Mission, vision, and values: What do they say?

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What Do They Say?

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Abstract

Despite widespread recognition of its importance, very little empirical research has been conducted on strategy documents, particularly Mission or Vision statements. A database containing 489 organizational statements from 300 different organizations was analyzed via content analysis to determine how many distinct concepts could be identified and the most commonly used concepts. Statements were carefully read to determine if multiple use of a term within a single statement indicated multiple meanings. The results indicate that while traditional titles are most often used to label such statements, there is a wide variety of terms used to express the ideas contained in them. Many organizational statements contain so many unique concepts that they begin to suffer from high density.

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Introduction

"Typically, executives devote a tiny percentage of their time and effort to gaining understanding, a tiny percentage to creating alignment, and the vast majority to documenting and writing a statement. In fact, the distribution of time and effort should be nearly the opposite: *spend the vast majority of your time creating alignment*. In short, worry about what you do as an organization, not what you say" (Collins, 2009).

The field of business ethics has been around for quite awhile. Unfortunately it has yet to develop a generally recognized body of knowledge or an applied ethical perspective. What we have today are discourses on acceptable and unacceptable

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ethical behavior, treatises on actions that should and should not be taken, and conversations about the appropriate attitudes to be espoused. These contributions, all equally valuable, are from business academics and philosophers alike. Yet, there is no true agreement between these sides (Robin, 2009).

In 2002, because of unethical practices employed by the likes of Enron, we saw the passage of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, which called for a Code of Ethics. Then in 2008 and 2009 we saw the virtual melt down of the American corporate system. Not surprisingly, practitioners and academics alike, now more than ever, need to delineate the factors that make up the ethical organization (Jin & Drozdenko, 2010).

It seems that people are not listening. Recent data from the Ethics Resource Center show that over 50% of U.S. employees watched at least one occurrence of unethical conduct in the workplace during the past year. Further, more than a third watched a second as well (Verschoor, 2005).

Jim Collins, the management expert quoted above, seems to be suggesting that there is a misalignment between a company's message and its actions (Collins, 2009). One piece of evidence that we can look towards is the company's mission statement. During the 1990s, more than half of the U.S. businesses had some kind of mission or vision statement (Levering, 2000; Walter, 1995). This number doubled from 10 years earlier (Levering, 2000). One of the reasons for their recent popularity is that these "statements" try to capture the inherent nature of the company (Verma, 2009). Further, a value statement can act as an ultimate control system; as long as the values are agreed upon, there is need for control

(Verma, 2009).

These statements are found on the wall in the conference room. We have all seen them. "Our company strives to be the best..." They show up as glossy wall posters, table tents, and even laminated wallet cards. They are typically used by organizations to describe why the entity exists, what it is striving to accomplish, what it stands for, and how it plans to achieve its objectives. These statements have become an integral component of corporate strategy. Statements of this type have become common and expected fixtures within every type of organization regardless of industry, size, or for-profit status. The creation, publication, and distribution of these statements is one of the most common business practices today. Yet, little empirical research has been done on the subject of corporate mission statements and the like.

The most basic of all unresolved issues on this topic is what to call the statements of this genre in general. Two primary purposes that mission statements serve (Klemm et al., 1991) are external and internal communication and motivation (Verma, 2009). They are typically strategic in nature, so they could be called "strategy" statements. Yet, they are often descriptive of an organization's identity, so they could be called "identity" statements. They often describe why an organization exists and what it is seeking to accomplish; thus, they could be called "imperative" statements, "purpose" statements or just plain "mission" or "vision" statements. Although lacking a creative flair, "Formalized Organizational Statements" seems to allow for the generality needed when referring to the entire genre of statements typically carrying the label of mission, vision, values, purpose, and principles.

CEO David Fagiano indicated that "organizations are living organisms, in many ways very similar to individuals. People have personalities; organizations have cultures. Personalities and cultures are formed by values because, quite simply, values state what is important to individuals or businesses" (Fagiano, 1995, p. 5). Strong formalized organizational statements can provide landmarks along the way. Just as a buoy marks a shipping lane and keeps a ship heading in the chosen direction, formalized organizational statements provide the benchmarks to keep an organization, work groups, and individuals on the right path. Personal experience has taught us that individuals in organizations can get so caught up in the race that they forget why they are running. Sooner or later a crisis jars the organization into a painful awareness that they are seriously off course.

Therefore, if organizations want to maximize productivity and ensure that they are doing the "right" work, they must provide organizational members with a clear understanding of who they are, where they are going, and how they are going to get there (see Falsey, 1989).

In order to assist organizational leaders in crafting stronger statements, an empirical analysis of the concepts contained within formalized organizational statements must be done. For the purpose of this study, the term "concept" refers to any element, idea, expression, unique thought, or descriptive language communicated either explicitly or implicitly within a formalized organizational statement. To date, little empirical work has been done that clearly identifies the unique concepts typically included in formalized organizational statements and their frequency of use. The questions that should be answered empirically include: Which concepts are being expressed

most typically in these statements? Are there common concepts that seem to be "fashionable" or "trendy?" Understanding these concepts will provide practical insights to future statement writers, allowing them to both avoid cliché and include key concepts.

The goal of this study is to conduct a detailed classical content analysis using a large number of formalized organizational statements from a heterogeneous group of organizations throughout the United States. This content analysis will produce an exhaustive list of the most commonly used elements and provide valuable insight regarding the inclinations of organizations in this regard.

In addition, this study seeks to raise awareness of the issues facing practitioners and executives as they consider the creation of a formalized organizational statement. It is clear that there is an obvious lack of consistency and standards related to the labeling of these statements. Perhaps it is time to create some universal norms that can be used to communicate and educate organizations and students regarding this key piece of strategic planning and implementation. Maybe then employees can begin to respond to Jim Collins' call to "*spend the vast majority of your time creating alignment*" (Collins, 2009).

Literature Review

Although the use of formalized organizational statements has been widespread in the United States for several years, there has not been a significant amount of research done that addresses the content of these formalized statements, or the most common frameworks employed in their construction. In fact, there is a void in the literature regarding what these statements actually entail. For example, an Internet database search, of most key business and industry journals, yielded only a handful of related articles that were empirical or theoretical in nature. There are a certain number of studies that include mission statements from a sample of companies, yet with little or no analysis attached (Abrahams, 1995; 2004; Graham & Havlick, 1994; Jones & Kahaner, 1995; Williams, 2008). Most articles are anecdotal in nature. Of the scholarly articles, very few evaluated the content and structure of formalized organizational statements (see David & David, 2003; Williams, 2008).

Studies Looking at Structure and Meaning

One recent study (Williams, 2008) did look at the content of the mission statements. It analyzed the statements gathered from firms listed on the 2006 Fortune 1000 list. After conducting a content analysis of these firms' mission statements, it was found that the higher-performing firms included eight of the nine recommended components more often than did the lower-performing firms, and the differences were significant for three of those components (Williams, 2008). The results of the study stressed the continuing importance of mission statements. Further, it showed that the content components have not changed significantly in the past 20 years (Williams, 2008). Yet, the study also noted that the authors of mission statements usually provided rationales for the components and labels that they used. Not surprisingly, the resulting variations in terminology and definitions limited the comparability of some studies with others. Any long-term benefits were minimized. Therefore, although this serious flaw in the mission statement literature had been identified before (e.g., Bart et al., 2001; Peyrefitte & David, 2006; Williams, 2008), it has not yet been fixed.

In another study (Firmin & Gilson, 2010), the mission statements of 107 member institutions of the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) were analyzed. The analysis looked at the frequency of words used in the statements as well as the general constructs expressed. The results in the article were discussed in light of higher education's overall objectives and how mission statements set the tone for institutional setting (Firmin & Gilson, 2010). Yet this content analysis looked at the statements' role in providing religious training and other aspects of the university's function. Another study, focusing on CEOs, dealt with the structure and meaning of organizational vision in the macro sense of the word (Larwood, 1995). This study revealed that a vision statement might be a result of having vision or a vehicle for communicating the vision. However, the study did not examine the content of the statements themselves. Another major study involving vision looked at the effect of a salient vision on strategic involvement and managers' perceptions (Oswald, Mossholder, & Harris, 1997).

Although there were numerous articles touting the need for formalized pronouncements of corporate identity, mission, or values, as well as articles describing how to write and communicate such statements (for example, see Wall, Sobol, & Solum, 1992; Scott, Jaffee, & Tobe, 1993), few seemed to carefully analyze the content and structure of these central pieces of organizational philosophy. Interestingly, one study found that 82% of organizations surveyed had mission statements, yet only 40% of those statements appeared to organization members to reflect reality (Wright, 2002). The pervasiveness of use suggests a need to conduct research regarding content and structure of these statements, to ultimately determine if these statements achieve their intended purpose.

Studies Looking at the Relationship with Company Performance

Little research has been done on the relationship between mission statements and company performance, and one study that did find mixed results (Bart & Baetz, 1998). Yet, no one seems to doubt the value of formalized organizational statements. One interesting article, published in The Economist, involving multinational managers (Only, 1995), proposed that the globalization underway in many industries today has forced managers into a new paradigm characterized by new players and partnerships. This article explains that "it is far more effective to get people to believe in the company's values, than to keep issuing them with instructions and keeping a close eye on their performance" (Only, 1995, p. 18).

Two Other Studies

Another recent study (Davis et al., 2007) wanted to understand the influence of a mission statement's ethical contents on university students. It found that those universities with ethical statements in their mission produced a significantly higher number of students with perceived character trait importance in comparison to the universities that did not contain these statements. Yet, it was found further that the mission by itself did not produce any orientation unless coupled with the overall strategic education process (Krohe, 1995). In another recent study (Verma, 2009), undertaken to understand the perception and influence of mission statements on executive behavior, found that the mission's message did not get across to the intended target audience. Another study (Palmer & Short, 2008) analyzed

the content of mission statements from 408 AACSB schools. The relationship between mission content and measures of business school characteristics, including performance, was examined. Overall, considerable variance in the content of organizational missions existed. One final study (Desmidt & Prinzie, 2008) examined the data from four Flemish nonprofit healthcare organizations. A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to all 4,443 organizational members of the participating organizations. One of the main findings of this study was that organizational members rarely engage in the behaviors associated with the management of mission statement meaning (Desmidt & Prinzie, 2008).

According to William J. Morin (1995), Chairman of Drake Beam, Morin Inc., our society, in general, is in the midst of a "value crisis" (Morin, 1995, p. 10). He observes that we "are becoming a people without rudders, without vision and with values that have very little value at all" (Morin, 1995, p. 10). This situation has resulted in a concept he calls "Silent Sabotage" which he defines as "a turned-off, disenfranchised society that gives up in silent disapproval; it's a worker who comes in later and goes home earlier than he or she did 10 years ago; it's people at work who just don't care" (Morin, 1995, p. 10). To counteract this effect in organizations, leaders must cultivate and align a common set of values and a clear vision (Collins, 2009).

After conducting exhaustive research into the essence of companies that have achieved the label of "visionary," Collins and Porras (1997) concluded that a fundamental element found in all these companies is the presence of a core ideology. The authors describe this as "core values and sense of purpose beyond just making money – that guides

and inspires people throughout the organization and remains relatively fixed for long periods of time" (Collins et al., 1997, p. 48). In fact, highly successful and visionary companies have been more ideologically driven than purely profit-driven (Collins et al., 1997, p. 55).

In another study, Ledford, senior research scientist at the Center for Effective Organizations, University of Southern California, refers to a concept called "corporate philosophy" (Ledford, Wendenhof, & Strahley, 1995, p. 4). They use this term to include any expression of a corporation's philosophy, whether the vehicle is a list of values, a vision statement, a mission statement, credo, purpose or other document.

Yet, according to many, the need is deeper than simply producing visionary statements. In the words of former National Semi-Conductor CEO Gil Amelio when discussing his experience turning around that company, "... just publishing a Vision statement and speaking in visionary terms at your communications meetings doesn't automatically enroll your people to accept it, believe it, and make it work" (Terdoslavich, 1996, p. 115). For example, another interesting concept gaining popularity is that of "Bi-Focal" vision. This is the rather profound concept that stresses the need for clear vision of the distant future as well as clear vision of the here and now (Harari, 1997, p. 46). Values statements have become extremely popular in the recent past. More than half of the values statements in the United States were created between 1989 and 1995 (Walter, 1995). This number was double of what there were in the eighties (Levering, 2000).

In fact, upwards of 80 % of the Fortune 500 companies in the United States have something that

they call a "values statement" (Walter, 1995, p. 87). In an interview conducted with Medtronic CEO Bill George, the company's success was said to be found in "rock-solid, mission-driven values that are nonnegotiable and universal" (McKibben, 1995, p. 20).

Many organizations prefer the term "mission statement" when communicating core beliefs or purpose. Most commonly, mission or purpose statements clearly state the foundational reason the organization exists. Gerald B. Johanneson, president of Haworth Inc, says "We feel a mission statement lays it right out there as to the kind of company we are and what our principles are and what our objectives are and how we want to work" (Nelton, 1994, p. 61).

Although there is not necessarily a right or wrong way to use labels such as "Vision", "Values", or "Mission", this variation can lead to confusion. Organizations are using each of these tools in many different ways with different techniques and with different levels of success. This confusion may cause hesitancy on the part of organizational leaders to undertake the task of guiding their companies using strong formalized organizational statements. In addition, the barrage of different formalized statements may dilute the motivational power and short-circuit the statement's effectiveness. Ultimately, the impact of such statements may be diminished if they are not constructed carefully and sensibly. No wonder, in yet one last study (Panda & Gupta, 2003), little emotional commitment was found with the mission statement, regardless of the longer term implications for the survival of the company.

Method

Data

The data analyzed in this study were collected originally via direct mail by an author assembling a book to contain the "mission statements" of approximately 300 American corporations. The sample thus provided a good cross-section of heterogeneous companies from dozens of industries.

The statements were originally gathered and compiled by author Jeffrey Abrahams for his book entitled "The Mission Statement Book". Abrahams (1995; 1999) explains in his book that he wrote to 2,600 companies requesting copies of their mission statements. Because little to no qualitative analysis has been conducted on mission statements, we chose to look at this data at a starting point for analysis. We will discuss in the implications section next steps for future research related to comparing content over time. The sources of that list of companies included the *Fortune 2000, the Forbes 200, the Inc. 500,* and *The 100 Best Companies to Work for in America*. He also indicated that 875 responded to his inquiry, and that 374 actually acknowledged that they had some sort of mission statement.

The data included in the sample consisted of the actual formalized organizational statements from the 300 organizations. These included organizations from a multitude of industries and varied in terms of size and scope. Many of the companies in the sample included more than one distinct statement. Several included separately titled statements within one larger statement context. The total number of distinct statements in the sample was 489. This included 15 statements that were left untitled by the organization.

It is not known whether those companies responding to the request for statements actually included all of their formalized organizational strategy statements or only their "mission statement." The actual letter used in the collection of the statements requested the company's "mission" statement. Therefore, it is safe to assume that a significant number of the companies included in the sample have additional statements worthy of analysis.

Similarly, it is important to note that a company's response indicating that they did not have a "mission statement" does not necessarily mean that they have no formalized organizational statements. The responder may have considered the request specific to those statements entitled "mission." Other responders clearly interpreted the request as any formalized statement that is "mission-like." Therefore, Abrahams' (1995; 2004) high-level statistics showing that only 43% of responders actually had mission statements, should not be construed as the percentage of companies that truly employ formalized organizational statements in general.

For the purpose of the current study, the variety included in Abraham's sample was the primary attractive characteristic. The sample provides a good heterogeneous data population from which to do a content analysis.

Analysis

Since the premise of this paper is exploratory in nature, classical content analysis was employed, using a complex text analysis methodology. Although each individual occurrence of a concept's descriptive word was not coded, if the concept emerged in separate sections of a statement or in a slightly different context, it was coded again. In other words, if the word "quality" was used several times in the same sentence, it was not coded unless it represented or described a unique circumstance. For example, the following statement would be coded as including two occurrences of the concept of "Quality-General/TQM": "We strive to give employees a *quality* work environment as we continuously improve our *quality* as determined by our customers." Conversely, the following text would only receive one occurrence of the concept of "Quality-General/TQM: "Everything we do has the highest *quality*. Quality is important because…" This required painstaking evaluation and eliminated the ability to use a simple text search functionality to identify occurrences of the concepts.

Results

The 474 titled statements included in the sample were identified by their companies using 46 different names. Fifteen of the statements were left untitled. Table 1 includes the titles and their frequency of use within the sample, sorted by frequency.

After the coding was complete, the total number of separate codes identified and created was 122. Table 2 illustrates the frequency with which the various concepts were found within the data. The frequency of occurrence reflects the number of times the concept was mentioned within the context of the sample. In some cases, an individual statement may have contained more than one occurrence of the concept.

As identified in the tables, 489 statements were provided by the 300 companies included in the sample, resulting in a ratio of 1.63 statements per

Table 1. Titles by Frequency of Occurrence

Freq.	Title	Freq.	Title
216	Mission	1	Code of Ethics
78	Vision	1	Corporate Culture
45	Values	1	Credo
23	Principles	1	Defining Statements
20	Strategies	1	Directional Statement
15	Untitled	1	Ethics
13	Purpose	1	Expectations
10	Goals	1	Heritage
9	Philosophy	1	Idea
8	Objectives	1	Mission & Purpose
6	Creed	1	Mission and Driving Forces
5	Commitment	1	Mission, Philosophy and Standards of Performance
4	Beliefs	1	Objective & Strategy
4	Strategic Imperatives	1	Organization
3	Core Values & Belief	1	Promise
3	Values & Mission	1	Pledge To Shareholders
2	Aspirations	1	Quality Commitment
2	Mission & Philosophy	1	Quality Statement
2	Philosophy/Values	1	Statement of Policy
2	Values & Strategies	1	Strategies & Objectives
2	Values & Vision	1	Values & Beliefs
1	Application	1	Values & Practices
1	Basic Game Plan	1	Vision/Mission

company. It should be noted that one should not determine from this that companies typically have more than one statement, nor should it be construed that companies have an average of 1.63 separate formalized organizational statements.

Table 2: Concepts Found in the Sample - By Frequency

Freq.	Concept	Freq.	Concept
255	Shareholder Return/Value	77	Efficiency/Speed/Quickness
230	Quality-General/TQM	76	Cost Effectiveness/Reductions/Control
211	Customer Needs/Expectations Met/Exceeded	75	Environmental Focus
210	Financial Performance/Profitability	74	Supplier/Wholesaler/Dealer Relationship/Partnership/ Interests
197	Integrity/Ethics	73	Leadership
196	Innovation/Creativity	72	Socially/Culturally Responsible
193	Community Focus/Involvement	68	Customer Satisfaction
144	Employee Training/Development/Growth	68	Fairness
141	Market Position/ Leadership/Reputation	66	Trust
137	Business Expansion/Growth	65	Diversity/Equal Employment
116	Continuous Improvement	64	Work Environment – Challenging/Rewarding/Pleasant
116	Quality Products & Services	61	Dedication/Devotion
114	Value/Affordability/Low Price	61	Responsiveness
105	Excellence	55	Competitiveness
104	Customer Service	52	Communication (Internal)
101	Employee Respect/Dignity	52	Effectiveness
91	Employee Recognition/Rewards	52	Financial Strength/Health
82	Consistency	50	Customer Focus
82	Teamwork	49	Employee Retention & Attraction
81	Safety	47	Change – Managing, Embracing, Promoting
78	Employee Advancement/ Opportunity	45	Empowerment

Freq.	Concept	Freq.	Concept
44	Productivity/Productivity Improvement	22	Initiative
42	Core Competency/General Strengths	22	Organization Structure
41	Employee as Valuable/Asset/Importance	22	Risk Taking
38	Employee Skills	20	Employee Inspiration/Motivation
37	Accountability	19	Acquisitions
37	Employee Participation/ Participative Work Environment	19	Excitement/Enthusiasm/ Energy
37	Operational Results/High Performance	18	Achievement Orientation
37	Professionalism	18	Friendliness/Courtesy
35	Adding Value	16	Industry Knowledge/Awareness
34	Product Mix/Diversification	15	Customer Welfare
33	Quality of Life	14	Cooperation
32	Customer Relationships	14	Planning
32	Employee Involvement	13	Autonomy/Freedom
31	Pride	13	Strategic Alliances/JVs
31	Quality Service	12	Caring
30	Employee Satisfaction	12	Employee Security
29	Aggressiveness	12	Fun at Work
29	Reliability	12	Ownership
27	Product/Business Development	12	Research & Development
26	Balance of Responsibilities	11	Customer Convenience
26	Distinctiveness/Unique	11	Decentralization
26	Employee Benefits/Compensation	11	Differentiation
26	Flexibility/Adaptability	11	Good place to work/Preferred Employer
24	Longevity/Tradition/Legacy/Heritage	11	Problem Solving
23	Accomplishment	9	Customer Retention
23	Learning Organization	9	Employee Utilization
23	Market Share	9	Employee Well-Being

Freq.	Concept	Freq.	Concept
8	Centralization/Coordination	3	Hard Work
8	Simplicity	3	Ingenuity/Resourcefulness
8	Stability	3	Progressiveness
8	Urgent	2	Agility/Agile Thinking
8	Walk The Talk Work Environment	2	Empathy/Compassion
7	Customer Loyalty	2	Joy
7	"Dynamicness"	2	Zero Defects
7	Employee Loyalty	1	Aliveness
6	Communication (External)	1	Customer Relations
5	Feedback/Advice/Input	1	Greatness
5	Golden Rule	1	Union Relationship
5	Market Oriented		
5	Timeliness		
4	Courage		
4	Gain/Profit Sharing		

Discussion

Following the detailed analysis of the sample, several observations are made. First, the bulk of the organizations opted to use traditional titles to describe their formalized statements. Second, although there was a significant list of distinct concepts included in the sample, there was a strong consistency between the statements in terms of a few key concepts. Third, evaluation of the statements revealed a phenomenon we refer to as concept "density" in which several unique and highly meaningful concepts are loaded into a very short statement, thus creating a density that can be measured, as described below.

The titles used to describe formalized organizational statements range from highly traditional to unique. While some organizations choose to leave their statements untitled, others choose to create their own title by combining one or more traditional titles.

It is interesting to note that just 10% of the titles were applied to 78% of the statements. The top five most frequently used titles (Mission, Vision, Values, Principles, and Strategies) resulted in 382 of the 489 total statements. This seems to indicate that the majority of companies choose to use traditional titles versus opting for a more unique and creative approach.

Analysis of the statements, however, revealed that the specific concepts within the statements are often communicated uniquely and without using traditional words or phrases. For instance, the concept of Shareholder Return/Value was an overwhelmingly pleonastic concept in the sample. The statement writers described the recipients of that return or value, as shareholders, stockhold-

ers, stakeholders, share owners, investors, stock-owners, owners, to name a few. These occurrences were unique but all communicated the same concept. This careful analysis revealed that the concept of "Shareholder Return/Value" was mentioned 255 times. This should be contrasted with the 114 times the word "Shareholders" was used as indicated by Abrahams (1995; 2004). It should also be noted that it was Abrahams' intention only to illustrate the most common key words and phrases used in the statements. He did not intend his word and phrase counts to be interpreted as inclusive of the concepts being communicated. Hence, this particular study, by applying a complex content analysis, provides a more comprehensive evaluation of concepts communicated.

In many instances, the same concept emerged multiple times within the statements provided by a company. Sometimes, company officials included the same concept in all of their separate statements. In addition, there were multiple examples of companies using a particular concept several times within the same statement.

While carefully reviewing the data, we were often amazed by the number of distinct concepts communicated within a statement or even within a sentence. We use the term "density" to describe this phenomenon. A quick tabulation of the results shows the total number of concept occurrences to be 5,673. This means that on average; nearly 12 different concepts were discussed per statement and 18 different concepts per company. There were many, many instances of organizations packing up to 20 strategic and descriptive words and concepts into a very short statement.

Limitations and Further Research

Although this research provides good empirical data with which to understand the concepts that companies are communicating with their formalized organizational statements, there is significant room for additional study. Future qualitative analysis projects should focus on understanding the actual proliferation of formalized organizational statements within organizations. This study does not attempt to answer the question of how many companies have formally written statements. Neither does it contemplate the number of different statements a company writes over time. Rather, our focus was on examining the conceptual framework inherent in mission statements. Since the data are over 10 years old, we ask: What is different today? As mentioned, we see this study as a starting point for a conceptual framework. From here, future research can look at how the core concepts identified here have changed over time.

In addition, future research could investigate relationships between various concepts within the context of a statement. This would allow for the gathering of additional insights into what things are being communicated within each uniquely titled statement. Understanding what is currently being communicated as vision, purpose, mission, or values would be the first step in developing a framework that could lead to consistent societal definitions of the mission, vision, purpose, or values statement.

Although we are not convinced that there is significance in what a company chooses to call their statement, developing norms around formalized organizational statements would enhance the ability to communicate about them in corporate and

educational settings. In addition, a universal framework could assist organizations in the development of these statements and create a sense of familiarity. The blank sheet being used today would be replaced with a general framework within which to work.

Finally, there seems to be a need for additional research into the concept of density within statements. For instance, is there a correlation between the density of a statement and the level of ownership within the organization? Is there a correlation between density and organization performance?

As for practical implications, executives will acknowledge that there is a widespread skepticism within many organizations today regarding the corporate mission statement. Fueled by popular comic strips that provide a satirical look at the things organizations say and do, employees are becoming cynically aware of overused, underpracticed corporate rhetoric.

Conclusions

There were clear instances that the impact of the statement seemed to be diminished and diluted by all the corporate buzzwords and politically correct terminology (see also Lewis, 1999). A popular approach was to attempt to communicate multiple messages or feelings by strategically employing key words and phrases. In those cases, there was no attempt to clarify, explain, or operationalize the concepts. In our opinion, this phenomenon gives the appearance that the company felt a concept was important enough to include in their formalized organizational statement, but not important enough to explain what it meant or how it would be applied practically.

Another interesting result of the study related to the recurrence of various concepts across statements and organizations. It was clear that a small number of concepts are consistently included in formalized organizational statements. There is a "short list" of issues that companies feel must or should be communicated within their personal, formalized statements. This is probably, in large measure, indicative of the fact that most companies have similar needs, motives, objectives and concerns. For-profit companies exist in an environment that is built upon providing a specific product or service to a customer while meeting certain financial expectations as prescribed by the owners or investors of the organization. Because of that, it should be expected that their formalized organizational statements of mission, vision, or values center on issues dealing with quality, service, customers, and shareholders.

We believe it is important for leaders and strategic planning consultants to acknowledge this danger and work to ensure that the concepts being expressed in formalized organizational statements are reflective of the organization's true identity. Employees and customers are more sophisticated now, and are easily seeing through the trendy business buzzwords being used. We hope that this research sets the stage for future conversation and more exploration into the meaning and use of mission statements as a viable mechanism for an organization's identity and culture.

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