

Sex, Lies, and Mission Statements

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Mission statements abound. One often sees them gracing the walls and halls of the world's leading corporations. Boston-based Bain & Company recently reported that of the 500 firms it surveyed, nine out of ten had used a mission statement some time in the last five years—thus making it the most popular management tool deployed in recent decades.

The reason for such popularity is that mission statements are usually considered the cornerstone of every company's strategy formulation exercise. Most commentaries on mission statements imply that superior performance results follow shortly after their inception. Little evidence exists, however, that "proves" their true value. Most studies have tended to focus almost exclusively—even obsessively—on their content. None has attempted to compare "prescription with practice," and only a few have tried to link findings about mission statements to any measures of performance or satisfaction.

As a result, it is currently unknown how mission statements are actually being used (relative to what the experts are saying), how satisfied companies are with them, or how useful they are to an organization's existence. In other words, do they "make a difference" in terms of performance? These questions form the basis of a major ongoing research project, and this article presents some of the answers that have recently emerged.

MISSION STATEMENTS: THE SEX DRIVE OF ORGANIZATIONS

The power of mission statements rests in their ability to achieve two key results: (1) to inspire and motivate organizational members to exceptional performance—that is, to influence behavior; and (2) to guide the resource allocation process in a manner that produces consistency and focus. Mission statements accomplish these ends in the following ways.

They provide a sense of purpose and direction. A major cause of failure in most organizations is the inability of top management to

identify and agree on what the organization is really trying to accomplish. When this occurs, employees throughout the firm, especially senior managers, become confused and easily distracted in both their day-to-day and long-term orientations. Before long, confusion and chaos (the "natural state" of all large organizations) dominate.

A well-conceived and well-communicated mission statement, however, is intended to help begin the process of overcoming these limitations. It does this by giving organizational members some security of direction (as opposed to wandering aimlessly) and channeling their energy into selected areas. In essence, a mission statement is a formal written document designed to capture and convey a firm's unique and enduring purpose. It should answer some fairly basic yet critical questions, such as: What is our purpose? and, Why does our organization exist? At Johnson Controls, the answer to these questions is "to continually exceed our customers' increasing expectations." At Disney, it is "to make people happy."

Knowing the answers to these questions, however, is not always easy. Just ask Xerox, Ford, and IBM. At different times, each has become confused about the reason for its existence, and the results were almost lethal. Each eventually recovered, but only after rediscovering what its real purpose was and what it was really trying to accomplish.

It is not surprising that mission statements today are regarded as the pivotal starting point for effectively wielding almost every new management program and initiative: TQM, corporate reengineering, self-directed work teams, management by objectives, SBU/divisional planning, and so on. Mission statements form the only solid

Why aren't mission statements getting the credit they deserve, or the results managers and experts have expected?

foundation upon which any corporate program can rest if it is to endure for the long term.

They ensure that the interests of key stakeholders are not ignored. It is not uncommon for most individuals, when pressed, to respond that the real purpose of their firm is to “make money” or “maximize shareholder value.” Adopting this attitude in the extreme, however, has been shown to create serious and sometimes fatal problems for companies. Focusing exclusively on shareholders’ interests often causes a firm to shortchange its customers (as Ford did when it compromised customer safety in its Pinto automobile and caused the deaths of dozens of people), its employees (as GM did in its bad faith bargaining with unions in the 1970s and ’80s), and society (as when Exxon tried to avoid its responsibilities and cover up its negligence during the Exxon Valdez oil spill). Ironically, when a corporation appears to focus exclusively on its

shareholders, it is those same shareholders who really lose in the end.

There is today, however, an emerging, enlightened, and expanding view that an organization exists to meet and serve the needs of many different groups, not just the shareholders. If it does not satisfy the needs of its shareholders and owners, its short-term future will be far from guaranteed; but if it does not also meet the needs of its customers—for quality, service, delivery—it will not exist at all. Customers will eventually seek other suppliers, and new competitors will enter the fray. Moreover, if a firm does not meet the needs of its employees (wages, recognition, respect), its long-term survival may be in doubt. Good employees will leave and the firm will develop a reputation that discourages qualified candidates. Finally, if a firm does not meet the needs of its community or society (for good corporate citizenship), its existence will ultimately be threatened through legislation or other means.

Mission statements, therefore, aid companies in shouldering the needs of multiple constituencies. And success with mission statements has been described in terms of the ability to balance the many competing interests various stakeholders place on a firm. One of the most widely quoted (and oldest) mission statements, which appears to strike this balance successfully, is that of Johnson & Johnson (shown in **Figure 1**).

They sharpen a firm’s (business) focus.

Such writers as Thompson and Strickland (1996) have suggested that the fundamental rationale behind mission statements is to articulate a “definition of the organization’s business.” They take this position based on the philosophy that no firm can do everything well all the time, or be all things to all people. So it is important to specify which stakeholder needs the firm intends to pursue and—perhaps even more important—which ones it does not. Companies that fail to set some appropriate boundaries on their operations often find themselves with no focus, no anchor, and no direction. Nowhere has this been more obvious than in the recent spectacle of Donald Trump, who, without an appropriate set of organizational boundaries, found himself wandering from real estate development to hotels to airlines and eventually to casinos—all in pursuit of something called “a deal.”

They enable better control over employees. One of the greatest challenges of managing a large corporation is “staying focused”—ensuring that the activities of all members are consistent with the company’s stated objectives and strategy. Many formal and bureaucratic techniques and tools have been developed over the years to assist in this function and minimize the risk of “dysfunctional activities”: formal reporting and management information systems, formal and

Figure 1
Johnson & Johnson’s Mission Statement

The Mission (“Credo”) of Johnson & Johnson

We believe our first responsibility is to the doctors, nurses, patients, mothers and all others who use our products and services. In meeting their needs, everything we do must be of high quality. We must constantly strive to reduce our costs in order to maintain reasonable prices. Customers’ orders must be serviced promptly and accurately. Our suppliers and distributors must have an opportunity to make a fair profit.

We are responsible to our employees, the men and women who work with us throughout the world. Everyone must be considered as an individual. We must respect their dignity and recognize their merit. They must have a sense of security in their jobs. Remuneration must be fair and adequate, and working conditions clean, orderly and safe. Employees must feel free to make suggestions and complaints. There must be equal opportunity for employment, development and advancement for those qualified. We must provide competent management, and their actions must be just and ethical.

We are responsible to the communities in which we live and work and to the world community as well. We must be good citizens—support good works and charities and bear our fair share of taxes. We must encourage civic improvements and better health and education. We must maintain in good order the property we are privileged to use, protecting the environment and natural resources.

Our final responsibility is to our shareholders. Business must make a sound profit. We must experiment with new ideas. Research must be carried on, innovative programs developed and mistakes paid for. New equipment must be purchased, new facilities provided and new products launched. Reserves must be created to provide for adverse times. When we operate according to these principles, the shareholders should realize a fair return.

informal reward systems, senior management leadership styles, and, of course, personal supervision. For the most part, all these tools exist as control mechanisms operating outside the individual.

Mission statements, however, hold the potential for creating inner control either through their ability to inspire and motivate workers or through the process by which they are created. Good missions, in other words, induce employees to control their own behavior with less formal mechanisms. To the extent that a company's mission statement appeals more to the hearts than the heads of its workers, greater employee commitment to the mission follows. This in turn strengthens the firm's control over the actions of its members because they voluntarily accept the mission. Several notable examples of companies that use their mission statements to control (in a personally emotional way) the day-to-day activities of their members are Worthington Industries, Johnson & Johnson, The Body Shop, L.L. Bean, Levi Strauss, and British Airways.

They promote shared values and behavioral standards. Shared values and behavioral standards—the hallmarks of an organization's culture—help sharpen the focus of organizational members and augment control over them. Those who do not “buy into” those values and standards either quit or are encouraged to leave. Those who remain have a strong sense of identity and affiliation with the organization and are dedicated to preserving and protecting the principles and practices it promotes and publicizes. In this capacity, a mission statement acts as a declaration of philosophy whose purpose is to influence both thought and deed.

Mission statements, then, as described in all these ways, are the “sex drive” or “libido” of organizational life. Inspiring passion and personal pleasure in the firm, their success is often described in such terms as commitment, involvement, and satisfaction. As such, managers should feel compelled to work diligently on them. The “joy of mission statements,” however, rests on frequent communication and both the mutual understanding and acceptance of each party's needs. They therefore need to be clear, concise, and to the point. **Figure 2** offers a few notable examples.

Despite their apparent widespread use, the value of mission statements is inconclusive. Many firms seem to operate—quite successfully—without them. Many unanswered questions concerning their adoption and deployment persist. And numerous anecdotal accounts question their true worth and real purpose. As a result, the successful formulation and implementation of mission statements is viewed as a highly uncertain process with unpredictable outcomes. Nevertheless,

Figure 2
Mission Statements From Other Companies

SONY MUSIC CANADA

Our passion is music. Our commitment is to our artists. Our focus is customer service. Our edge is innovation. Our success is in our attitude!

NEWPORT SHIPPING COMPANY

We will build great ships. At a profit if we can. At a loss if we must. But we will build great ships!

AT&T

We are dedicated to being the world's best at bringing people together—giving them easy access to each other and to the information and services they want—anytime, anywhere.

JOHNSON CONTROLS INC.

Continually exceeding our customers' increasing expectations.

BURLINGTON NORTHERN RAILROAD

Our goal is to design and consistently deliver transportation and information services that exceed our customers' expectations. A successful railroad will be at the heart of this effort. We will achieve this goal by developing an atmosphere that stimulates the productivity and innovativeness of our people and leads to profitability and growth for our owners and employees.

despite these doubts and criticisms, senior managers continue to forge ahead in creating and using them in such numbers that their “population” shows no signs of decreasing.

THE LIES

So how well do mission statements accomplish all these feats, perform all this magic? Do they really drive an organization's performance? To find out, we contacted senior managers from 88 leading North American corporations by mail and asked them to relate their experiences with mission statements following a set of prescribed questions. Fifty percent of the companies responding classified themselves as “primarily manufacturing,” 34 percent as “primarily service,” and the rest as being involved in both types of activities. Only 7 percent of the firms were described as “unrelated,” whereas 93 percent were categorized as a collection of “related” business activities.

In the survey, the managers were asked to comment on the following characteristics and features of their firm's mission statement:

- the extent to which their mission was being achieved;
- the clarity of the statement;
- their satisfaction with their firm's current statement;
- their satisfaction with their firm's mission development process;
- the influence of their firm's mission over the personal behavior and actions of others throughout the organization;
- the degree to which employees were committed to the mission;
- the degree to which organizational arrangements were aligned with the mission;
- the specific people involved in creating the mission statement;
- the purpose or rationale behind its development; and, of course,
- the content of their firm's mission statement.

The respondents' answers were then analyzed in terms of selected performance measures—satisfaction with the statement's content and process, its achievement and influence on behavior—to determine which aspects and characteristics of each firm's mission were associated with superior performance. In this way, it was hoped, our findings would begin to address some of the uncertainty surrounding mission statements and contribute to their more effective deployment throughout the business world.

The responses we received were both surprising and revealing. The most amazing result was the fact that so much mendacity and misrepresentation appears to exist in the published and very public mission statements in our sample of firms. What is so discouraging is that there appears to be very little quality control or willingness on the part of senior managers to ensure that only properly formulated and worded mission statements are generated and released. The

overall conclusion is that, in any sample of mission statements, the vast majority are not worth the paper they are written on and should not be taken with any degree of seriousness.

This is indeed tragic, because so much time and effort appears to be spent in generating mission statements. They seem to hold so much

promise. But all too frequently the mission statement is itself a promise that appears to have been broken often before the ink is dried. Here is the evidence on which these conclusions are based.

Mission Impossible. Only a few managers believed their firms were making real progress in terms of achieving the goals imbedded in the published mission statements. Only 23 percent claimed they were making significant strides toward achieving their mission. About three-quarters of them, on the other hand, claimed they were experiencing problems of varying degrees in terms of realizing the goals. This was occurring despite the fact that the average age of the mission statements was 10 years.

Mission Ambiguity. One possible reason for this lack of mission success may be the fact that so few of the statements in our sample were perceived to be clear. Only 8 percent of the managers responding stated that they thought their current mission statements were fully clear or self-evident to the rest of the organization. Seventy-one percent claimed they were only "somewhat satisfied" with their mission's clarity. And 20 percent were downright dissatisfied. One has to wonder, then, on what basis most of these statements were approved and released—not only to the rest of the organization but to the world.

Mission Dissatisfaction. What was truly surprising, however, were the results relating to managers' satisfaction with the actual *content* of their current mission statement. Although 36 percent reported they were "completely satisfied" with it, 37 percent reported only partial satisfaction, and 27 percent appeared to be dissatisfied to one degree or another. This observation is quite remarkable because it suggests that in a Western society whose corporate mantra is "TQM," North American managers are either permitting their companies to operate with out-of-date mission statements or allowing their firms to produce mission statements in which the leadership (or anyone else, for that matter) has little confidence.

Wrong Missions. It was also disheartening to discover that even fewer of the senior managers believed their firms were pursuing the "right" mission. Most (64 percent) expressed only limited satisfaction with the mission statement. Only 18 percent claimed to be fully satisfied with the direction specified in it. And 18 percent actually seemed to believe their company was pursuing the wrong mission. Given that these statements are supposed to be the cornerstone of every firm's strategic plan, it is no wonder executive committees often report frustration and dissatisfaction with overall strategy. It is also hard to imagine any substantial team-building within a firm's top ranks when there is so little agreement on something so fundamental to organizational success as the firm's mission.

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Development Process Dissatisfaction.

Low satisfaction with clarity and content suggests that there were probably serious problems with how the mission statement was developed in the first place. Analysis of the managers' responses confirmed this suspicion. More than 73 percent of the respondents indicated they were less than fully satisfied with the process used to develop their organization's mission statement. Of this amount, about 31 percent claimed to be dissatisfied to some extent, whereas 43 percent indicated they were only somewhat satisfied. With only 27 percent of the respondents voicing "total satisfaction," these findings suggest that perhaps many mission statements are being given the corporate blessing much too soon and that the process of mission development is being curtailed much too early.

No Influence Over Behavior. Given a development process that was cut short, it was not too surprising to find that the organizational understanding, commitment, and support necessary for mission acceptance was less than forthcoming; in some instances, it was counterproductive. In particular, the managers reported that their mission statements appeared to have a significant positive influence on the day-to-day lives of their employees in only about 5 percent of the firms. A partial positive influence on employee behavior was said to exist among 66 percent of the respondents. But about 15 percent stated that their mission appeared to have no influence whatsoever on employee actions, while almost 14 percent claimed the influence was of a negative nature. (Similar results were obtained in terms of our measures for "employee commitment" to the mission.) These results fly in the face of those who argue that mission statements should result in large numbers of individuals who both understand and are committed to them. Clearly, the evidence suggests that the reality of corporate life appears to be just the opposite.

No Involvement. Many groups (customers, suppliers, senior and middle managers, and so on) can legitimately claim to have a "stake" in the future of most firms. Managers in the survey were therefore asked to indicate the degree of involvement of nine stakeholder groups in developing their firm's mission statement (1 = not involved; 4 = highly involved).

Our analysis of the results indicates that, rather than widespread participation in the development process, only limited and highly selective participation was found, especially among the organization's elite. CEOs and members of senior management were by far the ones most involved with developing the mission statement. The participation rate for other stakeholder groups were: middle managers (44 percent of the firms); non-managers (23.5 percent); consultants (41.2 per-

cent); shareholders (26.2 percent); customers (20 percent); suppliers (7.1 percent); and board of directors (73.2 percent).

Mission statements, then, appear to be more for the benefit of top management than anyone else in the company. Moreover, as the organizational level drops, so does the rate of participation, with non-managers (all "other" employees) having the lowest rate of all internal stakeholders. Yet one of the supposed benefits of mission statements is the commitment and passion they inspire at all organizational ranks. Obviously, creating this passion is difficult if only a select few participate or are even aware of it. Why, then, do we see so many senior managers wringing their hands over the fact that their organizational members "just don't seem to get it"?

It was also startling to find so little participation from two important external stakeholder groups: customers and shareholders. If customers—and the satisfaction of their needs—are one of the primary reasons for any firm's existence, it would seem fairly obvious to involve them in the mission development process, if only for confirmation of the company's choices. Such was not the case, though, in our particular sample. This absence further reinforces the notion that mission statements appear to be much more internally oriented (especially with respect to top management) than heretofore believed.

Who's In and Who's Out? Given this pattern of participation in the development process, one would naturally expect to see mission statements in which the interests of top management were paramount. On the contrary, however, our review of the statements supplied by the respondents indicated that "customers" were the most frequently mentioned stakeholder group (appearing in 78 percent of the mission statements), followed by employees (52 percent), shareholders (41 percent), society (33 percent), and suppliers (21 percent).

Some would argue that this shows a particular sensitivity and astuteness on the part of those responsible for creating the mission statement. Others, however, would respond that the limited participation of customers and employees makes a mockery of both the development process and the resulting statement. How can senior managers claim to know what customers and employees want and what needs they intend to meet when they clearly have so little regard for their opin-

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ions on such a fundamental matter? As one lower-level employee was heard to remark when senior management unveiled the firm's new corporate mission, "That's their mission, not mine!" This is indeed unfortunate, considering that the firm's top management was known to have spent millions in consulting fees to facilitate the mission development process.

Improper Use. At the beginning of this article, it was argued that two major rationales supported the use of mission statements: increased employee motivation and a better resource allocation process. Our analysis shows, however, that neither rationale could be considered a major force behind the creation of the mission statements. Instead, managers' responses indicated that the degree to which mission statements were being developed for either rationale was quite limited. Only 35 percent of the firms reported using mission statements to inspire and motivate their troops (including themselves). And only 15 percent claimed that improved resource allocation was a consideration in their mission's development.

These findings would suggest, then, that managers in the sample are either using their mission statements for purposes other than motivation and resource allocation, or are simply unaware of the benefits that can accrue from pursuing these two purposes. There is also the possibility that with so little research on mission statements, senior managers are unconvinced about the real impact the documents can have on their companies (that is, they don't believe the "hype"). Or they are confused about how to use them properly. In any case, our findings suggest that mission statements are both misunderstood and misused in most modern corporations.

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR MISSION

The results obtained from this sample of leading North American companies are quite discouraging, indicating that mission statements generally do not hold much currency or favor within the top ranks of major Western corporations. And who can blame these managers for thinking so? The mission statements are not statements of fact, but more of fantasy and fiction. As a consequence, their usefulness appears highly questionable. One might be tempted to disband any current attempts to formulate or revise the mission statement of one's own company.

Analysis results have also shown that when mission statements are used, they may not be used for any of the reasons suggested by prior theory. Indeed, there appears to be more than an average probability that the next time you read or hear a mission statement, you should not believe

it and should discount its worth to that organization. At a minimum, you should shout, "Show me!" or "Prove it!"

Most of these mission statements appear to be more hype and hysteria than real beliefs, philosophies, and attitudes on the part of corporations. No wonder they are held in such contempt. They just don't seem to work—at least for most companies. But perhaps that is because most companies don't know how to get the maximum benefit out of them. Existing pronouncements about mission statements and their development are based largely on unsubstantiated and frequently anecdotal evidence. Reliable data are sorely needed showing how various organizations are profiting from—or at least deriving some satisfaction from—their mission statements. By following the practices of such firms, others might also benefit. If mission statements are to fulfill their promise, we need some guideposts regarding their use.

Fortunately, our research was able to uncover a number of important management practices related to the successful development and adoption of company mission statements. We found certain practices that, if followed, appeared to be highly correlated with selected performance measures.

Mission Components That Really Satisfy

Managers in the survey were presented with a list of 20 items that could be part of any company's mission statement. They were asked to indicate the degree to which the components were contained in their firm's mission statement, using a scale of 1 = "not at all," 2 = "somewhat," and 3 = "clearly specified." As shown in **Table 1**, six of the 20 components were found to be used to a fairly high degree (that is, with a mean usage score of 2.25 or more and "clearly specified" in more than 50 percent of the cases): organizational purpose; concern for satisfying customers; statement of general corporate goals; statement of values/philosophy; statement of distinctive competence; and concern for satisfying employees.

In contrast, five were observed to be "not part of the mission" to any great extent (mean usage score under 1.75 and "not part of mission" in at least 50 percent of the cases): concern for satisfying suppliers; specific financial objectives; technology defined; location of business; and concern for survival. Thus, while 75 percent of the components listed in Table 1 were being used with some degree of regularity, others were clearly out of favor in a quarter of the cases.

When these answers were correlated with responses regarding "degree of mission satisfaction," Table 1 shows that certain mission statement components were significantly correlated

Table 1
"Mission Component" Frequency Analysis and Correlation with "Mission Satisfaction"

MISSION COMPONENTS	MEAN SCORE (1 - 3)	Not part of mission at all (1)	Stated somewhat in mission (2)	Clearly specified in mission (3)	"Mission Component" correlation to "Mission Satisfaction"
1. Purpose/ <i>raison d'être</i>	2.82	1.4%	15.1%	83.6%	.42***
2. Concern for satisfying customers	2.71	6.8	15.3	78.1	ns
3. General corporate goals	2.56	6.9	30.6	62.5	ns
4. Values/philosophy	2.41	13.7	31.5	54.8	.19*
5. Distinctive competence	2.29	18.1	34.7	47.2	.29**
6. Concern for satisfying employees	2.28	23.3	24.7	52.1	.27*
7. Business definition	2.21	23.3	31.5	45.2	.33**
8. Concern for satisfying shareholders	2.16	24.7	34.2	41.1	.25*
9. Competitive strategy	2.15	19.2	46.6	34.2	.23*
10. Desired public image	2.12	31.5	24.7	43.8	.28**
11. Behavior standards	2.07	27.8	37.5	34.7	.23*
12. Nonfinancial objectives	2.06	26.0	41.1	32.9	ns
13. Specific products offered	2.01	28.8	41.1	30.1	ns
14. Specific markets served	2.01	34.2	30.1	35.6	ns
15. Concern for satisfying society	1.94	38.4	28.8	32.9	ns
16. Concern for satisfying suppliers	1.71	49.3	30.1	20.5	.22*
17. Specific financial objectives	1.68	50.7	30.1	19.2	ns
18. Technology defined	1.60	52.1	35.6	12.3	.25**
19. Location of business	1.53	67.1	12.3	20.5	.20*
20. Concern for survival	1.42	67.6	22.5	9.9	ns

Significance: * = .05; ** = .01; *** = .000; ns = not significant

with our satisfaction ratings, whereas others were not. Sometimes the correlations existed for those components found to be of moderate to high use (items 1 and 4-11). Managers with missions containing these items should interpret this finding as validating their current component choices.

In three instances, significant correlations with satisfaction were found when the degree of mission component usage was quite low. This happened with: concern for satisfying suppliers, technology defined, and location of business (items 16, 18, and 19 in Table 1). It is here that managers should pay especially close attention because the more company mission statements contained these components, the greater was the managers' satisfaction with the statement. And the more these components were missing from the statement, the lower was the satisfaction. Managers who are currently dissatisfied with their firm's mission statement would do well to reconsider it in light of these findings. They just might be able to discover at least part of the source of their dissatisfaction.

It was particularly interesting to identify the eight mission components (some of which were observed to have fairly high usage) that appeared not to affect mission satisfaction: items 2, 3, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, and 20. For some components, such as "concern for customers," this seems to be simply because of overuse. Because some expression of concern for customers appears in

virtually every mission statement in our sample, it no longer has any meaning or value, other than most managers think it should be included for PR purposes. Clearly, though, some companies are expressing that concern when they really don't mean it.

In other instances (specific financial objectives, nonfinancial objectives, specific products offered, and specific markets served), there seems to be no consensus on whether including a particular component in the mission statement makes any difference. Perhaps these should be expressed somewhere other than in the mission statement. Until evidence points clearly to the benefits from their use, managers would do well to avoid cluttering their mission statements with any more components than is absolutely necessary or warranted.

Mission: The More the Merrier

One possible reason for many managers' dissatisfaction with the way mission statements have been developed may be because so few stakeholders actually participated in developing them. When individual stakeholder involvement scores were correlated with scores on satisfaction with the development process, significant positive relationships were found (Table 2). The more members of these stakeholder groups participated in the mission development process, the

greater were the ratings of process satisfaction.

Sadly, though, the propensity to involve these groups equally does not seem to apply. Lower-level employees and customers garnered only 23.5 percent and 20 percent participation rates, respectively, in the development process, yet their involvement ratings correlated with the satisfaction scores as strongly as did those of the CEOs. Clearly, then, many firms in the sample missed a major opportunity to secure support for their mission statements when they failed to involve these two important stakeholder groups. Managers in other firms would do well to heed these findings and consider calling upon non-managerial employees and customers when designing their company's mission.

At the same time, the participation of a number of stakeholder groups in the process appears suspect. Consultants, shareholders, suppliers, and board members were not significantly associated with the managers' reported measures of mission

process satisfaction. This means companies that seek to involve as many stakeholder groups as possible in developing their mission may be practicing "overkill" and achieving little for all their extra efforts. Of course, it might also mean that many of the firms in this sample have yet to figure out precisely how to use these other groups wisely and so are missing out on the benefits accruing from them. Until this issue is sorted out, most companies should probably just concentrate on securing the participation and support of their customers and internal stakeholders. This is where the real opportunities for developing a satisfying mission appear to reside.

"Going the Distance" With Your Mission

A hallmark of effective strategic management is the relationship between a firm's strategy and its overall organizational structure. The more a company aligns structure with strategy, the greater is

Table 2
Stakeholder Involvement and Correlation with Process Satisfaction

STAKEHOLDER	INVOLVEMENT SCORE (MEAN) 1 = No involvement at all 4 = High involvement	Percent of cases in which individual stakeholders are "not involved at all" in developing the mission	Correlation between stakeholder involvement scores and managers' ratings of satisfaction with development process
CEO	3.90	12.6	.23*
Senior management	3.73	8.0	.38***
Board of directors	2.46	26.8	ns
Middle managers	2.43	56.0	.22*
Consultants	1.97	58.8	ns
Shareholders	1.76	73.8	ns
Non-managers	1.58	76.5	.23*
Customers	1.47	80.0	.24*
Suppliers	1.24	92.9	ns

Significance: * = .05; ** = .01; *** = .000; ns = not significant

Table 3
Organizational Alignment with the Mission

ORGANIZATIONAL COMPONENT	ALIGNMENT SCORE (MEAN) 1 = Not aligned with mission 5 = Totally aligned with mission	Correlation between "org. alignment" ratings and "mission achievement"
Strategic planning system	4.13	.35**
Leadership style	3.74	.38**
Operating planning system	3.73	.37**
Performance evaluation criteria	3.48	.48***
Structure/design	3.43	.26*
Training & development system	3.40	.37**
Budgeting system	3.35	.29**
Reward system	3.19	.31**
Recruitment/selection system	3.15	.31**
Job descriptions	2.93	ns
Total of individual org. alignment ratings	30.50	.36**

Significance: * = .05; ** = .01; *** = .000; ns = not significant

its success in achieving that strategy. Alignment helps focus the attention and efforts of all employees around the company's strategic choices. The same, then, should hold true for its mission.

Table 3 shows the results of testing this proposition. All but one of the nine organizational dimensions were found to be both significantly and positively associated with the managers' responses regarding whether their missions were being achieved. This confirms and reinforces the argument that organizational performance (and managers' satisfaction with that performance) is enhanced when mission and structure—the “yin” and “yang” of corporate life—are in harmony. A mission by itself is simply an intellectual activity; it takes the discipline of structure, systems, and formal procedures to make it dance. Working together, they create an invincible force that only a few organizations truly manage to accomplish but no competing organization can repel. Companies that do not understand this lesson or choose to ignore this advice operate at a distinct disadvantage.

Influencing Behavior: A Mission's Acid Test

The ultimate test of a mission statement is its ability to influence behavior. Organizational members will obey and follow the dictates of the mission only to the extent that they are committed to it. As we have seen, though, such commitment is not automatically forthcoming. Indeed, many managers in the survey believed their mission's influence over organizational members to be fairly lacking. However, a significant and positive relationship was found to exist between a mission's influence over members' behavior and each of the three performance measures of interest in this study: mission satisfaction, stakeholder involvement, and mission/organization alignment. More specifically, results suggest that “mission influence over the behavior and actions of organizational members” is significantly greater:

- the more the various stakeholders are involved in its development (correlation score = .36);
- the more organizational arrangements are aligned with the mission (correlation score = .52); and
- the greater the satisfaction with the statement (correlation score = .43).

In other words, the impact and commitment mission statements can deliver in daily organizational life come only when they are of high quality and are pervasive throughout the firm. This, of course, takes time and requires much focused and dedicated effort. Nevertheless, to the extent that there is a great reward for that investment in the form of committed and inspired organizational members, managers should not shy away

from the costs and challenges involved. Rather, they should embrace those challenges with enthusiasm and dedication.

Mission statements can be the *élan vital* of corporate life. To the extent that they are used wisely, any firm can derive great benefits from them, both emotional and financial. Trouble is, they are being misused and sometimes downright abused. The fallout from all this is a tarnished reputation for mission statements in general and doubts that are expressed in the cacophony of naysayers. The most remarkable discovery of our research has been the fact that managers, despite doubts and fears, continue to press on in their dedication and devotion to preparing and promoting their companies' statements. Often these actions are without merit (“I need a mission because everyone expects me to have one”), and the result is little more than a statement of fantasy, fiction, and lies.

Fortunately, at other times mission statements appear to be conceived and “carried to full term” on the nascent belief that a “sense of mission” is a good thing for any firm to have and an essential starting point on the road to success. Our research supports this latter view and offers some tangible evidence that the blood, sweat, and tears many firms shed in their mission quest need not be in vain. Along with some guidelines on what a mission statement should contain if it is to generate substantial managerial support, our results also provide some advice on both the nature and degree of stakeholder involvement and organizational alignment necessary to inspire commitment and mission accomplishment. Indeed, clear and tangible benefits await those firms that have both the fortitude and the foresight to invest—vigorously—in their mission. To be sure, additional confirmatory research is required. But the results obtained to date offer some exciting possibilities for the revitalized role of the mission statement as business moves into the twenty-first century. □

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