INNOVATION RESEARCH CENTRE

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ABSTRACT

This article presents findings from research which examined and analyzed the content of mission statements from 72 North American corporations. Specifically, twenty-five mission statement components were analysed to determine if there were any differences between innovative and non-innovative organizations. In addition, the rationales behind the creation of the mission statements in both types of firms were also examined and compared. The findings suggest that there are some mission components and rationales which seem to vary significantly between innovative and non-innovative companies and it is these to which managers should pay especially close attention.

KEY WORDS: mission statement, strategy, innovation, purpose, vision, content

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A Comparison of Mission Statements & Their Rationales in Innovative and Non-Innovative Firms

Mission statements are everywhere these days. So much so that Bain and Company has recently declared them the most popular instrument ever deployed by senior managers in the last ten years (1). But, surprisingly, the amount of information available on mission statements is relatively sparse. Much of the historical literature is simply filled with content analyses performed on various samples of mission statements (2,3,4). Only recently has there been any attempt to better understand the specific circumstances under which mission statements are effectively deployed (5,6,7,8,9,10). But much remains to be done. One interesting question which has not been previously considered concerns the differences in mission statements which might exist between innovative and non-innovative organizations.

Why Mission Statements Should Vary with Firm Innovativeness

Over the years, there has been a growing recognition of the need for executives to manage dissimilar business situations differentially. Not all organizational circumstances are the same and therefore the managerial responses required should be tailored to fit the specific context. This approach is often referred to as *organizational contingency theory* and has been applied to the case of innovative organizations by Galbraith and Kazanjian as follows:

> "For the innovating organization, what is called for is an absence of formal structure as bureaucracy is anathema to innovation. Rules, regulations, procedures, accepted practice and programmed activity will stifle creativity and drive out new ideas....What is needed is the organizational climate of an independent start up firm, characterized by an informal, unstructured, group problem solving approach where decisions are made quickly and communications are personal and face to face."

Thus, innovative corporations require organizational arrangements (i.e., systems, procedures, approaches, etc.) different from non-innovative ones. What, then, about the mission statements?

Without a doubt, the mission statement is regarded as one of the most fundamental building blocks of an organization. It is both the cornerstone of any firm's strategic planning process (11, 12) and is considered ***the*** starting point in such hot topics as re-engineering, TQM, and self directed work teams. Given our earlier comments on contingency theory, however, it would seem only natural to expect the nature and content of mission statements to vary significantly between different types of organizations - especially, innovative and non-innovative companies. After all, if innovation is a critical strategic advantage for an organization, it should somehow be reflected in the mission (13). But, exactly how true is this? Currently, the answer to this question is unknown and this, in turn, is what prompted the basis for the current research project.

Mission Statement Rationales: The Bottom Line

In its most basic form, a mission statement is a formal written document intended to

capture an organization's unique purpose and practices (14,15,16,17,18,19, 20). It should answer some fairly fundamental questions such as:

1. Why does this organization exist?
2. Why is this organization here?
3. What is this organization trying to accomplish?

The traditional major rationales and benefits associated with mission statements have been cited as:

a. Better control over the behavior and actions of employees (as a result of their inspired commitment to achieving the mission);

b. More focussed resource allocation; and

c. A better balance between the interests of competing stakeholders (e.g., customers, employees, shareholders and society).

Recently, there has been some research which suggests that there may also be specific financial performance advantages associated with selected mission practices (21, 22, 23, 24). Nevertheless, the bulk of the evidence to date indicates that the primary benefits of mission statements are more behavioral - than financial - in nature. In addition, none of the rationales for having a mission statement in the first place has been specifically investigated in the context of innovative versus non-innovative organizations. To the extent that significant differences exist, these should be identified since the innovation track record of North American and European firms is lacking. And anything which might point to improving their performance would be both highly welcomed and keenly examined.

The Research Questions

Given both importance of mission statements (in terms of their ubiquity) and innovation (for long term economic survival), we decided to address the issue of their linkage and association directly. After all, if we are to continue promoting the use and benefits of mission statements, we need to provide as much guidance as possible on how best to use them. And, no where is this more true than in the case of those organizations seeking to become - or remain - innovative. Consequently, a research project was launched to answer several specific questions:

* Are there differences in the content and characteristics of mission statements between innovative and non-innovative organizations?
* Are there differences in the rationales used to create and drive mission statements within innovative (as opposed to non-innovative) firms?

How the Research was Conducted

Sample selection and size.

The current study involved 72 senior managers from some of North America's largest industrial companies. Both the small sample size and the method of selection (judgmental) inhibit any assertions about the representativeness of the findings. Nevertheless, the results were expected to reflect some of the practices found within many leading and highly innovative corporations. There also appeared to be no industry bias.

Operationalizing mission statement content and component characteristics.

The content and characteristics of mission statements were operationalized by reviewing the prior literature and selecting those components which others had indicated or inferred as possibly being part of a firm's mission. Twenty-five components were identified and included:

* ***organizational purpose or raison d'etre***
* ***statement of values/beliefs/philosophy***
* ***distinctive competence/strength of the organization***
* ***desired competitive position***
* ***competitive strategy***
* ***relevant/critical stakeholders identified***
* ***specific behavior standards and policies to be observed***
* ***statement of general corporate aims/goals***
* ***one clear and compelling goal***
* ***specific financial performance targets/objectives***
* ***specific non-financial performance targets/objectives***
* ***definition of the business***
* ***specific customers/markets served***
* ***specific products/services offered***
* ***statement of self-concept/identity***
* ***statement of desired public image***

* ***identification of the business' location***
* ***definition of technology***
* ***concern for future/long-term survival***
* ***concern for satisfying customers***
* ***concern for employees and their welfare***
* ***concern for suppliers***
* ***concern for society***
* ***concern for shareholders***
* ***statement of vision.***

Operationalizing mission statement "rationales".

Mission statement "rationales" have been defined as those forces motivating the development and use of a firm's mission statement in the first place (25). In reviewing the mission literature, numerous reasons have been given for having a mission statement. Those cited most frequently (26) were adopted as the basis for operationalizing the mission statement drivers. They included:

* to create a common purpose for the organization
* to define the scope of the organization's activities and operations
* to allow the CEO to exert control over the organization
* to create standards of performance for the organization
* to help individuals identify with their organization, its aims and its purpose (and to encourage those who do not to leave)

* to promote shared values among organizational members
* to promote the interests of external stakeholders
* to motivate and/or inspire organizational members
* to help refocus organizational members during a crisis
* to provide a sound basis for the allocation of organizational resources.

Data collection

A questionnaire was developed (and pretested with managers) which measured: (a) the degree to which those mission components (referred to above) were present in the firms' actual mission statements; and (b) the degree to which the various mission statement rationales (referred to above) formed a primary rationale in developing their statements.

The mission content components were then measured by asking managers to indicate, on a three point scale, the degree to which each component was part of the content of their firm's formal written mission statement (0=not at all; 1=somewhat mentioned/included; 3=clearly specified). The managers were then asked to indicate, using a five point scale, the degree to which various mission statement rationales represented a major justification in developing their statements (1=not a rationale/driver in developing the mission; 5=a primary rationale/driver in developing the mission). A five point scale was also used to measure how satisfied managers were with their current mission statement (1=very dissatisfied; 5= very satisfied). Finally, a ten point scale was used to classify how innovative each firm was (0 = not innovative at all; 9 = extremely innovative). Using the mean of the sample, we classified 53 of the firms as innovative and 19 as non-innovative. Table 1 shows the mean for the

"percentage sales" and "number of new products" associated with the sub-sets of innovative and non-innovative companies. Clearly, the firms which were classified as innovative also appear to be so in reality with over twice the percentage sales from new products (as opposed to the non-innovative sub-set) while utilizing almost half the actual number of new products. (Obviously, the non-innovative firms are plagued with too many market "losers".) The firms classified as innovative also reported significantly higher levels of importance attached to innovation (and significantly greater levels of satisfaction with their firm's overall financial performance) than did their less innovative counterparts. Such evidence, therefore, attests to the validity of the method by which the sample firms were classified into sub-sets according to their innovativeness.

Note, however, that few of the questions raised in this study have ever been asked in previous research and virtually none with respect to innovative firms. Thus, the initial attempts here should be considered somewhat exploratory in nature.

Data analysis

The frequency with which each mission statement component and mission driver was mentioned in the questionnaires was tabulated. Using a series of t-tests for independent means, we then compared (a) the 25 mission statement components; and (b) the 10 mission statement rationales for differences within the sub-samples of innovative and non-innovative firms

The Findings

Mission Statements in Innovative vs. Non-Innovative Firms

Ten of the 25 mission statement components investigated were found, in the case of the innovative firms, to be used significantly more often than in the case of the non-innovative firms (see Table 2). These high-use mission components were:

* competitive strategy,
* behavior standards,
* one big goal,
* specific financial objectives,
* non-financial objectives,
* technology defined,
* concern for survival,
* concern for employees,
* concern for shareholders, and
* a statement of vision.

For all of the remaining mission components, there were no significant differences observed in the frequency with which they were mentioned between innovative and non-innovative companies.

Table 3 shows that the respondents in the innovative firms were significantly more satisfied with the content of their firms' mission statements, its clarity and its understandability than those respondents in the non-innovative firms. The former also reported that their

missions were perceived to have significantly greater influence over both their own behavior as well as the behavior of "others". As a result, respondents in innovative firms claimed to be significantly more committed to their mission statements than those in the non-innovative organizations.

Mission Statement Rationales

The results from the analysis of the ten rationales or "drivers" used in creating the firms' mission statements are displayed in Table 4. Only four of the ten drivers were found to produce significant differences between the innovative and non-innovative sub-sets of firms.. The four high-usage drivers were:

* providing a common purpose,
* creating shared values,
* emphasizing the interests of external stakeholders, and
* inspiring employees.

Each of these rationales was found to be used to a significantly greater extent in the case of our subset of innovative firms. There were no significant differences between the innovative and non-innovative firms insofar as the other mission statement rationales were concerned.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings presented in Tables 1 and 3 are enticing. Table 1 demonstrates that high numbers of new products are not necessarily what make a firm innovative. Instead, it is the

number of new products brought successfully to market. In addition, Table 3 shows that the mission statements of our innovative companies were ones which appeared to make a difference in the everyday lives of firm members. They created action. It was, therefore, this track record of success and behavioral influence on the part of our innovative firms which made our principal research findings (i.e. with respect to mission content and mission rationales) all the more intriguing - and enlightening.

Mission statement content

The finding in Table 2 suggest that there are indeed significant differences in the content and characteristics of mission statements between innovative and non-innovative organizations. Let us briefly examine the possible reasons for and implications of these differences.

Competitive strategy. Innovative firms were found to identify their competitive strategy more clearly in their mission statements than non-innovative companies. "We are innovators" , "our edge is innovation" and "we bring good things to life" are just three of the ways in which the competitive strategy of our innovative firms was expressed. Of course, there are many other ways that an organization can choose to compete, win customers and beat the competition. But no organization can try to compete using all the possible methods available. By better understanding their own competitive strategy (and articulating it in a clear and simple fashion), innovative firms give greater definition and focus to their business activities. Firms which lack this precision in their competitive choices become confused and wander aimlessly in search of some competitive holy grail. While these latter organizations

may enjoy an abundance of new products, few are successful.

Behavioral standards. Similarly, it was found that higher emphasis on behavioral standards was both expected and expressed in the missions of our innovative firms (as compared to the non-innovative sub-set.) Earlier studies have shown that innovative behaviors on the part of employees are one of the principal contributors to high levels of innovation - or firm innovativeness (27). These same studies have also established that where firms specify somewhere in their mission the innovative behaviors expected, high levels of the actual behaviors appear to follow. The findings from the current study, therefore. add further evidence, in a very general way, to these earlier investigations.

Financial objectives. One of the surprises of the current study, however, was the discovery that mission statements of innovative firms appear to be associated with significantly higher levels of specificity regarding their financial objectives than non-innovative organizations. To be sure, the average level of specification actually observed was not that high and appears to hover more around the "somewhat mentioned" category (as opposed to the "clearly mentioned" category). Nevertheless, it is one of the few occasions in which research on mission statements has found a slight preference for the inclusion of quantitative targets.

In previous studies it has been argued that the reasons for the lack of financial targets were: (a) to keep the mission statement fairly general and (b) to keep employees motivated by avoiding anything which might be perceived as a "turn-off".(28). In innovative firms, however, the potential for failure is greater relative to established operations. Clearly articulating and understanding the financial results which will define success or failure is, therefore, especially important for:

a) selecting which projects to more forward, and

b) administering rewards - particularly where initial losses are expected to be high - or where, as one manager put it: "I need to know how much money I can lose in the first year before I'm in trouble!"

Non-innovative firms, unfortunately, do not appear to provide this guidance and, again, suffer the consequences.

Technology definition & concern for survival. The finding that "technology definition" and "concern for survival" were more highly specified in the case of innovative firms was not that surprising. Successful innovative firms understand the high risks involved and realize that they must choose carefully their competitive battlegrounds with respect to technology. No firm can expect to be innovative in everything. And the lessons of history have shown that greatness comes from focus. Non-innovative firms, on the other hand, do not make these choices. Their lack of concern for survival has also caused them to not make any of the choices necessary with respect to the firm's critical success drivers (e.g. innovation).

Concern for customers, employees & shareholders.. There was no difference between either category of firms in terms of their "concern for customers". Yet, both innovative and non-innovative firms were found to have fairly high levels of customer awareness and sensitivity in their missions This emphasis on the customer (by innovative and non-innovative firms alike) is probably due to the avalanche of writings which have appeared in recent years extolling the virtues of satisfying customers and exhorting managers to pay them more attention. Employees and shareholders, on the other hand, have not received this same level of attention. So, it was fascinating to observe that the mission statements of

innovative organizations contained significantly clearer and more explicit references in their concern for employees and shareholders than our non-innovative organizations. Innovative firms obviously seem to better appreciate the need for recognizing the contribution which these stakeholders make to company success. By giving them equal prominence in their firms' mission, innovative companies help balance the (potentially competing) interests of multiple stakeholders for the benefit of the entire organization. Non-innovative firms, in contrast, appear to be working in a state of imbalance and may, in fact, be focussing on the customer to the detriment of other critical stakeholder groups.

Vision. The innovative firms in our sample were observed to have significantly more prominent statements of vision imbedded in their documents than non innovative firms. This observation is testimony to the forward thinking nature of innovative organizations. They simply have a better sense of direction than non-innovative organizations. They know where they are going. To craft a vision, however, a firm must have some sense for the kind of future needs that are going to exist (and which eventually must be satisfied by some company). According to Table 1, innovative firms appear to have a much better capability for sensing future demand and responding with those winning new products that customers want. Non-innovative firms would be well advised to spend more time on this important component which guides long term action.

What didn't seem to matter. Apart from the mission components which were found to differ significantly between innovative and non-innovative companies, 15 components were observed not to vary in any material way among the firms. Exploring the reasons for this lack of differentiation is well beyond the scope of this paper. It would be especially interesting in

any future research, however, to investigate the degree to which our non-varying mission components were "necessary" (as opposed to "sufficient") conditions for the purpose of discussing a firm's innovativeness.

Mission Rationales

The examination and analysis of mission rationales found only four instances in which the impetus behind the missions was different for innovative and non-innovative organizations (see Table 4). There are at least two interpretations of these results. One interpretation is that innovative firms approach the creation (or, re-formulation) of their mission statements differently because they are fundamentally different from non-innovative firms. Innovative firms have achieved their state through focus, hard work and exceptional levels of employee commitment. As a result, innovative firms better understand (perhaps almost intuitively) the importance of having a common purpose, maintaining shared values, considering external stakeholders and inspiring employees. They create their missions with these thoughts in mind.

Another equally valid interpretation of the findings from Table 4, however, is that by emphasizing, to a significant extent, the firm's purpose, values, external stakeholders and employee motivation during the mission's creation, a more innovative organization will result. In other words, a firm's choice of certain "mission rationales" may lead to higher levels of firm innovativeness than others. The logic behind this viewpoint is that inspired employees who understand their organization's focus (i.e. purpose and values) should be more sensitive to identifying potential new product areas for exploitation and growth. For those firms seeking to increase their rate of innovativeness, they should look closely at the way in which they

launch and deploy their mission statements.

Which of these two competing interpretations is correct will be the subject of a future research study. Nevertheless, it was interesting to observe how most of the rationales emphasized within the subset of innovative firms appeared to find themselves expressed in the actual content of the mission statements. For instance, the mission rationales of "common purpose" and "values" appeared to influence the content of mission statements within innovative firms (see Table 2) through the higher emphasis on such items as: competitive strategy, specific financial objectives, non-financial objectives, technology definition and vision.

The mission rationale of "concern for external stakeholders" was also found to have a more significant presence in the actual mission statements of innovative firms found through explicit references to the firms' shareholders. The mission rationale of "having inspired employees", though, could not be traced to any specific references in the mission statements of innovative firms. No matter. Table 3 has shown that innovative firms appear to have much higher levels of committed employees than non-innovative organization. (Most likely as a result of some of our points expressed earlier above.)

It was somewhat enigmatic, however, to find such a lack of congruence between the mission rationale of "setting behavior standards" and the actual content of the mission statements. While the mission rationale of "setting behavior standards" was not observed to differ in any significant way between innovative and non-innovative firms, significant differences in the degree to which selected behavior standards were expressed in the mission statements apparently existed. What this probably means is that both innovative and non-

innovative firms understand why they are creating and deploying their missions in the first place. Nevertheless, innovative firms manage to articulate the required behavior standards in their mission statements more effectively. Non-innovative firms, as we have seen, may argue the need for behavior standards (in their mission rationales) just as forcefully and persuasively as innovative firms. The difference is that the non-innovative firms don't seem to mean it or want it as much.

Some Final Thoughts

The findings presented in this paper are consistent with the emerging theory surrounding mission statements i.e., that mission statements do indeed vary between different types of firms and according to the circumstances in which they are found. Previous studies have shown how the content and characteristics of mission statements vary with the nature of a firm's technology (i.e., high versus low tech; industrial firms, etc.) and that they can have an impact on firm performance. The current study appears to add credence and support to these to these earlier findings. Additionally, the study has taken some tentative 'first steps' in establishing a possible relationship between the rationales with which managers approach the creation of their mission statements and the actual content of those statements. Clearly, more work is required. But, the current findings certainly suggest that "form (content) follows function (rationale)". Managers, therefore, would do well to consider and refer to these findings when developing their own firm's mission statements - particularly where matters of firm innovativeness are involved.

Table 1
Company Performance Characteristics: Innovative vs Non-Innovative Firms

Company Characteristics		Mean score: Innovative Firms n=53	Mean Score: Non-Innovative Firms n=19	Significance (two tail t-test)
1.	% 1995 sales from new products introduced in the last five years	39.1	16.2	.000
2.	#new products introdnced in the last five years	173.0	332.6	ns
3.	Satisfaction with firm's financial performance	5.9	4.3	.002
4.	Importance of innovation	4.3	3.5	.005

Table 2

Mission Component Frequency Analysis: Innovative vs Non-Innovative Firms

Mission Components	Mean score: Innovative Firms n=53	Mean Score: Non-Innovative Firms n=19	Significance (two tail t-test)
1. Purpose/Raison d'etre	2.9	2.7	ns
2. Values/Philosophy	2.4	2.4	ns
3. Distinctive Competence	2.3	2.2	ns
4. Desired Competitive Position	2.5	2.3	ns
5. Competitive Strategy	2.3	1.7	.001
6. Identify Stakeholders	2.2	2.2	ns
7. Behavior Standards	2.3	1.6	.001
8. General Corporate Goals	2.6	2.4	ns
9. One Big Goal	2.7	2.2	.026
10. Specific Financial Objectives	1.8	1.3	.001
11. Non-financial Objectives	2.2	1.8	.050
12. Business Definition	2.3	2.1	ns
13. Specific Markets Severed	2.0	2.1	ns
14. Specific Products Offered	2.1	1.9	ns
15. Self Concept	2.1	1.9	ns
16. Desired Public Image	2.2	2.1	ns
17. Location of Business	1.6	1.5	ns
18. Technology Defined	1.7	1.3	.002
19. Concern for Survival	1.5	1.2	.018
20. Concern for Customers	2.7	2.7	ns
21. Concern for Employees	2.4	1.8	.006
22. Concern for Suppliers	1.8	1.6	ns
23. Concern for Society	2.0	1.7	ns
24. Concern for Shareholders	2.3	1.9	.067
25. Vision Statement	2.5	2.1	.052

Table 3

Firm Mission Characteristics: Innovative vs Non-Innovative Firms

Mission Characteristics		Mean score: Innovative Firms n=53	Mean Score: Non-Innovative Firms n=19	Significance (two tail t-test)
1.	Year created	1985	1988	ns
2.	Last year revised	1991	1991	ns
3.	Satisfaction with the current mission statement	7.0	5.1	.005
4.	Mission clarity	6.5	5.2	.011
5.	Mission influence over respondents' behavior	7.4	5.9	.015
6.	Mission influence over others' behavior	6.4	5.3	.010
7.	Commitment to mission	6.6	5.2	.000

Table 4

Mission "Rationales" for Innovative vs. Non-Innovative Firms

Mission Rationales	Innovative Firms Mean Score	Non-Innovative Firms Mean Score	Significance (Two-tail t-test)
1. Establish a Common Purpose	**4.2**	**3.4**	**.004**
2. Define the Business Scope	3.8	3.6	ns
3. Allow Management (especially the CEO) to Exert Control	3.1	2.7	ns
4. Set Behavior Standards	3.8	3.5	ns
5. Help Employees Identify with Firm	3.7	3.3	ns
6. Create SharedValues	**4.0**	**3.5**	**.082**
7. Ensure Interests of External Stakeholders are not ignored	**3.9**	**2.9**	**.002**
8. Inspire Employees	**4.0**	**3.3**	**.041**
9. Refocus in Crisis	3.3	3.1	ns
10. Resource Allocation	3.3	2.8	ns

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