

Organizational Goals  
and Mission Statements in Educational Institutions

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ABSTRACT

This paper will look more closely at how educational organizations function with respect to its goals and mission statement, and those theories surrounding their effectiveness.

Introduction

“A mission statement is a statement of the organization’s purpose, what it wants to accomplish in the larger environment” (Kotler, quoted by Simpson & McConocha, 1991). According to Simpson and McConocha, “Some of the better mission statements belong to organizations that relate to people’s needs instead of just products. Needs are more enduring” (p 1).

Learning environments such as schools and universities often adopt mission statements that cater to students’ needs. For example, the mission statement for a school in Fairfax County, Virginia, states:

The mission of this elementary school is to create a safe, challenging learning environment in which students (a) experience the excitement of achieving success while setting and striving to obtain progressively higher and higher goals; (b) work hard to achieve their goals while maintaining an appropriate balance of academic, physical, and social endeavors; (c) learn to think and solve problems and make decisions in a rapidly changing world; (d) develop personal responsibility, leadership, and self-discipline; and (e) develop the

ability to work cooperatively with others regardless of differences. (Fairfax County Elementary School Plan, 1995-1997)

The statement goes on to express a commitment to building home-school partnerships that recognize both the importance and the right of parents to be actively involved in their children's schooling.

Many schools and universities have mission statements and good intentions to achieve them. The leaders of such schools must grasp the significance of the mission statement, and then try to encourage staff development around it. This could improve staff quality, job satisfaction, relationships among staff members, and student accomplishment (Simpson & McConocha, 1991). But according to Payne (1996), 98% of staff members do not know what their organizational mission is, let alone the statement or its significance (p. 13).

According to Simpson and McConocha (1991), a good mission statement has four purposes:

1. It provides what's expected and why.
2. A supervisor can use it to suggest new ideas and new ways of accomplishing tasks.
3. Knowing the mission statement, both workers and supervisors will help to cope with emergencies and change that would interrupt the routine and cause frustration.
4. A good mission statement provides a sense of not only what is expected but why it is expected. (p. 6)

If the principal of a school clearly states the mission of the school at meetings, reminding the staff of its purpose, then it becomes embedded in their minds each time they make a decision on any issue for the school. Merely writing the mission statement in a staff handbook without constant reminder would not help fulfill the

school's mission. Parents and the community should also be aware of the school's mission in order for an effective collective effort.

A principal or a rector can use the mission statement to generate new ideas and accomplish new tasks. But this will only happen if teachers are encouraged to give their input and if administrators act on that input, provided there is consensus among other staff members.

Democratic and uplifting leaders will try to build skills and self-confidence in workers. They have knowledge about human behavior and interpersonal processes. They understand how praise and recognition of employees can enhance organizational productivity. They empower workers through training and participatory decision making. (Wilson, 1999, p. 129)

Knowing the mission statement helps a principal or a rector and staff work out problems during emergencies. If each staff member knows the purpose of the mission statement, in an emergency they will know what is expected of them. A leader would not have to be present or contacted before a quick decision could be made. Knowing the mission statement can thus foster a better relationship between the principal or rector and other staff members.

Having a clear mission statement alone is not an insurance policy, but it is a starting point. Missions come in three varieties: (a) definition of who you are, (b) definition by what you are, and (c) definition by what you do. Mission statements help overcome the self-centering trend of most organizations. They shift the focus to what happens to the customers, including those internal to the setting (Williams, 1996).

Vision and belief come together in a mission statement. According to Williams (1996), historically, organizations that have a vision are more productive. In an academic setting, a vision could be having a school district in which students are drug free. This is also an expression of hope, given by a leader of a school district or a community. A good leader will envision the future of an organization, even if it is far-

reaching. Beliefs are the foundation for both mission and vision. “Without beliefs,” says Williams (1996), “there is no way to link an organization’s focus to personal energy” (p. 5).

### Organizational Goals

“The rung of a ladder was never meant to rest upon, but only to hold a man’s foot long enough to put the other somewhat higher.” (Thomas Huxley, quoted by Rohlander, 1998, p. 30).

Goals are a way of keeping score in an organization. Rohlander (1998) differentiates among personal, organization, and future goals. Usually small goals lead to bigger ones. If people see a connection between their personal goal and the organization’s goal, chances are that they will make a greater impact within the organization (Rohlander, 1998, p. 30).

Goals determine results, and results are a reflection of goals. By considering an organization’s achievement, one gains insight about its goals. Principals and rectors can help their staff define personal goals for students and interpret the relationship of personal goals to the school’s goals. A staff that sees its personal goals met is likely to have a greater vested interest in the overall goals of the school.

Interrelated goals require trust and accountability. Accountability is facilitated by written standards that directly relate personal performance to the goals of the organization (Rohlander, 1996). If a teacher’s accountability to her student exceeds what is required of her, she should be compensated, either monetarily or by special

recognition. Such recognition gives teachers incentive to perform even better at other tasks or goals the organization wants to accomplish.

Schools are public organizations that are funded by government both federally and locally. They are also supported by the community in which they serve. Their managers (local school boards) are voted into office by the public. School boards and superintendents, as public managers of school districts, must take into consideration priorities established by the political and societal environments in which they are embedded and which they serve (Kniss, 1998, p. 282). They must set the tone that encourages their organizations to develop clear and consistent values and must be able to focus on multiple and conflicting goals. Public managers must find a way to integrate politics, substance, and administration when they envision public values (p. 280).

A school superintendent or education governing body must consider community opinion when making decisions about a school district. The superintendent's goals must be compatible with the local community's vision. Public managers should engage the political systems within which they operate on continuing and purposive missions to give them roles in shaping the policies by which their organizations will live, always with an eye towards "valuable new activities and goals" (Moore, quoted by Kniss, 1998, p. 281).

According to Moore (cited by Kniss, 1998), goals and missions in private organizations can be adapted to public organizations. Moore's three-part theory of public managers gives equal consideration to substance, politics, and organizational implementation. This is a challenge for public managers, especially education managers, because traditionally it is believed that policy dictates organizational goals. Moore argues that the public manager's ideas should dictate the organization's goals,

purposes, and mission. Therefore, education managers should have a purposive mission that will enhance their policies within a school district with a vision to change and develop new ideas that would improve schools. Because organizations change, their leaders must be willing to let goals change. They should not limit their values and goals by focusing only on the current mission (Kniss, 1998).

Moore (cited by Kniss, 1998) articulates six key principles for public managers:

1. Values are rooted in the desires and perceptions of individuals.
2. Managers must follow the desires of citizens expressed through the government.
3. Managers can create values not only by effectively meeting citizen desires but also through establishing and running public institutions.
4. Public institutions must economize the use of public money.
5. Managers are accountable to citizens and their representatives for their public enterprises.
6. Managers must change their organizations to become forward-looking, adaptable, innovative, and experimental. (p. 280)

In educational institutions, superintendents, rectors or whatever the title may be as leaders, must maintain public trust. Their responsibility as leaders is not only to the schools but to the political and social environment in which they operate. Therefore, education leaders need a broad and consistent statement of purpose to determine the tasks that will meet organizational goals, elicit public support, and enhance operational capabilities (Kniss, 1998). They must become creative and innovative leaders within the organization for it to be successful.

The goal of any service-related organization is not only to deliver services but to also to foster change and improve lives. According to Drucker (1999), realizing that goal means focusing on the institution's mission, defining the results it is after, and assessing what the staff is doing and how they are doing it. Leaders have the task of putting their resources where they do the most good and can get the best results. "Good intentions," says Drucker, "are no longer good enough" (p. 34).

As important as goals and mission statements are, managers must address other things too. Compensation is a key factor in employee productivity and satisfaction. According to Flannery and Hofrichter (1996), "While many management gurus disparage extrinsic rewards (money) and emphasize intrinsic rewards such as job satisfaction, findings suggest that pay remains a key factor to reshaping staff behavior" (p. 6). Teachers historically have been overworked and underpaid. "New compensation strategies alone will not transform an organization, but monetary compensation can propel staff members to redirect their energies to better alignment with organizational priorities" (p. 6).

Most school and universities districts in the United States and elsewhere in other countries are facing teacher shortages. The work load, low salaries, and emotional demands placed upon teachers are driving them away from the profession. The teaching profession is still dominated by women, while men continue to constitute the majority of administrators, with better compensation and benefits (Conner & Sharp, 1992, p. 337). School leaders, most of whom are men, must seriously address the compensation issue and its effect on employee morale.

Strategic planning requires a commitment of time and resources to pursue the goals of an organization (Burdette, 1998, p. 17). Most teachers are so overwhelmed by paper work that they are unable to engage in strategic planning. One in-service day

per quarter is not enough time to plan an effective year-long curriculum. Effective planning involves staff working in teams to direct focus and balance efficiency and innovation (Kellough, 1990, p. 17). For this, teachers need greater institutional support.

### Summary

The National Commission on Excellence in Education recommended in its book A Nation at Risk that managers of learning institutions play a crucial leadership role in developing schooling and community support on reform issues, and that school boards must provide the support required to enable these leaders to carry out their leadership role more effectively. A school district and its leaders have to consider the overall picture in running an educational organization. Mission statements and goals are a positive step towards a new beginning, but compensation for work must also be considered. Morale and attitude play an important role in how a mission statement and goals are accomplished.

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