

**MISSION AND MANAGEMENT  
COMMITMENT**

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## MISSION AND MANAGEMENT COMMITMENT

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Many managers misunderstand the nature and importance of mission, while others fail to consider it at all. As far back as 1973, Peter Drucker<sup>1</sup> observed: "That business purpose and business mission are so rarely given adequate thought is perhaps the most important cause of business frustration and failure". Unfortunately, his comment is as true today as it was then.

### UNDERSTANDING MISSION

The reason for this neglect is due in part to the fact that mission is still a relatively uncharted area of management. Most management thinkers have given mission only a cursory glance, and there is little research into its nature and importance. What research there is has been devoted to analysing mission statements and attempting to develop checklists of items that should be addressed in the statement<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, a major problem is that mission has become a meaningless term - no two academics or managers agree on the same definition. Some speak of mission as if it is a commercial evangelism, others talk about strong corporate cultures and still others talk about business definitions. Some view mission as an esoteric and somewhat irrelevant preoccupation which haunts senior managers, while others see it as the bedrock of a company's strength, identity and success - its personality and character.

Despite the diversity of opinion about mission, it is possible to distinguish two schools of thought. Broadly speaking, one approach describes mission in terms of business strategy, while the other expresses mission in terms of philosophy and ethics.

The strategy school of thought views mission primarily as a strategic tool, an intellectual discipline which defines the business' commercial rationale and target market. Mission is something that is linked to strategy but at a higher level. In this context, it is perceived as the first step in strategic management. It exists to answer two fundamental questions: "what is our business and what should it be?".

The strategy school of mission owes its birth to an article, "Marketing Myopia", which appeared in the Harvard Business Review in 1960<sup>3</sup>. The author, Ted Levitt, a Harvard marketing professor, argued that many companies have the wrong business definition. Most particularly, companies define their businesses too narrowly. Levitt reasoned that a railroad company should see its business as moving people rather than railroading, an oil company should define its business as energy and a company making tin cans should see itself as a packaging business. Managers, Levitt argued, should spend time carefully defining their business so that they focus on customer need rather than on production technology.

More recently, it has become common for companies to include a statement of what their business is in the annual report. The cover of the 1988 annual report of Redland, a roofing, aggregates and construction materials company, is an example. It reads:

Spanning the  
*Roofing*  
World with  
*Aggregates*  
Construction  
*Bricks*  
Materials

The first page of the annual report of British Telecom reads: "British Telecom's mission is to provide world class telecommunications and information products and services and to develop and exploit our networks at home and overseas".

Corning Glass states: "We are dedicated to the total success of Corning Glass Works as a worldwide competitor. We choose to compete in four broad business sectors. One is Speciality Glass and Ceramics, our historical base, where our technical skills will continue to drive the development of an ever-broadening range of products for diverse applications. The other three are Consumer Housewares, Laboratory Sciences, and Telecommunications. Here we will build on existing strengths, and the needs of the markets we serve will dictate the technologies we use and the range of products and services we provide".

In contrast, the second school of thought argues that mission is the cultural "glue" which enables an organisation to function as a collective unity. This cultural glue consists of strong norms and values that influence the way in which people behave, how they work together and how they pursue the goals of the organisation. This form of mission can amount to a business philosophy which helps employees to perceive and interpret events in the same way and to speak a common language. Compared to the strategic view of mission, this interpretation sees mission as capturing some of the emotional aspects of the organisation. It is concerned with generating cooperation among employees through shared values and standards of behaviour.

IBM, in its hey day, was an example of the cultural view of mission. The company described its mission in terms of a distinct business philosophy, which in turn produced strong cultural norms and values. In his book, *A Business and its Beliefs*<sup>4</sup>, Thomas J Watson Jr described these beliefs, many of which were established by his father, and insisted that they were the central pillar of the company's success. Watson asserted: "The only sacred cow in an organisation should be its basic philosophy of doing business". For IBM, "the basic philosophy, spirit and drive of the business" lies in three concepts: respect for the individual, dedication to service and a quest for superiority in all things. The importance of other factors which contribute to commercial success, such as technological and economic resources, is "transcended by how strongly the people in the organisation believe in its basic precepts and how faithfully they carry them out".

Is it possible to reconcile these two different interpretations? Are they conflicting theories or are they simply separate parts of the same picture? We believe these theories can be synthesized into a comprehensive single description of mission. We also believe that some of the confusion over mission exists because of a failure to appreciate that it is an issue which involves both the hearts (culture) and minds (strategy) of employees. It is something which straddles the world of business and the world of the individual.

In the pages that follow we outline a framework that defines mission. The value of this framework is that it helps managers to think clearly about mission and, more importantly, it helps them to discuss mission with their colleagues. Previously, managers have had an intuitive understanding of mission. Intuition is not, however, enough. Mission needs to be managed and it can be managed better if it is clearly defined.

## **BUILDING A DEFINITION OF MISSION**

We have developed our theory of mission both through an intellectual, top down process and through discussions with managers and employees. Through this approach, we have tried to build an understanding of mission that is firmly grounded in the day-to-day realities of corporate life (see the description of the research project on the next page).

We focused on managers in companies with a strong sense of purpose and a strong culture. We wanted to know why they were committed to their organisations, and if they had a sense of the company's mission. They responded by telling us about the behaviour patterns and behaviour standards in their companies.

They brimmed with stories about why their companies were special. In Marks and Spencer, a retailer known for its high quality and value for money, employees talked about quality and value. They described the high standards they demanded of themselves and their suppliers. One manager commented: "The M&S standards were much higher than those I had worked with before. It appealed to me and I became hooked. Before I had set my standards to conform with the group of people with whom I associated. I was fairly lazy. I found at M&S I had to work harder than I had ever worked at school, but it was attractive because the standards that were set were so high and to fall short of them would be letting myself down".

They enthused about good human relations and visible management: "I have had 27 years in Marks and Spencer. What was it that appealed to me when I joined? It was that the senior levels were real people and real personalities, even for me in a relatively low position. It wasn't that I spent a lot of time with them but rather it was the apocryphal stories that were handed down to me that made me feel I had met them. The organisation had a strong personality and I could identify with the policies, people and practices of the business. The Board have enough visibility so that I have a good idea of what they want from me."

## DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH PROJECT

A research team from the Ashridge Strategic Management Centre approached 42 companies that expressed an interest in the project. These companies are listed below. Initially we asked them how they had developed and used their mission statements. However, we soon discovered that a number of the companies in our sample had a strong sense of purpose, or a strong culture, or both.

We therefore identified from the original group of companies four businesses that seemed to have a strong sense of purpose supported by a strong sense of culture. These companies were Bulmers, manufacturers of cider and soft drinks; Egon Zehnder, the Swiss-based international executive search consultancy; Marks and Spencer, the international retailing business; and Royal US, the American arm of a British insurance company.

Finally, we examined four cases where senior managers had set about developing a new mission and philosophy. One of these cases, Shell (UK) Refining, has been well documented by a variety of different researchers and we relied on their evidence. We also relied on published data for Borg-Warner, a diverse multinational corporation, since the company's efforts to create a mission have been developed into a Harvard Business School case. The Burton Breweries story has been described in a book, *By GABB and by GIBB*, published and edited by former managing director David Cox, and we tested its evidence through a number of interviews. In the other company, British Airways, we interviewed many managers and employees at different locations.

### DETAILED INTERVIEWS CARRIED OUT

Bulmers  
Egon Zehnder  
Marks & Spencer  
Royal US

### FULL CASE STUDIES

Borg-Warner  
British Airways  
Ind Coope Burton Brewery  
Shell UK Refining

### PERSONAL EXPERIENCES DISCUSSED

Akzo	Gencor	Price Waterhouse
Ashridge Management College	Grand Metropolitan	Prudential
BBA	Hanson	Rank Xerox
BOC	ICI	Royal UK
The Body Shop	LIG	Shell International
British Petroleum	Lloyds Bank	WH Smith
BUPA	Richard Lochridge Associates	Tarmac
Burmah Castrol	Mars	TI Group
Burson Marsteller	McKinsey & Co	Trusthouse Forte
Courtaulds	Metropolitan Police	Valment
First Chicago Bank	Northern Ireland Electricity	Wellcome
Ford	Portsmouth & Sunderland Newspapers	

At British Airways, staff spoke of the new pride and professionalism among employees as the result of the effort in the 1980s to build a service culture: "I feel proud to work for BA", said one individual. "People outside BA recognise the achievement, especially when they travel on the airline."

Pride and dedication was also evident in Egon Zehnder, an executive search firm. Consultant after consultant spoke of concepts and values which the company holds dear: the primacy of the client's interest, teamwork and the "one firm" concept. Mark Weedon, former managing director of the London office, explains: "We are not a group of separate profit centres. The objective is to maximise the whole. We shy away from measuring productivity. You're selling the firm, not the individual or the office. We are very different from the average search firm. It's a sort of subjugation of self." Said another consultant: "There are very few arguments here. Because? Because we all depend on each other. We're not selfish in generating work....We recognise each others' skills and we'll switch assignments or work as a team."

An employee in a large manufacturing company spoke of emotional commitment and sense of purpose. For her, the company's high standards of behaviour are epitomised by the chairman's example. She commented: "He believes that all people are equal. He's a bit paternalistic for my way of thinking but he insists on human decency and he is consistent....The company believes in treating people like human beings. There is too little of that in my life - look at the way people push past you in the street..." To this woman, working for her company is one way of supporting "human decency", a concept she values strongly.

In these companies the commitment and enthusiasm among employees seem to come from a sense of personal attachment to the principles on which the company operates. To them mission has more to do with living out behaviour standards than with achieving goals. To the managers we spoke to, their mission appeared to be to follow the standards and behaviours their companies ask of them. From this flows pride and enthusiasm. Employees are not simply conforming to peer pressure or suffering from corporate indoctrination - they are giving their personal endorsement and commitment to these standards and behaviours.

To understand why, we tried to push interviewees to articulate their feelings further. We asked questions such as: "Why are you attached to these standards? Why is the one firm concept important to you? Why is treating people well so important to you?" The answers were the same - in the blunt words of a director of Bulmers, the UK brewery and drinks business, "because it's right". Interviewees were making strong value judgements, arguing that the values and practices of their companies are morally correct. In other words, they make a connection between their own personal values and the beliefs of their companies. When these reinforce one another, people feel a deep satisfaction.

But the sense of rightness these employees feel is not restricted to a personal or moral realm. When pushed even further, some also articulate a commercial rationale. They assert that their behaviour is more effective than their competitors. They argue that their way of working is not only more personally satisfying but also superior to that of their competitors.

A consultant at Egon Zehnder explained the commercial rationale behind the Egon Zehnder philosophy: "The philosophy means you're more dedicated to the client. One has a different attitude from what you might have in another search firm....The firm bends over backwards to encourage sharing, giving advice, helping other officers around the world....In the long term, the approach produces better quality search work."

Another consultant from Egon Zehnder reinforced the link between the commercial rationale and moral rationale, showing how the two can become intertwined. "When you first come here, you get exposed to a lot of strong hype and ethics. At first it seems a bit heavy....Then you start to believe it, and that worries you, until you realise that you have to have it because of the way we try to present ourselves and our belief in quality, in confidentiality, the process of dealing with the client - that's all fundamental to ensure that you operate efficiently....I was interviewing this morning and I found myself becoming Messianic about the firm because you really believe it. I do believe it because I need it."

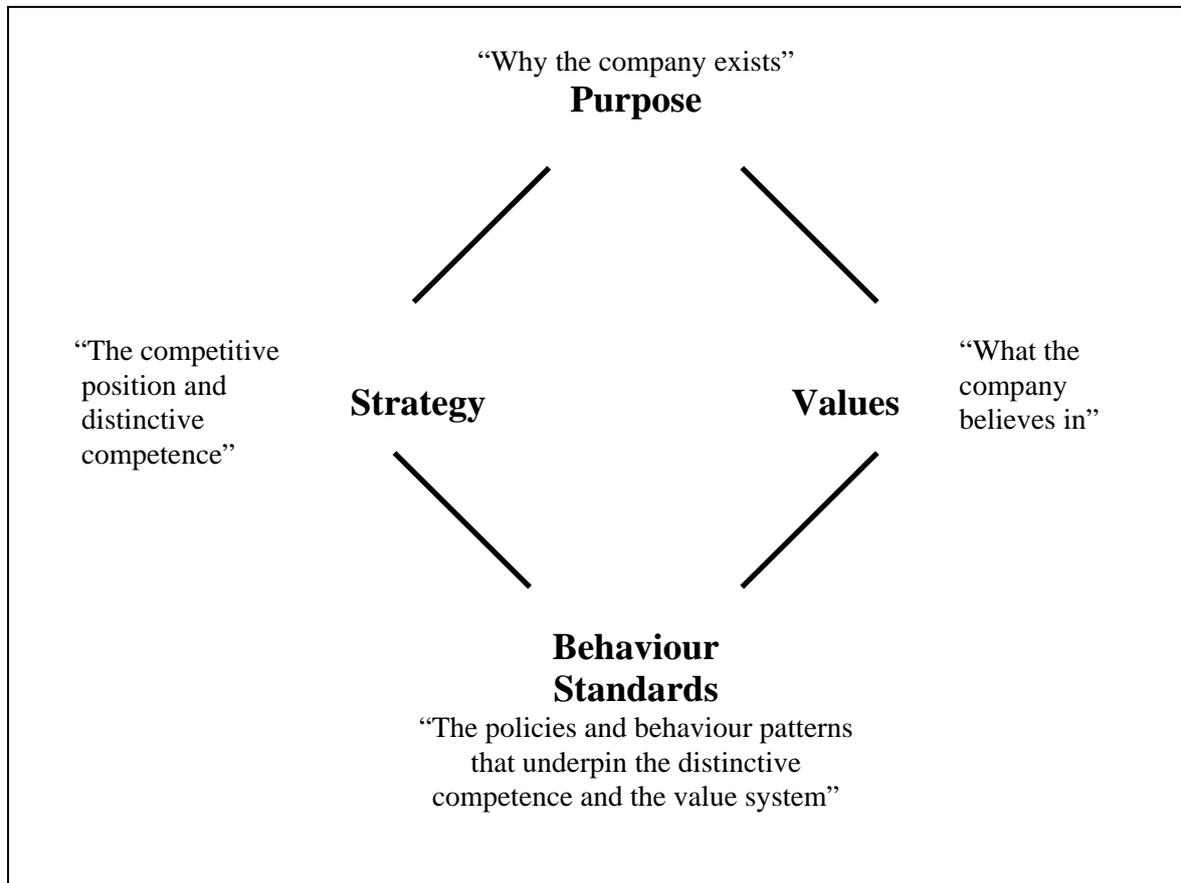
We were hearing managers talk primarily about the standards and behaviours in their companies and why these are important to them. They gave two reasons. They are committed to the standards because, to them, they are worthwhile and elevating. They are also committed to the standards because they can see the practical good sense behind them; they can see that the standards add up to a superior business strategy.

We have attempted to make sense of these responses by developing a definition of mission. Our definition, which we have illustrated in Exhibit 1, includes four elements - purpose, strategy, behaviour standards and values. A strong mission, we believe, exists when the four elements of mission link tightly together, resonating and reinforcing each other.

## **Purpose**

What is the company for? For whose benefit is all the effort being put in? Why should a manager or an employee do more than the minimum required? For a company these questions are the equivalent of a person asking "why do I exist?". The questions are deeply philosophical and can lead boards of directors into heated debate. Indeed, many companies do not even attempt to reach a conclusion about the nature of their overall purpose.

However, where there does appear to be an overall idea of purpose, companies fall into three categories. First there is the company that claims to exist for the benefit of the shareholders. For these companies the purpose is to maximise wealth for the shareholders. All decisions are assessed against a yardstick of shareholder value. Hanson, a conglomerate focused on Britain and the USA, is one example. Lord Hanson repeatedly states, "The shareholder is king". Unlike many companies whose chairmen claim to be working primarily for the shareholders, Lord Hanson believes what he says and manages the business to that end. Hence Martin Taylor, a director, feels quite free to say: "All of our businesses are for sale all the time. If anyone is prepared to pay us more than we think they are worth we will sell. We have no attachment to any individual business."



*Exhibit 1: The Ashridge Mission Model*

Most managers, however, are not as single minded as Lord Hanson. They don't believe that the company's only purpose is to create wealth for shareholders. They acknowledge the claims of other stakeholders such as customers, employees, suppliers and the community. Faced with the question: "Is your company in business to make money for shareholders, make products for customers or provide rewarding jobs for employees?", they will answer yes to all three.

The second type of company, therefore, is one that exists to satisfy all its stakeholders. In order to articulate this broader idea of purpose many of these companies have written down their responsibility to each stakeholder group. Ciba-Geigy is an example. It has published the company's business principles under four headings - the public and the environment, customers, employees and shareholders. Under the heading of the public and the environment it has five paragraphs describing principles such as: "We will behave as a responsible corporate member of society and will do our best to cooperate in a responsible manner with the appropriate authorities, local and national". For customers there are three paragraphs, employees eight paragraphs and

shareholders five paragraphs.

A less detailed statement of the company's commitment to its stakeholders is given by Monsanto: "Monsanto's continuing success requires customer enthusiasm for our products, employee dedication and skill, public acceptance of our social behaviour, and shareowner confidence and investment. Our goal is to merit their collective support and, in so doing, share with them the rewards that a truly great worldwide company can generate".

In practice it can be argued that the multiple-stakeholder view of purpose is more a matter of pragmatism than arbitrary choice. In a competitive labour market, a company which totally ignored its employees' needs would soon find its labour costs soaring as it fought to stem the tide of rising employee turnover. But what is important is the psychology of statements of purpose. Lord Hanson is saying that he is expecting his managers to put the allegiance of employees after the interests of shareholders in their list of priorities. Other companies say they have equal priority. For employees this makes them very different companies.

Managers in the third type of company are dissatisfied by a purpose solely aimed at satisfying stakeholder needs. They have sought to identify a purpose that is greater than the combined needs of the stakeholders, something to which all the stakeholders can feel proud of contributing. In short, they aim towards a higher ideal. The planning director in one company, operating in a depressed region of Britain, explained: "I don't get excited about making money for shareholders. I like to help businesses succeed. That's something I can get excited about. I believe our future depends on it - I don't just mean this company, it's about the future of the nation, even the international community - it's about world peace and that sort of thing."

At Marks and Spencer one manager described the company's purpose as "raising standards for the working man". This rings true for many others in the company who felt, particularly in the early days of Marks and Spencer and after the war, that they were improving the standard of clothing available to the average person because they were able to retail high quality goods at affordable prices.

At The Body Shop, a retailer of cosmetics, managers talk about "products that don't hurt animals or the environment". At Egon Zehnder the purpose is to be the worldwide leader in executive search. Whether these companies have an almost moral crusade, like Marks and Spencer or The Body Shop, or whether they just aspire to be the best, like Egon Zehnder, they have all reached beyond the stakeholder definition of purpose. Each stakeholder, whether shareholder, employee or supplier, can feel that doing business with the company supports some higher level goal.

We believe that leaders will find it easier to create employees with commitment and enthusiasm if they choose a purpose aimed at a higher ideal. We have met individuals committed to shareholders or to the broader definition of stakeholders, but we believe that it is harder for this commitment to grow. Purposes expressed in terms of stakeholders tend to emphasise their different selfish interests. Purposes aimed at higher ideals seek to deny these selfish interests or at least dampen their legitimacy. This makes it easier to bind the organisation together.

## **Strategy**

To achieve a purpose in competition with other organisations, there needs to be a strategy. Strategy provides the commercial logic for the company. If the purpose is to be the best, there must be a strategy explaining the principles around which the company will become the best. If the purpose is to create wealth, there must be a strategy explaining how the company will create wealth in competition with other companies.

Strategy will define the business that the company is going to compete in, the position that the company plans to hold in that business and the distinctive competence or competitive advantage that the company has or plans to create.

Egon Zehnder provides a good example of a strategy which explains how the firm will achieve its purpose. Egon Zehnder wants to be the most professional, although not necessarily the biggest, international executive search firm. Its competitive advantage comes, it believes, from the methods and systems it uses to carry out search assignments and from the "one-firm", cooperative culture it has so carefully nurtured.

Marks and Spencer's strategy in textiles is a second example. In its clothes retailing business, Marks and Spencer seeks to offer the best value for money in the high street by providing a broad range of classic quality clothes. The company's competitive advantage comes from its dedication to quality through managing suppliers, its high levels of service, and the low overheads generated by high sales per square foot.

## **Behaviour Standards**

Purpose and strategy are empty intellectual thoughts unless they can be converted into action, into the policy and behaviour guidelines that help people to decide what to do on a day-to-day basis.

British Airways provides a good example of how the company's purpose and strategy have been successfully converted into tangible standards and actions. It promotes itself as the "world's favourite airline" and declares as its aim "To be the best and most successful company in the airline industry". The strategy to achieve this is based on providing good value for money, service that overall is superior to its competitors and friendly, professional managers who are in tune with its staff. These strategic objectives are translated into policies and behaviour guidelines such as the need for in-flight services to be at least as good as those of competing airlines on the same route, and the requirement that managers and employees should be helpful and friendly at all times.

By translating purpose and strategy into actionable policies and standards senior managers at British Airways have dramatically changed the performance of the airline. Central to this effort was the training and behaviour change connected with the slogan "Putting People First".

The Body Shop, an international retailer of cosmetics, has a purpose of developing cosmetics that don't harm animals or the environment. Its strategy is to be more environmentally conscious than its competitors, hence attracting the "green" consumer and the "green" employee. Within the company, environmental consciousness has been translated into policies and behaviour standards, one of which was almost unique when first introduced. All employees have two waste paper baskets: one for recyclable products and one for ordinary garbage. Employees receive training in what can be recycled and what cannot. In the last year or two a number of other companies have introduced similar policies.

Egon Zehnder provides another example of the link between strategy and policies. Egon Zehnder's strategy is to be more professional than other executive search consultants. Connected with this it has a set of policies about how consultants should carry out assignments, called the "systematic consulting approach". One of the policies is that consultants should not take on a search assignment unless they believe it will fit the client. Another policy is that there should be a back-up consultant for every assignment in order to ensure a quality service to the client. Supporting this systematic approach are behaviour standards about cooperation. These are ingrained into the culture rather than written on tablets of stone. An Egon Zehnder consultant willingly helps another consultant within his or her office or from offices around the world. Philip Vivian, a consultant, explained this behaviour standard: "Collaboration and cooperation are very important and it is unusual in this industry. It is essential that we recognise each other's skills and switch assignments or work as a team. It is also critical for international work. We have one Japanese assignment that is being coordinated from Tokyo, Milan, Paris, London and Frankfurt. So we have to work as a team. It is also critical for international work. It doesn't always work out perfectly because of the inevitable problems of communication. But the 'one firm' concept helps. We all know we are working for the same firm - no office is going to lose out if it helps another".

The logic for the cooperation as described by Vivian is a commercial logic. The firm wants to be the best. This means being better at cooperation than its competitors. As a result it needs a behaviour standard that makes sure consultants help each other. This commercial logic is the left-brain logic of the firm.

Human beings are emotional, however, and are often driven more by right-brain motives than left-brain logic. To capture the emotional energy of an organisation the mission needs to provide some philosophical or moral rationale for behaviour to run alongside the commercial rationale. This brings us to the next element of our definition of mission.

## **Values**

Values are the beliefs and moral principles that lie behind the company's culture. Values give meaning to the norms and behaviour standards in the company and act as the right brain of the organisation. In Exhibit 2, we show how strategy and values constitute the left and right brain of

companies with a mission.

In many organisations corporate values are not explicit and can only be understood by perceiving the philosophical rationale that lies behind management behaviour. For example, consultants in Egon Zehnder believe in corporate behaviour because they are committed to the firm's strategy. But they also believe in cooperative behaviour because they feel that it is "right". Egon Zehnder people are naturally cooperative. They have been selected for that quality. They believe that people ought to be cooperative. "It makes a nicer place to work and it suits my style", explained one consultant. "And it's a better way to work", he added with the faintest implication of a moral judgement.

Egon Zehnder people can also be moral about certain aspects of the systematic approach. The policy of not taking on an assignment unless the consultant believes it is good for the client highlights a moral as much as a commercial rationale. Other executive search companies will take on any assignment, they argue. But Egon Zehnder puts the interests of the client first and will advise the client against an assignment even if it means lost revenues. It is a professional code of behaviour. As professionals they feel a moral duty to advise the client to do what is best for the client rather than what is best for Egon Zehnder. There is a commercial rationale for this behaviour, but the moral rationale is stronger.

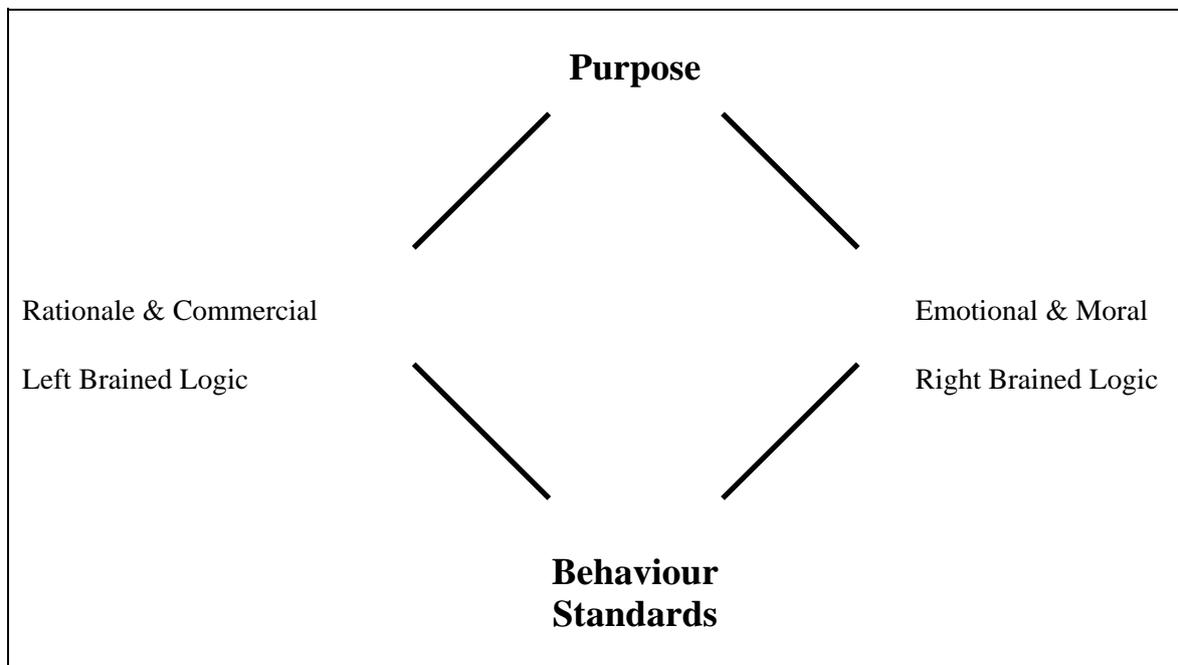


Exhibit 2: Two Reasons for Action

The same is true in British Airways. There is a good commercial reason for "Putting People First", but there is also a moral reason: we are all people and life would be better for all of us if we took a little more care with each other. This moral rationale was put high on the agenda when 35,000 British Airways staff went on the Putting People First training programmes. The new behaviours described by the trainers were presented as a philosophy of life as much as a way of improving British Airways. Participants were asked to consider how they greeted their families when arriving home as well as how they handled customers.

A third example of the way in which values can provide an additional logic for behaviour comes from Hewlett-Packard. The HP Way describes a behaviour standard made famous by Tom Peters in "In Search of Excellence: managing by wandering around (MBWA)". Hewlett-Packard's strategy has been to succeed in high value niches of the electronics industry by being better at innovation and product development. To implement this strategy HP needs to attract and retain the best engineers and product managers. These high quality individuals do not like to be closely controlled or hierarchically managed. HP, therefore, developed the MBWA policy as a management approach suitable for these kinds of high achievers. The MBWA behaviour standard is based on good commercial logic.

But MBWA has also become a crusade of its own. Managers believe it is the right way to manage not only high achievers but all personnel. MBWA is not good behaviour only because it is good strategy but also because it is something everyone should be doing. It acknowledges the innate creativity of individuals and underlines the manager's respect for people. It has been imbued with values.

The objective observer can easily identify situations, such as captaining a ship, where MBWA would be totally the wrong style of management. Yet for managers committed to the HP Way it is almost sacrosanct. Like the systematic approach at Egon Zehnder, or putting people first at British Airways, MBWA in Hewlett-Packard is not only good strategy but "the right way to behave".

These three examples show how values can provide a rationale for behaviour that is just as strong as strategy. It is for this reason that the framework in Exhibit 1 has a diamond shape. There are two rationales that link purpose with behaviour. The commercial rationale or left brain reasoning is about strategy and what sort of behaviour will help the company outperform competitors in its chosen arena. The emotional, moral and ethical rationale or right brain reasoning is about values and what sort of behaviour is ethical: the right way to behave in our society.

Our definition of mission includes both these rationales linked together by a common purpose.

## **CREATING A STRONG MISSION**

A strong mission exists when the four elements of mission reinforce each other. This is most

easily perceived by looking at the links between the strategy and the value system and whether both can be acted out through the same behaviour standards. Are the important behaviour standards central to both the strategy and the value system?

In Egon Zehnder, British Airways and Hewlett-Packard they are. We looked at only one or two behaviour standards for each company, but we would find much the same reinforcement of both strategy and values if we examined other behaviour standards. Hewlett-Packard's commercial strategy depends on attracting and keeping high quality committed employees. This means it has to demonstrate a set of values which desirable employees will find attractive. So, for example, it has an "open door" policy that encourages dissatisfied employees to approach senior managers; a policy of high integrity and open communications with stakeholders; a belief in informality and in decentralisation; a policy of promoting from within; and a commitment to teamwork. Each of these policies and behaviour standards has a rationale both in the company's strategy and in its value system. They work cumulatively to create a strong mission.

Marks and Spencer is another company where the most important behaviour standards are essential pillars of both the strategy and the value system. One of the platforms of Marks and Spencer's philosophy is good human relations. As one manager explained: "Marcus Sieff gave many presentations both in the company and outside. But he only ever gave one speech, about good human relations". Part of Marks and Spencer's strategy is to have employees who take more care, particularly in relation to customer service. By caring for employees, Sieff would argue, the company will create employees who will care for the company and its customers. As a result Marks and Spencer is famous for its services and support for employees, from the quality of the toilets to things like dental care. The policy of good human relations is a standard of management behaviour referred to by one manager as "visible management". Almost identical to Hewlett-Packard's standard of MBWA, visible management requires that managers, even at the highest level, spend time visiting stores and talking to staff and customers. As one board member explained: "In a normal week, the 12 board members will probably between them visit about 25 stores. These are not red letter days. We will just go in and talk with some of the management, supervisors and staff. It's about getting out and listening to the organisation".

In companies like Egon Zehnder, Marks and Spencer and Hewlett-Packard, the management philosophy and value system dovetail with the strategy so that the company's policies and behaviour standards reinforce both the strategy and the philosophy. The whole has integrity. These companies have strong mission. Strong missions come, therefore, from a clear fit between the four elements in the framework.

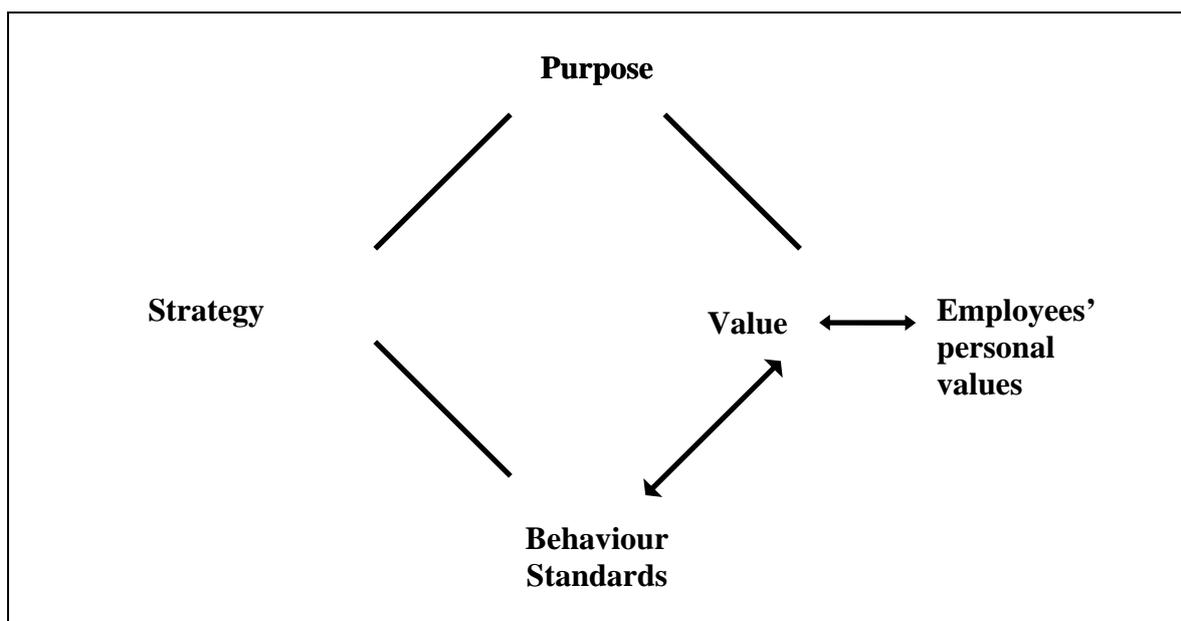
## **A SENSE OF MISSION: THE EMOTIONAL BOND**

A sense of mission is an emotional commitment felt by people towards the company's mission. But even in companies with very strong missions there are many people who do not feel an emotional commitment. We were told, for example, that even at the height of Hewlett-Packard's success an employee survey revealed a large minority of employees who did not have a strong belief in the capabilities of the senior management team, implying that they lacked a sense of

mission.

A sense of mission occurs, we believe, when there is a match between the values of an organisation and those of an individual. Because organisation values are rarely explicit, the individual senses them through the company's behaviour standards. For example, if the behaviour standard is about cooperative working, the individual will be able to sense that helpfulness is valued above individual competition. If the individual has a personal value about the importance of being helpful and cooperative, then there is a values match between the individual and the organisation. The greater the link between company policies and individual values, the greater the scope for the individual's sense of mission.

We see the values match (illustrated in Exhibit 3) as the most important part of a sense of mission because it is through values that individuals feel emotional about their organisations. Commitment to a company's strategy does not, on its own, constitute a sense of mission. It is not unusual for groups of managers to discuss their company's purpose and strategy and reach an intellectual agreement. However this intellectual agreement does not necessarily translate into an emotional commitment and hence the strategic plan does not get implemented. The emotional commitment comes when the individual personally identifies with the values and behaviours lying behind the plan, turning the strategy into a mission and the intellectual agreement into a sense of mission.



*Exhibit 3: Meaning Comes Mainly from Values*

The source of the emotional commitment created by a values match is subtle. People are searching for meaning and for an opportunity to transcend the ordinariness of day-to-day existence. Values give meaning. Living up to one's values or joining a group of people successfully following these values helps an individual feel a sense of transcendence. In these circumstances, work becomes more fulfilling because it is filled with greater purpose. Work helps the individual achieve something that is personally important and which, therefore, gives him or her intrinsic satisfaction.

Consider a fastidious individual who has a personal bias towards tidiness and perfection and who works as a proof reader. If the organisation believes fervently in accuracy and error free work, the individual will, in all likelihood, find satisfaction in fastidiously rooting out the minutest blemish or error. He or she will also feel valued. If the organisation applies these principles to other areas of the business, the person may begin to feel a warmth for the organisation that gives further personal satisfaction. The employee will see the organisation as a "good" company. If, on the other hand, the organisation is driven by deadlines and allows too little time for proof reading, causing books to be published with errors, the proof reader will feel frustrated, unappreciated and angry.

Working with a "good" organisation does not guarantee that employees will have a sense of mission. Consider the person who is responsible for cleaning the car park of the Boy Scouts headquarters. The organisation has an elevating purpose. It has a clear strategy. It has strong values and well grooved policies and behaviour standards. It is also highly successful, with more than 17 million members worldwide. In other words the Boy Scout movement has a strong mission. Yet the car park cleaner may or may not feel a sense of mission. It will depend on his or her personal values and the values and behaviour standards by which he or she is managed. Each individual is making a judgment: "Does this organisation care about the sort of things I care about?". If it does, then there is the potential for developing an emotional commitment. If not, then support from the individual is grudging, based on a contract of so much work for so much pay.

It is important to recognise the individual nature of a sense of mission. It is a personal, emotional feeling created by the individual relationship that the person has with the organisation. If the car park cleaner is gregarious and believes more in making people happy than in dirt-free cleanliness, he is more likely to feel a sense of mission about the Boy Scouts if the office workers stop to have a joke with him in the car park and involve him in the office events. If his boss is a tidiness fanatic, he is going to feel uncomfortable and will be unlikely to develop an energetic commitment to the organisation.

Recognising the personal nature of a sense of mission is important because it has two implications. First, no organisation can hope to have 100% of its employees with a sense of mission, unless it is very small. People are too varied and have too many individual values for it

to be possible for a large organisation to achieve a values match for all its employees. Second, careful recruitment is essential. People's values do not change when they change companies. By recruiting people with compatible values, companies are much more likely to foster a sense of mission.

We have pointed out that even in companies with a strong mission, many people lack a sense of mission. This may be because they have few strong values and, therefore, feel very little for the company. It may also be because their values conflict with those of the company. These individuals may not be poor performers or disruptive but their motivation is more self-interested and their attitudes are likely to be more cynical. These individuals may give good service to the company but there are benefits to a company that only come through having individuals with a sense of mission.

We have defined the terms mission and sense of mission at some length and been at pains to draw a distinction between these two concepts because we believe managers are frequently confused by them.

Mission is an intellectual concept that can be analysed and discussed unemotionally. Like strategy, mission is a set of propositions that can be used to guide the policies and behaviours of a company. However, mission is a larger concept than strategy. It covers strategy and culture. The strategy element of mission legislates what is important to the commercial future of the company. The values element of the mission legislates what is important to the culture of the company. When the two are in tune, reinforcing each other and bound by a common purpose, the mission is strong. When there are contradictions and inconsistencies, the mission is weak.

Sense of mission is not an intellectual concept: it is an emotional and deeply personal feeling. The individual with a sense of mission has an emotional attachment and commitment to the company, what it stands for and what it is trying to do.

A company with a clear mission does not necessarily have employees with a sense of mission. Some individuals may have a sense of mission with varying degrees of intensity. Many will not. Over time the number of employees with a sense of mission will increase as the policies of the mission become implemented and embedded in the company culture. But even a company like Hewlett-Packard, that has had a clear mission for 30 or more years, will not have more than 50% of employees with what we would recognise as a sense of mission.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE ASHRIDGE MISSION MODEL**

Mission thinking has implications at all levels in business as well as for those connected to business. Our greatest hope is that our research will stimulate management teams to give the subject some executive time.

We are confident that the Ashridge mission model is a powerful analytical tool and we want managers to use it. It may be appropriate, therefore, to summarise why we think the model is so

powerful.

First, the model states that organisation values need to be compatible with employee values. This compatibility or lack of it can be analysed and measured, bringing objectivity to the discussion of culture and human resource issues. Will the members of the executive team have a values conflict with the proposed mission? Will the marketing department have a values conflict? While we recognise that the analysis of cultures and values has, in the past, proved difficult and of limited managerial benefit, we believe that values differences of the kind exposed by mission thinking can be analysed and have important management implications. Techniques for interviewing, group discussions and questionnaires will quickly expose these value differences and confront managers with the need to change the values in the mission, change the people or win the people to the new values.

Moreover, since values must be embedded in behaviour standards, values conflicts become exposed when managers or employees react to behaviour instructions. It may be hard to analyse whether the managers of the chemical laboratory believe in "supportive management". It is much easier to decide whether these managers are likely to implement a standard of managing by wandering around. The model's strength, therefore, is that it defines the relationship managers need to create between organisation values and employees' values.

Second, the model demands that strategy and values resonate and reinforce each other. It is possible to identify many values that are compatible with a particular strategy, but it is hard to analyse whether these are the right values, whether they resonate with strategy sufficiently strongly.

The mission model's emphasis on behaviour standards helps to solve this analytical gap. By insisting that strategy and values are converted into a few behaviour standards acting as beacons of the mission, the degree of resonance between strategy and values is exposed. If it is possible to condense the mission into a few symbolically important behaviour standards, such as "putting people first" or MBWA, then we can be confident that the strategy and the values resonate strongly. If not, if no powerful behaviour standards can be identified, then the fault almost certainly lies in a lack of resonance between strategy and values. Further mission planning, further experimentation and further insight is needed.

We can illustrate this with an example drawn from our own organisation, Ashridge, whose largest activity is a management college outside London. Ashridge has identified four important planks of its future strategy: two of these are "self-directed learning" and "internationalisation". With the ambition of becoming Europe's best management school, Ashridge recognises the need to become more international and to eliminate elements of its culture and product offering that have historically been focused on the British and Commonwealth market. It also feels that the best way of achieving European pre-eminence is to become more learner-centred: to focus on the needs of managers. Since different managers have different needs a learner-centred focus demands that Ashridge develop ways of helping managers learn what they want to learn rather than what the lecturer wants to teach them.

Both of these thrusts are proving difficult to implement; not because the strategy is unclear or

because there is a widespread disagreement about the values, but because the policies and behaviour standards that need to underpin the new mission are hard to identify. What behaviour is required of a lecturer or a programme administrator or a member of the hotel staff to ensure that they are contributing to the themes of internationalisation or participant-centred-learning? We don't yet know. It will take more months, possibly even more years, to identify the appropriate behaviours and get to the point where the behaviour standards can be articulated. We have not yet found a resonance between the desired strategy and the organisation's current values.

Managing mission is, therefore, a continuous, ongoing process. Few companies will be able to articulate the behaviour standards that drive their mission without working at the problem over a number of years. By being clear about the need to have a mission, the need to create a resonance between strategy and values and the need to articulate behaviour standards, managers can avoid a superficial attitude to mission and continue the analysis, thinking and experimentation for long enough to develop the mission that will make them into a great company.

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## **Further Reading**

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