



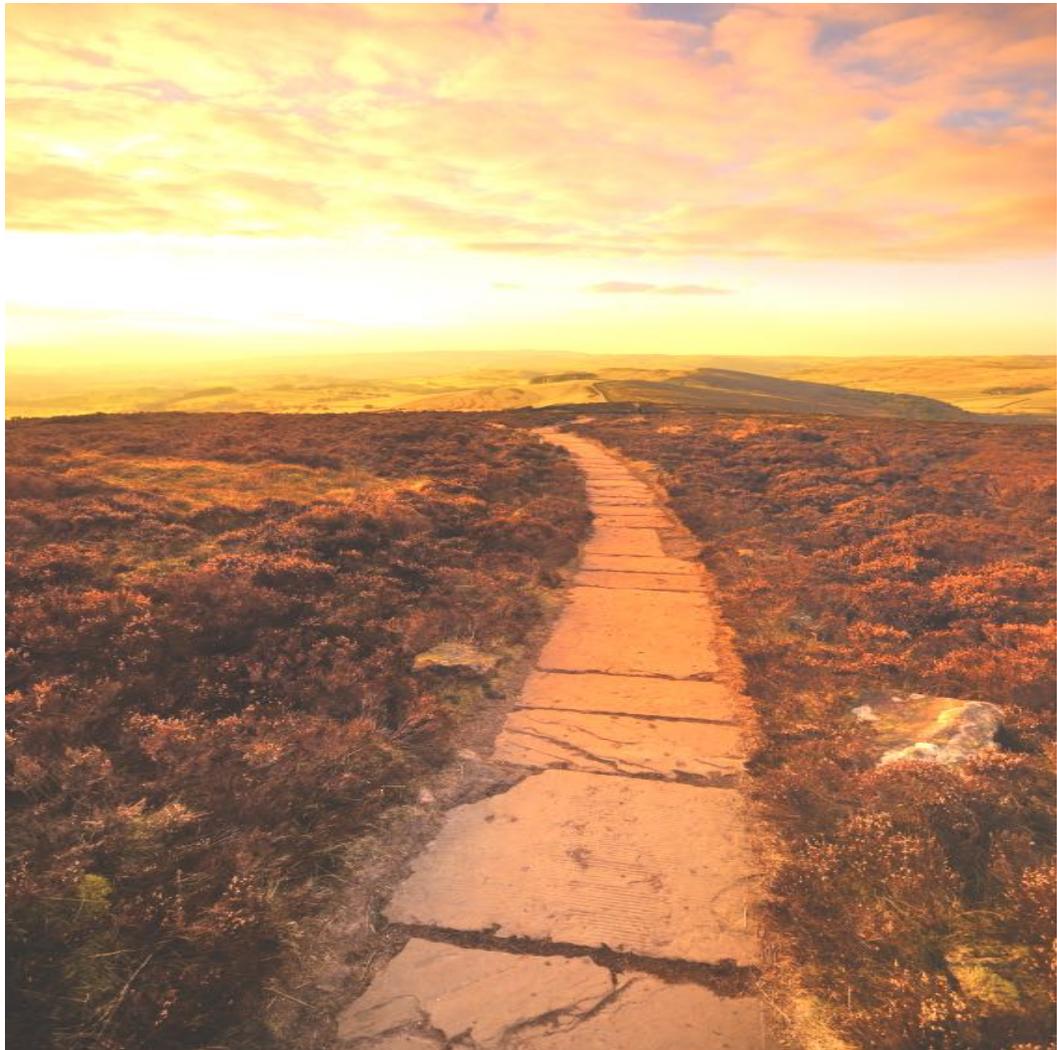
Center for World-Changing Organizations

Strengthening organizations that make the world better

#3 In Our Guides & Workbooks Series

Guiding Statements Guide

Core Values, Mission, and Vision



By Jonathan Reed, PhD

***Never doubt that a small group
of thoughtful, committed people
can change the world.***

Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

— Margaret Mead

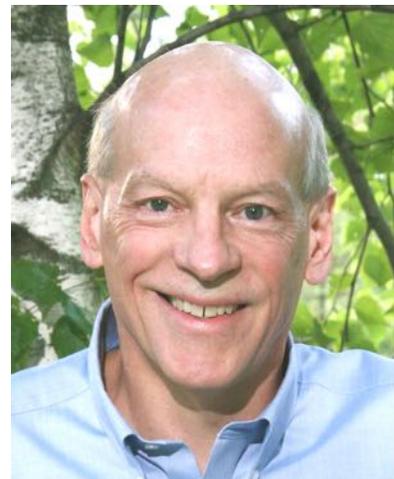
Jonathan Reed, PhD, the Center's founder, has an unusual background for a management consultant. After completing his doctorate in the biological sciences at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, he served there as an Honorary Fellow and Lecturer. He then founded The University Group, a private consulting firm representing sixty-five leading faculty at UW—Madison.

When clients began asking him to consult with them, he discovered he enjoyed consulting more than managing a consulting firm. So he started advising clients on his own. Since then, he has worked for a broad range of corporations, governmental institutions, nonprofits, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) both in the US and abroad.

Along the way, he co-authored *A Systems Handbook: An Introduction to the Systems Age* for GE Medical Systems, consulted for USGS Science Centers for seven consecutive years, and helped lead the Conservation Science Division of The Nature Conservancy.

He also has worked on international development projects in Afghanistan, the former Soviet Union Republic of Georgia, and Trinidad. One of the projects that he served as lead consultant received a national quality award.

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#3 Guiding Statements Guide Core Values, Mission, and Vision

This guide explains why core values, mission, and vision statements are the best statements to state the intentions and guide the strategies of organizations making a difference in their communities and the world.

Many world-changing organizations¹ still use corporate-style mission, vision, and values statements to define themselves. Doing so can create a shaky conceptual foundation for them. Management theorists designed them for companies whose primary purpose is to maximize shareholder value—typically by boosting profits.

Maximizing shareholder value defines their underlying mission, guides strategies, and success.² Corporate visions reflect financial success and industry leadership. And their values, which usually have no bearing on mission and vision, promote ethical business behavior.

World-changing organizations are different. Though they all want to make the world better, what they do and how they measure success varies widely. Hence, there is no equivalent to *maximizing shareholder value* as a universal measure of success. The *impact* they make aligned with their missions and visions defines their success.

The main difference between mission-based and profit-driven organizations is what drives them. *Core values* drive a world-changing organization: its mission, vision, and the *passion* of its supporters and employees.

Unfortunately, most management books and consultants still advise all organizations to define themselves first by mission, next vision, and last values. Mission-driven organizations should reverse this order.

Guiding statements declare what an organization values, does, and plans to accomplish. They provide the same clarity of purpose and strategic guidance to a core-values-driven organization as *maximizing shareholder value* does for a profit-driven one. The figure below illustrates the difference between these statements.

This is the third in our *Guides and Workbooks Series* to help purpose-driven leaders and managers build more successful and better-funded organizations. The subjects of our guides are *strategic planning, guiding statements, strategic marketing, branding, leadership, and management*.



They are based on our research and work with organizations such as General Electric Medical Systems, Rexnord Aerospace, The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Geological Survey, and U.S. Agency for International Development; as well as smaller organizations. We list our guides at the end of this document.

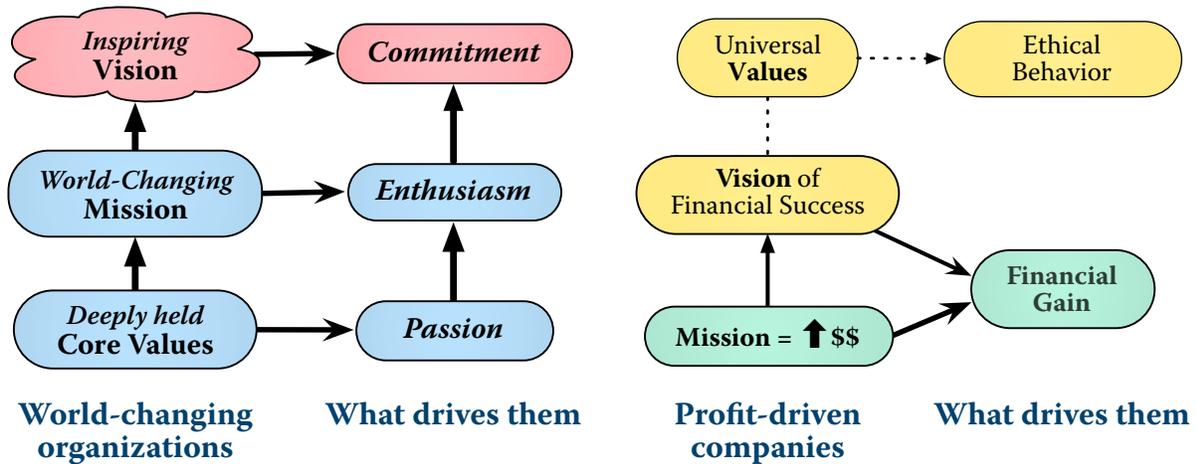


Fig. 1. Guiding statements of world-changing vs. profit-driven organizations

Key Recommendations

- Use **world-changing core values, mission, and vision statements** to define and guide your organization.
- **Identify your core values first.** Your ideas about how to improve your community or change the world, as well as your organization’s mission and vision all spring from its core values.
- **Decide what your organization intends to accomplish** before reviewing your mission.
- **Consider developing specific mission and vision statements.** They are usually clearer and more compelling than broad, sweeping ones for all but large organizations.
- **Write your guiding statements for specific audiences,** including current and future board members and employees, as well as clients, funders, and supporters. If the general public understands them and finds them compelling—great, but your success doesn’t depend on them.
- **Different ways to convey your guiding statements.** How you declare your core values, mission, and vision is up to you. Some organizations list them as three separate statements; others combine them into one statement, which they often entitled “Who we are and what we do.” If you decide to use a single statement, the following construction might be helpful: *“Compelled by our ... [a distillation of your core values], we intend to ... [vision of what you intend to accomplish] by ... [the main ways you accomplish your mission and vision].”*

Statement of Core Values



Your organization's core values influence everything it stands for and does. They are the source of passion and conviction that holds it together and drives everything it does. They are the source of its unique character. Therefore, we recommend you review or draft your core values before your vision and mission.

Statement of Core Values. The few deeply held principles and beliefs that the organization's guiding members, supporters, and staff:

- Are most passionate about.
- Are the source of their commitment to the organization and its mission.
- Believe at least one of which distinguishes the organization from others in its field, and is the principal reason people support and work for it instead of other institutions.³

Try to identify the three-to-five essential values that capture what your organization stands for and guide what it does. The fewer you list; the more weight each one will carry. Don't make a laundry list of a dozen or so "core" values.

If you identify more than five or six core values, combine similar ones, and toss out the less important ones. If you have trouble doing so, look deeply into your organization's values, principles, and beliefs.

Some Zen traditions distinguish between live words and dead words. A live word is a gut word; a concrete word that resonates with meaning. A dead word is from the head; a dry, lifeless word meant to explain. Use live words to name your core values. Look to the source of why your organization is passionate about certain causes and conditions to determine its core values. If necessary, recall the recent issues and decisions that generated the most passion in your organization, and identify the underlying principles and beliefs behind this passion.

If a core value doesn't quite capture the essence of what you want it to, examine its roots. Years ago Toyota developed "**The Five Whys**" to determine the root cause of a problem. Toyota employees are trained to ask *why* a mistake happened up to five times to identify its underlying cause. The source of a problem is rarely more than five causal links away from the problem. Similarly, you can use the *five whys method* to uncover the sources of what your organization is most passionate about.

Organizations usually identify one of three types of values:

Core Values. Defined above.

Guiding Principles. Widely held assumptions about the way an ethical organization should behave and how employees should conduct themselves as representatives of the organization.

Operating Principles. Specific guidelines about how employees should conduct their work. Operating principles often restate industry standards and best practices.

Core values are far more important to a mission-driven organization than guiding or operating principles. If your organization needs a set of guiding or operating principles, develop them after you review or draft your guiding statements.

The values statements of most companies are similar. They espouse universal values such as integrity and honesty to guide ethical business behavior. Rarely do they connection to a company's mission or vision, and thus are usually presented last. The opposite is true for purpose-driven organizations. An organization's world-changing ideas, mission, and vision all emanate from its core values.

Before reviewing your mission statement, consider if it might be easier to define what you intend to accomplish by acting on your core values—your vision—before your mission.

Vision Statement

Vision Statement. A compelling description of what the organization plans to achieve eventually by acting its core values.⁴

A vision statement declares an organization's long-term intentions about what it intends to accomplish. Its goals state what it wants to achieve in the next three-to-five years. And milestones describe what the organization needs to complete in the next year or two to accomplish its goals.

Your vision and goals should be compelling—inspiring everyone associated with your organization to strive to reach them. Specific visions can be particularly inspiring. Two powerful long-term vision statements are in the endnotes: one from the book *Three Cups of Tea* and the other of the Native Village of Wainwright's Traditional Use Area Conservation Plan on Alaska's North Slope.⁵ (We're aware of the controversy surrounding *Three Cups of Tea*.) Both paint a clear picture of what these organizations intend to accomplish.



If the organization's vision paints a *broad* picture of what it hopes to achieve in the long run, consider narrowing it. An expansive view neither portrays a clear portrait of what it intends to accomplish nor gives planners a sense of their organization's strategic direction. Guiding statements should do just that: guide the organization's strategy and activities.

Mission Statement



A mission statement should do more than just stating the organization's purpose. It should also guide its strategies and decisions by indicating what it does and who or what benefits from its activities. Therefore, we define a mission as:

Mission Statement. A clear and compelling statement of:

- **The organization's purpose**—the reason it exists.
- **What makes it unique.**
- **Who or what benefits from its purpose.** If it isn't obvious who or what benefits from its work, state it. If its purpose is to serve others, identify them. If it's to advance new ideas or methods, state them.
- **What it does.** Consider including what your organization does—the main ways it fulfills its purpose and vision.⁶

There is no formula to draft a mission statement, nor is there an ideal length. Goodstein, Nolan, and Pfeiffer⁷ favor comprehensive mission statements up to 100 words. We believe you should use as few or as many words as you need to create a clear and compelling mission statement. Some organizations can capture the essence of who they are and what they do in a sentence or two. Others take a full paragraph or more to convey it effectively.

Boards and planning teams often strive to develop the shortest possible mission and vision statements. Short, snappy mission and vision statements that seem precise and uncluttered on the first read often turn out to be vacuous on closer inspection. Though *end poverty as we know it* or *save the rain forests* types of mission statement seem noble, they don't offer a clue to what an organization should do.

If you can capture your organization's mission in a short statement, consider yourself fortunate—and a gifted writer. If not, don't worry about length. Focus on substance and inspiring readers to take action. Short mission statements are apt to meet Dilbert's (Scott Adam's cartoon character) definition of a mission statement:

Dilbert's Definition of a Mission Statement. A long awkward sentence that demonstrates management's inability to think clearly.

Boundless mission statements are an open invitation to your organization's guiding members to pursue pet projects or possibly hidden agendas. Because most core-values-driven organizations are inclusive and participatory, a lot of time can be spent pondering the merits of what are essentially *off-the-wall* proposals. If your mission is precise, you can simply dismiss them.

More about Mission Statements

Mission Statements Have Consequences

Consider the implications to NASA when in 2006, during the waning years of the Bush Administration, administration-appointed officials ominously dropped the opening phrase, “To understand and protect our home planet” from its mission statement. It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to get the message: stop wasting taxpayers’ money on frivolous climate change research.

What a Mission Statement Isn’t

A mission statement isn’t a marketing slogan, a catchy tagline (like Star Trek’s: “To boldly go where no man has gone before”), or its core message (an elevator speech that briefly explains what’s unique and exciting about an organization. Our *Strategic Marketing Guide* defines these other statements.

Revise, Revise

Keep sharpening your mission and other statements until they’re right. When we help clients clarify their statements, we usually go through many revisions before they’re right. We don’t do this because we’re compulsive word-smithers: it’s because we’re gradually discovering the organization’s true nature. Seemingly minor changes in wording often reveal new insights about an institution. Sometimes changing a single word can alter its entire meaning. Consider the implications of changing “a” to “the” as in “a leader in its field” to “the leader in its field.”

Eight Criteria to Evaluate Your Mission Statement

We adapted the following criteria to evaluate a mission statement from Goodstein, Nolan, and Pfeiffer.⁸ Check your mission statement against these eight criteria:

- It reflects your core values.
- Employees and supporters understand it.
- Employees and supporters feel inspired and energized when they read it.
- It is brief enough, so staff and supporters remember the gist of it.
- It clearly describes the organization’s purpose.
- It reflects what makes your organization unique.
- It strikes the right balance between being broad enough to promote flexibility in how one carries out the mission but sufficiently precise to establish strategic focus.
- Leaders and managers use it as a basis to formulate strategies and plans, and make decisions.

A Cautionary Tale about Vacuous Mission Statements



Guess what company released this mission statement around 1980?

The fundamental purpose of the _____ Corporation is to provide products and services of such quality that our customers will receive superior value, our employees and our business partners will share in our success, and our stockholders will receive a sustained, superior return on their investment.⁹

Unless you're familiar with this infamous mission statement, there's no way of knowing even the company's industry. We consider it the perfect archetype of the generic mission statement: anonymous, vacuous, impersonal, lifeless—machinelike. Some management consultants in the 1970s and 1980s admonished clients about the dangers of tightly focused, specific mission statements.

Some claimed railroad companies nearly folded at the end of the nineteenth century was because they defined their missions too narrowly. Apparently, railroads would have thrived if they just recognized that they were in the broader transportation business instead of the steel-rail business. The start of long-distance trucking apparently wasn't a factor. This "dire" tale of mission nearsightedness and others convinced many organizations to adopt broad or even generic mission and vision statements.¹⁰

... one more thing

You will know you've got a sound mission statement when people in your organization often refer to it in meetings and discussions—as in, "Well, that idea seems to fit with our mission because ..." This doesn't mean that they've memorized it; it means they "get it."

More about Vision Statements

Your Vision Is Your North Star

Think of your organization's vision as its *North Star*—a bright, fuzzy star above the horizon. It's fuzzy because it's shining back from your organization's desired future, not the future that's likely to be there in, say, ten years from now. Too many things can happen between now and then to predict accurately or plan carefully for that future.



Even a distant North Star can help your organization set its strategic compass to true north (establish its *strategic direction*) and chart a course to its destination (determine the best strategies to pursue to reach its goals and vision). Setting your strategic direction is one of the surest ways to prevent *mission drift*—a gradual shift in strategy away from accomplishing an organization's mission and vision.

Probable versus Bold Visions

We believe visions should represent an ambitious or even bold stretch for an organization—but not *mission impossible*. A courageous description of what it plans to accomplish has power. It can generate the type of enthusiasm and commitment rarely seen in organizations these days. Given the crucial and time-critical missions of most world-changing organizations, ambitious or even audacious visions may serve many of these organizations well.

But declaring and then not reaching a daring future or goal can demoralize a team. One needs to carefully weigh the merits of setting their sights on a distant summit against the chances of never reaching it. A bold vision is akin to a ***Big, Hairy Audacious Goal*** (BHAG), which Jim Collins and Jerry Porras¹¹ brought into the organizational lexicon in 1994.

Example of a Specific Vision We Helped Craft for an Aerospace Client

We have encouraged some clients to draft unconventional vision statements. We once helped write a two-page, single-spaced vision statement for an aerospace client, which included a colored bar graph depicting projected sales of its major product lines for the next five years. A London-based holding company with 1,200 companies in its portfolio had recently acquired this aerospace company. This statement traveled up the company's hierarchy to its London headquarters.

London's reaction was:

1. We've never seen a vision statement that even came close to being this long and detailed.
2. We've never understood so clearly what one of our companies was intending to accomplish in five years and how it would do so.
3. We enthusiastically support this vision, but:
4. You must change the title to "Executive Summary" and draft a standard 1-2 sentence vision statement.

After making the required changes, our client went on to exceed everyone one of its five-year performance projections depicted in its new executive summary.

Advantages of Specific Mission and Vision Statements



Precise mission and vision statements, like an archer taking aim at the bulls-eye of a target, can concentrate an organization's energy and resources on what's crucial to its long-term success. Broad statements, like a caveman's bludgeon, can do the opposite. They can offer cover for an organization's guiding members to pursue pet projects or too many diverse activities for the organization to excel at any of them.

Explicit statements clearly communicate to everyone: the organization's purpose, whom it serves, and what it plans to accomplish. On the other hand, expansive missions and visions are veritable invitations to the most assertive of an organization's guiding members to put their stamp on an organization by proposing bold and sometimes risky new ventures.

At some point in an organization's evolution, its guiding members need to plot its strategic direction—pick a destination and chart the best course to get there. While it's easy to reach consensus on broad mission and vision statements, they don't provide strategic direction. One way to stop punting big decisions about what the organization needs to concentrate on down the road is to develop explicit guiding statements.

Sophisticated funders and donors understand the importance of strategic focus. The first thing they often turn to size up an organization is its guiding statements. Clear and compelling declarations that say, "This is who we are and what we do" inspire confidence.

They mark organizations that can be trusted to use resources wisely and get results. Fuzzy or excessively ambitious statements are red flags to seasoned funders who know from hard-earned experience they often mirror the organizations behind them.



FedEx and The Nature Conservancy Are Succeeding Like Hedgehogs

FedEx started changing the world as soon as it began in 1998. It never intended to become a full-service shipping company. From the outset, it focused on one thing—*overnight delivery*. By perfecting the logistics of getting a package across the country in one night, it became an overnight success.

The Nature Conservancy started in 1950. It initially protected small natural areas on the East Coast. Since then it became the largest private conservation organization in the world by sticking to what it knows best—permanently protecting wild lands in the US and thirty other countries.

FedEx and TNC changed the world by excelling at one thing. Both had what management theorists call a narrow strategic focus. Both also tapped into a pent-up but unrecognized demand: for an overnight delivery service and for a conservation strategy to permanently protect critical wild places. Both organizations grew by applying the one thing that they excelled at in different locations and in different ways instead of diversifying what they did.

In an exhaustive six-year study¹² of over 1,400 US companies published in 2001, Jim Collins and his research team discovered that the 11 corporations that made the jump from good-to-great shared several distinguishing characteristics. Chief among them was that they understood the "one big thing" that they could excel at, were most passionate about, and were a principle source of their revenues.

Collins called it their *“hedgehog concept.”* Hedgehogs apparently know how to do one thing exceeding well—rolling up into a ball to protect themselves from foxes.

The 11 comparable companies were like *foxes*—inquisitive creatures that are constantly on the move in search of prey. They kept switching strategies—through mergers, acquisitions, restructuring, and the like—always looking for new ways to maximize growth. All failed to make the leap to greatness.



We know some world-changing organizations can’t specialize in one thing. Most hospitals must provide the full range of healthcare services, universities wear many hats, and state natural resource organizations serve a wide spectrum of constituents. Yet, such organizations can build their identity and culture around what they are most passionate about and, thus, distinguish themselves from others in their field. See this endnote if you’re still not convinced your organization could benefit from explicit guiding statements.¹³

Strategic Focus

Strategic Focus. The breadth of things that an organization does to accomplish its mission and vision—the scope of the core strategies it pursues. One that excels at one or a few things has narrow strategic focus; one that tries to do many things has a broad focus. Management research indicates that narrowly focused organizations are usually more successful than broadly focused ones. A growing theme in strategic planning and marketing is “focus, focus, focus.”

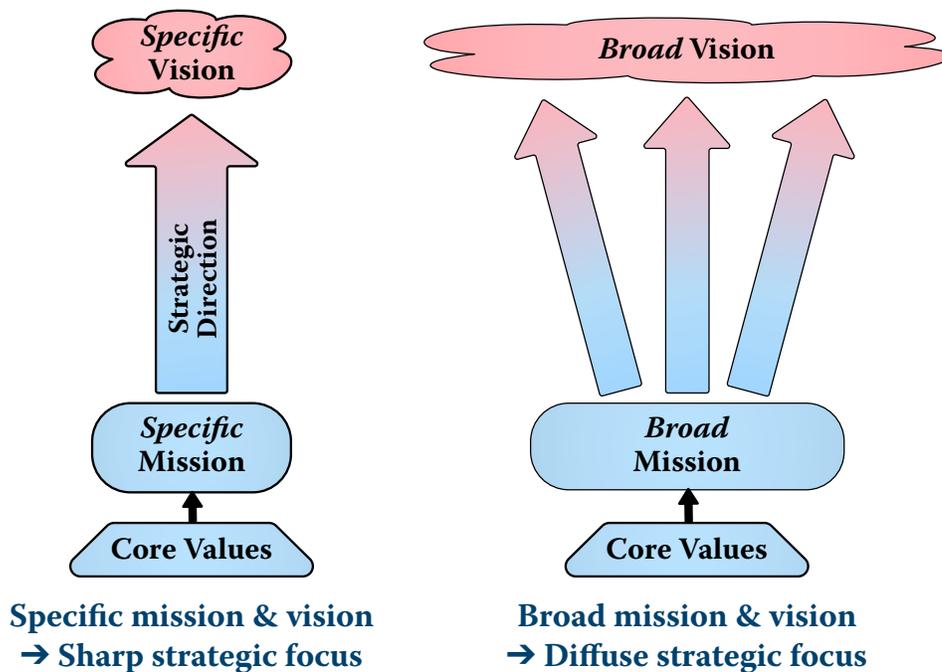


Fig. 2. How mission and vision affect strategic focus

CONCLUSION—A SHORT CASE STUDY

Terra Institute is an international-development organization specializing in land issues in developing countries. Several years ago, its executive committee asked us to help them develop a plan to recruit a new executive director and diversify its board. Terra’s founders, David and Sandie Stanfield, were retiring with the intent of passing Terra’s leadership to the next generation of international land experts.

The Stanfields and the other members of the executive committee, however, wanted to ensure that David and Sandie’s original intentions in founding Terra would still guide its work. Their primary concern was that Terra’s new leader might shift its work away from pro-poor, social-justice land projects to more lucrative technical projects, which often lack a social-justice component. Having worked on Terra projects in Afghanistan, Georgia, and Trinidad, the committee felt we understood its founders’ intentions and sought our advice on how to ensure they guided Terra’s future work.

Although David and Sandie’s *core values* had guided Terra’s work for over thirty years, they never explicitly stated them. At our meeting, we asked them and the executive committee to describe the core values that defined and guided Terra. Here’s what they came up with:

- We are dedicated to secure and equitable access to the land.
- Promoting more equitable access to land includes improving the rights of the disadvantaged in today’s world as well as ensuring the rights of future generations.
- We seek to work for and empower the disadvantaged—to advance social justice.
- We work to leave a legacy to build on by continuing to cooperate with local experts and institutions.
- We practice transparency in our work: we do what we say we will do, and we make the process of our work and outcomes visible to all.



Next, we suggested they review Terra’s mission statement, which was:

The mission of Terra Institute, Ltd. is to increase understanding and enhance community, national, and global welfare by evaluating, developing, and disseminating ideas and methods to promote widespread, secure, and equitable access to land and the sustainable use of the earth’s resources. To carry out its mission, Terra Institute conducts applied research, evaluates public and private land policies, and provides educational and technical assistance concerning economic, social and political development, legal institutions, and environmental and technology systems related to land and its uses.

Every time we read this mission statement, we found that the details of what Terra did obscured its core purpose. But as its just defined core values made it clear, its core purpose was to promote secure and equitable access among the world's poor. During the meeting, we redrafted the mission as a statement of how Terra acted on its core values to bring about positive changes in the world. We distilled its capabilities to a manageable number and identified those it served by indicating where it worked. What follows is Terra's new mission statement, which is close to the one we drafted and presented at the meeting:

The mission of Terra Institute Ltd. is to design, implement, and evaluate the most effective strategies to promote equitable and secure access to land in developing countries, post-conflict regions, and disaster areas.

Given that Terra was recruiting a new executive director and board members, the executive committee decided to postpone developing a new vision statement. As in Terra's case, clear and compelling guiding statements can capture the essence or spirit of a mission-based organization. They sum up its principles, beliefs, aims, and hopes in three tightly integrated statements. They form its conceptual foundation, establish its strategic direction, and are the basis of its strategic plans. Unlike profit-driven corporations, core values underpin everything these organizations stand for and do.¹⁴

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the veracity of Greg Mortenson's accounts of his experiences in Pakistan dampen our enthusiasm to unreservedly recommend this otherwise inspiring book.]

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** *Recommended*

* *Highly recommend*

ENDNOTES

¹ **World-changing organizations** are committed to making the world a better place. They work at all geographical scales—from local communities to globally. They are for-profit companies that are committed to making a difference in the world, most nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations, and many governmental institutions. They work in many fields including science, engineering, healthcare, education, conservation, social-sector development, and the arts.

² We don't mean to imply that the only reason for-profit companies exist is to maximize their profits, or that it's the only reason people invest in and work for them. Many companies also view improving their communities and making the world a better place as part of their mission. But they all share the same underlying mission, which is to make money—usually by maximizing their profits. This mission is the primary reason people invest in and work for them.

³ **Values.** There are many definitions of values in the management literature. A few writers define core values. Of the three values statements we paraphrase below, the first comes closest to our notion of core values.

A few *essential and enduring guiding principles*—Collins and Porras, *Built to Last*, 222.

Organizational values that *guide an organization's conduct and influences its desired future*—Goodstein, Nolan, and Pfeiffer, *Applied Strategic Planning*, 14.

“... *how we expect to travel to where we want to go*”—that influences an organization's daily operations—Senge, et al., *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, 302.

“Values” can be defined from various perspectives. In ethics, a value is defined as “any object or quality desirable as a means or as an end in itself” (Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)). In social movement theory, it is defined as “what a group perceives as desirable and what is undesirable—what is good and what is bad” (Ibid.). We define values as “an interlocking set of beliefs that reflects a particular way of understanding and living in the world, which bring meaning to one's life and shape one's goals and behavior.”

⁴ **Vision.** Below we paraphrase how other management writers define a vision:

An idealized image of *an organization's future that highlights its purpose, what makes it unique, and what it can accomplish*—Goodstein, Nolan, and Pfeiffer, *Applied Strategic Planning*, 38-39.

An external vision of *how the organization wants to be perceived when it accomplishes its 3-10 year goals*—Kaplan and Norton, *Strategy Maps*, 34-35.

A present tense description of having achieved what an organization set out to accomplish, and the path it took to do so—Senge, et al., *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, 302.

A specific description of an organization's future when it succeeds—Wikipedia article on *Strategic Planning* under heading “*Mission Statements and Vision Statements*,” accessed on 2007-8-6.

⁵ Greg Mortenson describes a powerful vision in his book, *Three Cups of Tea* (p. 38), of building a large teaching hospital in Tanzania ten years before it was built. (We are aware of the controversy

about the veracity of Mortenson's accounts in this book.) The Native Village of Wainwright Traditional Use Area Conservation Plan on Alaska's North Slope drafted on April 16, 2004 describes another specific and powerful vision of the future. This vision statement is imbued with Inupiat core values. The Village posted at:

http://www.nature.org/wherework/northamerica/states/alaska/files/wainwright_text.pdf.

Vision Statement

We the Inupiat people of the Native Village of Wainwright envision a future for our children to continue to learn our Inupiat way of life, remaining strong in our subsistence traditions and way of life. Since time-immemorial this culture and tradition have been passed from one generation to the next, taught and passed on by the elders. Through design, development, and implementation of the Native Village of Wainwright's Traditional Use Area Conservation Plan (TUACP), we will accomplish this vision. Our first priority is the conservation of our resources and protecting our cultural way of life. We the Inupiat people are the first conservationists of the land for thousands of years.

Integration of Traditional Ecological Knowledge and western science will create the tools for this project. The TUACP will be used to protect the subsistence use areas that have been used as traditional use areas for thousands of years. The TUACP will also be used as an educational tool to be added to the school's core curriculum, teaching them the values, traditions, and conservation of their traditional use areas. If we are to encourage participation by the residents, it must start at home with our children, to foster and nurture the next generation of wildlife and habitat conservationists. Habitat is the key for the Inupiat peoples' cultural survival.

The TUACP will serve as a formal plan to be presented to the Bureau of Land Management and other interested parties that wish to conduct business in and around Wainwright's traditional use area. We the Native people of Wainwright understand that economic development provides jobs for the people and revenue for the North Slope Borough and State of Alaska. But development must be done appropriately and sustainably with respect for the land and Inupiat peoples of the Arctic who depend on this area for their cultural and subsistence needs. When there is a proposal for land or resource development, the developers must keep in mind the sacred values of the Inupiat people. One of our greatest beliefs is we do not own the land, but the Inupiat is one with the land. When traveling or camping on it we must show respect for the land at all times.

⁶ **Mission.** Below we paraphrase how other management writers define a mission:

A brief statement of why an organization exists, what it does and why it does it, and who it serves—Goodstein, Nolan, and Pfeiffer, *Applied Strategic Planning*, 169.

An organization's ideals, what makes it unique, and what it does described in a way that excites, inspires, and can be used to assess its progress in achieving its ideals—Ackoff, Magidson, and Addison, *Idealized Design*, 51 and 57).

An internally focused statement of *why an organization exists, its purpose, and the values that guide employees' behavior*—Kaplan and Norton, *Strategy Maps*, 34.

The reason an organization exists: its purpose—Senge, et al., *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, 303.

An inspirational statement of *an organization's purpose and ultimate goal, and that identifies its strengths, the needs of those it serves, and what it believes*—Drucker, *Managing the Nonprofit Organization*, 7-8.

Shared intention that unites people to make the world a better place—Ed Pusz, in the Foreword to Holland's *Branding for Nonprofits*, xi.

⁷ Goodstein, Nolan, and Pfeiffer, *Applied Strategic Planning*, 188.

⁸ Ibid., 187-188.

⁹ Answer: General Motors, circa 1980.

¹⁰ Collins, *Good to Great*.

¹¹ Collins and Porras (*Built to Last*, 9) coined the term “*Big Hairy Audacious Goals*” (BHAGs) to characterize daring, bold goals that “visionary companies” use to excite and inspire those who will undertake them.

¹² Collins, *Good to Great*.

¹³ [The Allure and Perils of Broad Mission and Vision Statements](#)

Broad mission and vision statements are appealing and inclusive. They welcome everyone and every idea into their big tent. Who could quibble with saving the rain forests or ending poverty as we know it or finding the cure for cancer? Such inspiring proclamations must surely set the stage for world-changing success. They don't. They're a death knell, not a clarion call.

Most leadership teams and boards of organizations with broad guiding statements have a multitude of strategic options available to them. Many are compelled to pursue too many diverse strategies and programs ever to be successful.

The danger of broad or ill-defined missions and visions entrap an organization's leadership team and board into a devil's bargain. To maintain harmony, a planning team might agree to launch a range of new programs proposed by its members, who are members of the organization's leadership team and board. But the cost to the organization of doing so might be steep: An organization that tries to do too many things usually fails to do any of them well. Expansive mission and vision statements invite such a bargain.

Having worked with many leadership teams and boards in the private, nonprofit, and public sectors, we have found that broad and seemingly uplifting statements of purpose sometimes mask deep fissures in leadership teams and boards. Here are some potential perils of vast mission and vision statements:

Strategic dispersion. They entitle organizations to dabble in too many things and spread their resources too thinly over too many activities to succeed at any of them.

Organizational Rorschach inkblot tests. They enable each of the organization's guiding members to project and justify his or her ideas and agendas onto the organization. The most assertive and strongly opinionated guiding members of the organization usually run the show.

A failure to communicate. Such statements rarely describe what the organization does or

intends to accomplish.

Divisiveness. Instead of focusing guiding members' creativity and experience on how best to carry out the organization's overall strategy, they shift their focus to the much broader and potentially divisive topic of what overall strategies to pursue. This change of focus can cause leadership teams and boards to fracture into small and sometimes divisive (or even warring) camps. To accommodate all factions, planning teams often end up pursuing many diverse programs. Again, when organizations spread their resources too thinly over too many programs, they guarantee their mediocrity.

Red flags. Individuals, granting agencies, and foundations with the means to provide significant support to organizations are often the most astute at measuring them up. We suspect that instead of being inspired by lofty mission statements and grand visions, most would see red flags that warn of mission impossible.

An organization's purpose and aims determine the scope of its activities. We and many management researchers believe that organizations that focus on and excel at one or a few things are likely to be more successful than those that try to do many things. A narrow strategic focus enables the organization to acquire the knowledge and specialized skills to excel at what it does—and explain who it is and what it does to its target audiences. Strategically focused organizations are likely to attract more attention and funding. They are usually better places to work than those that dabble in many things.

¹⁴ David Stanfield, founder and president of Terra Institute, gave me permission to use this information in our guides.

THE CENTER'S SERVICES AND RESOURCES

Presentations, Workshops and Training

- **Presentations at leadership meetings, retreats, and annual gatherings** to learn about world-changing ideas and tools—and assess their potential benefits for your organization.
- **Custom workshops on specific topics.** For example, our one-day workshop, *Discover the Keys to Your Organization's Success*, explores the key drivers of your organization's success and how to improve them.
- **Training programs** on strategic planning, marketing, and leadership.

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We offer a full range of consulting services on all phases of planning, marketing, and leadership development—guidance, surveys, design, facilitation, and implementation.

Resources

- **Our Guides and Workbooks** listed below. See our website at www.wcorgs.com for details.
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#1 Strategic Planning Guide: To Make a Difference in the World ~35 pages

#2 Strategic Planning Workbook ~45 pages (not pictured below)

#3 Guiding Statements Guide: Core Values, Mission, and Vision ~20 pages

#4 Strategic Marketing Guide: To Better Understand, Engage, and Serve Those Who Determine Your Success ~45 pages

#5 Strategic Marketing Workbook ~45 pages (not pictured below)

#6 Branding Guide: To Stand Out from the Herd ~24 pages

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