The challenge to reposition three divergent higher education institutions as a new comprehensive institution

Nerine Bresler

Department of Marketing Management, University of Johannesburg

Abstract

This study was designed to assist three higher education institutions that were forced into a merger to develop an identity, based on the unknown. A new type of organisation needs to be constructed in a changing environment. The paper presents the results of a survey of 654 stakeholders who were asked to indicate whether they associate any of the institutions with a list of 19 statements. The results are presented in a perceptual map to facilitate decision making. It depicts the merger partners as very different. This was confirmed by what the respective names triggered in respondents' minds. The findings suggest issues management needs to address during the post-merger procedural integration to create and communicate value, through combined synergies, and to avoid some of the possible negative consequences of mergers.

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1
Introduction

The Minister of Education recommended that various higher education institutions in South Africa (SA) merge to form new institutions (Gibbon, 2004). On 9 December 2002 it was confirmed that the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) had to fully merge with the Technikon Witwatersrand (TWR) to form a comprehensive institution that would incorporate the East Rand and SOWETO campuses of Vista University (Vista) (Mokadi, 2003). Normally mergers are part of a general strategy for diversification or growth (Shrivastava, 1994: 225). Specific attributes of merger candidates are evaluated to form the basis for selecting the right partners, to assess the strategic fit before any merger takes place (Shrivastava, 1994: 220). However, in this case no rationale or justification was given for the decision and neither the strategic nor the organisational synergies were clear. Individual institutions were left with unclear expectations about the positioning or cultural fit that needed to take place. It was expected of them to develop and manage the merger decision process for eventual integration without knowledge of the process and effects (Jansen, 2002: 2).

RAU, TWR and Vista had unique brand images, or positions in the market which differentiated them from competing higher education providers when, in January 2005 they became one institution; the University of Johannesburg (UJ). UJ must now develop a new institution type with a unique and stable identity and position its brand based on the merger partners' respective organisation-wide reputation, and the performance of their products and services. The new position should also be closely aligned to the value expectations of key customer segments (Knox, 2004: 110-112).

UJ holds multiple positions which are reflected in the perceptual map of this study, and Trout (2005: 28) argues that multiple positions are similar to multiple personalities or schizophrenia, which causes confusion. A brand must have a distinctive focused point or it fails. Branding and positioning are linked. Branding involves the process of building an identity or brand, and positioning puts the brand in the minds of customers to create an image.

The challenge is therefore for UJ to identify critical associations that moulded consumers' perceptions about RAU, TWR and Vista, and to tailor the new brand to reflect these values (de Chernatony & Riley, 1997: 100). Muller (2003: 1) poses the useful question: "What are we and what are we to become?"

2
Purpose of the study

This study was designed to assist three higher education institutions that were forced into a merger to develop an identity, based on the unknown. In order to do so it had to identify the positions the merger partners, with different and unequal academic profiles, held in the market's mind. The objective was to characterise UJ to guide the decision as to what position UJ wants to own. Familiarity with the perceptions of key stakeholders is central to corporate brand management (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001: 441). To facilitate decision making it was necessary to develop a perceptual map that graphically presents the perception that RAU, TWR and Vista then held in the minds of various stakeholders and publics, like students, members of academic and administrative staff and employers. The findings regarding differences and similarities suggest issues that management needs to address during the post-merger procedural integration. Only then can they create value that customers understand (Hooley & Saunders, 1993: 169).

3
Developing a perceptual map to capture relative images

To graphically present the perceptual positions of RAU, TWR and Vista, one needs to select appropriate statements that will capture relative images. This is done by giving a brief overview of the literature relevant to the following three aspects: image as an important indicator of perceived quality and reputation, the relationship between organisational culture, identity and image, as well as what is expected of higher education institutions.

3.1 Image as an important indicator of perceived quality and reputation

Services' marketing literature identifies image as an important quality indicator for customers and LeBlanc and Nguyen (1997: 74) describe image as the overall impression made on the minds of customers. It is related to tradition, ideology, business name, reputation and variety of services, and to the impression of quality communicated by each person interacting with customers. Reputation relates to the institution's capacity to position itself in the minds of its customers, and is described as the consistency of an organisation's actions over time (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001: 441). LeBlanc and Nguyen (1997: 76) argue that there is a significant relationship between perceived quality and reputation. For grade twelve learners in SA, the reputation of an institution (or a study programme) was the most important of the listed influences, on choice of institution for study. Lower fees appear fourth on this list and were more important to Africans than coloureds, Indians and whites (on a continuum) (Cosser & Du Toit, 2002: 6).

The physical environment in which a service encounter takes place allows the service provider to give tangible evidence of the service on offer. The design of the service setting may have a powerful effect on customer feelings and perceptions; it needs to be comfortable and organised in a professional manner (LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1997: 77 and Oldfield & Baron, 2000: 90). Since students spend much of their time in contact with physical elements of their educational experience (lecturing, laboratory, library, facilitating and recreational facilities) the campus and its security are important to them. The design of the servicescape indicates the service firm's capabilities and the quality of the service encounter. It can serve as a differentiator, signaling the intended market segment, positioning the organisation, and conveying distinctiveness from competitors (Bitner, 1992: 244).

Student perceptions of the higher education experience are also determined by technical elements (content and delivery of course material) and functional elements (service

processes and interpersonal interactions of a non-technical nature) (Oldfield & Baron, 2000: 89). The service experience is complex and the expectations likewise so. According to LeBlanc and Nguyen (1997: 76) as well as Oldfield and Baron (2000: 91) students generally found the performance of academic staff and their ability to inspire trust and confidence, as well as the way academics treat them, acceptable. However, the judgments on higher education's performance are based on the expectations and perceptions of many stakeholders and are often subjective, rather than objective (Rowley, 1997: 10 and Oldfield & Baron, 2000: 86).

3.2 The relationship between organisational culture, identity and image

The increasing levels of interaction between organisational members and outsiders have collapsed inside-outside boundaries, and a closer relationship has developed between organisational culture, identity and image (Hatch & Schultz, 1997: 356). Culture, identity and image are mutually interdependent parts of a circular process that defines organisations to various constituencies (Hatch & Schultz, 1997: 357). The organisational *image* is the fabricated and projected image of itself to influence public impression but it is influenced by the behaviour and everyday interactions between organisational members and external audiences. Organisational *identity* refers broadly to what members perceive, feel and think about their organisations and differs from *corporate* identity. The latter focuses on the visual identity of the corporate name, logo and colours, to create a monolithic identity for the organisation (Hatch & Schultz, 1997: 358). Van Riel and Balmer (1997: 341) use corporate and organisational identity interchangeably, but admit that there is a gap between the actual and desired corporate identity; that the narrowing is of strategic importance and requires a multidisciplinary approach.

To see through this terminological *fog*, Balmer (2001: 249) uses business identity as an umbrella label to cover corporate identity, organisational identity and visual identity. This study adopted this viewpoint to identify and select important

components of the merger partners' image. Establishing the desired business identity for the new comprehensive institution requires the merger partners to discover the benefits that are perceived by key stakeholders as important. These benefits need to be delivered and perceived as unique, or better, or distinctive when compared to the other organisations (Van Riel & Balmer, 1997: 348). Such a repositioning exercise is normally done as a result of external turbulence, for instance a merger (Van Riel & Balmer, 1997: 349). This study follows the process they suggested; examining the current identities, in order to debate the desired new identity which must be present to reflect stakeholders' actual and aspirational self images (Harris & de Charnatony, 2001: 441).

3.3 What is expected of higher education institutions?

Over the past ten years higher education institutions world wide have experienced dramatic changes both in their funding and student numbers. In addition, competitive advantage was a concept alien to this sector (Oldfield & Baron, 2000: 86). SA is experiencing similar turbulence created by environmental changes such as a growing entitlement to further education, globalisation, political forces and legislation (Auf der Heyde, 2005: 41-48 and Viljoen & Rothmann, 2002: 2-3). Education management must now be concerned with market share, productivity, return on investment and the quality of services offered to their customers (LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1997: 72). They should adopt a quality management philosophy, which can have lasting effects on the institution. It can lead to student recommendations of their programmes to others, as well as future monetary contributions (Cosser & Du Toit, 2002: 3).

In order to maintain cutting edge global competitiveness, and to address the urgent need for transformation, providers of higher education further need to be responsive to the expectations of direct *employability* as opposed to guaranteeing *employment*. That is, they have to develop a highly educated workforce equipped for greater occupational mobility and flexible

work patterns (Kruss, 2002: 3-8). Providers are expected to equip graduates with the tacit high level knowledge, skills and attitudes required by the labour market, alongside general and specialist academic knowledge (Kruss, 2002: 2 and Viljoen & Rothmann, 2002: 2). Nearly ninety percent of grade twelve learners in SA view higher education as a gateway to employment. The majority (55 per cent) planned to study at a technikon and thirty five percent intended studying at a university, whilst ten percent were undecided. Indians (65 per cent: 24 per cent) and whites (57 per cent: 31 per cent) were more likely to choose a university, rather than a technikon, whilst the opposite was true of Africans (59 per cent:31 per cent) and coloureds (49 per cent: 39 per cent) (Cosser & Du Toit, 2002: 3-4). Access to universities is associated with exclusivity of admission or university exemption, which African learners need to achieve in far greater numbers to increase university access (Cosser & Du Toit, 2002: 10). The percentages of learners wishing to enroll at the 36 higher education institutions in South Africa namely: TWR 4.9 per cent, RAU 1.2 per cent and all campuses of Vista 1.2 per cent reflected the relative popularity of the three merger partners (Cosser & Du Toit, 2002: 4).

4
Research methodology

A literature review, along with discussions with students provided the basis for developing a questionnaire. This was adapted from the SERVQUAL instrument (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1990: 180-185) and various image and positioning studies of higher education institutions (Bresler, 1994: 260-263). The statements for constructing the perceptual space on a positioning map were selected to span collectively the range of possible components of an image of a higher education institution. These perceptual dimensions also needed to differentiate between institutions; in other words the attributes had to be determinant, that is relate to preference (relative value) and differ across institutions (Moore & Pessemier, 1993: 149-150).

The wording of the SERVQUAL-based questionnaire was supplemented with context-specific items where necessary (LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1997: 74) and tailored to the language students can identify with (Sudman & Blair, 1998: 252-254). It was pre-tested to identify and eliminate possible problems, by having researchers review the draft and by piloting it in the field (Sudman & Blair, 1998: 300-301). Third year Marketing Research students were trained to administer the questionnaire in face-to-face interviews. The respondents were asked to indicate whether they associated any of the three institutions, with a list of 19 statements which have been used to describe higher education institutions, and encapsulate the determinants elicited by the literature study. In each case they could indicate one of the institutions, or as many as they think fit that particular statement, or none. Their opinions may have been based on their experience, or on what they have heard from other people.

The target population mainly comprised students of the three institutions but also included other stakeholder groups that interact with the merger institutions, as they too form quality judgements (LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1997: 77). Since the target population would have first-hand experience and knowledge regarding only one of the three merger partners, but was likely to make buying decisions and recommendations about all three, a correspondence analysis was selected to develop a perceptual map (Sudman & Blair, 1998: 259). In a correspondence analysis the input data are in the form of a contingency table (see Table 2) indicating a qualitative association between rows and columns. The perceptual map provides insights into (1) similarities and differences within the rows (statements) with respect to a given column category (institution), (2) similarities and differences within the column categories with respect to a given row category, and (3) relationship among the rows and columns (Malhotra, 2004: 707-708). The interpretation of the results is similar to that in discriminant analysis and principal component analysis as categories that are closer together than others are more similar (Moore & Pessemier, 1993: 154-155).

The primary objective of perceptual mapping is to provide a picture of how the various brands, or institutions, are perceived and what characteristics or components of their respective images differentiate them (Moore & Pessemier, 1993: 171). The advantage of correspondence analysis compared with other multidimensional scaling techniques in that it reduces the data collection demands imposed on the respondents. The respondents are merely asked to indicate which attributes or evaluation criteria apply to each of the brands or institutions. They do not have to know enough to make rational decisions or to rate different brands or organisations; yes/no answers suffice. In other words, having studied at one of the institutions would qualify them to have an opinion about all three (Malhotra, 2004: 708 and Moore & Pessemier, 1993: 172). The disadvantage is that correspondence analysis is an exploratory data analysis technique and it is not suitable for hypothesis testing (Malhotra, 2004: 708).

Table 1
Composition of the final sample

Institution	Frequency (n)	Gender	Frequency (n)	Stake-holder	Frequency (n)	Race	Frequency (n)
TWR	225	Female	345	Students	449	African	405
RAU	134	Male	309	Academics	62	White	139
Vista	53			Admin.	30	Coloured	48
Schools	90			Others	113	Indian	62
Public	152						
Total	654		654		654		654

A judgement (non-probability) sample of about 800 respondents was interviewed and yielded 654 usable questionnaires. Table 1 reflects that 225 were from TWR, 134 from RAU, 53 from the two campuses of Vista, 90 from secondary feeder schools, and 152 from the broader public which included employers, parents, alumni and students from the nearby University of the Witwatersrand. There were 345 female and 309 male respondents, of which 449 were secondary, and higher education students, 62 academic and 30 administrative staff members, and 113 others. The majority (405) of the respondents were African; 139 respondents represented the white population group; 48 the Coloured group and 62 were Indians.

5
Results

A perceptual map (Figure 1) represents spatially the way in which individuals perceive various brands, or in this case higher education institutions. If similar, they are located close together, and those that are perceived to be dissimilar are located further apart. The institutions are shown as points on the map, spanned or defined by dimensions, which represent distinct general properties of the institutions. The visual format makes it easier to digest than if the same information were presented in tabular form, but the level of awareness or frequency of associations can only be obtained from the association table; see Table 2 (Moore & Pessemier, 1993: 144-147). Of the 15 108 associations with statements on the questionnaire, 7 777 were with respect to RAU, 1 643 with respect to Vista and 5 688 with respect to TWR. The image of RAU in terms of the questionnaire statements is thus better imprinted in the minds of the respondents than TWR's, and Vista is an almost unknown entity compared to TWR.

5.1 Images of the three merger partners

- **Image of Vista**
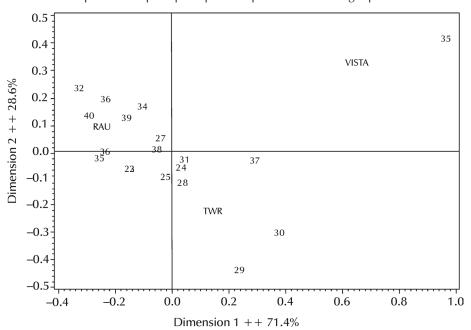Vista is associated with affordable fees only (statement 35).

- **Image of TWR**

TWR has differentiated itself from Vista and RAU in achieving a racial balance (statement 30), preparing students for the job market (statement 29) and providing ample opportunities for social interaction (statement 37).

- **Image of RAU**

RAU's physical facilities have clearly set it apart form the other merger partners. Its lecturing and library facilities are perceived to be state of the art (statement 32), home comforts like toilets, places to eat and relax are good (statement 36) as well as security on campus (statement 40). RAU's administration is effective and efficient (statement 39), and the environment is seen to be conducive to study (statement 34). Respondents also associated RAU more prominently with attracting high calibre students (statement 26) and doing research on the forefront of technology (statement 33) than TWR. The respondents associate RAU more with the provision of high quality education (statement 22) and the best place to study (statement 23) than TWR. These two statements (positioned on top of each other on the map), as well as the previous two, are seen to be similar and could be considered as restatements (Moore & Pessemier, 1993: 150).

Figure 1

Correspondence space perceptual map of the three merger partners

- **Non-differentiating factors**

The statements in the middle of the map, close to the origin, do not clearly differentiate the one institution from the other. Respondents felt that both TWR and RAU were led by experienced and qualified managers (statement 38), addressed the challenges of globalisation (statement 31), and employed knowledgeable lecturers (statement 24). This is what was expected of higher education institutions; their core product, which is generally not a differentiator. It is the augmented product that is used for differentiation purposes (Levitt, 1986: 78-84, and North; Kotzé; Stark & de Vos, 2003: 1,6,8). Whilst RAU was associated more closely with not lowering its standards compared to TWR (statement 27), TWR was offering challenging courses more than RAU (statement 28) and that its teaching was up to date with the latest standards (statement 25). It should be borne in mind that the associations are between rows, within columns and among

rows and columns. For example, with respect to the frequency of associations with statement 27 (row): there were 420 (54.40 per cent) associations with RAU and only 268 (34.72 per cent) with TWR (see Table 2).

- **Most important differentiating factor**

Of the 19 statements listed, respondents had to choose one, which was the most important to them, and it transpired to be: "the provision of high quality education" (statement 22) for 235 (34.3 per cent) respondents. Quality education was more important to white (45.2 per cent) respondents than Africans (28.4 per cent). The positioning map placed RAU the closest to this ideal position. Table 2, statement 22 reveals 508 (56.38 per cent) associations with RAU compared to Vista (53:5.88 per cent) and TWR (340:37.74 per cent). Preparing students for the job market (statement 29) was most important to 111 respondents (16.2 per cent). This was more important to TWR (19.1 per cent) than RAU respondents (11.2 per cent). With respect to statement 29, TWR's association score.

Table 2

Association table: Frequency of associations for dimensions 1 and 2

Synopsis of 19 statements	RAU count:%	Vista count:%	TWR count:%	Total count
22. Provides high quality education	508:56.38	53:5.88	340:37.74	901
23. Is the best place to study	435:56.20	46:5.94	293:37.86	774
24. Lecturers are knowledgeable	443:48.52	96:10.51	374:40.96	913
25. Use latest teaching methods	418:49.94	71:8.48	348:41.58	837
26. Attracts high caliber students	484:61.58	38:4.83	264:33.59	786
27. Have not lowered standards	420:54.40	84:10.88	268:34.72	772
28. Courses are challenging	412:46.71	84:9.52	386:43.76	882
29. Prepares students for job market	256:29.91	69:8.06	531:62.03	856
30. Achieves a racial balance	186:27.39	97:14.29	396:58.32	679
31. Address globalisation challenges	341:48.85	79:11.32	278:39.83	698
32. Has state of the art facilities	531:71.28	55:7.38	159:21.34	745
33. Does forefront research	432:61.89	31:4.44	235:33.67	698
34. Environment conducive to study	491:60.10	94:11.51	232:28.40	817
35. Fees are affordable	159:20.52	330:42.58	286:36.90	775
36. Good home comforts on campus	534:66.42	71:8.83	199:24.75	804
37. Social interaction opportunities	326:37.91	149:17.33	385:44.77	860
38. Experienced, qualified managers	438:53.74	79:9.69	298:36.56	815
39. Effective, efficient admin.	460:61.42	70:9.35	219:29.24	749
40. Excellent security on campus	503:67.34	47:6.29	197:26.37	747
Total associations	7777	1643	5688	15108

Key: Frequency: row percentage, sample size 15108

Statistic	DF	Value	Prob
Chi-Square	36	1812.678	0.000
Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square	36	1573.742	0.000
Mantel-Haenszel Chi-Square	1	35.391	0.000
Phi Coefficient		0.346	
Contingency Coefficient		0.327	
Cramer's V		0.245	

was the highest with 531 (62.03 per cent) in comparison to RAU (256: 29.91 per cent) and Vista (69: 8.06 per cent).

6
Top of the mind awareness of the institutions and opinions about the merger

To support the findings of the perceptual map, respondents were asked to share their thoughts on the image of the merger institutions with the interviewer and to articulate the first thing that came to mind when they thought of each. This was the first question, and the starting point (institution's name) was rotated.

6.1 Image of Vista

- The respondents had limited knowledge about Vista and perceived its education as inferior and that its degrees had little recognition in the job market compared to other universities (151 respondents: 22.0 per cent).

- This is considered to be attributed to inadequate resources (19 respondents: 2.8 per cent) and

- the stigma of its location, crime, and corruption (107 respondents: 15.6 per cent).

- However some respondents thought the education was good and the students' attitudes excellent (46 respondents: 6.6 per cent).

- Vista's orientation was seen as black (134 respondents: 19.5 per cent) and its

- management and administration were perceived to be inadequate (34 respondents: 5 per cent).

6.2 Image of TWR

- For TWR, the top of the mind association was 'the best technikon in SA' (179 respondents: 26.1 per cent). This was confirmed by statements about providing quality education, academic excellence, well-recognised reputation, having motivated and committed students, good lecturers, and being competitive (172 respondents: 23.9 per cent).

- Many respondents associated TWR with providing a variety of job-related courses, good quality technical and practical training (137 respondents: 20.0 per cent).

- However, a large number of respondents thought of TWR in terms of fashion freaks, clothes, parties, bashes, beautiful girls with little focus on the academic side (160 respondents: 23.4 per cent). This was confirmed by statements about lack of discipline, ease of entry, too relaxed, boredom, not really academic or up to standard, education could be better, just ordinary, learning at college level, and not as good as RAU or Wits (97 respondents: 12.7 per cent).

- TWR was also known to be a multi-cultural institution (44 respondents: 6.4 per cent) with a black orientation (26 respondents: 3.8 per cent).

- Its fees were considered to be expensive (66 respondents: 8.7 per cent) and

- its facilities and security not up to standard (39 respondents: 5.8 per cent).

6.3 Image of RAU

- The high academic standard of RAU sets it apart from the other merging partners in that it was the first thing that came to mind (231 respondents: 33.6 per cent). The reputation was described by words such as excellence, mentioning the difficulty of entry, the degrees it offers, academic focus, and in addition to this, a large number categorised RAU as the top university in South Africa (107 respondents: 15.6 per cent).

- A noticeable number said that RAU's courses were very practical and rendered students competent for the job market (92 respondents: 13.4 per cent).

- RAU was considered to be a university for Afrikaans speaking people, dominated by whites (226 respondents: 33.1 per cent). However, some respondents perceived RAU to be multi-racial and culturally diverse (49 respondents: 7.2 per cent) while the large number of them that believed slow transformation and racism to be a problem, is a cause for concern (144 respondents: 21 per cent).

- The atmosphere at RAU was vibrant (36 respondents: 5.3 per cent).

- The facilities are a distinguishing factor (50 respondents: 7.3 per cent), and so is

- RAU's research orientation (17 respondents: 2.5 per cent), and good management (13 respondents: 1.9 per cent).

- It is interesting to note that some believed that RAU was too good for their liking and its image overrated (17 respondents: 2.5 per cent).

These results of the answers to the open ended question largely confirm the findings of the perceptual map, but provide more nuance of meaning to the data. This is to a certain extent always lost or destroyed by pre-coding, as in the case of the predetermined association statements (Sudman & Blair, 1998: 420).

Mixed feelings were expressed about the merger. Respondents had to indicate if they thought the merger would lead to a more effective use of limited resources, on a scale of one to seven, where one indicated 'not at all' and seven 'most definitely.' Approximately the same number of respondents selected one, four and seven, which represent 'not at all' (1=140: 20.4 per cent), 'unsure/don't know' (4=157: 22.9 per cent) and 'most definitely' (7=143: 20.9 per cent). More RAU respondents (32.8 per cent) said it would 'not at all' work, than TWR respondents (11.2 per cent). A large number of respondents wanted to justify their opinions. Some felt the merger would create an enabling environment, with better facilities where everybody could study, whilst others were of the opinion that it would be more expensive, the institutions served different markets, it was a political issue and would be harmful to the standard of education. Of all those who felt emotionally compelled to justify their opinions, 142 respondents (20.3 per cent) explained why they favoured the merger and 124 (18.2 per cent) why they believed it would not work.

7
The challenges and recommendations to management

The management challenge is to establish a new position with a distinctive competence for UJ. It is recommended that they design a comprehensive service offering, with the ability to provide superior value on a continuous basis, based on the unique capabilities depicted in the positioning map. These benefits were perceived by key stakeholders as the categories: important, being delivered, better or distinctive. In other words, UJ management must develop an identity or brand based on these findings, and then make the customers assimilate the brand. This challenge has many subcomponents.

7.1 The challenges faced by UJ management

The study indicates that UJ management needs to address the following issues during the post-merger procedural integration. They would be wise to focus on

- the quality of education delivered by RAU,
- the employability of students as achieved by TWR, and

- affordability.
- The Vista component has to adopt the culture of the other merger partners and assiduously employ quality assurance processes to earn a similar reputation.
- Facilities of TWR should be upgraded to match those of RAU.
- The extreme social orientation of TWR students needs to be resolved.
- The new institution will automatically become multicultural, but diversity has to be respected and transformation in form, structure and culture achieved (Viljoen & Rothmann, 2002: 2-3).

To define how this is to be achieved is predominantly an intellectual and managerial activity.

7.2 Recommendations to UJ management

In order to create a new position for the UJ brand that is closely aligned to the value expectations of key stakeholders, management needs to consult widely. A few guidelines are given;

- Corporate branding involves multiple stakeholders, interacting with numerous staff across many departments, because teams composed of members with dissimilar characteristics are likely to differ with respect to values, exhibit greater conflict and tend to be associated with poor communication, team integration and consensus building (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001: 441). UJ management must consult and not alienate core customers (especially staff) in the process in order to retain the emotional ties between the brand and its supporters.
- They then need to develop a high relative performance strategy that stays close to the markets and technology they are currently employing. The new comprehensive institution has to stay focused on the development of products that fit the technological, production, marketing and customer strengths of the constituent institutions (Moore & Pessemier, 1993: 94).

- UJ management should not ignore the comfort familiarity provides; too much change will confuse customers and prevent the development of customer loyalty (Hollins & Hollins, 1991: 95). Duncan (2001: 76) cautions that during re-branding one should not undermine the fundamental values and strength of the brand (constituent brands in this case).
- External and internal, as well as procedural and physical integration is required amounting to a total transformation. Coordination of activities within and between units needs to be modified and new ones established as assets are re-deployed, assuring their availability where needed. The development of a consistent corporate culture, including a frame of reference to guide strategic decision-making will perhaps be the most complex part of the integration.
- Commitment and motivation of personnel and the establishment of a new leadership are important issues, because mergers generally impact adversely on emotions, morale and productivity. One needs to migrate the goodwill of the three constituent institutions into one and migrate the stakeholders into the new comprehensive institution (Sampson, 2003: 25).
- Marketing must be turned into a line function; every employee must harmonise his/her perceptions and internalise the new identity in developing a congruent brand perception (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991: 90,131).
- The amount of money spent on the creation of the new image will not make stakeholders change their minds; they will decide themselves what to think (Broekaert, 2003: 38). The success of the integration must therefore be monitored by follow-up positioning studies.

8
Limitations of the study

The limitations of the study are firstly, that the results are not representative of the opinions of all the stakeholder groups who interacted with the three higher education institutions.

In addition to those surveyed, the publics of higher education include inter alia; accreditation organisations, the business community, trustees, government agencies and the mass media, which were left out (Kotler & Fox, 1995: 20). The perception map could therefore have been somewhat different, and due care must be exercised not to generalise the results to be applicable to either all stakeholders or a particular group, or a particular course or component of a merger partner. For instance one can decompose the information and construct different perceptual maps for particular stakeholder groups or service offerings.

Secondly, the sample over-represents students and in particular undergraduates from TWR. The interviews were conducted during the last week in September 2002, while RAU prepared to contest the legitimacy of the merger decision with TWR. (RAU decided to engage in negotiations with TWR in March 2003). As it was then considered to be a sensitive issue, RAU's management instructed personnel not to engage in discussions about the proposed merger. Unfortunately this obstruction led to refusals to participate and the confiscation of some questionnaires (Moleki, 2002). Many RAU students were, at the advice of their Student Representative Council, also reluctant to disclose their perceptions about the institutions. Some may argue that students are not the logical group to survey since they are in the process of acquiring their education and for the most part may have little knowledge of what should be expected of higher education institutions along key qualifying dimensions.

9
Conclusion

From the study it transpires that making the decision to merge is just the beginning. The process needs to be nurtured and managed carefully, particularly in the immediate post-merger period. The integration is a very complex multi-faceted one including marketing and financial considerations. It should be a fully interdisciplinary approach, since many uncertainties about individual careers and eventual student qualifications foster anxiety and insecurity (Shrivastava, 1994: 224-225 and Viljoen & Rothmann, 2002: 5-8).

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