry) such as Starwars and Indiana Jones do little to foster creativity and creation compared to the old models or sets which can be combined in multiple ways:

“Lego used to be all about providing basic building elements that allow children to create and play in worlds of their own imagination (not in the imagination of movies or comic books). What happened?”

Consequently, they articulate a counter position to LEGO as a facilitator which is LEGO as market-dominated or as a “lackey to the entertainment industry” i.e. as a sell-out: “I think Lego is selling itself and our children short.” In questioning the reflexive positioning of LEGO in relation to creativity, some posters still position LEGO as a creative company, however, as a company that has forgotten how to be creative when it comes to product design:

“… I just wish they would bring out the old stuff, and get their creativity back.”
“… disparate product lines that seem to have very little to do with LEGO’s foundation – creative building”
“..., independent creativity is at the core of Lego’s product. If only the company had enough confidence to return to its core values…”

Like the last extract above, such posts tend to position LEGO as a company that is no longer true to its roots or its core values. However, there are also (a minority of) posters who support LEGO’s position as both creative and as a facilitator of creativity.

Even though, the board is targeted at parents, children also join in the debate mirroring the subject positions offered by the parents or adults. Consequently, most child posters articulate the anti-facilitator position urging LEGO to re-introduce old LEGO sets while a few argue that the creativity has not been lost but rather redirected or redefined:
“Some people say expanding the product line increases imagination. But what can you do with some action figure person? A specialized piece with all sorts of stuff on it? Can you just use that for something else? I’m just one kid, but EVEN we are starting to miss the old, traditional values I know you guys loved when you were a kid.”

“Creativity is still there but it’s changed and it is different now. But you just have to look harder to see it. The new sets use the storyline so the kids can take the storyline and shape into the way they want it or the way they see it. All I’m trying to say is the creativity is still there you just need to look harder to see it.”

The analysed posts suggest that children and parents construct or articulate a number of different subject positions as shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject positions assigned by children</th>
<th>Subject positions assigned by parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator of creativity</td>
<td>Facilitator of creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-facilitator of creativity</td>
<td>Anti-facilitator of creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A lackey or sell-out (to the entertainment industry)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis reveals that LEGO constructs multiple subject positions for itself when addressing both children and parents. Some subject positions (those of responsible company and facilitator of creativity) are evoked in relation to both stakeholder groups whereas others (protector of children and benchmark) are specific to the texts addressing parents. The stakeholders (children and parents) construct subject positions that are both similar to and different from the ones articulated by the company. While LEGO as a responsible company is not addressed, the creativity positioning is highly debated and contested. The interactive positioning articulated by posts on the parents’ boards by both adults and children counter the reflexive positioning of LEGO as a facilitator of creativity positioning LEGO as an anti-facilitator of creativity and as a company which in itself lacks in creativity as well. In addition, the lack in creativity opens up to an additional subject position where LEGO is seen as a sell-out due to its adaptation of popular themes from the entertainment industry.
Discussion and Implications

The paper adopts a relational approach to corporate identity and argues that this perspective inherently leads to a multiplicity of identities. Focus is subsequently placed on how articulations of subject positions from both organisation and stakeholders as they appear on a LEGO website contribute in the identity construction process. The aim is to discuss the usefulness of subject positions as an analytical concept for the exploration of relational corporate identity.

The exemplary analysis discloses that even within a rather narrow set of issues (fun, creativity and safety) both LEGO and its stakeholders positioning the company in a variety of ways. The variety of subject positions uncovered may be seen as an indication that subject positions may be a suitable analytical concepts useful for exploring multiplicity in identity construction. However, the explorative nature of the analysis means that some notes of caution must be addressed.

Firstly, the analysis focuses on a narrow selection of texts and should therefore not be seen as an exhaustive analysis of the corporate identity of LEGO. What the analysis does explore is the potential usefulness of subject positions as an analytical term that can help further understandings of the identity construction process and inspired future analytical work.

Secondly, the few articulations of LEGO voiced by children and parents on the website may also be an area that requires further investigation. Although, there are thousand (perhaps millions) of posts on the LEGO Message Boards, very few contain explicitly identity-relevant narratives. This brings in to question the participation of stakeholders in identity construction as it may raise doubts in terms of whether or not stakeholders participate at all. However, lack of participation is not the only potential explanation. It may be that the very product focused nature of the LEGO website also becomes reflected in the issues raised on the boards or that the LEGO moderators give preference to those posts which have a product rather than company focus. In addition, it can be argued that even though there are few texts or posts relating to the company, the analysed texts indicate that stakeholders do indeed participate in identity construction through interactive positioning.

Thirdly, it seems worth addressing the relationship between identity and subject position. The final question thus is if multiple subject positions are the same as multiple identities? It is possible to
question whether the identification of different subject positions supports the existence or multiple selves or if one single, uniform identity can prevail. What the analysis indicates is that when taking a relational, discursive perspective on identity, multiplicity in identity can be said to emerge with the various, contradicting or contrasting, subject positions articulated by organisation and stakeholders.

The cautionary notes aside, the paper offers the tentative suggestion that corporate identity, at least in a relational view informed by social constructionism, is inherently multiple as different subject positions are offered simultaneously by both organisation and stakeholders. Approaching corporate identity as emerging from continuous interactions between various (ante)narratives where both an organisation’s internal and external stakeholders participate as narrators holds implications for the concept’s central tenants of integration, harmonisation and coordination. It raises the question of how to integrate, harmonise or coordinate when the voices of the stakeholders also articulate identity. And calls for further research into the implications of multiple social corporate selves.

**Bibliography**


Christensen, Lars Thøger & Morsing, Mette (2005). *Bagom corporate communication*. Frederiksberg: Forlaget Samfundslitteratur


Nielsen, Anne Ellerup (2002). Rhetorical Features of the Company Website. *Skrifter fra Center for Internettorskning*. Vol 6, pp. 3-30


Schultz, Majken & Hatch, Mary Jo (eds.) (2004). *Organizational Identity: A Reader*. Oxford University Press


