

Mission, vision and values

Mission: Defines the fundamental purpose of an organization or an enterprise, succinctly describing why it exists and what it does to achieve its Vision. The mission could be either for the long term or the short term. A corporate mission can last for many years, or for the life of the organization or may change as the organization develops. It is not an objective with a timeline, but rather the overall goal that is accomplished as organizational goals and objectives are achieved.

Vision: Defines the desired or intended future state of an organization or enterprise in terms of its fundamental objective and/or strategic direction. Vision is a long term view, sometimes describing how the organization would like the world in which it operates to be. For example a charity working with the poor might have a vision statement which read "A world without poverty"

It is sometimes used to set out a 'picture' of the organization in the future. A vision statement provides inspiration, the basis for all the organization's planning. It could answer the question: "Where do we want to go?"

Values: Beliefs that are shared among the [stakeholders](#) of an organization. Values drive an organization's culture and priorities.

Mission statements and vision statements

Organizations sometimes summarize goals and objectives into a [mission statement](#) and/or a **vision statement**. Others begin with a vision and mission and use them to formulate goals and objectives.

While the existence of a shared mission is extremely useful, many strategy specialists question the requirement for a written mission statement. However, there are many models of strategic planning that start with mission statements, so it is useful to examine them here.

- A **Mission statement** tells you the fundamental purpose of the organization. It defines the customer and the critical processes. It informs you of the desired level of performance.
- A **Vision statement** outlines what the organization wants to be, or how it wants the world in which it operates to be. It concentrates on the future. It is a source of inspiration. It provides clear decision-making criteria.

An advantage of having a statement is that it creates value for those who get exposed to the statement, and those prospects are managers, employees and sometimes even customers. Statements create a sense of direction and opportunity. They both are an essential part of the strategy-making process.

Many people mistake vision statement for mission statement, and sometimes one is simply used as a longer term version of the other. The Vision should describe why it is important to achieve the Mission. A Vision statement defines the purpose or broader goal for being in existence or in the business and can remain the same for decades if crafted well. A Mission statement is more specific to what the enterprise can achieve itself. Vision should describe what will be achieved in the wider sphere if the organization and others are successful in achieving their individual missions.

A mission statement can resemble a vision statement in a few companies, but that can be a grave mistake. It can confuse people. The mission statement can galvanize the people to achieve defined objectives, even if they are stretch objectives, provided it can be elucidated in [SMART](#) (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) terms. A mission statement provides a path to realize the vision in line with its values. These statements have a direct bearing on the bottom line and success of the organization.

Which comes first? The mission statement or the vision statement? That depends. If you have a new start up business, new program or plan to re engineer your current services, then the vision will guide the mission statement and the rest of the strategic plan. If you have an established business where the mission is established, then many times, the mission guides the vision statement and the rest of the strategic plan. Either way, you need to know your fundamental purpose - the mission, your current situation in terms of internal resources and capabilities (strengths and/or weaknesses) and external conditions (opportunities and/or threats), and where you want to go - the vision for the future. It's important that you keep the end or desired result in sight from the start.

Features of an effective vision statement include:

- Clarity and lack of ambiguity
- Vivid and clear picture
- Description of a bright future
- Memorable and engaging wording
- Realistic aspirations
- Alignment with organizational values and culture

To become really effective, an organizational vision statement must (the theory states) become assimilated into the organization's culture. Leaders have the responsibility of communicating the vision regularly, creating narratives that illustrate the vision, acting as role-models by embodying the vision, creating short-term objectives compatible with the vision, and encouraging others to craft their own personal vision compatible with the organization's overall vision. In addition, mission statements need to be subjected to an internal assessment and an external assessment. The internal assessment should focus on how members inside the organization interpret their mission statement. The external assessment — which includes all of the businesses stakeholders — is valuable since it offers a different perspective. These discrepancies between these two assessments can give insight on the organization's mission statement effectiveness.

Another approach to defining Vision and Mission is to pose two questions. Firstly, "What aspirations does the organization have for the world in which it operates and has some influence over?", and following on from this, "What can (and /or does) the organization do or contribute to fulfill those aspirations?". The succinct answer to the first question provides the basis of the Vision Statement. The answer to the second question determines the Mission Statement.