

Mission Analysis: An Operational Approach

by

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Many managers are sceptical of mission statements. If they are to be really useful, they have to amount to more than pithy aspirations.

Following the agenda-setting work by Drucker [1] on the importance of business mission, the issue of developing Mission Statements as a management tool for focussing attention on organizational goals and purposes has been given much renewed attention in recent years. This attention includes many descriptive surveys of organizational practices [e.g. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7], as well as the overtly prescriptive management literature advocating the development of Mission Statements [e.g. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16].

This literature maps out familiar arguments about the *benefits* of mission analysis and formulation (e.g. see Greenley [17] and Jauch and Glueck [18]), the *components* of a Mission Statement (e.g. see David [19] and Pearce [20]), and the *use* of the Mission Statement to capture an enduring and authoritative articulation of organizational purposes, thus providing management with 'a framework for analysis, choice, implementation, and evaluation processes' [21].

However, there is some feeling that such prescriptive consensus among the conventional authorities does not appear to be easily or directly translated into operational reality by executives [22, 23]. This may account for the quite remarkable lack of empirical evidence for the claimed and assumed positive effects of mission analysis, let alone the recognition or measurement of the possible negative impact which Mission Statements may have (though, see Campbell and Yeung's [24] interesting account of the debacle associated with Commissioner Newman's attempt to change the philosophy of the Metropolitan Police Force by written philosophy in the 1980s).

The Problem with Mission Statements

The prescriptive literature, as represented above, appears to offer a high degree of idealised simplification. In fact, the managerial student omission

soon encounters major obstacles in the actual pursuit of the conventional wisdom for his/her organization.

Indeed, there is far greater consensus in the literature regarding the necessity for mission analysis than there is clear evidence as to the issues that should be analysed. Even if a relatively holistic view, like that of Campbell *et al* [25], is adopted, it is far from clear that the terms commonly used to identify the components of mission - such as 'values', 'philosophy' or 'strategy' - are genuinely unambiguous or easily reduced to actionable and operational terms by the executive. (We attempt in the next section of the paper to provide a structured view of Mission Statement components in operational terms). Indeed, recently Hooley *et al* [26] have commented on the lack of just such standard procedures or consensus about how to approach mission analysis and formulation in organizations.

In fact, the manager's search for guidance about the specific variables to analyze and mechanisms to employ, in order to produce an effective Mission Statement, is further frustrated by the argument that 'Mission statements do not create a sense of mission, it is rather the other way round' [27], and that 'Defining mission is essentially a creative process. You cannot arrive at a mission by analysis or by following a process of management meetings and workshops. It comes from insight and understanding' [27]. This is clearly less than helpful to the manager facing the practical problem of evaluating the mission issue for his/her organization. However, such counsel of despair presumes creativity to be non-analytical and only possible outside of a structured context, and indeed that mission is a well-understood and unitary concept. Such assumptions can and will be substantively challenged in this paper.

Further complications are added by the emergence of new paradigms competing with the concept of mission as a mechanism for identifying organizational purposes and direction: for example, 'strategic intent' [28]; strategic 'vision' [29]; and, 'desired future position' [30]. Such paradigms share a focus on building an articulation of long-term direction and goals for an organization, though adopting somewhat different formulations.

As the leading UK proponent of mission analysis, Andrew Campbell defends mission as the *purpose* of vision and strategic intent - the latter he sees as essentially statements of goals and preferred strategic position (an argument which would clearly encompass the 'desired future position' model). In this sense Campbell sees mission as an enduring purpose and model of behaviour, compared to strategic goals which may change with circumstances. However, less than helpfully, precisely the opposite view is taken by Hamel and Prahalad [31], Prahalad and Doz [32] and Hooley *et al* [33]! Indeed, it is far from clear that there is any real consensus about such fine distinctions, and certainly some confusion and ambiguity remains in the use of these terms by executives.

Perhaps at the heart of the confusion lies the implicit assumption that 'mission' either has a single and universal comprehensive meaning, or if it has not, that it should do. We will argue below that there are a number of distinct (though related) roles for mission analysis, which allow us to identify a number of different types of Mission Statement.

Observation of Practical Realities

Our observation of executives in seminars, planning workshops, and similar events over the past several years, has allowed us to uncover and identify a number of problems in the practical exploitation of mission analysis.

First, our observation is that executives polarise by attitude. On the one hand, there are managers who report that mission analysis is the single most important thing they have ever done in their organizations - the 'Born-Again Mission Disciples'; while other managers view mission analysis as a sham, and a wasteful, meaningless exercise - the 'Disillusioned Mission Cynics'. Neither entrenched perspective may be viewed as supportive to fully exploiting mission analysis for the benefits it may offer.

Second, we have observed some enthusiasm among managers for mission analysis - as a way of obtaining an articulation of purposes to put their work into context, to build and share consensus about the organization's aims, to understand the significance of events, or simply to understand better what is required of them by their organizations. However, in practice, the implemented reality of Mission Statements often does not appear to deliver these promised benefits to managers. Managers have suggested to us a number of critical problems faced at the implementation stage in mission analysis:

- the Mission Statements that are produced are qualitative, non-specific, unclear and ambiguous, and so serve little useful purpose in the organization;
- the Mission Statements constructed inevitably seem to represent a trade-off or compromise between the interests of different groups inside and outside the organization - in trying to be 'all things to all people' they end up as largely valueless to anybody;
- to avoid conflict, Mission Statements contain nothing but 'motherhood' - no-one can disagree with what they say, but they have no influence on what people in the organization *do* or *how* they do it;
- Mission Statements are inconsistent - they are self-

contradictory in the demands they place upon managers, for example, often in social responsibility imperatives compared to required market position and financial performance;

- Mission Statements are poorly integrated - the different components all make sense on their own, but they look as though they have been produced in isolation, and they are not compatible and lack realism - for example, injunctions from corporate levels to behave in ways that ignore market and competitive realities;
- Mission Statements that try to encompass everything, rather than recognizing market and SBU differences;
- Mission Statements that are so 'visionary' they lose touch with reality in the organization and the marketplace, and have no credibility with line managers - the 'Field of Dreams' approach to mission; and
- Mission Statements are produced that are inward-looking and historically-based, when we desperately need to be market-focused and future-oriented.

We can make no claim for the general representativeness of these statements, they are simply compiled from noting managers' reactions to the mission issue, in planning workshops and similar venues, as noted above. Such comments do suggest, however, a pathology of mission in practice, or simply that the reality of the implementation of mission analysis may not be all that is promised by the conventional literature.

Indeed, the more recent literature does contain some indications of problems similar to those outlined above - such as, Mission Statements which are 'short on numbers and long on rhetoric' [34]. Campbell and Yeung [35], in the well-reported Ashridge research into mission, concede that 'Many companies misuse mission statements by articulating high-sounding values that are unrealistic or not part of day-to-day behaviour. These statements generate cynicism rather than pride and undermine the authority of the leadership rather than reinforce the culture'. Similarly, they found some managerial confusion surrounding the mission issue, with such perceptions reported as 'another demonstration of senior management's incompetence and lack of willpower' [35]. In less fundamental, but nonetheless telling criticism, Cochran and David [36] surveyed Mission Statements and concluded that many were unreadable and uninspiring.

Our view is that if the theory of mission has any value, it should above all else be accessible to managers. In the light of such comments as those above, this paper is written with two basic goals. The first is to simplify the wide-ranging literature into a few basic principles. The second is to provide managers and strategic planners with operational tools for evaluating and working on the mission question. The purpose we pursue is one of relevance and application based on working with managers and planners on mission

analysis, rather than further conceptual or theoretical development. We hope to offer at least an initial step in a managerial methodology for handling the question of mission - the absence of which has been emphasised above.

Structuring Mission Content

Prescriptions as to the desirable content of Mission Statements are many and varied. However, a review of this literature suggests that we can distinguish four major areas of development to be reflected in the holistic Mission Statement:

- the statements relating to *organizational philosophy*;
- the specification of the *product-market domain* or scope for the organization;
- definition of *organizational key values* for participants; and,
- the identification of *critical success factors* in the marketplace or industry faced.

Organizational Philosophy

Common to most prescriptive views is the suggestion that at the centre of mission lies the definition of the central purpose [37, 38], or philosophy of the organization [39, 40], or even creating a form of 'corporate constitution' [41].

Some see this area as encompassing broad issues: the 'grand design, quality orientation, and atmosphere of the enterprise, and the firm's role in society' [42], or the combination of 'managerial culture and ethos' with social responsibility and public image [43]. More focussed perspectives emphasise specific service to internal and external stakeholders [44], and the identification of values, beliefs, guidelines, aspirations, and thus the creation of a unifying force in the organization [45].

In the simplest terms, the underlying question here is 'what do we want this organization to *be* and to *stand for*?'

Product-Market Domain

Though less commonly made explicit, another stream of thought looks to mission to define where the organization is to operate. Indeed, one recent commentator suggests that currently managerial interest in mission analysis in the UK is shifting from a focus on internal to external issues [46].

For writers like David [47], Pearce [48] and Pearce and David [49] this area is described as the definition of the customer-base, the product/service offering, location or geographic coverage, and the core technologies to

be exploited. This is a form of 'business definition' in mission analysis [50], similar to that advocated by Abell [51] and described as 'product-market scope' by Ansoff [52] as the foundation of corporate strategy.

Some see this as creating the essential element of market-orientation needed in strategic planning [53], by identifying market opportunities and specifying target customers and markets [54]. The definition of domain in this sense is only considered more generally by other mission writers, for example simply as 'strategy' [55].

In the simplest terms, the central question to be addressed here is 'where are we going to compete, or what is our *field of operation*?'

Organizational Key Values

A variety of sources suggest different, though related, ideas about defining the core values or principles which provide guides to action for members of the organization [56], or the 'policies and behaviour that underpin the distinctive competence and value system' [57].

Some see this area as building corporate culture [58] and 'selling' corporate beliefs to employees [59], or motivating employees to achieve the organization's economic objectives [60], and even providing the basis for appraisal and reward [61].

In the simplest terms, the central question here is 'what do we want people in this organization to be *good at*, and how do we want them to *behave*?'

Critical Success Factors

Less easily identified in the traditional prescriptive literature are suggestions about the external impact of mission. These are taken here as the identification of critical success factors in the market or industry faced.

For example, Bettinger [62] and Ackoff [63] look to Mission Statements to clarify the basis for competitive differentiation. On the other hand, Jauch and Glueck [64] more specifically demand a focus on customer needs and utilities, similar to the emphasis by others on benchmarking customer satisfaction and customer service needs [65, 66, 67, 68]. It is here that we can locate 'strategic intent', as it has been described by Hamel and Prahalad [69], in terms of the basic principles underpinning our desired strategic position.

In the simplest terms the central issue here is: 'What do we have to be *good at to succeed* in this market or industry?'

The Scope of Mission Analysis

Taken together, these strands of the debate about mission suggest the model in Figure 1, emphasising both the internal and external elements of mission, as well as the narrow and broad dimensions of mission, which can be identified in the literature. This model is in the tradition of those produced by Campbell *et al* [70] and Hooley *et al* [71], but the goal here is to move the debate towards mission as an operational tool rather than just describing and explaining the theoretical and normative concept of mission.

Distinguishing Types of Mission

As noted earlier, the literature implicitly assumes that only one type of mission analysis and Mission Statement is possible or desirable - the 'universal mission statement' [72]. However, the analysis of the disparate components of mission above, and, indeed, simple logic suggests this assumption to be highly questionable. In other words, in the terms of Figure 1 - what do we have if we can see only one or two of the elements covered in our Mission Statement?

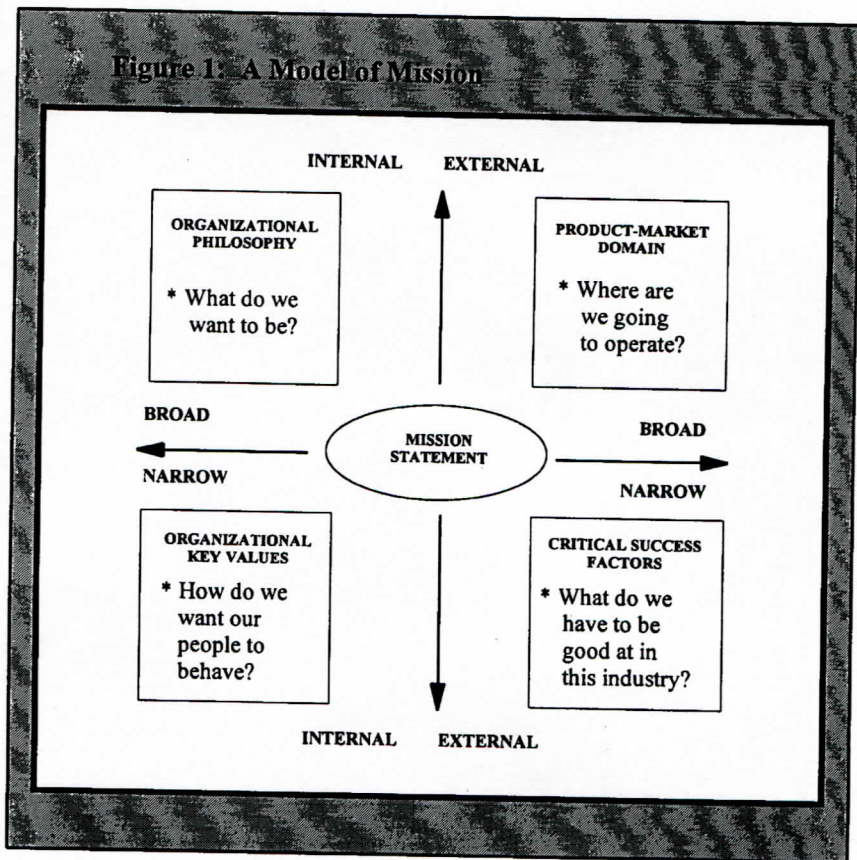


Figure 2 suggests that there are several possible types of Mission Statement, reflecting the internal/external and broad/narrow dimensions of mission, as we have identified them above.

Figure 2: Types of Mission Statement

		ARE THE EXTERNAL DIMENSIONS COVERED?	
		Yes	No
ARE THE INTERNAL DIMENSIONS COVERED?	Yes	Global Mission	Organizational Mission
	No	Market Mission	No Mission

The suggestion here is that if all the dimensions outlined in Figure 1 are covered by our mission analysis, then we may consider that we have a *Global Mission Statement*. On the other hand, a view of mission that is concerned only with beliefs, philosophy and internal values, can be labelled an *Organizational Mission Statement*. However, where analysis leads to a view of mission that is dominated by defining the market base and critical success factors in the marketplace, this may be seen as a *Market Mission Statement*. (Of course, a Mission Statement in which we can find no sign of internal values or external domain is really *No Mission*).

The point of these distinctions is that there is no basis in the available evidence for assuming that mission is a unitary concept which can only serve a single purpose. Indeed, in the large complex organization, it may well be possible to identify a positive need for all these types of Mission Statement, working down from the global to the market or SBU level. This is a matter for management choice not prescriptive generalisation - the question to be confronted is what we want mission analysis to achieve in a given situation.

An Operational Diagnosis

The approach taken here has been to recognise the barriers managers confront in working on corporate mission, and to build a model of mission that recognises the key components of mission and the different types of Mission Statement which may be produced.

The next stage in moving from theoretical conceptualizations to practical operational work is the development of a diagnostic tool that may be used to confront the mission issue in organizations, either in building a Mission Statement for the first time, or in evaluating an existing statement. The instrument we have developed for these purposes is shown in Figure 3, including four worksheets and the appropriate guidelines for use. This is a relatively crude instrument but one which has nonetheless proved effective in confronting the mission question with managers in a practical way, and leading to pragmatic outcomes.

Figure 3: Corporate Mission Diagnostic

The goal of this diagnostic and its worksheets is to test the adequacy of an existing Mission Statement or to assist in the construction of a new Mission Statement.

These worksheets are used iteratively - we have to work backwards and forwards until we reach conclusions about the adequacy of our Mission Statement. The worksheets follow this logic:

Worksheet 1: Draft Mission Statement

This Worksheet is not illustrated here because it is simply a blank piece of paper, headed Worksheet 1, on which we summarise the key points of our existing or proposed new Mission Statement.

For a new Mission Statement, this may be a stage of brainstorming and of information gathering, while for the testing of an existing Mission Statement it may be more a process of extracting the key points from the available documentation.

This Worksheet may be where we start and where we finish. It may be a descriptive narrative or a series of bullet points, but it should end up as our best view of the Mission Statement - though we will almost certainly have several attempts at this before we are satisfied.

Worksheet 2: Elements of Mission

This Worksheet asks us to work from the rough notes in Worksheet 1, to categorise the different types of issue we have proposed for the Mission Statement, or that we have collected from the existing documentation.

Organizational Philosophy	Product-Market Domain
Organizational Key Values	Critical Success Factors

This Worksheet asks us to identify either by brainstorming for a new Mission Statement, or by analyzing the existing Mission Statement, the following dimension of mission:

Organizational Philosophy - what do we see as the enduring purpose of our organization, its unique characteristics, and what it wants to achieve?

Product-Market Domain - where do we intend to operate and compete, what are our products, what needs do they meet, who are our customers, what technologies will we apply, what are the boundaries of our markets?

Organizational Key Values - what values, norms, guidelines, do we think are important in our organization, what things do we want people to have in their minds when they make decisions, and carry things out for us?

Critical Success Factors - what things do we have to be good at to survive and prosper in our market place?

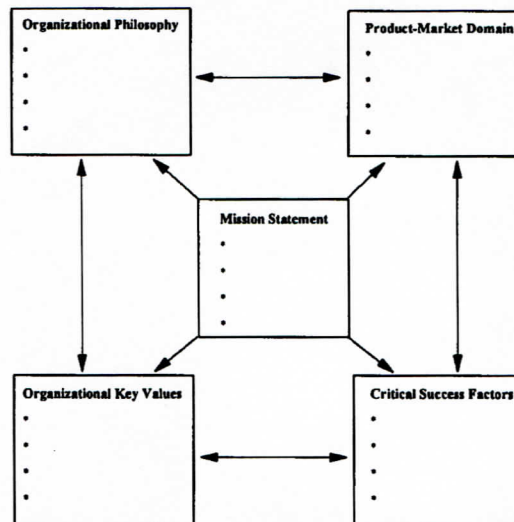
We should try to restrict ourselves to a few key points in each of these areas.

Worksheet 3: Mission Consistency

This Worksheet asks us to do two things:

First, can we summarise the key points we have gathered so far in drafting the mission statement and clarifying its dimensions in Worksheets 1 and 2 - we can enter these as bullet-points in the boxes provided.

Second, can we then test the internal consistency of what is emerging for our Mission Statement?



This second stage involves us asking questions like these:

- do the *critical success factors* derived from the mission actually make any sense in terms of the product-markets the organization has chosen - or are we trying to be good at things that don't matter?
- does the organization's *'philosophy'* relate to the key values we try to transmit to people who make decisions in the organization, or are there inherent conflicts because we have not thought things through enough?

- do these *key values* (services, quality, social responsibilities, or whatever) relate directly to the critical success factors in these product markets - or do our internal values have nothing to do with what matters in the marketplace?
- has the organization chosen sensible *product-markets* where its philosophy or sense of purpose makes sense?
- if we work through these dimensions of process, what conclusions can we reach about: the adequacy of our mission statement; the consistency between internal issues of philosophy and key values, and external issues of product-market domain and critical success factors?

Our conclusions may lead us to revise the dimensions we want to reflect in our Mission Statement, or to revise the draft Mission Statement.

The critical requirement of to move backwards and forwards between these stages - discussing, revising, testing, re-thinking - until we can move from the draft Mission Statement to the final version.

Worksheet 4: Testing the Mission Statement

Finally, Worksheet 4 asks us to evaluate our Mission Statement, by giving scores out of 10, against the criteria of:

- clarifying organizational philosophy
- clarifying product-market domain
- specifying key organizational values
- identifying critical success factors
- internal consistency
- succinctness
- memorability
- believability
- motivational force
- impact and vision versus 'motherhood'.

Our own views on how well we are doing on each of these questions provide a valuable test.

Give a score to the Mission Statement
 for each of the following questions

Score
 0 = very poor
 5 = medium
 10 = excellent

1. Does the mission statement make it clear what the organization stands for and why it exists?	
2. Does the mission statement make it clear where we have to compete and who are our customers?	
3. Does the mission statement tell us the values we should adhere to in working for this organization?	
4. Does the mission statement make it clear what we have to be good at to survive and prosper?	
5. Do the different parts of the mission statement hang together - does it make sense?	
6. Is the mission statement short enough so that people can understand it?	
7. Is the mission statement well-written enough so that people will remember it?	
8. Is the mission statement believable as a view of what this organization is all about?	
9. Is the mission statement challenging and exciting - will it motivate us?	
10. Does the mission statement tell us what we should be doing and what we should not be doing?	
TOTAL	
Conclusions/Implications	

Far more valuable is to ask others how well we are doing in developing our Mission Statement:

- our managers
- our employees
- our shareholders
- our customers, and
- our suppliers

would make a good start - because they may tell us we need to think harder and do better!

The results of what we find when we test the Mission Statement against its target audiences, may force us to go back to an earlier stage - maybe even to the rough notes in Worksheet 1.

In summary, the diagnostic requires four stages of analysis:

First, to reduce the Mission Statement (or our ideas for one) to key component points that fit on no more than one page (Worksheet 1).

Second, to categorise these key points into the areas of Organizational Philosophy, Product-Market Domain, Organizational Key Values, and Critical Success Factors. This pattern helps to determine the type of Mission Statement we have already (Global, Organizational or Market), compared to what we want (Worksheet 2).

Third, to test the internal consistency and compatibility between different parts of the Mission Statement and to remove problems through revising and redrafting (Worksheet 3).

Fourth, to test the quality of the Mission Statement in the view of the target audience inside and outside the organization (Worksheet 4).

Worksheet 1

The purpose of this Worksheet is to pose the challenge of identifying the key ideas that we have about an organization's mission. This may involve us in digesting and summarising an existing Mission Statement - not forgetting that these frequently run to many pages. On the other hand, we may simply be pooling our ideas for the first time - but even then we are looking for the key points not lengthy generalizations.

Candidly, if this stage is *impossible* - then we probably need to discuss more and think harder until it becomes possible.

It is also helpful at this stage to distinguish between aspiration and reality - which key points reflect the 'sense of mission' and purpose already evidenced in the organization, and which describe our vision or intention for how things should be different in future? The balance we seek here will depend on whether our goal is to articulate our present position, and to make sense of it, or whether we see our goal as creating a new and different mission for the future of the organization. These are different tasks, and we should understand the balance between the two that we seek.

Worksheet 2

The next stage is to work through the list of key points and to categorise them according to whether they describe and articulate organizational philosophy, product-market domain, organizational key values, or critical success factors - as we have defined these issues earlier.

Some key points may fit into more than one area. This is acceptable, but things are generally clearer if we sub-divide these points. It may be that we are left with some points which do not easily categorise. Two questions are worth rising here: (a) do we really understand what these points mean - or should we re-think until we can see whether they do fit? or, (b) if these points have nothing to do with any element of mission - neither external nor internal, neither broad or narrow - then do we really need them, or should we discard them for present purposes?

The pattern which emerges (i.e. where the key points fit) will suggest whether we are looking at a Global, an Organizational or a Market mission. This raises the question of whether what we have got is what we want. If not, we may have to go back to the earlier key point drafting and see what else we need to specify. On the other hand, if we want a non-global mission defined, then it may be that we have to discard some of the key points as irrelevant or at least not central to this goal.

Worksheet 3

The next stage is the comparison of each of the areas of mission, where we have some key points, to test for consistency, compatibility and completeness.

The real test is to validate and discuss the relationship between the different dimensions of a Mission Statement to see if it makes sense, and how much relevance it has to the process of generating practical strategies. In particular we suggest that managers may usefully ask:

- (1) do the critical success factors derived from the Mission Statement actually make sense in terms of the product markets the organization has chosen - or are we trying to be good at things that do not really matter in the marketplace?
- (2) does the organization's 'philosophy' relate to the key values that we try to transmit to people who make decisions in the organization, or are there inherent conflicts because we have not thought things through enough?
- (3) do those key values (service, quality, social responsibilities, or whatever) relate directly to the critical success factors in these product-markets - or do our internal values have nothing to do with what matters in the marketplace?
- (4) has the organization chosen sensibly product-markets where its philosophy or sense of purpose makes sense?
- (5) if we work through these dimensions of mission, what

conclusions can we reach about: the adequacy of a Mission Statement; the consistency between internal issues of philosophy and key values, and external issues of product-market domain and critical success factors?

If nothing else, you may find that managers have never before analyzed their Mission Statements for internal consistency, and have not related the internal and external aspects, so they may gain new insights just from this exercise alone.

In the first instance we are looking for direct contradictions between what we have defined in each of the mission areas (the arrowed lines in the Worksheet indicate the main relationships to be questioned). This is a test of consistency designed to weed out and remove contradictions - even if it means going back to the first stage and redrafting key points.

The second test is for completeness - where we have major items in one area of mission, does this suggest that other balancing items are needed in other parts of the mission?

This stage particularly is one of iteration - moving around the model of mission we have built, evaluating contradictions and completeness, making adjustments where necessary, and then re-evaluating.

Worksheet 4

The final stage is one of testing the clarity and credibility of the revised or draft Mission Statement. This involves sharing the output produced so far with representatives of those we seek to influence and collecting their views of what we have produced. Clearly, such evaluation is pointless unless we are prepared to listen to what we are told and adapt and revise as necessary - even if this means going back to the first stage of drafting key points, and working through the implications and then re-evaluating.

As emphasised in the guidelines to Figure 3, the key to effective use of the Worksheets is iteration - to keep working backwards and forwards through these different stages, until an acceptable output is achieved.

This approach offers an operational approach for managers and strategic planners to deal systematically with the mission question. The advantage of this methodology is that it can achieve the following: it gets to the specific issues quickly; it provides a framework for building consensus; it allows for the management choice of purposes for mission and consequently type of Mission Statement to be produced; and, it allows for an evaluation stage before final output is produced.

Concluding Remarks

Great potential benefits have been claimed for mission analysis in both articulating purposes and shaping corporate culture, and the technique is widely advocated to line management, and to strategic planners. While there is no substantive empirical evidence to support the widespread claims in the prescriptive literature there appears to be some evidence of management difficulties in operationalizing the mission concept effectively in an organizational context.

Our own experience and observation suggests some vagueness about how to work on mission in practical terms and how to achieve useful output in terms of Mission Statements that are credible and provide usable guidelines for planners and managers. To date there has been no serious attempt to provide an operational methodology to analyse and structure what is widely seen as a vital and complex stage in strategic planning.

The approach we have described here offers one such methodology. It involves three stages in operationalizing the theory mission: to reduce mission analysis to four specific areas - organizational philosophy, product-market domain, organizational key values, and critical success factors - that represent the internal and external, and the broad and narrow dimensions which can be represented by mission; second, to recognize that there are different types of Mission Statement serving different interests and purposes; and, third, to analyse these issues for both internal consistency and external acceptability, using the diagnostic worksheets.

This approach is relatively crude, but has been found to offer practical leverage for managers to confront the mission technique for their organizations - to reject it or adopt it; or, to clarify the purpose and content of Mission Statements in their specific situations.

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