EMPLOYEE CONSTRUCTIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION AND VISION

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Organizational mission and vision play important roles in the life of an organization and well-being of its employees. While many researchers have studied mission and vision from leadership perspectives, little is known about employee constructions of their organization’s mission and vision. Unlike previous research which approached mission and vision from rhetorical and socio-cultural perspectives, this study builds on a social constructionist foundation. Based on individual interviews with 45 employees from 22 organizations, this study seeks to understand how employees construct vision (in particular, the ideal future state of the organization, general values related to the ideal state, and authorship/source of vision) and mission (in particular, organization’s reason for being, uniqueness, possible changes, customers, clients, market segments, products, services, economic concerns, specific values related to its present operations, and ownership of the mission). This study also addresses the question of how employees’ constructions of mission and vision compare with the official versions of mission and vision. To answer the question, I conducted a thematic analysis of employee responses as compared to official mission and vision statements found on organizations’ Web sites. Results indicate lack of congruence between official and employee constructions of organizational
mission and vision. This study suggests that the lack of congruence is due to poor communication of vision/mission by leaders, low employee awareness of the advantages of knowing vision/mission, employees’ perceptions of vision/mission as irrelevant to daily work, and observed discrepancy between vision/mission and leaders’ actions. These findings have important practical implications for organizational professionals. The study makes a significant contribution to mission and vision literature, as well as research on employee perceptions, employee alignment, organizational identification, and organizational control.
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To my family
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

One can hardly overestimate the importance of mission and vision for an organization. As Meredith (2011) argued, “If a business does not have a vision, it does not have a dream … a dream to provide direction, to keep it alive, to motivate those involved through the tough bits” (p. 71). An effective vision contributes to higher levels of employee job satisfaction, organizational commitment, lower levels of turnover intentions and role ambiguity (Cole, Harris & Bernerth, 2006) and lower levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization at work (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). A vision helps to hold the organization together (Orton & Weick, 1990) and promote cohesion (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). Mission statements, as “carriers of ideologies and institutional cultures,” (Swales & Rogers, 1995, p. 225) can elicit emotional commitment to the organization among employees (Campbell, 1992) and thus increase productivity and reduce turnover.

Despite their promising potential to motivate employees to work toward a common goal, mission and vision often fail to fulfill their promise. In some organizations, mission and vision remain mere “celebratory ornamentations” (Thyssen, 2009), while in others, leaders become frustrated after unsuccessful attempts to get mission and vision to work. Bart (as cited in Panda & Gupta, 2003) observes:

Most of the mission statements appear to be more hype and hysteria than real beliefs, philosophies, and attitudes on the part of the corporation. 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. (p. 26)
Considering the immense amount of literature on mission and vision, such frustrations come as a surprise. Extant research provides exhaustive analyses of the necessary components that enhance the effectiveness of mission and vision. A quick Internet search for how to craft mission and vision statements returns over four million sixty thousand Web sites. Many of the Web sites (for example, informationweek.com and inciteinternational.com), as well as published articles (Helgesen, 2010; Lord, 2011; Yokl, 2011), provide detailed advice on what to include in the statements, how to word them, and how to implement them. Scholars and practitioners have said much on the importance of mission and vision, as well as the leader’s role in developing and implementing them (Bednarz, 2011; Bolton, Brunnermeier, & Veldkamp, 2008; Conger, 1998; Nanus & Dobbs, 1999). Recent literature (see e.g. Thyssen, 2009) identifies the need “to activate” mission and vision, i.e. to interweave it into the fabric of daily activities through a variety of channels. However, scholars have paid little attention to the role of employees in organizational mission and vision construction. Although, scholars (Fairhurst, 1993; Keyton, 2005; Thyssen, 2009) acknowledge employees’ contribution to mission and vision discourse, few (e.g. Mitki & Herstein, 2007) have actually studied it. We know much about visions and missions at development and implementation stages: why organizations need them, how organizations benefit from them, what leaders need to do to formulate and implement them effectively. Yet, we know almost nothing about what happens after that, once a mission and vision join organizational discourse.

To identify the gap more precisely, it is helpful to look at the theoretical perspectives commonly applied in mission and vision research. Traditionally, researchers have considered mission and vision from the rhetorical (Berson, Shamir, Avolio, & Popper, 2001; Dvir, Kass, & Shamir, 2004; Kantabutra, 2009) and sociocultural perspectives (Chee, Kamal, Wingender,
2011; Wang, 2011). Since the times of Ancient Greek philosophers, the rhetorical tradition addressed the persuasive potential of discourse. To use the words of Aristotle, the function of rhetoric “is not simply to succeed in persuading, but rather to discover the means of coming as near such success as the circumstances of each particular case allow” (as cited in Craig & Muller, 2007, p. 123). Rhetorical and management scholarship indicates that both visions and missions can function as powerful tools of persuasion (Nye, 2009; Yemm, 2008) and for this reason need to be part of a business strategy (Rogers, Gunasekera, & Yang, 2011). The socio-cultural tradition draws attention to the processes of individual and collective identity formation through discursive practices (Mead, 2007; Poster, 2007, Taylor et al., 2000, Cameron, 2000).

Socio-cultural scholars have traditionally conceptualized mission and vision as tools for disseminating and maintaining organizational culture through identification processes (Gioia, Price, Hamilton & Thomas, 2010; Golden 2009; Nelson & Donnellan, 2009).

Most information on mission and vision comes from leadership scholarship which often assumes that the leader plays the most important role in the formation and dissemination of organizational mission and vision. Nanus (1998) quotes Max DePree, CEO of Herman Miller Company, who said, “The responsibility of a leader is to define reality” (p. 231). According to traditional viewpoint, great leaders are the ones who make sense of reality, envision what the company needs to become in future, set goals and suggest ways of achieving them. In her review on the history of business ethics, Ciulla (2011) seems to agree with the words of Taeusch who said in 1926:

The world is in need of two types of men that it does not have in great abundance: those who are experts in technique, who contribute the ninety-five percent of perspiration necessary to carry on well the world’s work, and the inspired five percent who are
possessed on broad enough vision to see what there is to do. (as cited in Ciulla, 2011, p. 342)

According to this perspective, leaders assess reality, interpret it for their employees and tell them what needs to be done. Extensive literature on the relationship between leadership styles and vision/mission strength (Bass, 1985; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Berson et al., 2001, Conger & Canungo, 1998; Dvir et al., 2004; Sosik & Dinger, 2007) indicates that charismatic, transformational leaders are more likely to develop an inspiring mission and vision than transactional or passive leaders. Thus, the aim of an effective mission and vision is that employees “buy” leaders’ ideas and identify with the company.

Assuming that full responsibility for the creation and implementation of vision and mission rests with leaders ignores the fact that employees must enact mission and vision. Similarly, if we assume that the success of mission and vision depends on how well the leader formulates mission and vision statements, then we should also assume that employees have little to no impact on the implementation and effectiveness of mission and vision.

Interestingly, scholars and practitioners seem to disagree on the role of followers. While some believe that employees are mere executors of mission and vision, others are confident that employees are the ones who own organizational mission and vision (Dvir et al., 2004). Even scholars who conceptualize a mission and vision as the job of the leader often note the important role of followers. Fairhurst (1993), for example, says that “it may be precisely … in the discourse between leaders and members where a vision succeeds or fails” (p. 366). For some scholars, members’ role is “to grasp [the leader’s] message immediately” (Kantabutra, 2009, p. 323), for others (Avery, 2004) – to influence what is accomplished through voicing their opinions. Still other researchers believe members are active participants in “the development,
communication, dissemination, and implementation of organizational goals” (Wang & Rafiq, 2009, p. 92). Even in the most authoritative working environments, where the leader solely develops a mission and vision and then passes them down to employees, the life of the mission and vision is in the hands of workers.

Along those lines, there is great potential in approaching mission and vision from a social constructionist perspective. It is useful to know how employees perceive of and talk about organizational mission and vision. More specifically, examining how employees perceive and interpret the meaning of their organization’s mission and vision; how they talk about mission and vision components; and how the employee version of organizational mission and vision compares with the official one provides useful and important insights about employee contribution to the formation and maintenance of social reality. This knowledge is important for understanding both internal organizational processes (such as employee decision making) and the effect organizations have on society. By exploring the roles employees play in mission and vision formation and implementation, the present study contributes to the literature on mission and vision, as well as leadership literature. The study casts light on how employee perceptions affect the two fundamental components of organizational culture. It also provides understanding of why some visions and missions are less successful than others. Furthermore, it foregrounds the social constructionist capabilities of employee discourse which have lacked sufficient attention due to scholars’ preoccupation with managerial discourse.

By acknowledging the important role employees play in the social construction of mission and vision, we arrive at the two-fold understanding of mission and vision: One originates from leaders who develop visions and missions, present them to followers and integrate them into daily operations. The other understanding belongs to employees. They
interpret mission and vision, socially construct them in interaction with coworkers and apply them to their workplace situations. The degree of congruence between leaders’ construction of mission and vision and that of employees likely differs from case to case. If it is high, then mission and vision can act as forms of unobtrusive control (Tomkins and Cheney, 1985) when employees operate as a unified force representing and promoting the interests of the company. Conversely, if the degree of congruence is low, then there is likely much discrepancy between what leaders expect employees to do and what employees actually do.

Scholars increasingly acknowledge the impact organizations have on other spheres of life such as family, community, education, media, and state (Deetz, 1992). As Deetz (1992) notes, “corporate organizations make most decisions regarding the use of resources, the development of technologies, the products available, and the working relations among people. Organizational decisions, products, and practices have major effects on human development” (p. 3). Given the profound impact of organizations on every sphere of human activity, it is crucial to understand how organizational members view the reason for being and the desired future state of their company. That way we can understand the actual values and ideals organizations transmit to the society as opposed to the values and ideals intended by leaders. Overall, my hope is to stimulate further discussion on the role of employee constructions in the life of the organization and society.

While rhetorical and socio-cultural perspectives have helped scholars to understand persuasive and cultural aspects of mission and vision statements, the premises of social construction theory allow us to approach mission and vision in a refreshingly new light.
Social Construction Theory

Social construction theory operates on a set of important assumptions that are helpful in identifying workers’ contribution to the formation of organizational culture through mission and vision discourse.

First, social construction theory assumes that “meaning arises from social systems rather than from individual members of the society” (Allen, 2005, p. 35). The organization is one such system. On the one hand, organizations operate on a set of existing assumptions. On the other hand, they constantly generate new meanings in multiple interactions between their various constituencies. According to Barley (1983), “organizations are speech communities sharing socially constructed systems of meaning” (as cited in Foster &Bochner, 2008, p. 133). They exist mainly in the interaction of employees rather than in certain geographical locations or buildings. Whether an organization has a dozen employees or a few thousand, all employees participate in the formation of meanings related to the organization and its practices. Even when leaders exclude followers from the process of mission and vision creation, they still expect followers to understand and accept their ideas. It is unlikely that employee interpretation leaves no trace on organizational mission and vision. Because the purpose of mission and vision is to unite members on the way to common goals, employees must engage in the process of mission and vision interpretation.

In this dissertation, I argue that the meaning of mission and vision emerges in collective interaction between employees. When employees interact with each other, they socially construct mission and vision through production, reproduction, or modification of meanings. I believe that it is the socially constructed mission and vision, rather than their original managerial versions, that govern the life of an organization.
Second, social construction theory posits that knowledge construction is contingent on social, political, and historical context (Allen, 2005). Understanding those contextual factors is crucial in interpreting mission and vision. Deetz (1992) noted that in the United States, the concept of social construction has been given a shallow reading. Scholars often see social construction of reality as consensus between individuals coming together to share their independent experiences. Instead, Deetz (1992) argues, we should acknowledge that shared meaning arises out of “a background set of constitutive practices” (p. 125). Therefore, employees are social subjects who rely on organizational and, more broadly, social context to interpret and socially construct mission and vision. According to Deetz (1992), instead of approaching social construction as a process in which individuals share with each other their perceptions, we should be looking at social construction of meaning as a process of “perceiving the same” (p.125). In this dissertation, I do not analyze how employees negotiate their interpretations of mission and vision among themselves. Rather, I see every employee as a representative of organizational culture, whose interpretations have emerged from social and organizational practices, such as mission and vision discourse on organizational Web sites, as well as from interaction between individuals across and within hierarchical levels in the organization. Thus, a participant’s responses are an indication of both unique individual interpretations and employee discourses in general.

Due to the increasing integration of the organization into society, it is important to understand the connections between the two. No organization operates in a vacuum. To survive, organizations must respond to certain aspects of their environments, i.e. “all elements that exist outside the boundary of the organization and have the potential to affect all or part of the organization” (Daft, 2010, p. 140). Organizations must consider not only their own interests but
also the interests of the society (Hart, 2007). When developing mission and vision statements, leaders must ensure that organizational values match more general socio-cultural values in order to elicit emotional commitment among employees (Panda & Gupta, 2003). In the present study, I argue that the social context – both internal, i.e. constitutive practices in the organization, and external, i.e. environment of the organization – affects the interpretation of mission and vision among employees.

Third, social construction theory conceptualizes language as fundamental to meaning construction. Organizations are discursive constructions (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004) in which social realities are “talked into being” (Heritage, 1997) by its members. Because meaning emerges in collective interaction, we cannot limit ourselves to studying only mission and vision statements. Doing so would bring us back to the analysis of managerial meaning of mission and vision statements. Instead, the social constructionist approach offers an opportunity to go beyond the boundaries of individual statements and explore the broader mission and vision discourse as a result of member interaction. In the current study, I analyzed not only the statements themselves but employees’ interpretation of their organization’s mission and vision. Such analysis enabled examination of how employees conceptualize the meaning and significance of mission and vision. I was able to see the result (i.e. the employee constructions of mission and vision) and also the very process (i.e. how employees transformed official mission and vision when responding to my questions).

Finally, social construction theory conceptualizes knowledge and social action as interrelated phenomena. When developing an organizational mission and vision, leaders hope that those will guide followers in their actions. Mission and vision tell employees what kinds of behaviors are appropriate and even desirable in the organization. It is important to see what
knowledge about the organization emerges as a result of interaction between employees. In other words, to understand the effect that mission and vision will have on organizational operations, we need to understand how workers conceptualize the mission and vision of their organization.

Grounding this study in social construction theory expands our knowledge about what happens to mission and vision once they become part of employee discourse. Such knowledge helps us understand how employees interpret and modify fundamental organizational concepts; how multiple discourses contribute to the formation of organizational reality; and also why some visions and missions are successful, while others are not.

Although I did not study the effect of socially constructed mission and vision on their organizations, the dissertation certainly contributes to our understanding of their effectiveness. There is no agreement in literature on what exactly effective visions and missions are and how we can measure their effectiveness. When talking about the effect mission and vision have on employees and organizations, scholars use many different concepts such as assimilation (O’Connell, Hickerson & Pillutla, 2011), “buy-in” (Swales & Rogers, 1995), commitment (Slack, Orife, & Anderson, 2010; Dvir et al., 2004), congruence (Panda & Gupta, 2003), engagement (Benjamin, 2011), fulfillment (Suh, Houston, Barney, & Kwon, 2011), inspirational “strength” (Berson et al., 2001), job satisfaction (Cole et al., 2006), performance (Kantabutra, 2009), and ownership (Keyton, 2005). Even though none of those concepts was of specific interest to me in this study, they are part of mission and vision effectiveness and that is why they came into the dissertation as supporting concepts. Each of them adds to our overall understanding of how visions and missions work. For that reason, I employed those diverse concepts and related literature to build rationale for my research questions.
The study had one main research question with a few more specific sub-questions:

**RQ: When asked to reflect about their organization, how do employees construct the organization’s mission and vision?**

Although the boundary between mission and vision is somewhat blurry, they are fundamentally different from each other. Therefore, the present study addressed them separately.

**Mission**

While a vision explains the value of a future state, a mission provides the reason for the organization to exist beyond making money (Collins, 2006) and describes more specifically clear and compelling goals to be achieved (Keyton, 2005). Intel’s mission, for example, is a plan for a decade, “This decade we will create and extend computing technology to connect and enrich the lives of every person on earth” (www.intel.com).

**Content of Mission**

Because missions are intended to guide daily operations and decision making processes, it is important for them to be precise and tangible. According to Collins and Porras (1998), a lack of clear concepts and tools is a primary reason some mission statements are ineffective. Unlike organizational vision which must be abstract enough to appeal to a large number of people, a mission statement requires a higher degree of clarity. Dess and Miller (1998) identify six general questions a typical mission statement attempts to answer:

1. What is our reason for being? What is our basic purpose?
2. What is unique or distinctive about our organization?
3. What is likely to be different about our business 3 to 5 years in the future?
4. Who are, or who should be, our principal customers, clients, or key market segments?

5. What are our principal products and services?

6. What are, or what should be, our principal economic concerns? (p. 261)

For example, Ben & Jerry’s mission consists of three parts: social mission, product mission, and economic mission which together provide reason for being, purpose and uniqueness of the organization as well as its product: e.g. to make, distribute, and sell the finest quality all natural ice cream. It also addresses the company’s principal constituencies: e.g. “increasing value for our stakeholders” and “expanding opportunities for development and career growth for our employees” (http://www.benjerry.com/activism/mission-statement/). Finally, Ben & Jerry’s mission refers to principal economic concerns: e.g. “to operate the Company on a sustainable financial basis of profitable growth.”

When leaders emphasize the importance of mission and try to implement it, employees are likely to engage in meaning-making behaviors in an attempt to understand the mission of their organization. Examining how followers socially construct major components of their organization’s mission provides insights into how they perceive of the organization. In line with Dess and Miller’s (1998) questions, I sought to understand how organizational members construct the purpose, uniqueness, future changes, customers, clients, markets, products, services, and economic concerns proposed in the mission and identify other possible concepts and themes that might emerge in interaction about mission. The first sub-question is:

**RQ (a): When asked to reflect about the components of their organization’s mission (such as the reason for being, uniqueness of the organization, changes, customers, clients, market segments, products, services, and economic concerns), how do they construct them?**
Mission and Values

Missions often contain not only concrete goals and time frames but also emotional appeal. Researchers (see, for example, Dvir et al., 2004) have argued that the success of a mission often depends on its ability to provoke emotional response among followers. As Collins & Porras (1998) note, a mission “is crisp, clear, engaging – it reaches out and grabs people in the gut. People “get it” right away; it requires little or no explanation” (p. 242). If a mission strikes a chord with employees, they will be more committed to the organization’s ideals and more willing to act in the interests of the organization (Benjamin, 2011). Conversely, if a mission fails to elicit emotional commitment of the employees, there is a high possibility of cynicism and disillusionment among organizational members (Panda & Gupta, 2003). Thus, leaders often attempt to find a match between the values of the organization and those of the individual (Campbell, 1992). Only at the intersection of organizational and individual values can a sense of mission develop. Leaders may invest their best resources into mission development and implementation, but it is followers who enact the mission. Ardichvili, Mitchell, and Jondle (2009) call mission and values “the lifeblood of the organization” (p. 449). They explain:

For an organization both to survive and thrive, mission and values must be an integral component of an organization’s strategic focus. They must be aligned to foster a high performance culture and flow freely and systemically throughout the organization to become the genesis of operational norms (i.e. codes of conduct and ethics) that drive desired behavior. (p.449)

Given the importance of the mission, and its value component in particular, it is necessary to know what organizational values are from the point of view of employees; whether employees accept them and share the values with their coworkers. Hence:
RQ (b): When asked to reflect about their organization’s more specific values related to its present operations, how do employees construct them?

Although organizational practitioners tend to conceive of diversity in terms of demographics (i.e. gender, race, ethnicity of their employees), recently the concept of diversity has undergone significant transformations. The organizational world increasingly acknowledges the diversity of values (Helgesen, 2010). Even though values can be explicitly stated in the mission, it is also important to learn how employees interpret those values, how they reconcile potentially contradicting values (such as profit and social service), whether they see any other values as implied in the mission and how they refine the value content of organizational mission in interaction because it is in the process of social construction where organizational reality emerges.

Mission and Ownership

Values can be a strong motivational force that can stimulate employee “buy-in.” If there are discrepancies between three kinds of values (espoused, i.e. promoted by the top management; prevailing, i.e. actually being practiced; and desired, i.e. preferred by members), then the organization fails to elicit emotional commitment for its mission (Panda & Gupta, 2003). However, when the organization’s values are similar to those of the individual, the individual is more likely to invest his or her efforts to help the company succeed. Moreover, if members share the values, they experience the feeling of belonging to the group. Along those lines, I wanted to understand the degree of mission assimilation among employees:

RQ (c): When asked to reflect about their organization’s mission, how do employees socially construct the ownership of the mission?
Vision

Although there is no agreed upon definition of a vision, scholars and practitioners generally agree that a vision comprises two fundamental elements: (1) an idealized future state of the organization and (2) a direction for employees to follow (Barge, 1994; Baum, Locke, & Kirkpatrick, 1998; Conger & Benjamin, 1999; Kotter, 1982; Faust, 2007; Nelson & Gardent, 2011). For example, General Motors Corporation’s vision statement reads, “GM’s vision is to be the world leader in transportation products and related services. We will earn our customers’ enthusiasm through continuous improvement driven by the integrity, teamwork, and innovation of GM people” (http://www.csrglobe.com/login/companies/generalmotors.html). The statement envisions the ideal state (“the world leader”) and general guidelines on key organizational principles (“integrity, teamwork, and innovation”).

Because a vision should appeal to a large number of people with different interests and beliefs, it should possess a few qualities which would make it attractive to any employee. In his behavioral theory of vision, Kantabutra (2009) identifies the following attributes:

(1) Brevity – a vision should be brief but at the same time definite enough;
(2) Clarity – a vision should be clear and precise to be understood and accepted;
(3) Stability – a vision should be abstract enough to withstand the changes in organizational environment;
(4) Abstractness – a vision should represent a general idea rather than a specific achievement.

These four attributes reveal a paradox of a vision: on the one hand, it should be clear and precise so that employees can clearly see which direction to go, on the other – it should be brief, general and abstract to appeal to each and every employee, regardless of their differences. This
paradox creates possibilities of confusion among employees. Clarity has received significant attention in mission and vision literature. Dvir et al. (2004) note that if leaders want their vision to be salient for followers, they need to articulate it clearly. Ambiguity can be very valuable for organizations: it can shift interpretations of central metaphors and thus stimulate change, it can contribute to developing interpersonal relationships, and it can generate different interpretations of meaning (Eisenberg, 2007). In terms of organizational vision, a certain degree of ambiguity is helpful because it gives employees some freedom of interpretation and that is why can be appealing to the most people (Thyssen, 2009). However, excessive ambiguity may become an obstacle to acting on the vision (Nanus, 1992; Cole et al., 2006) or even provoke employees to engage in illegal or unethical behavior (Keyton, 2005). When a vision is vague or contradictory, employees would need to communicate their predicaments to reduce confusion (Fairhurst, 1993). In other words, before employees all go in the same direction, they need to come to a general agreement about what the destination is. Therefore, due to the inherent ambiguity of a vision, employees are likely to engage in interaction with each other in an attempt to clarify its meaning and significance.

**Vision and Future Direction**

One aspect of an organizational vision relevant for employees is what James (1994) calls the “futurist dimension.” Visions provide a glimpse of the future. They describe the ideal portrait of the organization. By doing so, visions function as a sort of a corporate fortune-teller: they address one of the strongest human anxieties – uncertainty about the future. They also play on general human curiosity about the future. Consider, for example, Chevron, whose vision is “to be the global energy company most admired for its people, partnership and performance” (http://www.chevron.com/about/chevronway/). Not only does the company have a prospect of
becoming the company in the global energy market, but it also possesses a set of concrete assets: people, partnership, and performance. Yet, a simple depiction of a desirable future state the organization may achieve is not enough.

As O’Connell et al. (2011) note, for the vision to take effect, it must address tension between what the organization is at present and what it might become in the future. The leader must present employees with challenging, but desirable future (Nanus, 1992). It is useful to know whether employees “buy” into the ideal image of the company or whether they construct a different destination to reach. Understanding what kind of future employees envision helps us assess the degree of cohesion between leaders’ version of the vision and that of employees. As Nanus (1992) explains, “a vision is little more than an empty dream until it is widely shared and accepted. Only then does it acquire the force necessary to change an organization and move it in the intended direction” (p. 134). Unless employees agree on the meaning and importance of vision with their leaders, they are likely to ignore or reject the vision (Lipton, 1996). Then the progress of the company towards the envisioned dream becomes problematic.

Given the fundamental role of discourse in the construction of social reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Potter Hepburn, 2008; Samra-Fredericks, 2008), it is also important to understand how employees construct the organization’s official vision: whether they accept how official statements and leaders in their discourse portray the ideal image or whether they question official representations.

Through appeal to the future state, a vision presents employees with a challenge (Kantabutra, 2009; Nanus, 1998). The challenge motivates people to work at the best of their abilities and at the same time promises a certain reward. Researchers (Holladay & Coombs, 1994; Kotter, 1990) point out that vision’s attractiveness depends on the balance between
desirability and feasibility of the depicted future state. If a vision carries a utopian image of the organization, it is likely to cause skepticism among employees and even fail in its primary function to inspire members for action. The present study allowed me to see how employees constructed the feasibility of the ideal state.

The desirability of the future achievement can be a powerful motivational force which enhances employees’ affective commitment (Kantabutra, 2009). Scholars and practitioners recommend leaders to know their followers’ needs. That way they can create a desirable destination for their followers. Leadership literature states that leaders should work on the achievability and desirability of the future goal (Holladay & Coombs, 1994; Kotter, 1990). The next research question helped me understand whether employees considered the future state of the organization desirable and whether they felt motivated to strive towards that end.

Future orientation, challenge, and desirability are only some of the attributes commonly used to describe organizational vision. The proposed study reveals other themes which employees use to construct the ideal future state of the company. The next question is:

**RQ (d): When asked to reflect about the future state of the organization, how do employees construct it?**

To summarize, from a practical standpoint, the answer to the above question is helpful in addressing concerns about why some visions do not work and whether they fulfill their primary function – to unify employees across all organizational levels in their aspirations towards a shared future goal. From a theoretical standpoint, I was able to see the follower contribution to strategic discourse and the very ideology and culture of the organization.
Vision and Values

In addition to a future orientation, visions contain important information about the present. Corporate visions provide a framework for understanding what corporations are at the moment. Studies demonstrate that knowledge about organizations is necessary for almost everybody. For example, workers seek information to reduce uncertainty (Sias & Wyers, 2001). Shareholders claim their right for knowledge of company affairs to the extent that “corporate information became shareholder driven” (“Editorial,” 2000, p. 2). There is also pressure for transparency from non-profit organizations, communities, legislators and general public. Through visions, corporations can explain to their workers what behavior is appropriate and at the same time organizations can create a positive image in the eyes of the general public.

Yet, the power of visions is not only in the informative potential. Visions reflect the key values of the organization, which creates a very powerful ethical appeal to the audiences. Defined as preferences about how situations should be handled (Schein, 1992), values are an important part of organizational culture (Dainton & Zelley, 2005; Keyton, 2005).

There seems to be a general agreement among practitioners and academia that one of the focal tasks of any organization is to coordinate behavior of individuals with different goals and interests. Shared values can serve as intrinsic motivation for employees to act in the interests of the organization (Ren, 2010). Organizational values often come from leaders. Research shows that leaders’ values strongly influence employees’ values (Brown & Trevifio, 2009; Meglino, Ravlin, & Adkins 1991; Morley & Shockley-Zalabak, 1991).

Although leaders define organizational values, it is important for members to adopt and share a common set of values. That way the organization could operate smoothly as a unified force. When managers’ values are clear to employees, organizations can expect higher level of
employee motivation and pride, which leads to increased performance (Lipton, 1996). Although clear articulation of values can be helpful, it is not the only condition for employee buy-in.

Because the organization is produced and reproduced in the interaction of its employees, personal values of members should be in congruence with organizational values (Keyton, 2005). According to Weiner (1988):

By definition, individual values serve as a guide to a person’s intentions and actions. Similarly, organizational value systems provide guides for organizational goals, policies, and strategies. Thus, the nature of the values is a crucial factor in the impact that culture will have on organizational effectiveness. If the prevailing values support appropriate goals and strategies, the culture is an important asset. Conversely, the wrong values can make the culture a major liability. (p. 536)

Research on employee-organization value congruence indicates that employees who share values with their organization are more likely to be empowered with decision-making which translates into higher organizational performance (Ren, 2010). Because the adoption of organizational values by employees is crucially important, many organizations invest significant amount of time and resources in value implementation. At the recruitment stage, for example, many companies try to identify and select those candidates who would share core values (see, for example, an account of a case study by Bergström & Knights, 2006). Later, successful companies try to integrate values into every aspect of their lives through various orientation and training programs (Lencioni, 2002).

Shared values are important because of their ability to create a sense of identity (Bolman & Deal, 2003). According to Scott, Corman, and Cheney (1998), identity is a structure “that indicates our perceived membership in a social collective” (p. 304). It operates on a set of rules
and resources which enable and constrain certain behaviors and thus produce and reproduce the whole system of organization. Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) posits that identity is part of an individual’s self-concept which bases on the knowledge of that individual about his or her membership in a social group, as well as value and significance attached to the membership. Thus, when an employee perceives himself or herself as a member of an organization, he or she not only has rules and resources which guide action but also experiences distinctiveness of the organization from other organizations. In decision-making process, a person identifies with a group, if he or she perceives that the group’s values or interests are relevant for making a choice (Simon, as cited in Scott et al., 1998). It is when individuals make decisions where we can witness identification, i.e. “the process of emerging identity… the type of behavior produced by and producing identity” (Scott et al., 1998, p. 304). Identification often occurs within groups, which provide individual employees with an important feeling of connection to the organization (Silva & Sias, 2010). Identification also serves as a means of unobtrusive control when employees willingly make decisions which promote the interests of the organization (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985).

Scholars and practitioners (Collins, 2006) frequently note the close interconnection between an organization’s core values and its vision. As Thyssen (2009) puts it, “talking about goals and visions is necessarily talking about values” (p. 122). Value content of vision statements provides an ethical basis for decision making. James (1994) defines the ethical dimension of visions as “an appeal to values specified or inherently implied in the vision which go beyond the self-interest of the visionary and the direct interests of those who are closely bound up with him or her” (p. 944). For example, whereas GM’s core values are integrity, teamwork, and innovation, Chevron’s priorities are people, partnership and performance.
Visions need to proclaim the values that large numbers of people can relate to. If values are appealing to the audiences, the latter likely have a positive image of the organization, which also stimulates the process of identification among employees.

Visions convey the organization’s “official” values, i.e. the values which leaders hope will serve as guidelines for employees. Research indicates that a shared vision facilitates cooperation not only between individuals (Meng-Hsiang, Chun-Ming, & Chia-Hui, 2011), but also between departments, which, in turn, facilitates cross-functional teams organizational citizenship behavior (Wong, Tjosvold, & Liu, 2009). Despite leaders’ intentions, however, employees do not always ‘buy into’ the proposed values. The organizational world has seen numerous cases when visions provoke nothing but skepticism, sarcasm or even downright rejection.

We know much about how leaders should craft an effective vision statement. Yet, we know very little about how employees socially construct the value-content of vision discourse. In particular, we do not know whether employees interpret organizational values the same way as leaders do and whether employees relate to the vision values, accept them and are willing to act on them. Given the importance of value adoption among employees, it is vital to know how organizational values transform, if at all, when they reach employees through vision. By answering the next research question, I will be able to further our understanding into potential areas of discrepancy between leaders’ values and employees’ values as well as into the kind of values that actually guide employee decision-making. Hence:

**RQ (e): When asked to reflect about their organization’s general values related to its ideal state, how do employees construct them?**
Vision and Authorship

Although organizational visions can be the product of teams of authors, they often bear the stamp of a strong leader whose insights delineate the desired configuration of the organization, its relationship with the environment, resources and direction to pursue in the future (James, 1994). Vision discourse is often based on the intuition and drive of an influential individual (Nanus, 1992) who serves as a powerful inspirational stimulus for the masses of followers. One such leader was Henry Ford, whose vision shaped and has dominated Ford Motor Company for over a century. Even if the authorship of the vision is unclear, organizational discourse engraves the names of iconic figures into narratives and corporate legends. In her book on narrative and institutional memory, Linde (2009) discusses business hagiography. In the institutional world, hagiography is a genre of narration which ascribes virtues to corporate founders and leaders. Corporate Web sites often contain allusions to an inspirational leader whose foresight took the company along the lane of success. Sometimes mission and vision are either direct quotes from what the leader said earlier or a reiteration of his or her principles. An authority figure whose genius instills trust and admiration among employees can be a catalyst for faster and stronger employee identification with the organization.

It is not surprising that the level of trust between leaders and followers is often associated with the potential of a vision to succeed. Because relationships between supervisors and subordinates can affect employees’ perception of mission and vision, it is important to understand how employees construct the authorship of the vision. As scholars (Collins & Porras, 1998; Lipton, 1996) observed, it is not the mere existence of a vision that matters to employees. Rather, what inspires employees is their perception of leadership as visionary, i.e. when leaders believe deeply in the vision and their behavior is consistent with it. Thus, if employees perceive
of their leaders as trustworthy and charismatic, they are likely to accept the organization’s vision and develop commitment to it (Hwang, Khatri, & Srinivas, 2005; Meng-Hsiang et al., 2011).

According to leader-member exchange theory, which originated from vertical dyad linkage theory (Graen & Cashman, 1975), in high-quality relationships, leaders and followers develop mutual respect, trust and supportive behaviors towards each other. In such relationships, “members move beyond their own self-interests to focus on larger mutual interests” (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995, p. 233). Examining how employees construct the authorship of the vision would provide insights into whether they are prepared to accept organizational vision based on their respect for and trust in the authors. As Shamir and Lapidot (2003) note, “trust in a superior reflects subordinate’s trust in the system that the superior represents” (p. 463). Therefore, if employees perceive the vision’s author as trustworthy, they likely perceive the vision as more acceptable. As a result, they are willing to enact the vision. On the other hand, if followers are critical of the author, they likely find his or her vision less inspiring and may be reluctant to act on it.

Another important aspect of vision authorship is the degree to which employees feel they contribute to vision formation. Although leadership scholars offer valuable insights into how leaders can assure a high degree of vision assimilation, i.e. “the degree to which a vision is owned and shared by organizational members” (O’Connell et al., 2011, p. 104), it is very helpful to look at the other side of the vision – the follower side. Besides vision authorship, a question about authorship will provide information about how employees construct their ownership of the vision. As Keyton (2005) explains, “when organizational members are involved in setting the vision, it becomes meaningful to them, increasing their ownership in the organization’s activities” (p. 138). If they feel that part of the authorship belongs to them, they probably feel
motivated to enact the vision. On the contrary, if employees do not see themselves as authors of the vision, then vision’s motivational power would need to come from an inspirational leader. Thus, the degree of perceived vision ownership among employees is yet another important factor which likely contributes to vision acceptance and member commitment.

By identifying common themes in how employees construct the authorship of the vision, we can better understand why in some companies’ employees are more willing to accept vision than in others. We also gain insight into how employees perceive of their own place in vision authorship: whether they feel as mere followers or actual creators of organizational vision. The next research question is,

**RQ (f): When asked to reflect about the authorship/source of the organization’s vision, how do employees construct it?**

It is important to understand what happens to organizational vision once it leaves the desk of the leader to reach the hearts and minds of the followers. Answers to the above question help us contribute to better understanding of how employee construction of vision authorship affects their decision-making: whether employees perceive of vision authorship as credible and inspirational or not. Therefore, research into socially constructed ownership is a valuable contribution to vision literature.

**Mission, Vision, and Coherence**

In this study, I define coherence as the degree of similarity in understanding what mission and vision mean between leaders and followers. Coherence depends on many different factors such as the content of mission and vision, the form of expression (Kantabutra, 2008), leadership charisma (Hwang et al., 2005), communication channels, and frequency of communication (O’Connell et al., 2011). In low-quality supervisor-subordinate relationships (Graen & Uhl-
Bien, 1995), characterized by lower levels of trust and respect between the parties, there is likely to be less agreement between leaders and followers about the meaning and significance of mission and vision.

There is significant practical value in understanding whether there is contradiction between leaders’ and employees’ construction of mission and vision. Employees who share an understanding of what the organization is and where it is going are likely to develop loyalty to the organization and work in its interests. For example, Nordstrom is famous for its dedication to customer service excellence. For over 100 years, the company has striven “to offer the customer the best possible service, selection, quality and value” (http://shop.nordstrom.com/c/company-history). In one instance, a Nordstrom representative took back a two-year-old blouse from a customer with no questions asked (Lencioni, 2002). In another, after taking a customer from department to department and helping him or her to select all the essentials for the relatives whose house had burned to the ground, an employee offered to wrap and ship all the purchases for free (http://www.dailyfinance.com).

To increase coherence, organizations develop a mission discernment process, i.e. a formal mechanism that ensures employees make right decisions (Buell, 2008). They also make mission and vision available to employees through organizational publications, such as an employee handbook, and corporate Web sites. In 1999 Cooley expressed her hope that in the future PR professionals would value corporate Web sites for their ability to connect the organization to the public. She quoted the words of Heath who said that a corporate Web site is a “means by which any organization – no matter how financially limited can sustain its messages over time and reach people around the world” (as cited in Cooley, 1999, p. 41). Today, the Web site has become the voice of the organization. Companies use their Web sites extensively to
connect not only with outside audiences but also with employees. This is where leaders and managers explain mission and vision hoping that employees will understand, accept and share organization’s values.

Lack of shared understanding is detrimental to employee commitment and job satisfaction. Furthermore, if employees construct mission and vision very differently from how leaders construct them, then employees likely make decisions which subvert organizational culture. Wrong decisions may distort operations and even damage the organization’s reputation in the eyes of various constituencies and general public (Gaines-Ross, 2010).

The organizational world has seen many examples when employees’ decisions were at odds with organizational mission and vision. For instance, Domino's Pizza's Web site says, “Domino’s Pizza Vision illustrates a company of exceptional people on a mission to be the best pizza delivery company in the world” (http://www.dominosbiz.com/Biz-Public-EN/Site+Content/Secondary/About+Dominos/). The core values are “putting people first, demanding integrity, striving for customer loyalty, delivering with smart hustle and positive energy, [and] winning by improving results every day.” In 2009, Domino’s Pizza’s reputation was tarnished when one of its employees made short movies of another employee doing unappetizing things to pizza and posted them on YouTube (Gaines-Ross, 2010). The employees did not only care about “improving results every day” or “striving for customer loyalty,” they also did not try to make Domino’s Pizza “the best pizza delivery company in the world.”

Therefore, it is important for organizations to understand how employees, as compared to leaders, construct mission and vision. Hence:

**RQ (g): How does employees’ construction of mission and vision compare with the official version of the mission and vision?**
By answering this question, the study furthers our understanding of employees’ social constructions of the key elements of organizational culture. Overall, this study expands our understanding of how employees contribute to the formation of social reality in contemporary organizations.
CHAPTER TWO
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Sample

My initial intent was to have focus group interviews with employees from large and middle-sized organizations. That decision was based on review of literature. Extant research, coming mainly from leadership scholarship, has pointed out the importance of the size of an organization when it comes to mission/vision research. Large bureaucratic organizations are stifling to charismatic/visionary leadership (Pawar & Eastman, 1997; Pillai & Meindl, 1998). Berson et al. (2001) found that organizational size affects the nature of the content included in a vision. Larger organizations comprise a broader range of interests; hence, a greater pressure on the leader to develop a vision which would represent different groups of people.

From my previous research I expected that middle to large organizations would be more suitable for this study for the following reasons. First, such companies would be more likely than smaller organizations to have vision and mission statements. Second, in an attempt to stimulate mission and vision assimilation, they would be more likely to encourage mission and vision discourse through making the statements available to employees on corporate Web sites and in training programs. Finally, as I noted earlier, from the social constructionist perspective, knowledge is always conditioned by the social, political, and historical context. Larger organizations not only have massive impact on the life of the society, but they have to explicitly state their position on vital societal issues. Therefore, I expected that in larger companies I could more easily observe the relationship between organizational and societal values.

After receiving approval from the IRB, I contacted people working in medium and large organizations through personal connections. Soon it became apparent that employees from larger
organizations were much harder to recruit. Two employees from a large telecommunications
corporation recommended me to get access to the organization through their HR department but
noted that the research would not get off the ground in less than a year.

In the end, I decided to interview participants from organizations of all sizes as long as
their organization had a vision, a mission, or both. This change did not threaten the study
because I did not seek to understand the impact of size on mission and vision constructions
among employees. In fact, this shift to organizations of all sizes has brought a few unexpected
benefits. I was able to recruit participants with very diverse ideas about the purpose of the
organization, its place in the industry, its impact on society, its relationships with customers,
future goals, and etc. Moreover, I was able to talk to employees with various degrees of
involvement in vision/mission development process and various degrees of closeness to their
leaders. All that has provided me with a very large array of themes, which is the very purpose of
an exploratory endeavor. As a result, my sample included participants from 22 organizations
ranging in size from 5 to over 157,000 employees.

Participants

I based the study on the discourse of employees from any department and of any job rank
with two exceptions: the personnel of HR and PR departments and top managers. I excluded the
former from the study because they often directly participate in the process of dissemination of
mission and vision inside and outside the organization. For some of them, promotion of mission
and vision is a job responsibility which may possibly induce them to provide “correct” answers
to researchers or even treat researchers as people to sell mission and vision to. I excluded leaders
and managers with top authority from the study because I was interested in the non-official
conceptualization of mission and vision.
The sample comprised 45 participants. Employees were drawn from organizations in the following industries: IT/software (13 participants), higher education (11), insurance (4), food and beverage retail (4), energy (2), fitness/recreation (2), retail (2), investment (1), aerospace (1), biotechnology (1), online travel (1), e-commerce (1), semiconductor (1), and community service (1). In total, 27 participants were female and 18 were male. The age range was between 22 and 63 years old. With respect to ethnic background, 30 participants were Caucasian/White, 10 were Asian, 2 were Native American, 1 was African American, 1 was Hispanic, and 1 was Portuguese/Caucasian. The range of tenure in the organization was 1.5 months to 24 years.

Data Collection Method

First, I conducted a short demographic survey. Although I did not intend to use the data in my analysis, the survey helped me to weed out the excluded categories or participants. Besides, it provided me with general information about participants in case I needed to trace emerging topics and themes to certain categories of employees. I also needed this data to adequately describe the sample.

Initially, my data collection method was focus group interviews, which I intended to complement with analysis of corporate Web sites for RQ(g). The method of focus groups interviews was a very attractive possibility because it would allow me to observe interaction between employees. According to Morgan (1997), focus groups provide a “rare opportunity to collect direct evidence on how the participants themselves understand their similarities and differences” (p. 20). I hoped to see how participants respond to each other, agree, disagree and react to other people’s comments. However, potential participants often expressed their concerns with higher risk of group pressure and lack of privacy. In addition, approaching organizations
through official channels meant indefinite delays for the research. In the end, I had to switch to individual interviews.

Although I had to alter the mode of interviewing, it was crucially important for me to preserve interviewing as the primary method of data collection in this study. The biggest advantage of interviewing was that it provided access to participants’ first-hand accounts of their experiences as well as their own interpretations. It also allowed me to observe their emotions. With the help of their non-verbal reactions (such as body language) and paralinguistic cues (such as sighing, pausing, etc.), I was able to tell whether they shared their organization’s mission and vision and whether they liked their leaders. I could tell whether they sounded skeptical, enthusiastic, frustrated, hopeful, etc. Although analysis of nonverbal messages was not part of this study, observing nonverbal and paralinguistic cues certainly helped me to interpret participants’ responses.

I employed what Holstein and Gubrium (1995) call active interviewing. They view both researchers and participants as “necessarily and unavoidably active [emphasis in original]” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 4). In line with the theoretical foundation of this study, active interviewing bases on the following premises:

1. an interview is reality-constructing; it is a meaning-making process which shows how meaning evolves over the interview;

2. participants are not vessels or repositories of answers, but rather, narrators, co-creators of meaning; they add to, take away from, and transform facts;

3. information is offered from a continually developed standpoint; the focus is on subjective interpretations;
(4) the goal of the research is to incite respondents’ answers, to activate narrative production by engaging into an interplay of alternate considerations;

(5) the researcher is responsible for continual self-analysis to minimize stereotyping respondents or imposing interpretations. (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995)

With the above premises in mind, I used the interview protocol as a general guideline, not as a strict set of questions to be read in the same order and wording to all participants. Most of the questions were open-ended. Many follow-up questions were unique to every particular interview and had not been planned ahead of time. Depending on a participant’s preferences, I conducted face-to-face or phone interviews. The interviews lasted from 13 to 47 minutes. As a result, I analyzed a total of 591 pages of transcripts.

After I recorded interviews, my next stage was to compare employees’ responses to official statements on their Web sites. Researchers often use organizations’ Web sites as data sources of corporate discourse. For example, Coupland and Brown (2004) analyze construction of organizational identity on Royal Dutch Shell’s Web site; Kampf (2007) uses Web sites to analyze cultural bounds or organizational representation; and Pollach (2005) studies the potential of Web sites to improve corporate self-representation. For the purpose of this study, corporate Web sites supplied the data on managerial versions of mission and vision necessary for RQ(g).

As I noted earlier, researchers indicate that mission and vision can come under a wide range of labels. For that reason, I concentrated on textual data from such pages as “Our Company,” “About Us,” “Culture,” “Code of Ethics,” and sections like “Our Vision,” “Mission,” “Strategy,” and “Core values.”
Data Analysis Method

Due to the novelty of the study and its exploratory nature, my primary data analysis method was thematic analysis. This method fit well with the goal of my research. Thematic analysis enabled description of general and more specific themes and relationships between them. At the same time I was not bound by a requirement to quantify content according to predetermined themes, like in content analysis, or by specific coding requirements, like in grounded theory (see Floersch, Longhofer, Kranke, & Townsend, 2010 for detailed comparison of the three).

Although in terms of procedures I did not utilize critical discourse analysis (for summaries of Wodak’s and Fairclough’s CDA see Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000), I viewed employee responses and vision/mission statements as discourse. According to Potter and Hepburn (2008), discursive constructionism views discourse as having a few fundamental qualities. First, discourse is constructed, i.e. assembled from different structural resources which help people describe the world. Second, discourse is constructive. People use structural repertoires to “put together and stabilize versions of the world” (Potter & Hepburn, 2008, p. 277). By analyzing how employees use language means to talk about their organization’s mission and vision, I could gain insights into how they construct their version of the world.

Next, discourse is institutionally and rhetorically situated. Institutional situatedness of discourse means that discourse is generated within social practices; it gives sense and structure to them (Potter and Hepburn, 2008). In analyzing workplace discourse from the social constructionist perspective, it is important to understand that conversation with coworkers is a social practice; it emerges within the context of broader organizational discourse. Employees are not blank slates. On the contrary, they are both producers and products of their organization.
Therefore, their discourse bears traces of many different factors such as norms of appropriate conversation style, relationships with their leaders, and each individual’s identification with the organization. Discourse is rhetorically situated because discursive constructions result from a selection process in which participants make choices by countering relevant alternatives.

In terms of a concrete procedure, the method of thematic networks proved to be a useful tool for answering the proposed research questions. Attride-Stirling (2001) provides a detailed description of the method with a step-by-step guide to its implementation. Importantly, the method does not seek to reconcile conflicting views and provide a unified definition of a problem. Rather, its aim is “to explore the understanding of an issue or the signification of an idea” (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 387). Likewise, the goal of the study was not to arrive at one clear-cut definition for mission and vision, but to explore how employees understand and construct the mission and vision of their organization. The method focuses on the subjective experience of social life. In particular, it allows researchers to uncover the magnitude, richness and meaning of such experience. It uncovers salient discursive themes at different levels. Specifically, Attride-Stirling (2001) describes three thematic levels: (1) basic themes, i.e. basic statements or beliefs anchored around a notion and evident in the textual data; (2) organizing themes, i.e. groupings of basic themes which represent more abstract principles; and (3) global themes, i.e. super-ordinate themes which reflect major metaphors in the data as a whole. A network representation of themes allows not only to see connections between ideas and group ideas together, but also to identify how groups of ideas relate to each other. Rather than describing the data in terms of isolated themes, such multi-level representation gives justice to the complexity of human experience. It allows raising analysis above direct description of concrete phenomena to the level of more abstract concepts, which makes results generalizable.
Another valuable quality of thematic networks is that they give researchers tools to go beyond mere description of how people talk about certain phenomena to understanding why they do so.

In analyzing data, I followed the Alltride-Stirling (2001) 6-step procedure which includes the following stages:

1. Coding material on the basis of research questions and salient issues arising from data;
2. Abstracting themes from the coded material;
3. Constructing networks, which involves identifying basic themes, clustering them into organizing themes, and deducing global themes;
4. Exploring and describing the networks;
5. Summarizing the networks;
6. Interpreting patterns.

I used the above procedure to answer RQ (g) as well. In particular, I selected mission and vision statements and also the text which elaborates on them. Then, I coded the text using research questions and any other salient themes present in the data. After I abstracted themes, built networks, described, summarized and interpreted them, I compared the results (i.e. official version) to the results obtained from interviews (i.e. employee version). The comparison provided insights into differences and similarities between managerial and employee constructions of mission and vision.
CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS

Mission

RQ (a) asked how employees construct their organization’s mission. Specifically, I asked employees about commonly identified components of a mission, such as the organization’s reason for being, its uniqueness, changes, customers, clients, market segments, products, services, and economic concerns.

Reason for being

When asked about their organization’s reason for being, 38 out of 45 participants identified one reason for being. They seemed to simplify the complexity of the organization and reduce diverse interests of multiple organizational constituencies to one sole purpose. The findings indicate that employees’ thoughts and ideas are organized around three major themes: 1. Reason for being located outside of the organization; 2. Reason for being located inside the organization; and 3. Multiple reasons for being.

Reason for being located outside of the organization. Most commonly, employees explained that their organization exists to satisfy a certain need lying outside of the organization itself. The need for the service or product could come from: customer, community, market in general, and investors.

Satisfying customers’ needs. Amanda, an excellence lead at a sales organization, noted, “Primary purpose is to provide world class software and applications to consumers and businesses worldwide.” When talking about customers’ needs, participants often believed that
their organization either knew what customers needed and tried to provide them with a necessary product or service or tried to discover those needs. For example, whereas Rohit, a software developer, and his company “make online travel easier and affordable,” Katie’s company is always “trying to find something new what the customers are looking for.” Some companies, like the retailer where Mitchell serves as a buyer, know their customers’ needs so well that they “make a lot of product decisions on behalf of our members. So we eliminate choice to a large degree and we offer what we think are the best values within a product category.”

Alicia and Alexandra were the only employees who suggested that their organizations were trying to create a need. Alicia, a client services specialist in a natural health products retailer, talked about educating customers on why they need those products. She explained:

My opinion would be that the purpose of this company is to educate people on ways to treat their ailments or sickness with natural health remedies and also to educate them on disease prevention by providing them with health products that will prevent them from getting sick and also help treat the cause of their sickness.

Both Alicia and Alexandra talked about healthier choices which customers may not fully appreciate, hence the need for education. The power of an organization to create and maintain a need for a product or service among its customers seems to escape employees’ attention.

**Satisfying community’s needs.** Claire, a barista in a large retail chain, noted that the reason for being is “to please the community. That's pretty much it. To please the community.” Susan said that her organization exists “to promote ad advance higher learning.” She explained, “I think we report to the taxpayers of the state of Pemblona, and we try to improve on our future and the improvement of society.”
Satisfying the needs of the market. Some participants referred to a need for their product or service on a more abstract level, as if determined by market and somewhat detached from the customer. Chuck, an R & D scientist, noted, “So the current organization is in biotech industry. So the reason why the organization is there is to make animal disease diagnostic products.”

Satisfying investors’ needs. Only one person said that the primary reason for his organization was to satisfy investors’ needs. Alexander, a software engineer, stated, “it is an organization that exists to keep its investors happy.” Although official statements mentioned investors/shareholder a little more often (three out of 22 organizations) than employees (one out of 45 employees), this theme was very rare in both discourses.

Reason for being located inside the organization. For some participants, the reason why their organization existed lied within the company. The “inside” reasons varied from profit to status of the company to its survival efforts.

Profit. Sam, a claims adjuster, stated, “Well, BCIP is there because there is a need for car insurance. It's required in all states in the US. So they're making money off of it.”

Status of the company. Nina’s response brought up a very interesting point – the purpose of an organization may be focused on the company itself, i.e. on its profile, status, and perhaps even image. Nina, an associate at a sales organization, explained:

I work for a division in a large company, an IT company. The purpose of this larger organization is to be an innovative IT company, world-renowned, world known. The division that I work for specifically supports the sales of this huge company. The purpose of this division is to support sales, to increase revenue, to help drive revenue attainment for this larger organization itself.
Negative Entropy. In response to the question about why their organization exists, some participants discussed what organizational scholars call negative entropy, i.e. “the state of survival and growth” (Modaff, Butler, & DeWine, 2012 p. 73). Employees saw the reason for being in their organization’s attempts to stave off entropy, a tendency for the system to become disorganized (Modaff et al., 2012). Katie, a product manager in an IT company, said, “My understanding is that they exist because of the innovation that they target and they are always growing, and there is never a stagnant moment. The moment the company gets stagnant, it just stops to exist.”

Origin. Some employees talked about how their company started and developed over time to achieve its current state. Raj, a software test engineer, said:

So it started with selling books online. It's broadened its product line to sell almost everything on the web. Right now our specific company is focused on making the reading experience better and so it's trying to come up with book readers.

When reminiscing about the early days of his organization, Boris, a software developer, tied the origin of the company to its founder. He explained:

Shelf founder decided to start selling books because basically it was easy. There are good catalogs for books. I guess it was his thinking back then that all you need to do is put this catalog online, people access it through the Internet, they say I want this, you ship it to them. (…) So Shelf is becoming more and more efficient, they can take advantage of that.

Multiple reasons for being. A few participants noted that their organizations had multiple reasons for being. Grace, a claims adjuster in a large insurance company, said:
I feel like it exists partially because they want to make money, you know, like other businesses do. But I also feel like they have a big emphasis on customer service, you know, wanting to make it a pleasant experience for all the customers as well.

Only 4 people out of 45 respondents thought of multiple reasons for their organization to exist. More importantly, only Anton, a software developer, discussed an interdependent relationship between the organization and its employees. He saw the purpose of his company in bringing together all different interests and needs. According to Anton, besides customers’ needs, there are also the needs of the organization and employees’ needs. He went on to explain:

To me, it’s a two-way street. I need to fill the needs of the company, whatever they need. And they need to fill my needs. I need to go there, I need to feel like I’m doing something useful. I need to feel recognized. And I need to feel rewarded because I have a family to feed.

On a final note, in response to the question, two employees cited or at least tried to cite their organization’s mission statement:

SOPHIA: “I have a quote, I wish I could remember it... to provide quality customer service for each customer every day.”

IRINA: “It seems like you're citing something, what is it?”

SOPHIA: “It's from our mission statement that our job is to empower each customer every day, every time they visit.”

To summarize, Table 1 illustrates the above themes and their relationships with each other. Within the global theme of reason for being, I identified three organizing themes: (1) one outside reason; (2) one inside reason; and (3) multiple reasons. The outside reasons included the following basic themes: customers, community, market, and investors. The inside reasons
comprised the basic themes of profit, status, negative entropy, and origin. Finally, multiple reasons could include various combinations of reasons, such as customers+organization+employees.

Table 1

*Thematic representation of employee construction of their organization’s reason for being*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global Theme</th>
<th>Organizing Themes</th>
<th>Basic Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reason for being</td>
<td>One outside reason for being</td>
<td>Customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Investors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One inside reason for being</td>
<td>Profit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Status of the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative entropy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Origin of the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple reasons for being</td>
<td>Customers, organization, and employees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compared to official mission statements, participants’ responses to the question about their organization’s reason for being tended to be narrower in terms of services/products, affected groups of people, the scope of the organization’s impact and geographic coverage. Some organizations have very extended mission statements which can take a full web page. For example, Jessica’s college has an official mission statement 346 words long. Although the format of the interviews gave participants complete freedom as to how long they could talk, most of them provided relatively short answers. They tended to narrow down the purpose of their organization to one type of service it provides and one group of people it targets. Jessica, who
serves as a fiscal specialist, said, “I think it exists to help the students to get through their education and make a better life for themselves.”

**Products and services.** In the above quote Jessica explains that her college’s primary is to provide students with education. The official mission, however, underscores the importance of other goals as well: educating citizens, pursuing quality research, striving for balance between research and instruction, and sharing expertise with broader community. In another example, Margaret’s response to my question was very laconic, “We invent products that save energy.” Her company’s Web site mirrors her remark in that the company pioneers new technologies to reduce electricity use. Besides that, the company sees the mission in serving “customers by meeting or exceeding safety recommendations,” enriching the quality of life, securing energy future and preserving the environment.

**Affected groups.** Many respondents (n=21) singled out one group of people, most commonly customers, when talking about why their organization exists. They often saw that group as a consumer of the primary service or product the company specializes in. Even within one primary group of consumers or clients, employees often viewed the group more narrowly while organizations emphasize diversity. Emily, an adjunct instructor, said that the primary purpose of her organization is “to help people who have fought get a quality education.” However, the university’s mission is to provide “learning opportunities accessible, challenging, and relevant to a diverse student population.”

Even when official statements explicitly talk about customers and employees as their reason for being, participants did not mention employees. For example, whereas Chuck’s company seeks to “to provide high quality products, services and support to our customers and a
harmonious and rewarding work environment for our employees.” Chuck himself said that “the reason why the organization is there is to make animal disease diagnostic products.”

Other companies view their mission even more broadly, i.e. beyond the dichotomy of customers and employees. One large beverage and food retailer centers its mission on four groups of people: employees, customers, neighborhood and shareholders. When talking to Rodrigo, a process engineer at the company, I learned that the primary purpose is to provide customers with high-quality products. Similarly, Alicia, who works at a natural health products retailer, views the mission in educating “people on ways to treat their ailments or sickness with natural health remedies,” thus basically narrowing all affected constituencies to health-conscious consumers. The organization itself, seeks to provide impact not only on direct customers, but also physicians, health professionals, politicians, corporate heads, builders, architects and manufacturers.

**Scope of effect.** Another difference between the official mission statement and employees’ construction of it lies in the scope of effect. Organizations see their mission more generally, i.e. they seek to provide a more lasting impact. Educational institutions strive to develop in students commitment to lifelong learning. Yet, their employees mostly talked about more immediate influence, such as offering hands-on education (Jessica) or an opportunity for students to get into the workforce faster (Nicole).

Interestingly, even those organizations that offer a very limited range of services or products strive for a more significant impact on people’s lives. Their employees, on the other hand, constructed the impact in more moderate terms. A networking company, whose reason for being, according to a testing engineer Pooja, is to provide clients with faster Internet, sees its mission in “doing business in a way that enables people to live healthy, prosperous lives.” An
online travel company wants to “revolutionize travel through the power of technology.” To one of its employees, Rohit, this simply means making online travel “easier and more affordable.” What official discourse calls “inspire and nurture human spirit,” employees viewed as providing customers with high-quality products. A large software company wants “to help people realize their full potential.” One of its employees, Amanda, constructed this mission in terms of providing “world class software and applications to consumers and businesses worldwide.”

**Geographic coverage.** Unlike official statements, employees’ constructions of organizational mission did not usually include global coverage. One semiconductor company sees its mission in being “the world's leading communications semiconductor company.” A software company states that its “mission and values are to help people and businesses throughout the world realize their full potential.” Their employees did not usually construct the organization’s reason for being in terms of global impact.

**What Employees Do not Say.** Some components of official statements were almost completely absent from employees’ responses. These included evaluation of mission, requirements/expectations for others, requirements for the organization, and accountability to organization’s constituencies.

**Evaluation of mission.** Sometimes official mission statements include the evaluation of the mission, e.g.: “This mission is not grandiose. It is based on simple principles, that when followed, allow significant change to occur.” In this example, the statement concludes an extended 3-paragraph description of organization’s goals and ideals and is probably intended to show that despite its complexity the mission is achievable and the reward is big.

**Requirements/expectations for others.** Employees never talked about what their organization’s mission required from anybody other than themselves. A natural products retailer
views its mission as a joined effort. The Web site reads, “In order for this mission to exist, open minds are required by all.”

**Requirements for the organization.** When an organization sets itself a mission, it sometimes explains what implications the mission has for the organization. “We hold ourselves accountable to our customers, shareholders, partners, and employees by honoring our commitments, providing results, and striving for the highest quality,” reads one official mission statement. Another says, “We are fully accountable to get each of these elements right so that CoffeePot – and everyone it touches – can endure and thrive.”

**What Mission Statements Do not Say.** Official mission statements do not usually say that the mission of the company is to make money. One mission statement explicitly talks about the necessity to “generate cash” and one other company hopes to “maximize revenue attainment.” Employees, however, talked more frequently about profit as part of their organization’s mission. Sam noted, “BCIP is there because there is a need for car insurance. It's required in all states in the US. So they're making money off of it.” Some employees even commented on profit as some obvious, natural, and omnipresent business goal. According to Henry, a program manager at an IT organization, “any corporation anywhere in the world today, its primary goal is to make money. That's why corporations exist, right?” Henry went on to explain that from a different perspective “our purpose for being here is building software for computers to make them easier and more comprehensive in use. That's at the consumer level and the corporate level.”

Overall, when asked about the organization’s reason for being, employees either constructed the reason from their own understanding or (much more rarely) tried to reproduce
the official statement. Only one participant questioned the adequacy of the official statement.

Pele, who works as an assistant at a recreation facility, said:

This company exists to give students and staff members of the university an
opportunity to enhance their physical life. I think a lot of people will tell you it's
for their mental well-being but I think 99% of them are here for vanity, to look
good.

**Uniqueness of the Organization**

When asked what makes their organization unique, employees commented on a wide
range of aspects which I grouped into seven general themes: origin, size, product/service,
customers, employees, structure/ownership, and character.

**Origin.** For some employees, the uniqueness of their organization is related to how the
company started. Rhonda, a fiscal specialist, felt that her college was unique in the legacy of an
iconic individual whom the college was named after. She said, “with Sam Elmington at the
forefront at all times and his particular goals in news related entities as the integrity and honesty
that he promoted continues to be a real standard bearer for this college.” Pooja looked back at
how her company started because she felt that it was among the first to occupy that niche. Rohit
thought that because his company was the first in the industry they could build up enough data
base to successfully withstand competition.

Although Henry reminisced on the past of his organization too, he looked at the concept
of uniqueness from a completely different perspective. Whereas for many participants unique
qualities were somewhat constant, for Henry uniqueness was something that could change over
time. He talked about the time when his organization started to illustrate that twenty years ago
the company was one of the kind in terms of unprecedented growth, employee benefits, work
environment and even dress code. At that time Henry’s organization was the one to set standards and many others followed suit. Henry explained:

I think that today we're not really unique in any way except for one. I would say we're unique in that we have a huge amount of capital in the banks that allows us to do more than most companies in the world.

Henry’s example shows uniqueness from a different side: rather than being a set of constant qualities, it is a process which reflects how organizations develop over time.

**Size.** To some employees, size made their organization unique. According to Nina, the size of her company was related to its impact in the world. She noted:

Because it is a global leader and it is so large, you cannot ignore it. It's not necessarily being innovative like its competitors that might be smaller companies and faster companies. SoftTechnologies is unique in a respect that it has been dominating the world IT for so many years already that it just takes a large space of the market.

For other employees, like Jillian, a coordinator at a consulting firm, the small size of the company was the key to one on one interaction with clients.

**Product/service.** Employees sometimes saw uniqueness of their organization in the kind of product or service they provide customers with. Steve, a procurement agent, said, “I think we are unique in our industry, there are very few companies that do what we do. So I would say what we buy and the diversity of what we buy is very unique.” Even though an organization may operate in a very well-developed field with many other similar organizations working side by side, it is a certain focus that makes it stand out. Susan, who works as a coordinator in a
college of communication, explained, “It is the communication aspect, the umbrella that covers such a wide range of areas but that's what makes us unique, it's our focus.”

**Customers.** Some organizations are unique because they serve a unique category of customers. For example, Samantha, an account operations specialist, said:

> Actually a lot of companies cater to wealthier clients, they cater to a lot of clients who are I guess more knowledgeable in terms of investing. (...) Whereas with Rob Feyer is... the way that we stand out is we try and focus on the individual investor making sure we help them secure long-term investing.

The amount of attention to customers is another aspect which many employees brought up when explaining how their organization was unique. Jeanette, a claims adjuster, responded, “I would say we provide one of probably the best customer services, it's famous for its customer service.”

**Employees.** Another theme encompasses all unique aspects of organizational life which have something to do with employees. Some organizations stand out from the crowd because they have unique individuals working in there. Rhonda said:

> I think we are unique in the fact that the faculty and the dean that we have with such ...worldwide knowledge in that area and the positions they have held prior to coming here is a real boost to the college…

Other participants viewed their organization as unique in terms of how it treats employees. Kat, an associate at an IT company, likes that her organization has a good focus on employees. She noted, “It really values, it tries to allow employees to have a personal life as well as a successful professional life, which I really respect.” Some organizations, like the one where Katie works as product manager, are unique in the generous benefits package they offer
their employees. Others appreciate the diverse identities of their employees. Paul, a customer service representative, commented, “One thing that I think is unique about CoffeePot is they do not take away your identity as a person for you to be able to work within the company. And they want and I would say strive almost for diversity and it's very much appreciated.”

**Structure/ownership.** An organization’s structure can be another unique aspect. According to Claire, her company is structured in such a way as to make employees happy. Grace’s organization is able to save money and pass the savings on to customers due to its unique structure. Unlike its competitors, BCIP, an auto insurance provider, does not have a network of local agent offices. Instead, it operates ten large call centers.

Emily thought that part of the reason why her university is unique is that it is a nonprofit school. Unlike other for-profit colleges, this organization is not having issues with payments and loans, which probably stimulates its efficiency and protects its reputation.

A few participants talked about how the type of ownership in their organization creates its unique culture. Margaret, an account manager, explained:

> Our company is privately held. Compared to other places that I have worked for, that drastically changes the culture. The owner is focused on privacy and taking care of employees, everything is very (long pause) more private than a public company would be when it comes to financials and how the company is doing, and what company is up to and that translates all the way down to the employee level. So they're keeping it a family type of thing.

Raj, a software test engineer, constructed the uniqueness of his company as a combination of structural and relational aspects. He said:
I like the company because it's more family-like. There is less structure and there is less process. … I believe that a lot of people stay or leave the companies mainly because of their manager, the relationship with their manager. Here, my specific manager is very good and his way of management is more like father to children manager. It means that he is a manager but there is nothing you would be afraid of talking with him about. You feel comfortable working and reporting to him. That's what makes it interesting and that's why I like to stay in the company.

**Character.** The final group of qualities which employees thought of as unique falls under a general category of character. The category comprises the style of behavior - both internal, i.e. behavior among employees, and external, i.e. organizational behavior towards customers, public, etc. – unique to an organization. This category also contains any other aspects which contribute to the overall image of the organization. For example, Tanya, a software developer, thought it was the spirit that made her company unique. She was fascinated by how her organization operated as one whole. She commented, “They have a goal and everyone in the company is working on the same goal. So all people are moving in the same direction trying to help improve our lives.”

According to Boris, a software developer from a different company, his organization is unique because “they are really fast moving, very aggressive, very forward-looking. And they also are very, very careful about how they are going to fulfill the customers’ needs. And they're trying to fulfill as many needs as possible.”

Overall, 10 people out of 45 were confident that their organization was unique, six people said that their organization was not unique, and two people said that the question was hard to answer. Although dictionaries define the word *unique* as being the only one, without a like or
equal, distinctively characteristic or unusual (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary), the majority of the participants talked about uniqueness as their organization’s strengths. An electronics engineer Prem, for instance, said his company “can integrate most of the products into just one wafer and that is its strength.”

When talking about their organization’s strengths, employees also talked about how they felt about the strengths. For example, Adrika, a software engineer, thought that her company was different from her former organization because of the importance it placed on customer satisfaction. She liked to know that their products were useful to customers. Katie said she liked the fact that her company had a sort of monopoly in their market segment and that was what made her want to work with them. Kat noted she really respected how her company allowed employees to have a personal life as well as a successful professional life.

Not all employees, however, talked about unique qualities of their organization as something positive. Some also identified weaknesses as part of their organization’s unique portrait. Jessica said, “I think the difference between working in this position compared to the other position that I worked in is that I feel that people umm not....[voice falters] treated as well.” She expressed her concern about information sharing and decision making in her organization. According to Pele, his organization’s strategy was sound, but the follow-through was lacking. He identified lack of coherence and consistency in delegation of power, as well as internal bickering and confusion.

**Unique Aspects Compared to Official Mission Statements.** Analysis of official mission statements shows that very few organizations talk about why they are unique. Only two of the 22 organizations use the word *unique* in their mission statements. One organization states
that its position in the market is unique because it is located at the intersection of many other fields. The other company mentions that it employs people of unique backgrounds and expertise.

Obviously, the word *unique* is not the only way organizations could talk about themselves as one of the kind. I also analyzed mission statements to see how organizations use other linguistic forms, such as: adjectives in the superlative form (e.g. the best), the definite article together with a noun and adverbial of place (e.g. the leader in the IT industry), as well as self-descriptive expressions including words #1 and *world*. That way I was able to gain more information into how organizations talk about their uniqueness. Table 2 below shows examples of how the linguistic forms are used in mission statements.

**Table 2**

*Linguistic representation of uniqueness in official mission statements.*

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<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjectives in the</td>
<td>To continually provide our members with quality goods and services at the lowest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superlative Form</td>
<td>possible prices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definite article,</td>
<td>We strive to maintain and improve our role as the major provider of health care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun and Adverbial</td>
<td>medical courses in the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of Place</td>
<td>To “enter new markets with the highest level of functional integration”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressions</td>
<td>To be #1 provider of technology solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>including words #1</td>
<td>To be the world's leading communications company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and world</td>
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</table>

Although the organizations do not often use mission statements to highlight what makes them unique, employees’ responses lead to a few important conclusions. First, employees struggle with identifying what makes their organization truly unique, i.e. unlike any other organization. Many participants either explicitly said that their company was not unique or
expressed their doubt in the organization’s uniqueness. Even those who claimed it was unique provided examples of qualities which may be wide-spread in Western organizations. One, rather curious, example is customer satisfaction. Despite the fact that excellent customer service is a well established and sometimes even taken for granted norm in the Western organizational world, 19 out of 45 participants believed that it is the customer service that makes them stand out from the crowd.

Second, in those rare cases when mission statements did touch on unique qualities, employees, too, named the qualities.

Third, regardless of their tenure in the organization, the employees had a good understanding of their organization’s strengths. This understanding is something that companies could capitalize on to stimulate employee identification with the organization. If leaders know how employees view the organization as compared to other organizations, they can evaluate whether their mission corresponds with the actual reality of the company.

Finally, although some employees talked about their organization’s weaknesses, none of the 22 official mission statements mentions weaknesses and ways to overcome them. Those few statements that have references to challenges talk only about outside challenges and the company’s willingness to face them.

**Change and Reason for Being**

Fourteen out of 22 organizations talk about change in their mission statements. When referring to change, organizations position themselves as agents of change, facilitators of change, protectors from negative change, or sticklers for status quo. In cases of long multi-sentence mission statements, organizations can also combine the above ideas: e.g. in one aspect they may
see themselves as an agent of positive and significant change, whereas in another aspect they may express their intention to facilitate change.

Some organizations aspire to bring about significant changes in their field or in the lives of their customers. For example, Round World hopes “to revolutionize travel through the power of technology.” Click “is committed to doing business in a way that enables people to live healthy, prosperous lives.” In all instances when organizations strive to instigate a significant change, their employees refer to the company’s reason for being in more modest terms. Rohit, who works in Round World, said, “we make online travel easier and affordable...by making it more affordable and they get more choices to the people when they book tickets and hotels.” Pooja, from Click, explained that the company’s purpose is to make the Internet faster.

Obviously, not all organizations portray themselves as agents of radical change. Some see the source of change outside of the company, i.e. in customers themselves. Such companies can present themselves as catalysts of a possible change or intermediaries between agents and their actions. Their reason for being is to provide opportunities for agents to make a change happen. Such is the mission statement at Soft Technologies which strive “to help people and businesses throughout the world realize their full potential.” A university says its aim “is to facilitate educational access and academic excellence.”

Analysis revealed some discrepancies between how organizations view themselves and how employees view their organizations. A recreation center’s mission statement claims that it “fosters personal development, enhances academic productivity, and enriches the quality of life”. One of its employees, however, believed the organization was not an agent, but a facilitator of change. He stated, “This company exists to give students and staff members of the university an opportunity to enhance their physical life.”
Due to the nature of services they provide, some organizations see their reason for being in preventing a negative change from happening. For example, a fire department states, “Our mission is to prevent the loss of life and property resulting from fires, medical emergencies and other disasters.” Charlie, a firefighter, understood that his department’s reason for being is to “protect the citizens from harm, and minimize damage to their property.” He went on to talk about the human side of their service:

We want it to be… everything we do in a professional manner and in a caring manner. Because typically when we serve people, it's a really bad day for them. We come and we need to be compassionate and thoughtful of the circumstances they are in but also mindful that we have a difficult job and a dangerous job.

It is interesting how this organization whose purpose is to provide that much of an impact on people’s lives does not really talk about itself as a hero. It is at the level of firefighters like Charlie where employees feel that their service can make a world of difference in people’s lives. Charlie stated, “It's a fulfilling career I guess because I have seen many, many people on the worst day of their life and have been able to make it better.”

I observed the same kind of discrepancy in the case of an insurance company BCIP. Its mission statement talks about providing “excellent coverage, low prices and outstanding service.” I interviewed four employees from one department whose mission is to “Effect a prompt, courteous, and equitable disposition of claims through direct customer contact.” Neither the company nor the department acknowledge their impact on customers’ lives. On the contrary, their employees experience that significant power on a daily basis. Three out of four participants felt that they could make a difference in their customer’s life. Jeanette said:
It [the company] exists to protect people against exposures, to make sure that they are not liable for damages on their own, make sure they are not stuck paying for damages out of their pocket. So it's there to protect people against unknown risk.

Loco stated, “I can make a really big difference in somebody's life. You could have a bad day and just by talking to me I can make your day better, you know, even though you were in that accident.” Thus, the impersonal dry business discourse of the organization’s and department’s mission statements misses the human connection which is the focus of employees’ daily activities.

Analysis of official mission statements shows that organizations either reject self-change or simply do not talk about it. CoffeePot, for example, talks about its unchangeable ideals by stating, “It has always been, and will always be, about quality (…) We always treat each other with respect and dignity.”

No official mission statement included learning as a goal. Organizations do not acknowledge the necessity to learn from their own experience and change/adapt as the environment changes. They do not acknowledge a possibility of difficulties and mistakes or willingness to learn from mistakes to be able to develop and grow. Some organizations state the opposite. They see their mission in continuing with whatever has proved to be successful over the years. A retailer’s mission is “to continually provide our members with quality goods and services at the lowest possible prices.” Mitchell, who has been with the company for over 20 years, believes that the organization has been successful because it has stayed loyal to its pure principles over the years. He explained:

Certainly, with the growth that we have had, there have been a lot of changes in the different businesses that we get into, the way we purchase products, the way we distribute
product and get it out to market, but at our core, our philosophy for what this business is and what makes us worth has not changed over the years. That's the reason for our success.

Whereas organizations seem to tacitly reject a possibility of self-change, 41 out of 45 employees were able to identify different organizational aspects that needed improvement or change.

Customers and Reason for Being

Official mission statements of the 22 organizations represented in my sample refer to customers and clients in one of the following four ways:

1. Some organizations simply refer to them as one indiscriminate group of people and explain what they do for that group. For example, one company’s statement reads, “To provide high quality products, services and support to our customers.”

2. Other mission statements identify specific categories of clients they deal with, as well as explain what they do for the groups. One organization directly addresses a narrow group of customers by saying, “Our mission is to provide you, the doctor, with (...) quality medical review courses.” According to another mission statement, a department in a large corporation “provides the company’s business units and Corporate Offices with innovative and effective common services.”

3. Only one company explains the importance of its customers by stating, “The customer is our number one priority and the reason we exist as a company.”

4. Two companies do not mention their customers at all. One online travel company talks about its passion for travel and its mission to revolutionize it but does talk about customers and clients.
Overall, employees easily identify their organization’s customers. When a company has a very narrow group of customers, its employees talk specifically about that same group. Nina, Amy and Steve work in small departments which were created within larger organizations to help those organizations with selling/purchasing operations. They all literally echoed their mission statements when they identified those professionals for whom their departments exist.

Even in those two cases when organizations did not refer to their customers in mission statements, their employees were very specific about who their organizations exist for. Charlie, for example, explained that his organization has inside customers (employees) and outside customers (community). Rohit, who works for the aforementioned online travel company, said, “Our customers are like one million customers or one billion customers. We think of each one as our customers. And think how it helps us to relate to a personal customer. The customer is not an entity or an abstract thing, for us it's very, very personal.” He went on to explain that even employees themselves can become customers at one point of time or another.

Sometimes employees identified those groups of customers and clients which, in their opinion, did not have enough attention from their organization. Rhonda stated, “We have responsibilities to our donors because we don't survive without the donors. (…) there's a whole other side that is free giving from donors, so they are also our customers.” Although Rhonda’s organization identifies four groups of constituencies it serves (i.e. students, industry, policy makers, and colleagues in the discipline), donors are not on the list.

Most employees had a profound understanding of what clients their organization existed for. The data provided two examples of the opposite. Alicia works in a natural health care products retailer. She told me that her company is more than just a store. In fact, it is an education center which teaches people how to prevent diseases and treat them. The official
mission statement refers to eight categories of people it strives to affect: physicians, health professionals, patients, politicians, corporate heads, builders, architects, and manufacturers. Alicia, however, talked only about patients. Jessica, a front desk person in an educational institution is another good example. Jessica talked about customers as she views them in her day-to-day activities. For her, customers are people, primarily students, who walk through the door and ask her questions. Jessica’s organization views its mission in a much larger social impact.

These examples show that on the one hand organizations could benefit from the inside knowledge that their employees have to make sure mission encompasses all reasons for being. On the other hand, if organizations view their mission in providing a larger impact on society, they need to communicate that mission to employees. Otherwise, employees might limit the organization’s reason for being to only one group of customers, probably the one they themselves deal with on a regular basis.

Although only one company explicitly stated that their customers were their number one priority, all employees noted a very high importance of customers to their organization. They said that customers were “reason to exist”, “lifeblood”, “backbone”, “foundation”, “lifeline”, “the most important thing”, “a major priority”, “the central piece of where the company is going”, etc. Boris, whose company strives “to be earth’s most customer centric company”, explained:

So Shelf is just saturated with customer obsession. The worst thing that someone can say about a system, this is going to be bad customer experience. If something is considered to be bad customer experience, they will do anything to fix it and change it. So customer experience is the yardstick that everything gets measured by. Is this going to be good for
the customer? They say they are the most customer centered company in the world. And they mean it.

Boris’s example illustrates that he did not only know what the mission statement said, but he also evaluated whether the organization’s declaration correlated with its actions.

Given the high importance of customers to the organization, it is helpful to understand what exactly makes customers a top priority from the point of view of employees. Fourteen out of 45 participants said that without customers the organization cannot exist. As Mitchell put it, “They are our most important asset. If we are not paying attention to what our members want and need, then we are sunk.” Eight employees explained that customers are important for monetary reasons. Chuck even cited the CEO by saying, “The CEO puts it, they pay our bills. I think that's the best way to say.” For an analyst, Jackson, clients are more than just a direct source of income; they spread the word which brings even more customers to the company.

Not all employees agreed with the construction of the customer as money only. Four employees expressed their criticism about how their organizations view customers. Kat said that her company values money over the customer. She explained:

The way they sell their product could be better because I feel like they are more focused on making money than making their customers happy. When they did not have competition this was fine, but now they have competition, it's making them look bad.

Another employee, Lisa, thought that her organization prioritized cost over customers’ needs or wants. Both women work for the same company whose mission declares commitment and accountability to the customer. Two other participants, Nicole and Courtney, who work for the same educational institution, distanced themselves from what they call “corporate.” Courtney stated:
I feel that the corporate side of NTU kind of loses that personal connection with the students because they are remote. I mean they do not work with students daily, they don't...and so... And since we are a for-profit and publicly traded, they are really concerned about the bottom line and the dollar. Somewhere between the campus here and working day-to-day today with the student and the communication all the way back up to headquarters, the personal side of things kind of gets lost.

Not all big organizations, however, lose “the personal side”. CoffeePot’s mission statement is “to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time.” When talking about customers, the company emphasizes the idea that it is all about human connection. Sophia talked about developing relationship with customers. She said, “They are like our family. At least when I was in the store, my customers were part of our team, part of our family. It was not my store that I ran, it was their store (...) We connect with them not in a business way but in a relationship way.” Like Sophia, another employee from CoffeePot compared customers to family. He was certain that there was intimate connection between the organizations and its customers.

One more point of difference between official mission statements and employee construction of customers is how they construct customers’ role for the organization. As I pointed out earlier, all participants believed that customers were crucially important, with 14 employees constructing customers as the precondition for the very existence of the company. Official statements do not talk about needing customers. Rather, they explain the opposite: why customers need them. Not only do companies explain how customers may benefit from their specific services, but some even imply that without the company customers’ lives would be incomplete. For example, one company strives “to help people and businesses throughout the
world realize their full potential.” The assumption here is that without the organization, customers are not functioning at their full potential. A similar implication is hidden in another statement which calls for “doing business in a way that enables people to live healthy, prosperous lives.” Still another organization states, “People need to realize that what they see, do and how they act is limiting.” Yet, only 2 out of 45 employees talked about symbiotic, or in other words, interdependent relationship between the organization and its customers.

**Industry**

It is important to understand how organizations, i.e. their leaders and employees, present the industry they work in because their perceptions will affect goals, organization’s place in that industry, values and perhaps even the very culture inside the organization. Any reference to industry would help to answer mission’s primary question: Where are we today? For example, if an organization is operating in a very competitive field, it may strive to achieve the status of a leader. It may also value innovation, risk-taking and hard work. A company operating in an environmentally hazardous industry may state that part of its mission is to minimize negative footprint on the environment. It may refer to a strict code of ethics and such values as accountability and corporate citizenship.

Yet, direct references to industry in official mission statements are rare. Although some mission statements take as much as one full page, only two out of 22 organizations provide some description of the field.

A natural products retailer’s mission statement talks about the company in opposition to the conventional health care system. Ever Happy seeks “to educate physicians, health professionals, and patients that cure does not mean symptom free; cure is not possible as health requires constant maintenance, balance and perseverance.” Once this goal is achieved, “the
standard medical model of treating illness will be remote. There will be no patients. There will be freedom from the business of medicine.” Alicia thought that her company offered an alternative to traditional medicine by stating:

I think it's crucial at this point that people find natural ways to keep themselves healthy rather than hurting their health and aging themselves through pharmaceutical companies. I see them as kind of the enemy and we are kind of the soldiers trying to take back. Alicia further explained how joining this company transformed her as an individual:

I've learned a lot since I started working. And I will be honest, when I got this job it was just to get a job, but later down the road I've gotten really involved in the company. It's important to me because I have kind of changed my lifestyle. I would say I am a bit more healthier I am a bit more active. And this position motivates me to do so. So it is very important to me.

The other organization – a communication college – talks about the role of communication in a democratic society and the goal “to disseminate knowledge in a world where interpersonal and mediated communication converge.” Susan noted a crucial role of education:

I think the more that we slight education, the more precarious we are as a society, that's what I think. I think there is examples of it all over the world. Maybe food is more pressing than reading a book but once you get past being able to provide food for your family and shelter and those needs, education has to come up right behind that. Or else I think we will fail to flourish.

In another case, an employee talked about how changes in the industry call for changes in the company. Software Technologies, as I cited before, seeks “to help people and businesses throughout the world realize their full potential.” The organization does not talk about industry
or its own place in the field. In another place on the corporate Web site, the mission transforms slightly and reads, “to be the world’s #1 provider of innovative technology solutions,” which may be interpreted as an indirect acknowledgment of existing competition. Lynne, an ST’s employee, talked about radical changes in the industry which happened over the past decade. According to her, when ST started, there was no competition in the field. Lynne noted that the company did not foresee that technology would spread beyond businesses on to consumers. She explained:

I think the problem is that my company didn't expect that to happen. We just were not prepared for that challenge. And all those companies, you know, while they were sitting in this background before, they were already planning for this consumerization. That's how they got ahead.

Alicia’s and Susan’s examples illustrate employees’ awareness of the position their organizations take in their industries. Alicia even went through a personal transformation when she started working for Ever Happy. Although many companies seek to employ people who demonstrate willingness to share the organization’s culture during recruitment process, Alicia’s case is a different story. It is a story of successful organizational identification which developed after Alicia got a job at Ever Happy. The identification became possible due to clear communication of the organization’s strong standpoint and cohesion between words and actions.

By contrast, Lynne lamented her organization’s lack of foresight and inability to adapt to changes in the industry. Even though Soft Technologies seem to acknowledge competition in one version of their mission statement, Lynne noted that they try to keep up the momentum which they built up a long time ago. They still rely heavily on the brand and expect customers just to go for it. There seems to be little understanding of what it means “to be the world’s #1
provider of innovative technology solutions” and what the company’s reason for being is in the new competitive environment.

**Products/Services and Reason for Being**

Given the importance of customers and clients to organizations, it is logical to assume that products and services (P/S) are just as important. Being an integral part of why organizations exist, P/S are likely to be the focus of official mission statements. Analysis indicates that organizations do not normally talk about their products and services at length in mission statements. Only one out of 22 organizations lists 18 kinds of services it offers. Reference to P/S in a mission statement is not meant to tell what an organization provides its clients with. Rather, organizations use mission statements to either explain the importance of P/S to the organization or set expectations as to what a good product or service means.

The fact that P/S are important seems to be a given today. Organizations try to explain how important what they are doing is to them through words which denote a strong emotional attachment. Words like *passion* and *fanatics* seem to be popular in organizational discourse. For example, an online travel company states they are passionate for travel. The Web site reads, “We are a company of travelers who come to work every day with passion to make travel better.” Soft Technologies claims the have a passion for technology. BCIP, an insurance company, strives “to be fanatics for outstanding customer service.” By using this emotionally-charged vocabulary, organizations try to convey the idea that their P/S are highly important to them. P/S are all they think about and strongly desire.

All employees agreed that the P/S were very important. They say P/S were “terribly important” (Emily), “critical” (Susan), “fundamental” (Sophia), and even “vital” (Kat). The reasons why were: “That's how we connect our company with a customer and that's what the
customer pays for” (Chuck); they are “the bread and butter of the company… The only reason this organization exists” (Prem); services “are directly affecting the customers and the relationship with the customers” (Rodrigo).

As regards passion, two organizations in my sample illustrate how employees construct this idea in the opposite ways.

The first example is that of CoffeePot. Its official mission statement repeatedly talks about passion: passion about “ethically sourcing the finest coffee beans, roasting them with great care, and improving the lives of people who grow them” and passion about what they do in general. It also says about human connection which starts with a perfectly made beverage. Three out of four employees conveyed the same spirit of passion and appreciation of the big impact that the product may have on customers’ lives. Claire said, “Me personally as probably along with everybody that I've met that works for the company truly enjoys their product.” She explained how passion develops together with knowledge about the product during employee trainings. Employees have to learn about coffee and its background, as well as go through coffee tasting, in order to understand what makes a great coffee drink. Claire thought the passion came from the company CEO. She stated, “The way he keeps his employees so passionate about the company is pretty impressive.”

Whereas Claire brought to light the source of the passion, Rodrigo explained how the spirit of passion in the company affected his own motivation. He noted:

I think what I see a lot is the passion for coffee. The culture that surrounds the company is… there is a lot of passion for the industry, there's a lot of passion for coffee. So every time I hear in meetings, I hear conversations, you can hear always the passion about their projects that they're working on. So that kind of influences their decisions because the
atmosphere makes you want to give 100% always. So that's one of the things that I really appreciate about the company.

Another employee, Paul, talked about how selling a beverage could build human connection. He said:

I would say as the person handing off those retail beverages and things like that to customers, having what I thought was a minimal impact, actually is a very big impact just because you never know what people are going through in the day and stuff like that. And it's funny but some of the smallest things just like a cup of coffee or just talking to somebody about something they want to buy is going to turn their day around.

The CoffeePot example illustrates a high degree of consistency between the official mission statement and employees’ construction of what the product means to the organization as a whole and to each individual employee.

The second example illustrates discrepancy between what the company says and what its employee thinks it does. Soft Technologies declares commitment to customers and partners and passion for technology. Employees, however, felt it is not always the case. Kat lamented the organization’s poor customer service and inability to sell its products well. She stated, “I feel like they are more focused on making money than making their customers happy.” Another employee, Lisa, cast a little more light on the company’s approach to products. She said:

It seems to me some important things are put aside just because of the cost of the development. (...) But it might be important. It might be more useful I believe. Some features should be in the product – it should be getting more responses from customers on what they like or what they don't like.
Is the company aware of this mismatch between words and actions? If yes, what does the company do about it, if anything? The answers to these questions may lie in shocking observations which Lynne shares with me. She said that talking about how important products are is a big part of employee training. Yet, that kind of discourse is a means to manipulate employees’ perceptions of the products. Lynne said:

I always talk about people drinking the Kool-Aid in our company, because they're just so obsessed with the product. Even if it's not a really great product, they are almost kind of brainwashed to think it is. Because you have to. That's the only way you can sell to people as if you really like your product or at least seem to like it.

This example shows that mission discourse can be part of manipulative rhetoric which organizations can use to persuade not only customers but also its employees of things which do not exist.

In addition to highlighting the importance of P/S to the organization, mission statements can articulate what a good product or service means. Most companies talk about quality goods and services. Some specify what attributes their high-quality product should have. For example, one organization seeks to provide doctors with “the most dependable, current, essential, and quality medical review courses.” A claims department in an insurance company strives to “effect a prompt, courteous, and equitable disposition of claims.” Overall, employees have a very good understanding what their organizations expect in terms of quality P/S. Anton’s example is a good illustration of how an employee construction of what a high-quality product means can add to official discourse. Anton works for a computer games company called Little Hedgehog, Inc. The corporate Web site says “We develop highly scalable, reliable services from
the ground up.” Anton talked about those same qualities from a personal perspective. He reminisced:

Actually even before I came to work with the company, I was telling my friends: You know I tried some of those games and they are highest-quality games. I never had any problems with them. They never freeze. They don't crash. They just work. I never saw a bug or software error in any of those games.

Although the company stresses its goal to “deliver fun to millions of customers around the world,” Anton explained that a quality product was not just about its impeccable functionality; it was about high ethical content standards. According to him, “there is nothing there that we would not put our logo on. Everything that you can get from us is guaranteed to be family-friendly, high-quality and just is going to be to the highest standard.” Even though there is demand for violent shooter games “that is a market that we're not going into because that does not align with company’s values.” This example shows that owing to their first-hand inside knowledge of products and services employees could certainly contribute to the corporate representation of what the company is and what it is not.

There are also examples when employee constructions reflect a conflict between corporate mission discourse and reality. One large educational institution states its commitment “to offering quality undergraduate and continuing education locally, nationally and worldwide to students.” Its employees repeatedly talk about the difference in perceptions between a corporate and an employee perspectives. They express their frustration with how the quality of education is decreasing. Courtney said:

We are lagging behind. And it takes time to change, to expand and implement new curriculum. Because it's coming down from headquarters standpoint and trickling down,
there is kind of like a year to two year lifetime. So I see our students are not getting necessarily the best and the greatest.

Economic Concerns

Two major economic themes in the official mission statements are competition and profit. One organization claims to have developed a formula that puts them “ahead of the curve and the competition.” Another strives to “be first to market.” As regards profit, organizations talk about it with different degree of explicitness. Animal Health, for example, sees part of its mission in strengthening the brand, generating cash, and improving profit. BCIP seeks to “make an underwriting profit while achieving optimum growth.” Other organizations talk about profit more indirectly – as reward for shareholders which results from adherence to a set of principles. The profit itself does not seem to be a problem for employees. It is the conflict between profit and quality which is a concern. Nicole, from Northern Technological University, said, “They are very financially driven. That sometimes is hard because I think sometimes the quality gets a little lost.” Nicole’s example is particularly interesting because nowhere in the official mission can one find even an indirect reference to profit. According to the statement, the reason why NTU exists is to offer quality education.

However, rather than analyzing simple reference to profit, it is more important to see how the economic component of a mission statement is constructed in a wider socio-economic context. Because organizational mission has a purpose of uniting and inspiring employees, it is logical to assume that its inspirational power would become particularly important during the times of economic turbulence. In other words, do mission statements continue to inspire and guide employees in difficult economic conditions when making ends meet becomes a primary concern? To answer that question we need to see how organizations construct their reason for
being in crisis. None of the 22 organizations has any reference to possible difficult times. Some even state the opposite. Little Hedgehog, Inc., says that the business is “rapidly growing.”

Twenty six employees noted that the current economic downturn has affected their organization. It is important to point out that in their judgments about whether the organization is struggling or not, employees relied on their personal observations rather than official communication. They referred to their bonuses, salaries, overheads expenses and layoffs as signs of how well the company was doing. Alexandra, who works in a recreation center, assumed there was no problem, “Nobody is dinging me on my head saying you know membership sales are down, so I think we're doing okay.”

Due to lack of official information from leaders, employees constructed economic concerns on their own. Some said difficulties were part of the game; others believed that all organizations were taking the hit and theirs was not an exception. Jessica complained that because there was no transparency in her organization she did not know how the organization approached economic concerns. In fact, she was uncertain whether the organization could survive the crisis. Evelyn, a recruitment coordination in an educational institution, stated, “Well, the enrollments are diminishing and I would imagine that layoffs are probably coming in. We down here, we don't actually see where the solution is coming from.” Another employee from the same organization, a career services specialist Courtney, noted her organization’s unwillingness to communicate with employees. She stated,

They are completely off base. It's almost like they have entrenched themselves into… they are very stubborn. So they have decided this is the route they want to go and they're not even looking for answers or a better route, or they feel that what they have done is the
best course. Once they have implemented it, that's it, that's the end of discussion. On the campus level it is not doing any good.

Jeanette was the only one who mentioned that leaders communicate concerns to employees and seek employees’ input. She said:

A lot of times at your own job you don't see the bigger picture that the company paints in terms of what real problems you have. But for example when the CEO comes to talk we do talk about how do you as an employee make a change in your company, how do you add to solving that concern.

Charlie made a good point by stating that although his organization does have a mission statement, the statement is not focused enough to provide guidelines for decisions in times when economic limitations call for internal organizational changes.

Thus, the analysis leads to a few important conclusions. First, organizations do not acknowledge a possibility of crisis in their mission statements. Second, they do not usually construct profit as their primary reason for being and that is why when it does become the top priority, organizations end up in a conflict between what they say and what they do. Third, in the times of economic hardships, employees experience uncertainty as to what the organization stands for. Forth, employees feel that having a focused mission and/or communication with leadership decreases the uncertainty.

Values and Reason for Being

RQ (b) sought to further our understanding of how employees construct specific values related to daily operations of their organization.

In their official mission/vision discourse most of the organizations (n=18) refer to their values in either direct or indirect way. The other four do not have any mention of their values
whatsoever. By direct reference, I mean a list of values which organizations may call differently (e.g.: as Values, Operating Principles, Code of Ethics), or even simply leave it nameless. In cases of indirect reference, organizations do not specifically list what is important for them. Rather, some values can be deduced from the way organizations word their vision/mission discourse. For instance, if an organization claims that they “pursue quality research,” it would be logical to assume that quality research is its value. Similarly, if a company says that they “need to be agile enough to grow, to operate more efficiently, and to take advantage of every business opportunity,” then we can expect that agility, growth, efficiency, and entrepreneurship are the qualities which that organization values. Given the terse format of mission/vision statements, it is very likely that indirect reference does not contain all the values which underlie the organization’s culture.

In my sample, official statements of the organizations have reference to the following categories of values: organizational operations (12 organizations), customers (10), employees (7), product/service (6), community (4), shareholders (3), partners (3), organization (2), and industry (1). Table 3 summarizes these findings.

Most value references explain what kind of employee behavior the organization values in its operations. This category includes 15 specific qualities such as integrity, profitable growth, entrepreneurial behavior, and innovation.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement places value on:</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Number of organizations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td>The organization values one or a few of the following</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>operations by explaining what behavior or approach is expected in organizational operations</td>
<td>qualities:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Achievement</td>
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<td>Aggressive execution</td>
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<td>Agility</td>
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<td>Brand support</td>
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<td>Discipline</td>
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<td>Efficiency</td>
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<td>Entrepreneurship</td>
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<td>Ethical behavior</td>
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<td>Excellence</td>
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<td>Innovation</td>
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<td>Intercultural engagement</td>
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<td>Integrity</td>
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<td>Profitable growth</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reliance on tradition</td>
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<tr>
<th>Customers</th>
<th>Take care of customers</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide certain effect on customers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>What the organization offers customers because they are valuable</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What employees should offer the organization to be considered valuable</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>product/service</th>
<th>High quality product/service</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Detailed description of valuable product/service qualities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>The organization explains how it views the community and</th>
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When talking about how valuable customers are, some organizations simply state that they need to take care of customers, while others elaborate on what effect they would like to provide on customers. One organization sees itself as a place that “inspires personal and intellectual growth.” Another one strives “to deliver value to the customer.”

Employees are a valuable part of seven official statements. Six organizations explain how they should treat employees. Similarly to the above category, some companies state that they take care of employees, others emphasize respect and opportunities. Electrous’s statement says, “Electrous provides opportunities for its employees to fully develop their abilities and make a personal contribution to the success of the company.” One large organization, however, takes a different approach. It explains the value of its employees from the point of view of their desirable qualities. In contrast to the others who talk about what they are willing to offer to
valuable employees, Soft Technologies explains what the organization wants to see in employees for them to be considered valuable. The values section on the corporate Web site reads, “As a company, and as individuals, we value integrity, honesty, openness, personal excellence, constructive self-criticism, continual self-improvement, and mutual respect.”

The product value refers to how organizations conceptualize the value of what they provide customers with. Some briefly state that they value high quality products or services. Others explain more specifically what exactly they want their product or service to be. Grand University states that a few valuable qualities are the very focus of its mission, “Quality, access, relevance, accelerated pace, affordability, and community are the core values that shape the Grand University mission and our commitment to you.”

Four organizations acknowledge the importance of community. CoffeePot sees its every store as part of a community. By being a “good neighbor,” CoffeePot hopes to be a force for positive change. Grand University’s central purpose includes empowering community members to become responsible citizens in a global community.

Other values include shareholders (whom organizations hope to reward), partners (whom they hope to respect) and the industry (which they are passionate about).

My analysis of employees’ responses shows that there are a few important differences between official statement and employee constructions of values. Although three employees cited their organizations’ operating principles and were able to reproduce them very accurately, the majority spoke from their internal experience. Overall, employees mentioned fewer values than organizational statements. Most commonly mentioned values are customers (10 people), integrity (6), efficiency (5), quality of product/service (6), respectful relationships in the workplace (4), teamwork (2) and excellence (2). When reflecting on their organization’s values,
employees mentioned values which are most pertinent to them rather than the whole organization. They never mentioned such values as sustainability, profit, entrepreneurial behavior, aggressive execution, or care for partners. On the other hand, employees often mentioned two values which were absent from official mission discourse. Those values are communication and supervisor-subordinate relationships.

Seven participants emphasized a great importance of communication in their working environment. When I asked Alicia what values guide people’s behaviors in her organization on a daily basis, she replied:

Communication is key here. We always try to have meetings as often as we can. Yeah, it's pretty much that communication is everything. If someone needs help in their department we always put into each other's heads, we always make ourselves available for another employee because we are a team.

Pooja and Adrika both noted that good communication was very helpful to new hires. When a new comer joins the company, it is important to give them proper guidance, explain where they need to go, how they can search for information and etc. Adrika added that open communication helps not only the new team member but also the team itself. She said, “We make sure that that person learns and he can help the team to grow.” Additionally, Adrika thought that communication was critical for sharing knowledge, voicing doubts and concerns, as well as resolving conflicts. She liked that people in her company communicate openly within teams, across teams, and also across the ranks of organizational hierarchy. Likewise, Jackson appreciated that employees in his company communicated freely across teams and across ranks. He explained, “I mean if I am working on a project it's very possible that the CEO will come and take a seat next to me and work on it.” According to Jackson, constant internal communication
helps employees to achieve the primary goal, which is “make sure that the customer is very happy.”

For Raj, open communication goes hand in hand with clear direction. He stated, “I think clear direction of where we are going, what each of us will be delivering and respect and open communication. These are some of the ones that I see in this company.” According to Raj, poor communication together with lack of direction would mean failure. Prem provided more insight into detrimental effects of insufficient communication. He said, “If there was no open communication, the whole group, each individual would be working separately without much productivity. (…) And teamwork cannot go without proper communication.”

Given the high importance of effective communication as constructed by employees, it is surprising to see that none of the organizations refers to communication in their official statements.

When asked about daily values in their organization, employees also talked about the relationship between supervisors and subordinates. Four participants noted that their supervisors do not micromanage. Both Lynne and Amanda, who work in Soft Technologies, explained how autonomy and responsibility is tied to individual characteristics of employees. Lynne stated, “You have to have a lot of motivation to get your work done. You need to be proactive I guess. I think being proactive is kind of like the first thing that they look for.” Along the same lines, Amanda explained that self-reliance is one of the qualities the company looks for when hiring employees. She said, “So I think they haven't hired just anybody for this position, not everybody could manage it.” She explain how this “empowering not removed” leadership style translates into positive outcomes for the organization. According to Amanda, “that sense of independence and importance I think drive quality output.” She really wanted to do a good job to make her
leadership proud of her and also to better her career. As I mentioned above, Soft Technologies state in their mission a list of desirable employee qualities such as personal excellence and continuous self-improvement. Although none of the Soft Technologies employees included themselves into the corporate mission, the analysis of organizational values allows a broader reading of the mission statement. Indeed, the statement which reads “to help people and businesses throughout the world realize their full potential” may just as well apply to employees.

Similarly, two other employees who spoke about empowering leadership noted that it has positive effects on their self-perception. Paul said:

I would say it's almost the freedom that is given to us to be our own manager, to be able to manage our own business from our desk and to have control over what we're doing. It doesn't feel so like you're coming to work and being told what to do, it's more so you want to come to work and you want to be doing this.

Paul’s organization CoffeePot refers to employees as partners because all the people in the company share a passion for the work that they do. Although the organization’s mission, “to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time,” seems to refer to customers, its supervisor-subordinate relationships inspire and nurture the human spirit of employees. Rohit, from Round World, stated, “It's not like there is micromanagement. So we are all kind of individual contributors. And we have pride in what we do.” When the mission of the company is to “revolutionize travel through the power of technology” the feeling of personal contribution can certainly make one feel proud about himself or herself.

To summarize, none of the organizations views employee empowerment as part of its mission. A far less radical idea for Western organizations would be viewing employee
empowerment as a precondition for employee involvement with and commitment to organizational mission. Yet, only one company lists empowerment as a value. By contrast, participants placed importance on empowering supervisor-subordinate relationships. They tied individual autonomy to such feelings as freedom to organize their work and pride in results. Both of the feelings can be powerful motivational forces which could ensure employee alignment with organizational mission.

When talking to me about values, some employees also identified problems in their organizations.

Kat talked about how different values in her organization conflict with each other and thus inhibit the company’s success. She felt annoyed that the organization expected both quality work and high speed from its employees. She lamented, “They do not know how to handle both at the same time and so they are lacking both. They don't have the speed, they don't have the quality that they could have.”

Emily explained how one value can be taken to its extreme at the expense of another value. Her university officially “is dedicated to making lifelong learning opportunities accessible, challenging, and relevant to a diverse student population.” What Emily has noticed is that the high value which the university places on students undermines the quality of instruction. She stated, “the control of the instructor or professors is overshadowed by the needs of the students. (...) I don't think it's very fair to the other students.” When I asked Emily what value she thinks is missing, she replied, “An added element of rigor in the courses is needed.” Rigor – or in the words of the mission statement, “challenging” lifelong learning opportunities – seems to be a forgotten value, whose role in the mission statement is simply nominal.
Courtney felt sad that the changing environment of her organization was affecting the institution’s priorities. The mission statement emphasizes quality education for students as its reason for being. Courtney stated:

I love working with the students and that's part of my work that I value absolutely. That's the reason why I to his job but because of the changes within my job it is something that has been taken away from me or at least diminished for the time that I'm able to spend with students.

According to Courtney, she has to work more with number than people. She explained: What it has done is it has created a lot more data entry a lot more busywork on my end, so it's taken away from me actually working with the students and working with employers, and going after helping the students be successful in securing their employment.

Pele identified significant discrepancies between values guiding people’s decisions in the recreation center he works at. He stated:

To me, the executive director, she sees this facility as an opportunity for students to grow, to be healthy, to interact. And I think her philosophy is fantastic. And I think she does a great job of it. But when you come down to the next levels, there is a huge inconsistency where one individual may say hey you wait here for the students. Make them happy. Or the other one will say something to the effect of no, we are here for the community students are a small part of what we are trying to do.

Officially the recreation center strives to foster “personal development, enhances academic productivity, and enriches the quality of life for a diverse university community.” However, Pele thought that most of his co-workers were guided by their personal values rather
than organizational ones. He identified two of such personal values: looking good in front of supervisors and networking in order to enhance chances of future employment in other organizations. Perhaps because organizational values and reason for being do not have much significance for employees, many of them prefer not to enforce the recreation policies among visitors. In Pele’s words, employees have “look-the-other-way-and-let-them-enjoy” attitude. He gave an example, “In one area we have 12 rules posted. Don't do this, do this, don’t do this. 10 of the 12 rules are rarely if ever enforced. And to me, that's a problem.” When I asked him why, he replied:

I think there is two reasons. I think one is flat out laziness. I think, yeah it's not a big deal, it's not going to affect me, I'm not going to do anything about it. And the other is nervousness. People are afraid to say, hey you're not allowed to do that. They want to be a friend, they want to be an ally.

When employees are guided solely by their own individual interests, they do not share their organization’s values and, what is even more important, are not willing to participate in organizational mission. Thus, the mission statement of the recreation center becomes nothing else than a string of lofty words.

My conversation with another participant, Steve who works in FlySky, shows how values can be used as a means of unobtrusive control. When reflecting on what values are important to people in FlySky, he noted that in any corporation the size of FlySky it is important to navigate the bureaucracy. He stated:

One of the terms that I always hear in the company is we always refer to finding a way, like we need to find a way to get things done, don't let things to be an excuse, like don't say, oh FlySky is so bureaucratic or FlySky is such a huge company. You have to find a
way around that. You can't let that stuff bring you down. That's one of the favorite
phrases in the company – you’ve got to find your way. I always hear people saying that.

Although the official statement does not contain any information on what employee
qualities the organization values, Steve’s reply shows that to fulfill the mission employees have
developed a value of adaptability. According to Steve, people in his company always talk about
the valuable quality to adapt to bureaucracy. It is an expected and very much appreciated type of
attitude in the workplace. Employees are encouraged to accept the system and rather change
their own behavior than question the ways of the organization. This is a good example of what
Tompkins and Cheney (1985) call concertive control, i.e. a type of control which organizational
members develop themselves and which is based on socially constructed values and norms.

When talking about adaptability to the system, Steve also referred to his supervisor by stating:

I think I've heard my manager say more than once that he thinks that doing this job well
means you have to be kind of willing to be an investigator. You know kind of to be
willing to roll with the punches, which means in a sense being able to be highly
adaptable, and look for answers where probably it isn't as easy.

According to organizational members, being an effective employee (which is the primary
purpose of mission and vision) means changing yourself and protecting the status quo. Deetz
(1992) explains that when one-sidedness is constantly reproduced, we observe systematically
deception the individuals believe that they are engaging in communication action – pursuing
mutual understanding – but are actually engaged in a concealed strategic action, even concealed
from themselves.” By socially constructing a value which allows them to achieve the company’s
goals, employees engage into mutual unobtrusive control.
Mission and Ownership

RQ (c) was intended to elicit participants’ constructions of ownership of the mission. Specifically, I asked participants questions about how they view the role of the mission, how they see their own role in creating a mission statement and implementing it.

Out of 45 participants only two people did not know for sure whether their organization had a mission statement. Susan explained why she was not aware of its existence by stating, “I don't know of this. It was not told to me on my first couple of days or ever since.” Although her organization has a 346-word mission statement posted on the Web site, Susan’s comment indicates that mission discourse is completely absent from organizational life. Her comment also shows that Susan as an employee expects mission to come from some other concerned party – maybe supervisors or co-workers who have been with the organization for longer – rather than be her personal responsibility.

Other participants were confident that their organization had a mission statement. Employees learned about it through many different avenues: when preparing for a job interview, going through initial orientation or training in the organization, hearing about it in meetings, seeing it on the Web site or an office wall. In the modern Western organizational world, it is a well known fact that during recruitment and selection procedures, organizations try to determine not only the applicant’s professional expertise but also his or her ability to fit in the organizational culture. Conversely, applicants try to evaluate whether the organization will be a good fit for them. As Cable and Yu (2007) note, both organizations and job-seekers form employment relationships based on the perceptions of fit. When I asked Courtney how she came to know about her company’s mission, she replied, “I'm 99.9% sure that I looked it up when I went for my interview because it's something that you do when you go in for an interview. You
check into the mission statement.” For Courtney, knowledge of mission statement was more of a selling point in the interview than a method to evaluate the fit.

For some employees, their first encounter with the mission can be really discouraging. Alexander, a software engineer, told me about frustration which he experienced when he first heard his organization’s mission in an initial training after joining the company. He said, “When I first saw it at the orientation, I wanted to leave and quit immediately. That was just all ridiculous. I have never heard anybody talking about it. Probably because people immediately forget it.” He went on to explain that “it was hypocritical. It has nothing to do with the work that the company does. It was completely unachievable and it was absolutely unmeasurable. (...) And it's not something that can be used as a guiding principle.”

Alexander was not the only one who talked about the hypocrisy or short life of mission statements. Amanda, an excellence lead, provided an interesting example of how she perceives organizational mission statements from a perspective of an outsider. She stated:

Well I think mission statements, to be honest, get forgotten so easily. Even as a consumer I rarely even see a mission statement, even when they are right in front of my face. I was at a Best Bean coffee store today and there was a mission statement on the wall and I kind of looked at it, and was like: Okay, yeah right, and you don't really care about me.

Lynne, a sales support specialist, thought that initial enchantment with a mission statement among employees wore off very quickly. She said:

I think that in a lot of companies the mission statement is great when it's first written, and everybody knows what it is, and it's posted up everywhere. But somehow it gets lost. I do not know that right now my position has a lot to do with the mission statement.
Evelyn and Prem, too, said that their organizations’ mission statements do not affect them directly. Evelyn explained:

Well, in my experience where I work, the mission statement is irrelevant. You know you go to work, you do your job and you do it to the best of your ability and no matter what they hang on the wall you're still going to do your job and hopefully we're all going to have the same common goal and going to be successful.

When I asked if she thought a mission statement was more of a fad, she readily agreed, “Yes, that's a good term! I believe so, yes. I believe that Harvard Business School probably developed that and everybody uses it because they think they should.” It is important to note that even though Evelyn did not have much faith in her organization’s mission statement or in the very idea of it, she still hoped that employees were working towards the same goal and could achieve success jointly.

When reflecting on her organization’s mission statement, Courtney introduced the role of a leader. She stated, “I think ultimately the mission statement ends up going to the waste side. It just kind of gets left in the dust, depending on who your president, CEO is and the direction of the leaders.” She assumed that the life of a mission statement was in the hands of leaders. To Amanda, employees are “just doers,” while a mission statement is the core to the needs of the people who design and develop a business. Another participant, Raj, said that a mission statement matters more for higher managers than ordinary employees. For lower rank employees, he said, management set much smaller goals. “So we would just do that,” Raj concluded.

Because employees sometimes associate mission with leadership, it is important to understand how they view the authorship of the mission statement and their leaders in particular.
Eighteen participants said they do not know who wrote their mission statement. Nineteen other participants attributed the authorship to leaders. Importantly, those employees who did not feel connected to the mission also commented on little involvement of leaders with the current mission. Evelyn, the employee who thought that mission was a fad, never met the CEO of her institution in person. She stated, “You know I don't think anybody really has an attitude or a feeling about him or any kind of real impression. I think he's just so far up that it's almost like he doesn't matter, he's not even there.” Another employee in the same institution, Courtney believed that her position was too miniscule to have any effect on mission. She stated, “We are so far down the chain that there probably would never be an opportunity. So it's just something on the website or on the wall somewhere.” Lynne believed that their mission was true when the company started but since then lost its relevance.

Although Raj and Amanda have constant personal interaction and good relationships with their leaders, neither one believed that mission belonged to them. None of the above employees would want to participate in writing or editing their mission statement. None of them believed they contribute to mission implementation. As Alexander put it:

I guess that for 99.99% of the employees the input that they have in steering the company would be zero. Even if they wanted to install a coffee machine on the floor they would not have the authority to do so... well, for the majority of the employees. The employees are driven by the guidelines, by the company policies. And the people who write company policies probably can be affected by the mission statement to create the policies that align with the mission statement. But everybody other than that, people other than those who write company policies just have to follow the protocols. They don't have any input in the direction of the company.
Certainly, not all participants felt alienated from their organization’s mission. Pooja said, “It's not about the CEO or anybody. Each and every individual makes an organization, they take it towards a successful path. And I would say people know better.” Jackson said he felt bound to the mission and vision of his company. Anton found it helpful that his values were aligned with the mission of the organization. Alicia and Paul even applied organizational ideals beyond their workplace. Paul stated, “Also reading the statement over and over I think it's kind of something to live by you know applying certain different things that the mission says to other parts of your life.”

Interviews also revealed how employees construct the importance of the mission. Analysis of their responses allowed me to identify a few themes. First, some employees thought it was important for the very existence of the organization. It defined the very foundation of the organization. Jackson stated:

If the company is not congruent to those statements out there on the wall, is not following them, then the company itself doesn't have any basis, no foundation. It's the mission and vision that define the foundation of the company. And the employees need to understand that very, very deeply.

Second, mission was important for the overall success of the company. Tanya stated, “So basically whatever we're doing we're trying to achieve this goal so we are closer and closer.” Another good example of this is Max’s reply. Max, a marketing coordinator at a student union building, said that when implementing the mission, he is “making sure to keep to this idea of what the building is supposed to be and what we are supposed to do here, and how we are supposed to function, and just trying to almost steer the boat, keep it down that path.”
Third, it created the spirit of *unity* among employees. Margaret said, “that's a good feeling that makes you feel that everyone else is working towards the same thing as you are and someone else is looking out for you the way you are looking out for them.”

Forth, mission allowed employees to experience *belongingness* to the organization. Vivienne explained, “My ability to relate to the mission statement is something that gives me the feeling of belonging.”

Fifth, mission helped employees to make *decisions*. Rodrigo, a process engineer, noted, “Well for me personally, when I'm working on a project or making a decision I sometimes think back of what it is. And then it kind of inspires me.”

Sixth, mission had a *positive emotional influence* on employee self-perception. Lisa, an IT contractor, said, “I believe it just cheers you up at work. It just makes you feel better, you know, you are important to the company.”

Seventh, a mission statement served as a *standard* by which employees evaluated their own performance. Jackson stated, “I do feel bound to that mission and vision of the company. I do feel bound to that. Because I need to make sure that those statements, I can always checkmark and say I meet those standards.” “The closer I am to the mission, - explained another participant, Nina, - the more successful I am as an employee.” Results indicate that not knowing what the mission is increases appraisal uncertainty (Miller & Jablin, 1991) among employees. Jessica said, “Well, since I cannot tell you what ours is, all I know is as long as I… if I wasn't doing something correct, I would hope that somebody would tell me if it was going against the mission statement.”

Finally, mission carried the *legacy of the founder*. Employees thought their goal was to make sure the organization preserves the shape and follows down the path that the founder
envisioned for it. Jillian said, “I don't know off the top of my head the full mission statement, but it pretty much lays out exactly how he wanted it to be or what he wanted people to get out of the course. So it's keeping up with that same level of customer service that he started with.”

In reply to my question about how they implemented their organization’s mission, many participants reported that they do not explicitly bring up the organization’s mission itself. Rather, mission is ingrained in people’s minds (Mitchell, Samantha) or at the back of their minds (Pooja). It is intuitive (Steve, Margaret). To implement the mission statement is second nature (Jillian). Stephanie used the word *internalize*. When I asked her to explain what she meant by that word, she replied, “Well, we understand it, we believe it, will live it. I think like with a lot of other things in your life, you can understand and live by it without discussing it every minute.”

Although most employees could not recall instances when employees would discuss their mission statement in workplace conversations, Jackson provided examples of how mission is intertwined into the fabric of daily discourse in his organization. He explained that mission is not only discussed in meetings and reinforced by the CEO, but it is regularly brought up in conversations among coworkers. In fact, it is so important to employees that they can even become emotional when they feel that they might have to compromise it. Jackson recalled:

One time one of the employees started crying because he's like we cannot have data in there because this is not pertaining to the mission and vision which Stan, our CEO, had laid out. (…) I know that we are in a time crunch here. We cannot put that because quality is very important. Part of our mission and vision is that we don't put this kind of data out there.

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It is also important to understand how employees view their role in creating or changing a mission statement. Some participants were skeptical about their ability to contribute to a mission statement because they thought they were not qualified for that. Others said they were not interested. Some participants also thought that in large organizations it would not be practical or even possible to ask every employee for their opinion on the mission.

Those participants who said they would be interested in developing a mission statement provided a few reasons why their contribution would be important. Pooja, a test engineer, thought it was important to seek input from every employee because “I think it's about coordination and communication between coworkers that will help a lot than making decisions at a higher level and then just throwing them at people.” Pooja believed that personal contribution would make each employee feel they are contributing something to the organization which will result in personal satisfaction and in increased productivity. That would be beneficial for the organization because “if each one thinks in that direction (…) it would make a better place for everyone.”

Charlie admitted that even though he had read his mission statement several times, it “does not weigh heavily.” He believed that it was not necessarily his direct involvement in writing a mission statement that mattered but rather communication with those who wrote it. He stated, “I guess my role in creating it is just to make sure that the people who are writing a mission statement understand what it is that I'm actually doing and that what I'm doing is what they want me to do.” Likewise, Claire thought it was important for her organization, whose mission is to build human connection with each customer, to get ideas from all levels. According to Claire, “people who work in the headquarters, who have never even been on the store level… so they don't really understand the importance of personal connection.”
Alicia was one of those employees who had directly participated in the creation of her organization’s mission. Alicia said that their mission resulted from a team effort. All employees sat around a desk and thought of the company and what it stood for. Each of them had to come up with 10 to 20 words. The entered those words on an Excel document. After that they picked the words from the list and created a mission statement. The CEO wrote the final version of the statement, but he made sure that all those ideas and beliefs were part of it. Alicia and her coworkers thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Alicia recalled:

I felt like I mattered, I was important to the company, that I wasn't just an employee. That I was working, that this was part of ....this was my company almost. It made me care a bit more. (...) when we were done and we finally have it we all had this overwhelming sense of accomplishment. And that really boosted the team morale. It was a very positive experience for our work performance and also for work morale.

Vision

RQ (d) was intended to understand employee constructions of the future state of the organization.

Ideal future state

Official statements represent a wide range of ideas and approaches. Some organizations have separate mission and vision statements, while others blend mission and vision into one statement. Those that have a separate vision statement (n=7) approach it from four different perspectives:
1. The statement describes a future world and the company’s contribution to that: “Everyone and Everything will be connected, at home, at work, and on the go. Semicom Solutions will enable all of these connections and enhance the experience”;

2. The statement portrays a future status of the organization: “The Student Union at Mid-Washington University will be a nationally recognized student union for excellence in programs and services within a premier facility”;

3. The statement reiterates the mission statement by saying what the organization should provide to its customers: “provide quality, long-term investments and personal service to individual investors in the local community”;

4. The statement represents a personal vision of the leader, as well as the organization’s overall objective: “To be a good father, husband, physician and educator. To integrate naturopathic principles in daily life, business and standard medicine.”

When I asked participants what was the ideal future state that their organization was trying to achieve, six employees said they did not know. Anton said that his industry was changing so fast that it was hard to tell what the ideal future would look like. Nina referred back to her conversations with her boss. She said the boss would always avoid talking about vision because their organization was very new and only starting to make sense of their own goals. According to Kat, her organization is at the turning point in its history. Its success depends on one product which will be released within a year. While Kat and her coworkers are waiting to see if customers like the product, they experience a lot of uncertainty about the future of the organization. Stephanie, a community relations specialist, did not know where her organization was heading because she felt that kind of information was only available to what she called “the corporate.” “If they want to make some changes in the structure or the way this company works,
they may do that, but I wouldn't know,” she said. Stephanie’s organization is not only lacking a clear vision statement, but more importantly it does not try to bridge the gap between the corporate and employees. By contrast, Margaret’s company communicates its goals and general philosophy so well that even without a vision statement Margaret was able to speculate on the future path of the company. Moreover, she suggested an idea which could well serve as a prototype of her organization’s vision, should the organization decide to develop one. Margaret stated:

I mean we are already number one so it's probably just to continue to stay in that position and continue to innovate and be a leader and you know help the planet because we're trying to create sustainable energy products that will reduce the negative side effects electricity and power and things have on earth. So probably just to be a steward to the planet [emphasis added] and continue to be profitable and provide jobs.

Although none of the official statements explicitly talked about growth, twenty-two participants said that the ideal future state, as envisioned by their organization, would be a bigger company. They spoke about expanding into new locations, conquering new markets, serving more customers, providing more services, and building more facilities. Some even talked about numerical growth rates per year. Three participants thought that the goal of their company was to acquire a leading position in ratings.

Another stark contrast between official statements and employee constructions of organizational vision lies in the effect that the organizations are trying to have on customers. None of the organizations talk about acquiring power over customers at deep cognitive and emotional levels. According to four employees, it is the “mind-share” that their companies are after. Boris explained:
It's very simple. They want to be the first thing people think about when they think about buying something. No matter what it is. That's their ideal state and they are working very hard to achieve it. Of course we want the global market but they also want what they call the mind share.

Similarly, Katie said that Software Technologies seeks to turn its customers’ thought process around. She said the goal is “becoming a market leader and everybody should start remembering what search engine I should go for among competitors.” Amy noted that the goal of her department, which serves a large corporation, is to have it ingrained in that corporation’s DNA. She explained, “What I mean by that is if we want to be able to exist, we want to be able to make sure that... if funding ran out or whatever, if our department was to close down, that it will affect all these other departments.”

For other employees, the ideal future state was more about a qualitative rather than quantitative achievement. Prem said that his organization strives to “continue working in the same field and not lose its direction in trying to achieve that overall mastery in the field.” Max thought that the Student Union he works at should “become an ideal location for students to hang out.” Some even said the ideal future would mean preserving those valuable qualities that their organizations have already developed. Rodrigo, who works at CoffeePot, saw the company’s goal in growing but preserving the mentality of a small local company. Another CoffeePot employee, Claire, brought up the same topic from a different perspective. She said:

I think what they need to do is make sure that people are getting that CoffeePot customer service and the love from CoffeePot that they get here locally everywhere. Because it's completely different. And the further you get away from the headquarters, the less focus on their core values and things like that. I think it's a huge thing to get better at.
These two examples show that the employees did not only know CoffeePot values and ideal future goals well, but they also saw weak spots and have suggestions on how to achieve that overall future ideal.

A few participants talked about the importance of vision. Steve thought “the clearer the goals are, the clearer the direction,” which is very helpful to him as an employee. Charlie identified several weaknesses in his organization such as lack of planning, employee accountability, and training. He stated, “We do so many things and that's where they fall short is they start running someplace but they don't know what the end objective is.” He disapproved that his organization was more concerned about being politically correct rather than being ethical. In his department an employee could be intoxicated at work. Supervisors “just kind of put the person to the side, looked a blind eye, and didn't do anything. And there is numerous occasions of that occurring.” Charlie asked a rhetorical question, “When you have a history of that, how can you then hold anybody accountable for not doing anything?” Finally, he believed the organization did not have a clear vision of training. He believed that “a vision statement would help all those things. If your vision was… depending on how you phrase best trained, best equipped, best whatever service that you can provide, then you would have steps to reach that.”

Whereas Charlie’s organization lacks vision whatsoever, Alexander’s company has vision which fails to reflect reality. As I quoted Alexander before, he believed the current mission is hypocritical, unattainable, and immeasurable. Moreover, he thought that the older vision which had been discarded a few years ago, was the one which was still driving the company. He stated, “Ironically I believe that was the previous mission statement of Soft
Technologies. It said we want every computer in the world to run ST software. I guess that's what they really want.” Besides, Alexander identified another unofficial vision by stating:

From the messages that I heard from ST people is that there is a main vision and purpose of life is to drive Pabball [competitor] out of business. I don't think that is recorded anywhere officially. I think it's not official in the ST itself.

Lynne discussed another problem with vision, i.e. the problem of vision realization. She was upset with the current standing of her company in the market. According to Lynne, while other companies’ stocks are rising, ST’s stocks are staying flat. She tied this current state of affairs to the organization’s vision. ST’s primary goal is to achieve global brand recognition, or as Lynne put it, “to be the ultimate software developing company … to be consumer and businesses’ first choice to go to without any question.” To Lynne, this vision is inherently flawed. She says:

I think touching on brand recognition, there is a point when you get comfortable with that and you feel like you do not have to put the work forward. I think it has been causing a lot of disconnect. You know we just rely too heavily on our brand recognition. We don't do much else outside of that. We just expect that people are going to buy the product and be happy with it.

ST’s approach is to brainwash employees and convince customers that ST’s products are the best. Like Alexander, Lynne talked about the organization’s hypocrisy when it comes to vision: It is more important to create massive make-believe rather than face reality. Another crucially important aspect Lynne brought up is the continuity of vision. She posed a question: What if we do get so big that everyone knows who we are, then where do we go? According to Lynne, in the organization’s vision “there was no plan for that.”
When I asked participants whether they thought their organization’s vision was achievable, thirty-six employees said yes. Some were very certain that the vision was within the company’s reach. They said the organization was getting there and even provided factual evidence, such as higher position in ratings compared to previous years, better leadership, better hiring pool, improved environment, etc. Others noted that their vision was achievable under certain additional conditions. For example, Tanya believed her company could realize its vision if it hired more young and passionate people. To Prem, vision is achievable but only in some niches of the market. Alexandra thought that if “some alumni write a big check,” the recreation center she works at can reach its ideal future goals. Pooja believed that shared understanding of the company goals among employees was the precondition for vision realization. She said, “On a larger scale I do not know how it will work, but if each individual, each member of the company has this mentality, then I think it wouldn't be that difficult to achieve.”

Three participants said their organizational vision was not achievable. Nicole thought that to reach its goals her university needs to implement changes. Charlie noted that vision was unachievable by nature. Its value is not the end result, i.e. achieved goal, but rather the process of getting closer to the goal. When I asked him whether he thinks his department’s vision is achievable, he stated:

No, but that's okay. Because the objective would be a hundred percent perfection knowing that in any situation something’s going to go wrong but from that we evaluate that, we learn from it and so we are better next time.

Thus, Charlie constructed vision as a continuous learning experience on the way to an ideal future state.
The participants’ responses to my question about vision desirability highlight a few important aspects of employee vision construction. Employees constructed vision desirability in three ways.

First, employees saw vision desirability as an opportunity to receive individual rewards separate from the organization. Vision can be desirable if its realization would provide an individual employee with tangible benefits, such as job security, pay raise, promotion, travel opportunities, etc. Vision can also be desirable for its promise of emotional gratification to employees. Rohit stated, “It gives me a sense of pride that I'm working for a market leader which is globally recognized. And then I'm also contributor in that and so that shows whether my work is paying off.”

Second, employees saw vision desirability as an opportunity to receive rewards together with the organization. They did not separate reward for themselves from reward for the organization. Alicia said:

I have become so involved that I do anyway look at it as my company because Mark [CEO] has given me the opportunity to grow so much that I'm just attached to it now. To me, this business is important because like I said I look at it is kind of like my business too because Mark has given us the independence to grow here. And I just feel like I can grow more.

To explain her position, she contrasted her current organization to previous experiences, by stating:

I can see that compared to my other jobs where I was in one department and I had one position and you kind of know that it's a dead and you cannot move up from there. You
really don't care. You know, you just come in to make some money and leave because it's not been helping your future in any way.

At Ever Happy, however, it is different for her:

Here you know that you can grow with this company. Here you know that you can possibly do great things, not just for yourself, but the things that may help a lot of people in the world. And because of that you get enthusiastic and you want to work harder.

Alicia is an example of an employee who strongly identifies with the organization. She shares her organization’s vision but at the same time she appreciates her own rewards as well.

Finally, employees saw vision desirability as an opportunity to provide rewards to the organization. When I asked Jackson if the company’s ideal future goal is desirable for him, he said:

I personally think so. Definitely. And one of the reasons is because then you'll clients that we have required in the middle east are really big. They are really big fishes. And I think that if you have somebody like that, if other companies see this, they go like hey they are your client?! Then something must be really awesome. We want to look at that too. It's really good for advertising basically.

Samantha, too, believed that the vision is desirable because it is good for business. She stated:

I think it's going to open up a lot of opportunities for us to show not only our clients but also our peers in the industry what Rob Feyer is capable of, to prove... well not to prove, but to show everybody continuously like we've had in the past that we are one of the number one firms out there.
Vision and Core Values

By asking RQ (e), I intended to understand employee constructions of their organization’s general values related to its ideal state. While in the mission section of the interview I asked participants about daily values held by employees, in the vision section I asked them about the core values which underlie the very essence of the organization.

Two employees cited their organizations’ official statements of values. The others made constructions of the values which they thought the organization was based on. Most frequently identified values are customer (17 participants), quality service/product (9), and integrity (6). Although a frequent term, integrity seems to have different constructions depending on the organization. Jeanette, who works in BCIP, an insurance company, thought that integrity means following the rules and regulations. She stated:

I think one of the main ones is definitely integrity, doing business with integrity. The company does not stand for any, I don't want to use the word shady, any tactics that are not legitimate. You know making sure that every employee is kind of doing everything by the rule, just fair service and dealings in everyday activities.

In the fire department where Charlie serves integrity in a fire department, is an unspoken value. He explained:

I mean with our job there is a certain level of integrity that has to be maintained. And I think that's fairly common. It's not even talked about really. But when people don't have that integrity, it really stands out.

For Charlie, “integrity is you do what you say and what is expected. Even when somebody is not looking over your shoulder, you are still doing what you're supposed to be doing.” Henry, who works for a software company, constructed integrity in terms of an ethical
choice by explaining that integrity means “I'm going to sacrifice my business to do the right thing for the customer.”

The majority of participants (n=27) said that their organization’s core values correlate well with their personal values. They talked about why those values were aligned. For instance, Katie believed that one of the core values at her organization is financial stability. She shared that value with the organization because financial stability gave Katie a feeling of job security, which in turn motivates her to work better. Sophia thought her organization’s values are “ethical and moral” and she tries to be that way as well. Alexandra appreciated the values of accountability, creativity, and innovation because they allowed her organization to move forward. She stated:

We have to always try to learn and always try to find better ways to do things. I personally believe in that I think it's important to be organized, to be realistic about your goals, but you always have to strive for more. Otherwise you get into a stagnation stage where you know nothing is going on and you just kind of roll down the hill.

Some employees (n=4) explained how organizational values applied to their personal lives. For Sam, for example, integrity and fiscal responsibility are his “daily values.” Amanda identified respect to workers and customers, intelligence, creative thinking, and passion as the core values at her company. She noted:

I think they are right on par with how I view my relationships in my personal life. I think if I had to explain what I wanted from my friends outside the fun things about you know like sense of humor and whatever else, I really value compassion and respect and intelligence out of my friends as well.
Anton stated, “I mean my values do not change when I leave work and come home. I have the same values the entire day. And the fact that my company's values are aligned really helps.”

For other employees, the relationship between their organizational and personal values was problematic. Lynne noted that out of the values of product pride, diversity, and corporate citizenship, she related to the last one the most. Katie said that in addition to financial stability she would like to see two more values: good treatment of employees and faith in the company. Alexander agreed with organizational values, but disagreed with organizational decisions.

Although Kat liked organizational values, she complained that other employees did not share those values. She believed, “they get caught up in their personal goals rather than the company goals,” when in fact “they need to remember that they are hired and paid to do work for the organization, not to make themselves look better to somebody else.” Grace felt that her organization’s two values (integrity and profit) collided with each other. She said:

I'm not so concerned with making a profit as I am on the integrity thing. I think it's very easy to make a profit but you have to make sure that you do it in an honest way, in a way that makes your customers happy as well. And so I think they kind of clash sometimes.

Three participants said that their organization’s core values did not correlate with their personal values whatsoever. Nicole believed that instead of focusing too much on profit, her institution should concentrate more on students. Courtney found it frustrating that her organization valued the interests of shareholders over the interests of students. She noted, “I personally don't think that you can… with education you can really calculate, track and quantify any success when you're talking about human beings.”

Pele explained the reasons behind his frustration with organizational values and their execution. First, he shared his observations about the conflict between espoused values and the
prevailing values that the fitness center he works at lives by. To my question about core values, Pele replied:

They'll tell you the students and that's what they'll tell to us, what they will tell other universities and other facilities. I don't believe that. I think it's run by the pro staff and their decisions and their meetings. I think the core values are not what they are written down as.

Pele described his experience of gradual disillusionment with the organization. At first, when he was hired, he felt very optimistic about the organization. He believed marketing discourse and things like a mission statement. Over a year, however, week by week he got more and more disappointed and frustrated. He realized that “they will say it's for well-being and for health and for healthy minds, which is garbage. It's about profit. This is a business.” His internal experience as an employee lead to his alienation from the company. Pele said, “After I realized they do not follow them [core values] I stopped…not caring, but I stopped considering them.” Thus, lack of consistency between discourse and actions resulted in the organization’s fiasco with its employee.

**Vision and Authorship**

RQ (f) sought to elicit employee constructions of the authorship/source of the organization’s vision.

Analysis of official statements indicates that reference to the leader in vision statements is rare. Out of 22 organizations, only Electrous has explicit reference to its founder and inspirational leader. One other organization, called Ever Happy, has a vision statement which sets goals for the leader rather than the whole company. It reads, “To be a good father, husband, physician and educator. To integrate naturopathic principles in daily life, business and standard
medicine.” Although these organizations’ vision statements bear the stamp of the leader, they represent authorship differently. Electrous refers to the leader as “our founder” and further introduces his five principles. According to the statement, “these principles guide each of us in the business decisions we make each day.” Thus, Electrous’s vision belongs to the leader, but it also is relevant to employees in daily decision-making. On the contrary, Ever Happy’s vision seems to be completely detached from employees.

The other official statements do not have any reference to the leader or author. Some of them, however, use pronouns we and our to include employees in organizational vision. For example, one statement reads, “We strive to maintain and improve our role as the major provider of health care medical courses in the world.” Another says, “Our vision is to be earth’s most customer centric company.” Four organizations have vision statements which are completely impersonal. Not only do they lack any reference to the author, but they exclude employees from the statement as well. Such statements start with verbs in infinitive forms (e.g.: “To be national leaders…”) or the name of the organization (e.g.: “The Student Union at Mid-Washington University will be a nationally recognized student union”).

Employee responses showed that many (n=18) did not know exactly if their organization had a vision statement. Fifteen other employees expressed uncertainty about who was the author of their vision. For many, vision was something detached and possibly created by “some kind of leadership team,” “executive board,” or “marketing and HR team.” Those employees who attributed the authorship of the vision to the leader and spoke high of him/her conveyed the feeling of trust in their leader’s vision. Pele said, “I think they have good ideas on where they want to go.” None of the participants saw employees as possible authors of organizational vision. Instead, they mostly pictured employees as followers who believed their leaders were
intelligent enough to take everybody to a better place. As Henry put it, “We have executive positions whose responsibility is for shepherding and guiding the company. (…) As an employee, if you don't agree with it, you're free to leave, it's free enterprise, right?”

To summarize, although leaders create vision statements for organizational members, vision statements fail to include employees. Besides, if vision effectiveness is tied to the leader, then low employee awareness of who is the source of their vision and lack of trust in the leader are likely to negatively affect employee buy-in. Finally, employees construct themselves as doers of vision, not authors of it. More research would help us understand whether employee involvement in vision creation can enhance vision effectiveness.
CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study explores such well researched concepts as organizational mission and vision in a new way. First, unlike previous research which was primarily interested in leaders and their roles in creating and disseminating mission and vision, this study brings to focus the employee side of mission and vision. It answers many important questions about how employees view their organization’s reason for being, values, constituencies, products, and services, as well as the future of the organization. Second, instead of looking at mission and vision from rhetorical or socio-cultural perspectives, this study bases on a social constructionist foundation. It highlights the interrelation between social context and employee constructions of mission and vision. The study also stresses the importance of employee constructions to the life of the organization. It provides numerous examples of how employees’ perceptions affect their behavior. In particular, the study shows how changing perceptions (e.g. disillusionment in mission and vision) result in changing behavior. Third, by comparing employee constructions to official statements on organizational Web sites, I reveal differences in mission and vision constructions between the two discourses.

Theoretical Implications

This study makes significant contributions to leadership, and particularly mission/vision, literature. As review of extant literature shows, almost all information available to scholars and practitioners presents mission and vision from a managerial perspective. Given the utility of mission and vision for the life of the organization, it is surprising to see how little research and
practitioner writing has addressed the employee side of the matter. In this respect, the present study fills many gaps.

First, leadership literature explains why mission and vision are important for the organization. For example, Mirvis, Googins, and Kinnicutt (2010) call vision “a motivational driver” and “an intellectual framework for company strategy” (p. 316). According to King, Case and Premo (2012), a mission statement is “a vitally important communication from the firm to all of its stakeholders” (p. 13), which explains why the firm is in existence. This dissertation offers insights into how employees construct the importance of mission and vision. While a few employees were very skeptical about mission and vision and even considered them a fad or a useless piece of wall decoration, many thought mission and vision were important. Employee responses indicate that vision is important because it instills a sense of clear direction and consistency in achieving future goals. It tells employees that their leaders have the foresight to envision the future of the organization and that leaders are able to ensure continuous development towards the ideal future goal and after it is achieved.

Mission is important for several different reasons. It is vital for the organization’s existence and success. It creates the sense of unity among employees, helps them to make decisions and feel that they belong to the organization. Mission also serves as a mood booster which allows employees to feel good about themselves and their role in the organization. It can be a standard against which employees evaluate their performance. Finally, by conveying the legacy of the founder, mission can evoke such positive feelings as pride in the organization. These results indicate that employees construct the importance of mission and vision differently from leaders. Employees see that mission and vision are important not only for the organization but also for members. They find points of intersection between vision/mission on one side and
their daily responsibilities and even self-perception on the other. Importantly, employees use mission and vision statements as information about leadership, specifically about its sincerity and effectiveness.

Second, the present study casts light on how employees construct the content of mission and vision. Regarding mission, employees constructed their organization’s reason for being and values more narrowly than official statements. Whereas official statements presented multiple organizational constituencies as their reason for being, employees often talked about customers and market demand as the only reason why their organization exists. Likewise, in terms of daily values, employees saw their organizations as having fewer values than named in official statements. In general, employees identified customers, integrity, efficiency and product/service quality as the values which drove people’s behavior in the organization. On the other hand, employees identified two values that none of the organizations mentioned in their statements: effective internal communication and supervisor-subordinate relationships which empowered employees. Effective communication was also important for employees in their constructions of economic concerns, possible changes to implement, and the direction in which the organization is going. These findings indicate that leaders and employees construct the mission of the organization differently. Because leaders view the organization and its role more broadly than employees, there is likely to be a mismatch between what leaders expect and what employees enact. These findings raise a question about the alignment between official mission discourse and actual practices in the organization.

From a practical standpoint, the above mismatch may result in discrepancies between priorities set by leaders and priorities set by employees. If employees believe that the only reason their organization exists is to satisfy the needs of customers, they likely will make decisions
primarily guided by customers’ interests. They will not place as much importance on community or shareholders. Then leaders’ attempts to engage employees in community initiatives will likely be perceived as fads and may even be met with resistance. Indeed, employees who believe that their organization exists only for customers will likely think of community projects as unnecessary burdensome addition to their workload or even a distraction from their primary purpose – to satisfy customers. Another possible problem for organizational life may lie in how employees view their own importance in the organization. While many organizations say that besides customers they exist for employees, employees do not see themselves as their organization’s reason for existence. If employees knew what a crucially important place they occupy in the life of the organization, they would probably identify with the organization more easily. More importantly, if employees knew that their organization had a broader purpose, they would stop reproducing the narrower and thus inadequate version of it in their discourse.

The above results carry important implications for theory as well. First, they contribute to literature on employee perceptions. Previous research has shown significant impact of employee perceptions on job satisfaction, organizational commitment (Borgogni, Russo, & Latham, 2011), respect in the workplace (Seijts & Roberst, 2011) and such bottom-line measures as customer loyalty, employee retention, and profit (Harter, Schmidt, Asplund, Killham, & Agrawal, 2010). This dissertation furthers our understanding of employee perceptions related to their organization’s purpose, and to mission and vision in general. Second, the above results are also a valuable addition to the literature on employee alignment. As Boswell (2000) notes, “ensuring that employees are knowledgeable of and behaving in alignment with the organization’s strategic direction is arguably of utmost importance, as organizations rely more and more on employees to contribute to the strategic goals” (p. 48). Boswell and Boudreau’s (2001) concept of “line-of-
“sight” refers to a combination of two employee characteristics: understanding of organizational strategy and knowing how to behave in order to contribute to the strategy. Gagnon, Jansen, and Michael (2008) argue that strategic knowledge is a necessary precondition to employee commitment to the organization’s strategic goals. Thus, employees must know the purpose of their organization and its values, both of which underlie organizational strategy. However, it is not just any knowledge. What is important is that employee knowledge and interpretation of fundamental organization concepts align with how leaders view the concepts. Gagnon et al. (2008) note, “employees must possess a global understanding of their organization’s strategy that is similar to those who created the strategy” (p. 429). This dissertation adds to the body of knowledge on how employees understand such fundamental concepts as purpose of the organization and its values and how close employee constructions are to those of leaders.

The next important concept in this study was organizational uniqueness. Contrary to Dess and Miller’s (1998) claim that a typical mission statement attempts to answer a question about what is unique or distinctive about the organization, none of the 22 organizations directly addressed this question in their statements. In addition, none of the organizations’ official mission statements mention its weaknesses, which are obviously part of their unique portrait. In contrast, employees identify unique qualities of their organization in terms of multiple dimensions: organization’s origin, size, product, service, customers, structure, ownership, operation, and character. However, most employees found it difficult to identify what makes their organization unique. Furthermore, many employees saw unique qualities as strengths rather than a combination of strengths and weaknesses. Finally, employees most commonly talked about uniqueness in terms of excellent customer service their organization provides and high value it places on customers and clients. This is truly surprising because both of the qualities are
so widely accepted and appreciated in modern organizations that they could easily be called mantras of the Western organizational world.

Significance of the above observations regarding organizational uniqueness becomes obvious within the frameworks of two theories: optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991) and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978). The former theory posits that individuals are driven by two competing needs: the need to belong to a collective and the need to feel unique. The latter suggests that perceived membership in a group and perceived distinctiveness of the group from other groups form part of an individual’s self-concept. Along those lines, we can expect those employees who cannot easily identify why their organization is unique to experience difficulties with organizational identification.

Regarding vision, the data reveal large differences between official and employee constructions. Many organizations prefer not to describe their ideal future state they would like to achieve in vision statements or even in interpersonal communication between leaders and followers. Employees say that they experience uncertainty as to what the organization strives to become in future. They explain this lack of information by changing environment, by the infancy of their organization, or by leaders’ reluctance to talk about vision. Many employees, however, were able to identify ideal future goals from their experience within the organization. They talked about quantitative (such as size of the organization) and qualitative (such as mastery in the field) goals. Some employees talked about significant cognitive and emotional changes their company strives to provoke in its customers. One employee called that goal winning “the mind share”. Another employee, whose organization does not have a vision, was able to formulate a possible version of vision during the interview. Some other employees talked about how they would alter their organization’s current vision statement for it to be more reflective of
the organization’s aspirations. These results question the wide-spread assumptions present in leadership literature that vision should always come from a leader. In fact, employee understanding of the life of their organization can be a valuable source of ideas from which leaders can draw to create or update vision statements.

These findings make valuable contributions to theory. On the one hand, they call into question the conceptualization of vision as viewed by vision-based leadership theories (for an overview of such theories, see Kantabutra, 2008). Vision-based leadership theories operate on the following premises:

1. Leaders need to articulate vision;
2. Vision is a key attribute of effective leadership;
3. Vision is the foundation of the leader’s effectiveness and reputation;
4. Employees’ job is to share their leader’s vision. (Kantabutra, 2008)

Kantabutra (2008) himself develops a behavioral theory of vision based on Mumford and Strange’s definition of vision, which views vision “as a mental model that a leader defines, given that it is the actual mental model that guides his/her choices and actions” (Kantabutra, 2008, p. 321). This dissertation allows to redefine vision as a mental model that any organizational member may suggest to guide both leaders’ and employees’ choices.

On the other hand, these findings receive support in social constructionist theories. Specifically, management and organizational studies operating from a social constructionist perspective, include organizational members in the process of reality construction together with managers. For example, Shotter (as cited in Samra-Fredericks, 2008) views managing as a conversation between the manager as the key author who creates “a coherent structure” (p. 132) and all the organizational members involved. In communication theory, social constructionists
believe that organizational reality is comprised of stories, metaphors, and “multiple, negotiated meanings” (Foster & Bochner, 2008, p. 90), with employees producing a large and important part of organizational discourse.

The present study also offers insights into how employees construct the feasibility and desirability of their organization’s vision. As noted earlier, vision literature recommends leaders to present their employees with a challenge. For a vision to be effective, leaders need to achieve a balance between feasibility and desirability of the big future goal. The results of the present study partially support these recommendations. Although utopian goals can provoke feelings of frustration and skepticism among employees, positive feelings are also possible. As one employee noted, it is all right to have an unachievable vision, because the travel to that vision is a valuable learning experience which matters more than the destination. Most employees sounded satisfied when they reported that they were able to see how the organization was progressing towards the ideal future state.

Regarding desirability, scholars and practitioners advise leaders to know their followers’ needs to create an attractive vision. My results help us to understand what kind of needs a vision statement should address. Employees do not necessarily expect to fulfill their individual needs. While some did report that their vision was desirable because it promised them job security or promotion prospects, others noted that they could benefit together with the organization. In fact, some employees did not even talk about individual rewards at all. They deemed their vision desirable because it would allow their organization to flourish.

The study also furthers our understanding of how employees construct mission ownership and vision authorship. Although employees often do not know who their mission and vision come from, they tend to believe that mission and vision are the job of the leader. Very few
participants consider mission employees’ responsibility. Indeed, many believe they do not qualify to participate in mission creation because they are “too far down the chain,” their organization is too big, or because they are not the founder of the organization. On the other hand, those who reported direct involvement in the process of mission development highlighted such positive outcomes as feelings of their importance to the organization, satisfaction from the ability to make a meaningful contribution to the life of the organization and overall feeling of accomplishment. Whereas for some mission was a useless fad, for others it was a guideline which they internalized and used intuitively it the workplace and beyond. These findings have important implications for the life of the organization. By involving employees in the process of mission and vision development, organizations can facilitate employee understanding and acceptance of mission and vision. Organizations can communicate to employees that their input is welcome and valued.

Furthermore, the above findings make a valuable contribution to employee involvement scholarship. Previous research has stressed the importance of employee involvement in such crucial organizational functions as workforce training (Felstead, Gallie, Green, & Zhou, 2010) and business performance (Jones, Kalmi, & Kauhanen, 2010). The present data show that those involved in the process of vision/mission development did not only feel better about themselves but also had higher opinions of their leaders as well as the organization as a whole. Previous research has also identified factors which stimulate employee involvement. Thomas, Zolin, and Hartman (2009) found that communication contributes to increasing levels of trust of coworkers, supervisors, and top managers, which in turn influences perceptions of organizational openness and stimulates employee involvement in the organization’s goals. Similarly, Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon, and Ziv’s research (2010) indicates that inclusive leadership (i.e. leadership coming
from an open, accessible, and available leader) is positively related to psychological safety, which facilitates employee involvement in creative work. My research supports those findings. Those employees who were skeptical about the possibility of their involvement in vision/mission development, also noted poor communication with leadership, distrust of leaders and coworkers, and lack of transparency in the organization. Conversely, those employees who enjoyed being part of the vision/mission development process, reported frequent personal communication with the leader, the feelings of respect and admiration for the leader, mutual trust between themselves and the leader, and strong identification with the organization. Furthermore, this study extends existing literature on employee involvement by applying employee involvement to vision/mission development process. Those employees who said they did not want to participate in the process explained their reluctance by the size of the organization, their inability to meaningfully contribute to vision/mission statements due to their low rank, lack of vision/mission relevance to their daily workplace responsibilities and lack of perceived ownership of mission and vision.

Overall, these findings highlight yet another avenue for involving employees in participative decision-making and dispersed leadership, the numerous benefits of which have long been known to organizational communication researchers.

Comparison of official and employee constructions of vision revealed that, although intended for employees, many vision statements fail to include employees. Results indicate low employee awareness of who is the source of their vision. Responses also show that lack of trust in the leader is likely to negatively affect employee buy-in. Employees view themselves as doers of vision, not authors of it.
The results on mission ownership and vision authorship support widely accepted ideas in extant literature about where mission and mission should come from, how trust is related to employees buy-in, and the positive outcomes of employee involvement. Yet, they also allow us to question the widely-shared assumptions about mission and vision authorship as well as employees role in developing mission and vision statements.

Furthermore, this research extends our understanding of mission and vision discourse from a critical perspective. The results indicate that mission and vision discourse can be part of a larger system of unobtrusive control (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985), when employees identify with the organization, embrace its values and as a result willingly act in the interests of the organization. More specifically, the study provides examples of how mission and vision can act as “discursive closure” (Deetz, 1992), i.e. the kind of communication which suppresses potential conflict. In one organization people learn to adapt their own behavior rather than question (or what they call “complain”) about its bureaucratic system. Their manager says employees are expected to be “willing to be investigators,” to be “willing to roll with the punches,” and to be “highly adaptable,” all of which maintains the status quo of the system itself.

In extreme cases, mission and vision discourse can act as a tool of manipulation. Louis de Saussure (2005) identifies the following signs of manipulation: a manipulator tries to have a human being adopt certain behaviors to fulfill the needs of the manipulator; a manipulator manipulates some aspects of human cognition, such as reasoning and emotions; and manipulation involves the kind of content which is not fully adhered to by the manipulator. An employee in the present study gave an example of a massive make-believe created by their organization through mission and vision discourse. The organization almost “brainwashes” its employees to believe that their product is the best when in reality that is not at all true. This
makes present findings particularly valuable for organizational control and manipulation scholarship, for example for the strain of scholarship on control through charismatic leadership (Aaltio-Marjosola & Takala, 2000).

In addition to the above contributions, this research also contributes to the literature on employee commitment, empowerment and disenchantment. The results of the study support and further extend the identification model by providing more information about how mission and vision discourse can stimulate or impede employee identification with the organization. The study provides additional insights into research on uncertainty and information-seeking.

A secondary contribution is related to social constructionist literature. Previous research on organizational mission and vision has largely approached them from rhetorical and socio-cultural perspectives. Moreover, it has predominantly concentrated on the leader’s side of mission and vision discourse. By applying the social constructionist lens to employee constructions of mission and vision, the present study makes significant theoretical contributions to the body of knowledge on organization, leaders, employees, and organizational discourse.

Building on the social constructionist theory, and specifically on Fairhurst and Putnam’s (2004) “grounded in action approach,” the study advances our understanding of how organizations are produced and reproduced in action and discourse. Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) note that according to this approach, “the organization never assumes the form of an identifiable entity because it is anchored at the level of social practices and discursive forms” (p. 16). The study shows how employees discursively construct the two cornerstones of organizational ideology and culture and how mission and vision guide their actions. It offers valuable insights into how employees view mission’s and vision’s components (such as reason for being, uniqueness of the organization, values, product, ideal future state, and etc.) and their weaknesses.
(such as short life, irrelevance, hypocrisy, and etc.). Some employees feel they are guided by mission and vision in their workplace decision-making and even beyond the organizational environment, in their personal lives. Others deny any effect mission and vision may have on their behavior.

In addition, the study addresses Deetz’s concern about shallow reading often given to social constructionism in the U.S. As I noted earlier, Deetz (1992) disagrees with a wide-spread understanding of social construction of reality as consensus between individuals coming together to share their independent experiences. Instead, he suggests we acknowledge that shared meaning bases on a pre-existing set of constitutive practices. In this study, employees are viewed as social subjects who rely on organizational and, more broadly, social context to interpret and socially construct mission and vision. As much as employees are producers of the organization, they are also products of the organization and society. Their responses reflect this twofold nature of social constructionism. On the one hand, employees see their organization’s reason for being in meeting market demands and serving the customer. On the other hand, these very ideas (together with many values such as integrity, efficiency, quality, and competitive advantage) are grounded in Western organizational and societal ideology. Given the highly interconnected relationship between the organization and society, this analysis demonstrates that scholarship may cast more light on social construction of organizational reality by focusing on employee discourse. Further analysis of employee discourse would help to understand how organizations and societies produce and reproduce themselves in these discursive cycles (society → organization → individual → organization → society).
Practical Implications

The analysis presented in this study provides a number of important practical implications for business professionals, communication trainers, consultants and virtually any person involved in the organizational world.

Much organizational literature points to the importance of shared purpose. It is an essential part of cooperative interaction between managers and employees (Tjosvold, 1989). In times of change, shared purpose is more important than organizational structure (Duke, 2001). Yet, empirical data suggest that shared purpose is a rarity in modern organizational world. According to a recent survey of more than 2,000 employees conducted by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (as cited in Eyre, 2011), only 28 per cent believed that their organization’s purpose was shared among members. The results of the present study highlight multiple gaps in constructions of organizational purpose between leadership and employees. Official mission statements demonstrate that leaders view organizations as complex entities whose overall reason for being consists of several specific purposes related to various constituencies. Employees, however, see only one purpose usually related to one constituency. Employee constructions tend to be narrower along all the dimensions: services/products, affected groups of people, the scope of the organization’s impact and geographic coverage. Interestingly, employees never include themselves into their organization’s reason for being. If employees understood that their organization had multiple reasons to exist and multiple purposes, they would be able to appreciate the organization’s potential to affect different groups of people, including themselves. Furthermore, if members knew that happy employees/shareholders/community etc. are part of the mission, they would see that employees/shareholders/community
are more than values but the very reasons their organization exists. That understanding would make their work more meaningful.

The data suggest possible causes of incongruence between organizational mission discourse and employee constructions. One reason employees do not construct the purpose of the company in its desired complexity may be their lack of knowledge about their company’s mission. Indeed, only two out of 45 employees tried to refer to their mission statement. Others admitted they were aware of its existence but could not say what exactly the statement was about. Some said they did not know if their organization had a mission at all. As data show, this lack of knowledge stems from insufficient or absent communication of mission in the organization. Some participants never heard or saw the mission after they joined the organization. Others were introduced to the mission during the initial training when they just joined the company but never heard about it ever since. As noted earlier, scholars and practitioners have repeatedly voiced their concerns that mission and vision are often “celebratory ornamentations” (Thyssen, 2009) rather than effective unifying principles in many organizations. Despite repeated calls for “activation” of mission and vision, leaders in some organizations do not communicate their mission and vision well enough for employees to fully understand what their organization stands for. Leaders should explain core organizational principles (such as reason for being, values, organization’s position in the industry, etc.) to employees and also provide members with multiple opportunities to talk about those principles and ask questions.

The data highlight the importance of effective communication of vision as well. Lack of communication between leaders and followers results in higher levels of uncertainty among employees regarding direction the organization is going and ideal future state it strives to achieve. Employees want to see that vision is achievable. Besides, they want to know that their
leaders have enough foresight to plan the next step, after the ideal future state is achieved. Without communication, that kind of knowledge would be difficult to obtain. Furthermore, proper communication is vital during crisis and/or change when employee uncertainty becomes very strong. This is consistent with extant research on communication and organizational change. Lewis (2000) conducted a study on organizational change in for-profit, non-profit and governmental organizations. She found that implementers rated communication problems (such as poor communication of vision and follow-through) as some of the most severe. In another study Lewis (2006) analyzed employee perspectives on implementation communication. She found that the higher the perceived value of their own input and of leaders' communication of vision, the higher their perceptions of success were.

The present study shows that employees do not seek out information about mission and vision. Many forget about them soon after they join the organization. This observation has very important implications for personnel development professionals, coaches, and trainers: They must educate employees on why mission and vision are important for the organization, how leaders and followers view the organization, and how employees will benefit from knowing and aligning with mission and vision. What seems to be an obvious fact to leaders may be a revelation to followers.

Another reason employees construct mission and values more narrowly is some employees did not see how their organization’s mission translated into their daily activities. They constructed organizational mission as something which is important for management rather than for average employees. In other words, employees did not see how the purpose of the organization related to them. These findings reflect well what many practitioners observe. Margolis (2011) notes that employees typically miss the big picture. She states, “When
employees understand how their daily activities align with the organization’s purpose, values and
goals, then work becomes more meaningful” (Margolis, 2011, p. 129). According to her,
employees who see the big picture strive to achieve results that make a difference. In addition to
the big picture, receiving feedback on whether they enact mission and vision effectively would
help employees see the connection between mission/vision and their daily work.

Finally, lack of congruence stemmed from perceived discrepancy between what the
organization says and what it actually does. Participants were often skeptical about their
organizational mission and vision discourse because they observed contradicting reality. Some
even confessed that after their initial excitement about the organization’s mission and vision,
they were disenchanted when they saw harsh reality. If an organization states its reason for
being as caring for customers but in reality cares more about its own bottom-line, its employees
are going to see the contradiction and possibly lose trust in leaders. Because trust in a leader is
related to trust in the system (Shamir & Lapidot, 2003), conflicting information is detrimental to
employee identification with the organization. Recent research shows that employee judgments
of the organization’s authenticity in its commitments is related to employee perceptions of the
organization’s true identity and can lead to such positive outcomes as organizational
identification, employee connections, greater motivation and productivity (Berger, Cunningham,
& Drumwright, 2006; McShane & Cunningham, 2012). Organizational world has seen
numerous examples of devastating effects employee disenchantment can have on the life of the
organization. Scholars and professionals agree that the intangible (such as employee
involvement, behavioral integrity, and trust in management) is just as important as having good
pay and even incentives (Denton, 1991; Kannan-Narasimhan, 2012; Nath, 2011; Robertson &
Brauner, 2013). If leaders want to facilitate employee acceptance of mission and vision, they
need to show that their actions align with words. Furthermore, they need to reevaluate mission and vision regularly to make sure they are up to date.

Different constructions of organizational mission by leaders and employees highlight differences in understanding of the organization and its place in society. In line with leadership literature, official statements construct the organization as an active social agent with its opportunities, challenges and responsibilities. By contrast, employees mostly see the organization as a customer-oriented, market-driven, profit generating entity. This discrepancy may lead to mismatch between what leaders expect and what members enact.

The present study is also insightful in terms of mission/vision content. Leaders should pay more attention to how the organization is unique, its position in the industry, its weaknesses, as well as possible and necessary changes. The study demonstrates that employees cannot easily identify those unique qualities that set their organization apart. Extensive research (Brewer, 1991; Pickett, Silver, & Brewer, 2002; Roberson, 2006) shows that individuals experience two conflicting needs: the need to belong and the need to feel unique. Şimşek and Yalinçetin (2010) found that personal sense of uniqueness was correlated with measures of wellbeing. Importantly, the benefits of uniqueness spread beyond an individual’s self-concept to his or her perception of the group they belong to (Pickett & Brewer, 2001; Pickett, Bonner, & Coleman, 2002). Hornsey and Jetten (2004) found that to accommodate both the need to belong and the need to feel unique, it is important to maximize group-level distinctiveness. If leaders and communication professionals could work together with employees to enhance member awareness of the organization uniqueness, members would be able to identify with the organization more easily.

Similarly, communicating the organization’s position in the industry would present employees with a picture of how the organization positions itself in relation to its competitors,
customers, partners, etc. and also what kind of industry it is. Knowing that would allow employees appreciate the organization’s priorities and values: e.g. innovation in highly-competitive IT industry, fiscal accountability in insurance, and environmentally-conscious practices in energy. The study also shows that official mission and vision statements did not include reference to any negative information such as organization’s weaknesses and possibility of difficult times. Employees, however, readily talked about possible changes their organization could implement to thrive in the future. Given employees’ concern with how true to reality mission and vision discourse is, leaders may find it helpful developing more realistic statements which would admit a possibility of mistakes, acknowledge weaknesses and express determination to work on continuous self-improvement.

Another important practical implication of the present study is related to the first-hand knowledge of the organization employees have. Their knowledge about prevailing values (i.e. the values which are actually being practiced), customers, product, internal relationships, weaknesses, etc. can significantly enrich mission and vision statements. Surprisingly, many participants in this study doubted their ability to contribute to mission and vision statements or expressed lack of interest in the process of developing them. However, those who did participate in creating the statements, reported that it was a very rewarding experience which showed that their voice mattered and also made them feel that they owned their organization. This is consistent with research on positive effects of participative leadership and decision-making (Bolden, 2011; Kim, 2002; Wright & Kim, 2004). Although getting all employees to collectively develop mission and vision may not always be feasible, leaders and communication professionals could significantly benefit from soliciting employees’ opinions both when creating mission and vision and when revamping them.
To summarize, the study reveals discrepancies between official statements and employee construction of organizational mission and vision. The stark differences between official statements and employee constructions highlight an important problem. If leaders and employees understand foundational organizational concepts differently, they will likely have difficulty cooperating with each other, which in turn will likely negatively affect the overall performance and well-being of the organization and its members.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Due to its exploratory nature, the present study had a number of limitations which at the same time open opportunities for further research. Some limitations are related to the method employed in this study. As noted earlier, I obtained the data through one on one interviews. Although the interviews provided a wealth of first-hand accounts and certainly ensured high levels of confidentiality, they did not allow me to observe the very process of how employees collectively construct mission and vision. Thus, while I could report on themes which emerged from my interviews with individuals, I was unable to separate individual perceptions from collective constructions. In that regard, future studies could employ focus group interviews which would provide information about how employees negotiate the organization’s mission and vision in a group, how mission and vision evolve in discussion, and how employees transform and modify official statements.

Additionally, I compared employees’ responses to mission and vision statements found on organizational Web sites. For the purposes of the present study, I viewed those statements as representations of leaders’ constructions. In those cases when participants knew exactly the origin of the statements, they noted that their organization’s official statements were written by leaders or executive teams. However, a few participants pointed to the disconnection between
their current leadership and official statements. In some organizations leaders exhibited behavior which was at odds with the statements, in others the statements on the Web sites were the heritage of the former leaders no longer working at the company. Such comments indicate a possibility of discrepancies not only between leaders and employees but also between leaders and statements on Web sites. I encourage future research to interview employees and leaders to see how they construct mission and vision. The comparison of employee versions and leader versions to official statements on organizational Web sites and in publications may well uncover three different constructions: how employees view mission and vision, how leaders view mission and vision, and how mission and vision are presented in official documents.

Other limitations of the present study are related to the sample. For the purposes of initial exploration of how employees construct mission and vision a very diverse group of participants coming from different industries and kinds of organizations allowed me to identify a broad range of themes. Further research may focus on certain kinds of organizations (e.g. for-profit vs. non-profit) or specific participant characteristics (e.g. old-timers vs. new-comers) to see if there are any correlations between them and vision/mission constructions. The size of the organization may also be an important factor in how its employees view mission and vision. Some of my participants encouraged me to compare small and large organizations. Specifically, when we talked about how employees viewed their role in creating mission and vision, a few participants noted that in large organizations it would not be feasible to engage every employee into that process. More research would help identify if the size of the organization can facilitate or impede employee involvement.

This study’s method prevented analysis of cause-effect relationships. Although I identified many broad and narrow themes in employee constructions, I did not yet answer the
question why employees viewed their mission and vision the way they did. Possible explanations presented in this dissertation are only first attempts to cast light on a largely under-studied subject. Future research would further our understanding of why employees construct mission and vision differently from official statements.

Furthermore, this study addresses many important aspects of mission and vision constructions raise questions for further exploration. The following four areas are only some of the avenues for future research.

First, this study highlights the problem of organizational uniqueness. As noted earlier, organizations do not talk in their statements about what makes them unique. They also avoid talking about their weaknesses or mistakes. In addition, employees struggle when trying to identify unique qualities of their organizations. In fact, employees often believe that excellent customer service sets their company apart from everybody else. It remains unclear why the widely spread value of excellent customer service is perceived as a unique quality. Is it because employees observe that despite much talk only their organization truly does care about customers? Or is it because employees do not hear much else besides customer care in their organization? Given how important are perceptions of organizational uniqueness for employee identification, more research would cast more light on this important subject.

Second, the study raises the question of vision/mission continuity. Further research could look into what happens to mission and vision in times of change. In this study I report employees’ concerns with the inability of leadership to ensure continuous development after a vision is achieved. Employees also noted cases when an old vision was still the actual guiding force despite the new vision already in place. I also identified instances when deteriorating economic conditions force organizations to change priorities thus rendering existing mission and
vision irrelevant. Further research would provide more information about what happens to mission and vision when internal and external conditions change.

Third, the study demonstrates that employees possess knowledge about the real life of their organization. That is why employees’ insights can be a valuable contribution to mission and vision when statements are written or revamped. Owing to extant research, we know a lot about who visionary leaders are. It would be very useful if future studies could look into the concept of visionary followers, i.e. employees who have both knowledge and inspiration to help leaders formulate organizational culture.

Fourth, from a critical perspective the present study demonstrates how mission and vision can function as a means of unobtrusive control. In this regard, alternative employee constructions of official mission and vision can be a way to resist this control. Further research could uncover how employees resist dominant discourses through constructing fundamental concepts of organizational culture (such as mission and vision) in their own terms.

Overall, this dissertation addresses many important aspects of organizational life related to how members see the present and future of their organizations. It also highlights potential areas of future research which could make valuable contributions to both theoretical and practical dimensions of organizational communication.


Brewer, M. B. (1991). The social self: On being the same and different at the same time.


Wright, B. E., & Kim, S. (2004). Participation’s influence on job satisfaction: The importance of


APPENDIX

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The protocol below includes a list of questions which guided interviews with participants. They served as general guidelines to keep discussions on track. However, in line with the “active interview” approach (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997), I considered participants as co-creators of meaning. I welcomed their input into what topics need to be discussed.

Because vision is grounded in mission, I started with questions about mission.

**Interview Protocol Project:** Employee Constructions of Organizational Mission and Vision.

Time of Interview/Date/Place: to be discussed with interviewees

Interviewer: Kopaneva, Irina

Interviewees: Before starting interviews, the participants were asked to decide whether they wanted to go by real or pseudo names.

Hello, my name is Irina. I am a graduate student at WSU. Currently, I am working on my dissertation in which I look at how employees perceive of and talk about their organization’s purpose for being, as well as current and future goals. I hope to learn what you think about the present and future of your organization and how you talk about that with your coworkers.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project. Your participation is very much appreciated. Before we start the interview I would like to reassure you that as a participant you have several very definite rights:

First, your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary.

You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time.

You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time.
The interview will operate on full confidentiality and will be available only to members of the research team, i.e. to me and my supervisor. Like I said before, I will audio record our discussion today. I want to make sure I capture your thoughts, ideas, and opinions. I will destroy the tapes once I transcribe them. In my analysis I will use pseudo names for you and I encourage you all to use pseudo names today. To protect anonymity of other people who may be mentioned in the interview it would be great if you could change their first names and avoid using their last names or the name of your company. Anything you say here is strictly confidential. I will not be telling other people outside of this room what you said. Excerpts of this interview may be part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will I include identifying characteristics in this report.

Before we begin the interview, I would like to ask you to fill out a short demographic survey which will give me a general idea of categories of people who took part in my research.

**Demographic Data**

Your pseudo name:_____________

Gender:__________

Age:____________________

Ethnic group:______________

Position in the organization:_____________

Tenure in the organization:_____________

Department:______________

Industry:______________

Thank you! Let us begin our interview.

**Mission**
RQ (a): When asked to reflect about the components of their organization’s mission (such as the reason for being, uniqueness of the organization, changes, customers, clients, market segments, products, services, and economic concerns), how do they construct them?

What is the reason for being of your organization?
How is your organization unique?
What changes should be made for the organization and its people to thrive?
How do you see the importance of customers/clients?
How do you see the importance of your organization’s market segments, products, and services?
What general economic concerns does your organization have?

RQ (b): When asked to reflect about their organization’s more specific values related to its present operations, how do employees construct them?

What values does your organization uphold in its daily operations?
Do you agree that those are the values the organization should uphold? If not, what values do you think should be important for the organization?

RQ (c): When asked to reflect about their organization’s mission, how do employees construct the ownership of the mission?

Who is the author of the mission? What do you think of the author?
How do you see your role in creating and implementing the mission?

Vision

RQ (d): When asked to reflect about the future state of the organization, how do employees construct it?

If you think about an ideal future state of your organization towards which it strives, what is it?
How desirable is it for you?
How achievable is it?

**RQ (e): When asked to reflect about their organization’s general values related to its ideal state, how do employees construct them?**

What values should the organization uphold to reach the ideal state in the future?

How do they correlate with your personal values?

**RQ (f): When asked to reflect about the authorship/source of the organization’s vision, how do employees construct it?**

Who wrote the vision? What do you think of them?

If you had a chance, would you somehow change the vision or keep it the way it is? Why? How?

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to answer my questions. I appreciate your help. If you have any questions or comments, feel free to ask me now or contact me by e-mail (ikopaneva@wsu.edu). Now I will start analyzing your responses. If I want to ask you more questions, would you consider taking part in a follow-up interview and perhaps, answer my questions by e-mail? What would be the best way to contact you? Thank you again. You have been very helpful.