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Three dimensions of effective mission implementation

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ABSTRACT

Mission statements are generally considered an important tool for strategy implementation. However, several authors have shown that there is a 'hole' in the mission theory, which in practice explains the inconsistency in mission statements in many companies because of the lack of motivation related to the mission. This article aims to bridge this gap by analysing the relationship between the mission of a company and its members' motivation. It entails an extension of the mission theory, in which three dimensions of mission development are analysed: formal, dynamic and motivational. On the basis of this framework, three forms of mission consistency are considered to explain the effectiveness of mission implementation: authenticity, coherence and integrity.

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Introduction

The relevance of the mission as a tool for strategy implementation has been advocated by several authors and ratified by various management experts (Ireland and Hitt, 1992; Michael and Pearce, 2004; Desmidt et al., 2011; Boyd et al., 2012). Considered as the starting point for most models of strategic management, the mission is commonly understood as the 'why', the raison d'être of an organisation (Suh et al., 2011; Blair-Loy et al., 2011), and a potential source of meaningful work (Michaelson et al., 2014), organisational alignment and motivation (Birkinshaw et al., 2014; Carpenter and Gong, 2016).

Some authors claim that there is an absence of a theory that explains the relationship between the mission and the motivation of an organisation's members, which, in practice, has been suggested as a potential contributor of the inconsistency that many companies show between what they declare in the mission and what they do in reality (Campbell and Nash, 1992; Richman and Wright, 1994; Bart, 1997; Bartkus et al., 2000; Cardona and Rey, 2008). However, recent research on prosocial motivation (Grant, 2008b) and its relationship with mission statements (e.g. Moss et al., 2011; Wang, 2011; Braun et al., 2012; Williams et al., 2014; Carpenter and Gong, 2016; Bastons et al., 2016; Smith, 2016; Desmidt, 2016) offers empirical evidence that can be used to fill the gap between mission statement and practice by considering a wider view of the role of motivation in mission development.

The purpose of this article is to contribute for bridging this gap by providing a more precise analysis of the concept of mission and its relationship with motivation by analysing the different dimensions of the mission and their forms of consistency.

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Mission: overview of the literature

Since the mid-70s, when Drucker (1974) proposed the concept of mission as a cornerstone in strategy development, different authors have provided contributions to the theory of corporate mission. Most of them complement each other, albeit with some differences in both their substance and their contents (Sidhu, 2003; Salem Khalifa, 2012). From the different approaches, we found three theoretical ways of understanding this concept (see Table 1).

Table 1
Mission perspectives.

Perspectives	Author	Evidence of the perspective
The mission as formal statement	Drucker (1974)	Proposes the concept of mission as an explicit answer to the fundamental question: What is our business?
	Davies and Glaister (1997)	Mission as a device to articulate the purpose of the school to its stakeholders
	Leuthesser and Kohli (1997)	Studies the content of a mission statement from a stakeholder's perspective
	Sidhu (2003)	Explores the concept of 'mission comprehensiveness' regarding the explicit formulation of mission
	Bartkus et al. (2004)	Compares the content of European, Japanese and US mission statements
	Williams (2008)	Analyses the role of mission as a communication tool
	Cochran et al. (2008)	Defines criteria for mission communication
	Biloslavo and Lynn, 2007	Studies the influence of institutional pressures on mission statement content
	David et al. (2016)	Analyses the characteristics and components of customer-oriented mission statements
The mission as dynamic practice	Pearce (1982)	Considers products, services and objectives as a fundamental part of mission
	Campbell and Yeung (1991)	Considers the mission as a set of interlocking elements that include the strategy and policies
	Bart (1997)	Distinguishes between 'mission prescription' and 'mission practice'
	Raynor (1998)	Comprehensive framework for mission within the context of market forces, core competencies, strategies and goals
	Michael and Pearce (2004)	Studies the role of mission as a third solution to agency
	Crotts et al. (2005)	Explores the role of internal processes in mission development
	Bartkus and Glassman (2008)	Studies the relationship of mission statements and mission practice from a stakeholder's perspective
	Hirota et al. (2010)	Explores the practical effect of mission implementation in corporate policies and business outcomes
	Suh et al. (2011)	Analyses the concept of 'mission fulfilment' as a practice
The mission as motivation	Kim and Lee (2007)	Studies mission attachment in employee retention
	Wright (2007)	Tests the relationship between the importance of organisational mission and employee motivation
	Cardona and Rey (2006)	Studies the personal-organisational mission complementarity and its effect on motivation
	Wang (2011)	Explores the relationship between mission-driven organisation and pro-social motivation
	Wright et al. (2012)	Analyses the relationship among leadership, motivation and mission valence
	Marimon et al. (2016)	Explores conditions of mission internalisation as a source of motivation
	Carpenter and Gong (2016)	Tests the relationship between mission matching and motivation
	Bastons et al. (2016)	Empirically researches the relationship between mission and motivation from a stakeholder's perspective
	Smith (2016)	Experimentally researches the motivational effects of mission matching
	Desmidt (2016)	Studies the relationship between perceived message quality in the mission and employee motivation

Mission as a formal statement

The first understanding of the concept of mission defines it as the essence of a business—what primarily characterises its identity— which often goes beyond making a specific product or providing a specific service. From this perspective, a mission is a formal expression of the scope of a company's activity in terms of the value brought to its customers. Ultimately, it comes down to answering the fundamental question 'What is our business?' (Drucker, 1974; Morris, 1996; Vasconcellos e Sá et al., 2011).

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