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Strategic Vision and Mission Statements: Exploring Qualitative

Perspectives in Health and Human Services

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Perspectives in Health and Human Services

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ABSTRACT

Strategic vision and mission statements are key elements of most public agency strategic

plans. Yet literature suggests that too often, these statements are out of focus, without

coherence, meaningless, forgettable, and ineffective. The purpose of this study was to

qualitatively explore how county human service managers perceive and experience

strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements in the context of strategic

management and leadership theories. A qualitative phenomenology study of 10

participant administrators was conducted in two departments with varied approaches to

the development and design of their strategic vision and mission statements. The study

found and concluded that the way vision and mission statements communicate does

matter. The first finding suggests that the manner in which vision and mission statements

are developed and constructed can impact organizational awareness and commitment.

The second finding suggests that effective vision and mission statements motivate and

inspire by appealing to personal passion and a sense of inclusive relevance to all. The

third finding suggests that vision and mission statements are enhanced by leaders who

model shared beliefs and create an alignment of the statements with strategic decision

and actions. The study recommends that clear and concise vision and mission statements

be collaboratively developed. It also recommends that the statements should appeal to

personal passion and be relevant to all. Finally, leaders should model shared beliefs of

vision and mission statements that are in alignment with all strategic organizational

decision and actions.

Keywords: vision statement, mission statement, health and human services

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The challenges facing public agencies today can be unpredictable, complex, and ambiguous. Environments can change very quickly, and these organizations commonly find themselves in a state of dynamic uncertainty. Managing novel viral pandemics, terrorism, cyber security threats, the global environment, and rising U.S. opioid deaths (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2019) may not have been organizational priorities of the past generation, but they are certainly at the forefront today. Many public agencies have long assumed that they were treating people fairly and equitably. Yet today, there are renewed calls for further examination of policies and practices to determine the extent to which racism and structural inequities may continue to exist. Rather than being solely the concerns of a minority, there is growing acceptance today that much work remains to be done.

In the context of the important need for strategic planning, Bryson (2018) created a list of other major concerns facing our society. These include the demographic impact of an aging population, accessibility to healthcare, the management of borders and the flow and status of immigrants, economic inequity, over 30,000 annual U.S. gun violence deaths, fiscal banking policies, and a decline in social capital.

In large part, government is responsible for addressing this introductory list of challenges, making strategic planning by public agencies more important than ever. However, strategic planning is part of a larger framework of strategic management, which provides a means for public agencies to assess, plan, and address changing challenges to ensure the future well-being of our communities. Bryson (2018) described strategic management as a continual process that enhances mission and creates public

value. This description recognizes that an organization exists in a fluid, changing

environment, and that strategic management must evaluate this changing environment in

"an ongoing way" to fulfill its mission (p. 23).

Once strategic management assesses the environmental changes, priorities, and

mission for the organization, the process used to fulfill that organizational mission is

strategic planning. Allison and Kaye (2015) defined strategic planning as "a systematic

process through which an organization agrees on and builds key stakeholder commitment

to priorities that are essential to its mission and responsive to the organizational

environment" (p. 1). Thus, developing an effective strategic plan is recognized as an

essential responsive approach to meeting the challenges facing public sector

organizations.

Further examination suggests that strategic vision and mission statements are

widely accepted as important foundational elements of the strategic planning process.

Strategic vision statements and mission statements are often seen prominently displayed

on websites and agency walls as the leadership and management direction of those public

organizations. Bryson (2018) stated, "Indeed, it is hard to imagine an organization

surviving in the long run without some sort of strategic vision to inspire it" (p. 270).

Strategic vision statements are seen as a means to create an inspired leadership direction

for an organization as well as set strategic direction for a desired future.

Although some suggest that strategic vision statements are an organization's

overarching leadership direction, mission statements are said to be guidelines for

management purpose to make progress toward the vision. Bryson (2018) stated it

succinctly: "A mission statement is a declaration of organizational purpose" (p. 134).

Rainey (2009) expressed a similar view that "ultimately, the mission statement expresses the general purpose of the organization and its major values and commitments" (p. 190).

Therefore, there are literature-based assumptions about the importance of strategic management and planning. The significance of vision statements to lead and inspire organizations to a better future has been established. Also established are strategic mission statements that define and guide an organization's management purpose.

Some literature suggests, however, that organizations too often have no clear understanding of what their strategic vision and mission statements are and how they serve as guiding philosophies for management staff. This study sought to explore strategic vision and mission statements to determine how public managers qualitatively perceive and experience strategic vision and mission statements. This included a study of how public managers perceive the effectiveness of vision and mission statements in the context of providing a guiding philosophy to achieve organizational purpose. A greater understanding of how vision and mission statements are perceived and qualitatively experienced can provide an important contribution to the knowledge and practice of public administration.

Significance of the Problem

Given the rapidly changing environment and challenges facing public agencies today, reactive management is not an option. Strategic management and its key component, the strategic plan, give organizations a proactive means of addressing challenges. Allison and Kaye (2015) described the importance of strategic planning as follows:

Strategic planning helps organizations achieve two critical outcomes: clear

decisions about purpose and strategy and commitment to those decisions. It is a

process designed to support leaders in being intentional rather than reactive.

Simply stated, it is a management tool, and as with any management tool, it is

used for one purpose only—to help an organization do a better job. (p. 1)

Considering the significance and insight of strategic planning as a tool to address today's

organizational challenges, it becomes important that government agencies all strive to do

a better job to create maximum public value.

The two key components that set the framework for strategic plans are vision

statements and mission statements. Bennis and Nanus (1997) described vision as an

image that is possible for the desired future of an organization. It is a future condition

that does not currently exist or ever has in the past. Of particular importance is the

impact that effective vision can have on members of the organization. According to

Bennis and Nanus, "It is an emotional appeal to some of the most fundamental of human

needs—the need to be important, to make a difference, to feel useful, to be part of a

successful and worthwhile enterprise" (pp. 85-86). However, in spite of the importance

of organizational vision, the authors further stated,

With all these benefits, one would think that organizations would take great care

to develop a clear image of their desired future, but that doesn't seem to be the

case. Instead, the visions of many organizations are out of focus and lack

coherence. (p. 86)

If organizational visions, often manifested in strategic vision statements, are out of focus and lack coherence, it raises questions about how vision statements are interpreted by public agency managers as well as their staff and the public.

The importance of the role strategic mission statements play in organizational strategic planning is also well documented. Parnell (2014) stated, "An organization's mission outlines the reason for its existence. A clear purpose provides managers with a sense of direction and can guide all of the organization's activities" (p. 140). Clear purpose and direction created through effective strategic mission statements would, therefore, seem commonplace in today's organizations. Yet, like strategic vision statements, strategic mission statements are also said to be lacking effectiveness in many strategic plans. Perkins (2008) pointed out that "mission statements help define an organization's direction and inspire employees to achieve corporate goals. Unfortunately, countless mission statements are meaningless, forgettable and totally ineffective" (p. 35).

Therefore, the importance of the strategic management process and strategic plans to overcome challenges facing organizations has been established. Strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements have also been established as important elements of strategic plans. However, the effectiveness of strategic vision statements and mission statements has been questioned, and how they are perceived by managers in public health and human service agencies is less clear. Indeed, as cited previously, if vision and mission statements of many organizations are considered out of focus, incoherent, meaningless, forgettable, and totally ineffective, then a significant problem exists.

Statement of the Problem

Strategic planning is an important tool that drives organizations to address and overcome challenges. Strategic vision statements can inspire an organization from its current condition, which may not be ideal, to a more desired future condition. Strategic mission statements can identify and direct organizational purpose. Although literature suggests that vision and mission are important to the success of organizations, research also suggests that a clear understanding of vision and mission statements as organizational guiding philosophies can be confusing and elusive.

With specific regard to strategic vision statements, Kouzes and Posner (2017) observed that because the root of the word vision means "to see," effective vision statements should be images that are effectively seen by all in the organization. However, they pointed out that these visions, which are created in the minds of leaders, are not always so clearly defined to constituents or members of the organization.

Similarly, although strategic mission statements exist to provide clear purpose and direction, they are not always effective. Ireland and Hitt (1992) stated that "evidence suggests that environmental complexity and turbulence create a need for effective mission statements. However, many organizations have not formed essential direction-setting statements" (p. 36).

Therein lies the problem for this study. Literature supports the importance of strategic planning and its key components of strategic vision and mission statements. Yet those strategic vision and mission statements are often thought to be confusing and ineffective. There is limited understanding of how county health and human services

managers perceive and experience strategic vision and mission statements and how these strategic statements provide a guiding philosophy to achieve organizational purpose.

Purpose of Study

Aligned with the stated problem, the purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore how county human service managers perceive and experience strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements. The study also explored how county health and human service managers perceive the effectiveness of strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements as guiding philosophies to achieve organizational purpose.

With over 10 million residents, Los Angeles is the largest county in the United States. With 34 county departments providing a diversity of public services, it has been selected for this study. The two largest departments providing public health and human services are the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS). Both departments have established vision and mission statements. These two departments agreed to make management staff available who could be interviewed for this study.

To address the purpose of this study, qualitative phenomenological interviews were conducted with managers from these county public health and human service departments. Their perceptions and lived experiences of strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements are a means to better understand how these strategic statements provide a guiding philosophy to achieve organizational purpose.

Theoretical Basis

The concepts explored in this study are significantly related to strategic management theory. As suggested by Bryson (2018), strategic management theory

includes the development of organizational strategic plans and guiding elements of strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements. In developing the relationship between strategic management and strategic planning, he further suggested that strategic management provides the framework that assesses the environment in an ongoing way to inclusively develop the strategic planning process. Thus, strategic plans are part of the greater theoretical framework of strategic management, which emphasizes an ongoing commitment to vision, mission, mandates, and goals to achieve public value.

Strategic vision and mission statements are critical elements of strategic planning and are therefore important to strategic management theory. Valcik (2016) stated, "A strategic plan provides a framework, which defines the required resources (current and future), business processes, and organizational policy guidelines. These resources must be aligned with vision and mission statements established by the organization" (p. 3). This study therefore explored these strategic vision and strategic mission statements in the larger context of strategic plans and strategic management theory.

This study also addressed strategic vision and mission in the context of leadership theory. Leadership theory is well established in the literature and is often discussed in the context of challenges facing society. Bennis (1992, as cited in Nanus, 1992) discussed a list of major problems facing the world today including the threat of nuclear terrorism, worldwide famine, global warming, poverty and violence, and went on to state, "Below the surface of all these problems—the metaproblem, if you will—is the lack of leadership in our human institutions. That's the rub, dear reader: without strong visionary leadership, the problems mentioned above will fester into gangrenous deadlock" (p. xiv). Although Bryson's (2018) similar list of problems was previously cited in reference to

the importance of strategic management, Bennis (1992, as cited in Nanus, 1992) also raised these similar challenges in the context of visionary leadership. Therefore, this study researched strategic vision and mission statements in the context of strategic management theory and leadership theory.

Research Questions

1. How do county health and human service managers perceive and experience strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements?

This research question was prompted by strategic management theory and literature that emphasizes the importance of strategic vision and mission as the guiding foundation of strategic plans. Literature also suggests that strategic vision and mission statements need to be constructed and communicated well to be effective. Given the importance of strategic vision and mission statements, how county health and human service managers perceive and experience those statements can provide important insights as to their effectiveness to the organization.

2. How do county health and human service managers perceive strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements as guiding philosophies to motivate and achieve organizational purpose?

Included in the theoretical aspects of strategic management and leadership is the question of how important strategic vision and mission statements are as guiding and motivating philosophies to achieve organizational purpose. This question explores the perceived and experienced perspectives of human service managers with regard to the effectiveness of vision and mission statements in guiding and achieving that purpose. This question also explores perceptions and the qualitative experience of county human

service managers from a motivational leadership perspective. Strategic vision and mission statements are said to have the greatest transformational leadership effect when they are shared in a personal meaningful way with members of the organization.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions of terms provide an operationalized context for this study.

Convenience sample. A nonprobability sample of participants for a study in which respondents are chosen based on their convenience and availability.

County government. For purposes of this study, county government refers specifically to Los Angeles County government.

Guiding philosophy. The guiding philosophy is where vision begins. The guiding philosophy is a system of fundamental motivating assumptions, principles, values, and tenets that guide an organization's direction.

Health and human service departments. For purposes of this study, health and human service departments refer to the Los Angeles County Departments of Public Health (DPH) and Public Social Services (DPSS).

Leadership vision. Leadership vision is the ability to have a desired end-state in mind and to lead common purpose that inspires people to want to make that vision a reality.

Organizational leadership. The ability to influence others within an organization to move forward toward the accomplishment of common goals.

Phenomenology. A qualitative strategy in which the researcher identifies the essence of human lived experience about a phenomenon as described by participants in a study.

Reflexivity. A researcher's self-reflection about their biases, values and personal background, and how this background shapes their interpretations formed during the study.

Servant leadership. Leadership that generally puts followers before self with a commitment to the greater good and well-being of all. Servant leadership is particularly geared to vision through characteristics of conceptualization and foresight, the ability to sense future direction, and need. Servant leadership has broader vision implications that extend beyond the organization toward the greater good of the community and society.

Social capital. The degree of good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse that a society demonstrates toward those who are less educated and less well-off. Social capital is seen as a crucial factor in building and maintaining personal and family physical and mental health as well as stronger communities.

Stakeholder analysis. An evaluation of any person, group, or organization that can place a claim on an organization's attention, resources, or output. Examples of government stakeholders can include citizens, taxpayers, service recipients, the organization's governing body, employees, unions, agency management, public interest or advocacy groups, political parties, contractors, collaborate private-sector partners, other government agencies, and the media.

Strategic management theory. A system of ideas that helps organizations plan

for the most effective means of addressing organizational challenges. This is done in the

context of an ever-changing environment.

Strategic mission. Strategic mission is an organization's management direction.

Its focus is the purpose for which the organization exists.

Strategic mission statement. A strategic mission statement is a component of a

strategic plan that defines the purpose of an organization. It commonly includes who the

organization serves, for what purpose the organization exists, and the distinctive manner

or how the service is provided.

Strategic planning. Strategic planning is an organization's process of defining its

strategy or direction. It determines the strategic vision, mission, and core values of the

organization. It considers internal and external stakeholders, an environmental scan of

the organization (SWOT analysis), the identification of most critical strategic issues

facing the organization, and the allocation of resources to manage and overcome those

issues.

Strategic vision. Strategic vision is an organization's leadership direction. It

does not define the current condition of the organization but thinks about an ideal future

with imagination or wisdom.

Strategic vision statement. A strategic vision statement is a component of a

strategic plan that defines what an organization aspires to become. The vision statement

should resonate with all members of the organization and help them feel proud, excited,

inspired, and part of something much bigger than themselves.

Transactional leadership. The most common leadership in today's organizations. It is based on contingencies and exchanges between leaders and followers in which rewards or punishment are key motivating factors for organizational behavior.

Transcendental phenomenology. A type of phenomenology focused on perceptions and the lived experiences that transcend a particular phenomenon into deeper personal feelings and meaning to the study participant.

Transformational leadership. Leadership that has strong ties to vision, which creates a connection of that shared mutual vision between leaders and followers toward common goals, which raises the motivation of the entire organization.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The introduction to this study highlighted many of the challenges facing society today, noting that overcoming these challenges is largely the responsibility of government, and other institutions that serve as its collaborative partners. Yet Bryson (2018) pointed out a troubling observation that public confidence in U.S. institutions is very low:

> According to a 2016 Gallup Poll, the only U.S. institutions in which more than 50% of the public had "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence were the military (73 percent), small business (68 percent), and the police (56 percent). Of the 15 institutions listed, Congress was at the bottom with 9 percent. In other words, in the United States, trust in almost every institution is very low, their perceived legitimacy is also in question, and whom and what to believe is up for grabs. Meanwhile, partisanship is at pre-Civil War levels—and we know how that turned out. One can rightly worry about the future of our republic and democracy itself. (p. 5)

Bryson suggested that these trends in challenging events, coupled with low public confidence, place greater responsibility on the performance and management of government agencies. This means that government agencies must envision an improved future, be observant about an ever-changing environment, anticipate potential opportunities and threats, and proactively address their mission to maximize public value. In short, this makes strategic management and strategic planning as well as strategic vision and mission statements, which are foundational elements of those strategic plans, more important than ever.

Strategic Management Theory

The significance of strategic vision and mission statements is their foundational role in the broader strategic management process. There are many views in the literature regarding strategic management theory, and it is difficult to provide a definition that is applicable to all organizations. General themes of strategic management theory suggest an organization envisioning an improved future and developing strategies, resources, and objectives to achieve that future. Hill et al. (2015) identified private sector business theory approaches that emphasize strategies for maximizing profit, building competitive advantage, diversifying product lines, expanding markets, and ensuring shareholder satisfaction.

Other authors, such as Bryson (2018), have suggested that public organizations have distinct theoretical strategic management considerations that focus on improved public service and value. A similar perspective about creating public sector value is expressed by Johnsen (2015) who stated, "Strategic management is important for organisational improvement because it can affect organisational adaptability, performance and legitimacy. Many factors are important for organisations' ability to adapt to changing circumstances, improve services, create value and sustain support" (p. 245).

Although there are strategic management theories that apply to either private or public sector organizations, the lines of separation have become less distinct. Authors such as Osborne and Gabler (1992) theorized that public organizations become more efficient by adopting innovative entrepreneurial business practices that create private sector partnerships and encourage competition. For that reason, this study also

considered private sector perspectives on strategic management theory including vision and mission statements, which may contribute to public value.

Strategic Management

Literature suggests that the terms strategic management and strategic planning are at times used interchangeably. At other times, strategic planning is conceptually discussed with no reference made to strategic management at all. Yet some authors note the distinction of strategic management as the larger environmental framework for strategic planning. Although a strategic plan is created by an organization to address issues at a point in time, Bryson (2018) pointed out, "Strategic management is the reasonable integration of strategic planning and implementation across an organization (or other entity) in an ongoing way to enhance the fulfillment of mission, meeting of mandates, continuing learning, and sustained creation of public value" (p. 23). Parnell (2014) also acknowledged the ongoing need to assess changes in the environment as part of the strategic management process:

> Inside organizations, strategies are being formulated, implemented, and controlled simultaneously while external and internal factors are continually reassessed. In addition, changes in one stage of the strategic management process will inevitably affect other stages as well. After a planned strategy is implemented, it often requires modification as conditions change. (p. 2)

Parnell therefore observed the dynamic nature of change and how the strategic management process requires adjustments to the static nature of strategic plans.

Thus, on September 11, 2001, it is likely that most major airports and government agencies in the United States had a strategic plan in place. Those strategic plans were

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aligned with their respective environments at the time. In 1 day, with acts of terrorism on 9/11, those static strategic plans became obsolete. Changes in the environment had taken place, and static strategic plans needed to be quickly modified by the change-conscious strategic management process. Passengers would no longer be permitted to simply present a ticket and board an aircraft. Revised strategic plans were needed. New screening, background checks, and safety protocols would have to be put into place. Failure to develop new strategic plans to manage terrorist threats was not an option.

Another changing environmental event that has prompted major strategic management concerns is the Covid-19 global pandemic. To varying degrees, static public health strategic plans were in place at the federal, state, and local government levels. Yet given the serious public health and economic implications of the 2019/20 pandemic, the environment has again changed. A more comprehensive strategic management review of current and past practices is necessary to better develop strategic plans of the future.

Strategic Planning

The purpose of strategic planning, as developed by Quigley (1993), suggests that the three historical foundations of strategic planning are to improve decisions, delegate authority, and communicate. With regard to improving organizations, he posited that these strategic planning decisions about today can best be made in the context of what the organization hopes to look like in its vision for the future. Thus, today's strategic actions help achieve that visionary future. Second, Quigley suggested that the strategic planning process allows a delegation of authority and responsibility of strategic planning to management levels within the organization. This creates an alignment of executive levels

to operations. Annual reviews of strategic planning progress can be presented for executive review and approval without abdication of responsibility. Finally, strategic planning has historically provided a means of shared communication throughout the organization. Strategic planning can identify and communicate purpose within the organization that can also translate purpose to external stakeholders.

Beyond these historical perspectives, Quigley (1993) further identified three current perspectives on strategic planning. The first includes the allocation of human and financial resources. He suggested that although the allocation of resources is fundamental to the strategic planning process, it should be used less as a means of control and more as a means encouraging capital. He stated, "The use of the planning process as a means of rationing or refusing funding is negative and demoralizing. Business opportunities should be refused only because they lack fundamental soundness, not because there is inadequate funding available" (p. 192). Herein lies a potential difference between private and public sector strategic planning. Although the private corporate sector may see great potential profit with risky business opportunities, the public sector may need to be more risk averse, given its responsibility for the stewardship of tax-supported resources. The second current strategic planning perspective suggested by Quigley is creating clear strategic focus that relates to achieving collaborative consensus within the organization's management team. Finally, he suggested that the most important current perspective in strategic planning is to forge a management commitment. Successful implementation of a strategic plan requires support from multiple sectors within an organization, making management commitment critical to the process.

Another perspective on strategic planning was provided by Bryson (2018) who defined strategic planning as "a deliberative, disciplined approach to producing fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why" (p. 8). He further emphasized a strategic planning deliberative approach as a means of addressing important issues. This deliberative approach takes place in various settings, internal and external to the organization, where information is gathered, analyzed, and learning occurs. He stated,

> In short, at its best, strategic planning requires deliberation informed by broad-scale yet effective information gathering, analysis, and synthesis; clarification of the mission and goals to be pursued and issues to be addressed along the way; development and exploration of, and choice among, strategic alternatives; and an emphasis on the future implications of present decisions. Strategic planning can help facilitate communication, participation, and judgment; accommodate divergent interests and values, foster wise decision making informed by reasonable analysis; promote successful implementation and accountability; and enhance ongoing learning. (pp. 9-10)

Bryson further described the ABCs of strategic planning, which summarize what strategic planning is all about. "A" represents a determination of the current condition of the organization. This determination may be part of a deliberative assessment process of internal and external stakeholders. "B" represents where the organization hopes to be. Getting from A to B involves clarifying strategic vision, mission, and goals, which is the subject of this dissertation. "C" represents the process of how the organization will

achieve its strategic plan in the context of strategy formulation and strategy implementation.

Bryson (2018) went on to describe a number of organizational benefits to strategic planning. The first of these benefits is strategic thinking, which is the ability to assess challenges, pursue purposes, or achieve goals in the context of the unique environment of the organization.

The second benefit of strategic planning is that it helps management improve its decision-making process by focusing on the most critical issues facing the organization. Exploring these critical issues in detail can lead to potential solutions, which can improve overall performance.

The third benefit is that strategic planning improves the overall management of an organization. This is more specifically described by Bryson (2018) as "enhanced organizational effectiveness, responsiveness, resilience, and sustainability," along with a fourth benefit which Bryson defines as "enhanced organizational legitimacy" (p. 14). Effective strategic planning creates higher levels of satisfaction among key stakeholders, which adds to the organization's legitimacy and credibility.

The fifth benefit to strategic planning that Bryson (2018) described is an "enhanced effectiveness of broader societal systems" (p. 15). Public organizations today cannot manage complex challenges alone. Every public agency has limitations, which makes strategic collaboration necessary for success. Therefore, many strategic plans today are collaboratively integrated across organizational borders. Finally, Bryson expressed the benefit of organizational satisfaction among participants of the strategic

planning process. Effective strategic planning can have a positive impact on the sense of

achievement and morale of an organization.

In spite of the many benefits of strategic planning described by Bryson (2018), he

pointed out that strategic planning is by no means a guarantee of success. The

effectiveness of a strategic plan is dependent, in large part, on decision-making leadership

and engagement of the participants within the organization. He stated, "If the

organization lacks the skills, resources or commitment of key decision makers to engage

in deliberative strategic planning, or if implementation of the results is extremely

unlikely, strategic planning will be a waste of time" (p. 17). Bryson further suggested

that this lack of skills, resources, or leadership commitment creates a strategic planning

paradox, where organizations that need strategic planning the most are least equipped to

successfully implement it. Conversely, strategic planning is most likely to work well in

skillful, committed organizations with strong leadership where it is least needed.

A number of key steps were identified by Bryson (2018) as part of the strategic

planning process. These include the initiation and agreement as to purpose and value of

the strategic planning process; clarifying organizational mandates and mission; assessing

the environment for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges (more

commonly referred to as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats—SWOT);

identifying strategic issues facing the organization; formulating strategies and plans to

overcome the strategic issues; establishing an organizational vision for the future;

implementing strategies and plans; and reassessing and revising the plan.

Allison and Kaye (2015) discussed strategic planning as a means to help

organizations make decisions about purpose and strategy followed by a commitment to

making those decisions a reality. In their strategic planning definition, they also make note of the importance of a commitment to stakeholders, organizational mission, and responsiveness to the environment. They stated, "We define strategic planning as a systematic process through which an organization agrees on and builds key stakeholder commitment to priorities that are essential to its mission and responsive to the organizational environment" (p. 1).

Upon developing an initial understanding that the organization is committed and ready to proceed with a strategic plan, Allison and Kaye (2015) identified a number of key steps in their model of strategic planning. This includes particular emphasis on stakeholder engagement to determine key considerations of the plan. Although assumptions can be made that the external community served by the organization is the primary stakeholder of a strategic plan, the authors pointed out the importance of considering the input of people working within the organization. These internal stakeholders have valuable knowledge and insight about the organization. Employees have first-hand knowledge and experience about what is working or not working on the front line. They can provide valuable insights on performance shortcomings and recommendations for strategically improving organizational effectiveness.

Other key strategic planning steps and considerations identified by Allison and Kaye (2015) include establishing mission, vision, and values statements; a SWOT analysis of the internal and external environment; an evaluation of change and program portfolio; business considerations including revenue and expenses; and organizational capacity such as human resources, structure, finance, communications, information technology, facilities, and planning. As part of the final step of the strategic planning

process, the authors emphasized a second level of strategic review in the context of strategic management and its emphasis on recognizing change. They stated, "This second level of review involves stepping back to see the big picture and checking in on whether any major assumptions underlying your strategic plan should be questioned or reexamined" (p. 221). This second level of review serves as a means of strategic management oversight for the strategic plan.

Valcik (2016) suggested that strategic plans can vary greatly depending on the focus and sector of the organization. With regard to perspectives on the importance of strategic planning in public and nonprofit organizations, he stated,

> Organizations that operate without a strategic plan or have a very limited strategic plan can potentially face severe consequences if resources are squandered or if goals are not attained. In the era of accountability, public and non-profit organizations alike will have to contend with meeting the expectations and oversight of the public at large. Increased accountability can be expected during federal and/or state economic crises and when certain political entities are elected into public offices. (p. 5)

Therefore, organizations that choose not to strategically plan do so at their own peril as the public and political oversight bodies expect effective management accountability. Valcik defined a strategic plan as a means to meet that expectation by providing "a framework, which defines the required resources (current and future), business processes, and organizational policy guidelines. These resources must be aligned with vision and mission statements established by the organization" (p. 3). Valcik's emphasis here on the

importance of strategic plan alignment with strategic vision and mission statements is a common theme in the literature.

A review of literature regarding strategic management and the strategic planning process reveals that there is no one way to develop a strategic plan. Strategic planning steps can vary greatly, and steps that may appear in one model may be totally absent from another. Differing organizational purposes and objectives can also influence how strategic plans are formulated. For example, the strategic plans described by Hill et al. (2015) emphasize private sector business strategies such as increasing profitability and gaining competitive market advantage. By contrast, Bryson (2018) addressed strategic planning in the context of public and nonprofit organizations, which emphasize more collaborative models and partnerships to create public value. Regardless of the many different approaches to strategic planning, most strategic plans contain at least the following five elements:

- Vision and mission statements

- Stakeholder analysis of those external and internal to the organization

- Analysis of organizational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT)

- Identification of critical strategic challenges facing the organization

- Plan of action with goals and objectives to improve conditions and overcome strategic challenges

Leadership Theory

Any comprehensive literature on strategic management theory will include its close relationship to leadership theory. The two theories cannot be separated. Allison

and Kaye (2015) pointed out that effective leadership is the key to any organization's

successful strategic plan. In the context of strategic management, they stated, "A

brilliant, well-funded strategy with adequate resources cannot be successfully executed

without shared, clear vision and direction—something the top leadership needs to

accomplish" (p. 173). They went on to suggest that "what is crucial to the strategic

planning process is to think carefully about the importance of leadership to the success of

the organization, and to consider ways in which leadership can be enhanced and

strengthened" (p. 174). Thus, strategic management and organizational leadership can

have an enhanced synergistic relationship.

According to Bryson (2018), strategic planning should be looked upon as an

effective tool of leadership. He stated,

> As has been pointed out before, strategic planning is *not* a substitute for effective
>
> leadership. There is *no* substitute for effective leadership (and committed
>
> followership) when it comes to planning and implementation. Instead, strategic
>
> planning is simply a set of concepts, procedures and tools designed to help
>
> executives, managers and others to think, act, and learn strategically on behalf of
>
> their organizations' stakeholders. . . . Whether strategic planning helps or hurts
>
> depends on how formal and informal leaders and followers at all organizational
>
> levels use it—or misuse it. (p. 353)

In the context of public and nonprofit organizations, Bryson further suggested that

leaders use the strategic planning process in diverse ways to build coalitions and

commitment to achieve organizational purpose.

Leadership Roles and Tasks Needed for Effective Strategic Plan Implementation

Strategic planning in the hands of an effective leader can greatly enhance organizational performance. Bryson (2018) identified the following leadership roles and tasks that are interconnected and important to effective strategic planning implementation:

- Understanding the context—Leaders should help constituents understand strategic organizational changes in the context of what they consider to be relevant trends and vision for the future. These constituents will include both internal and external stakeholders. Leaders with strong context skills understand how their organization fits into the environment and how strategic management might be beneficial to increasing their public value.

- Understanding the people involved, including oneself—Leaders should seek to understand the strengths and weaknesses of those in the organization who will be responsible for implementing the strategic plan. This includes an awareness of the leader's own abilities to manage the plan. With regard to leadership strengths of those involved with strategic management, Bryson (2018) emphasized humility and open-mindedness. He added, "Perhaps the most important strength is a passion for fulfilling the organization's mission and contributing to the well-being of multiple stakeholders" (p. 359).

- Sponsoring the process—Commitment to any strategic planning initiative requires leadership sponsorship from the top of the organization. Sponsoring by top leadership means that the commitment has been made to exercise power and authority to hold the organization accountable to undertake the strategic planning

process. Strong sponsoring leaders typically articulate the importance of strategic planning. They commit the necessary resources to the effort. They emphasize changes in the organization that will result. Leaders encourage creative thinking, constructive debate, input, and insight to improve the process. They are open to outside consultants or resources that can assist in the strategic planning process. They exercise leadership perseverance when the process becomes challenging. An additional benefit of leader sponsorship is that when organizations are in need of change, many people already know it and are very dissatisfied with the status quo. A leadership endorsement for change from the top of the organization can generate renewed energy and hope for success.

- Championing the process—Leaders who manage the day-to-day process are called the champions who track progress and monitor details of the strategic plan. They are the cheerleaders who model positive behavior, commitment, and pursuit of the common good. These champion leaders have a solid understanding of the strategic plan and what it hopes to achieve. They are good listeners with strong interpersonal skills who can understand frustrations and potential challenges expressed by staff. They often act as effective liaisons between staff and sponsorship leaders. They keep strategic planning high on the personal agendas of staff. They ensure that all staff in the organization receive ongoing reports on how the strategic plan is progressing. This includes encouragements to staff about how valuable their contributions are and how transformative the end product will be to the organization.

- Facilitating the process—Although their role can be seen as similar to the "champions," facilitators are often brought in from outside the organization. The benefit of an outside facilitator is that it adds an unbiased element to the strategic planning process. Staff often feel it is easier to discuss organizational shortcomings and the need for improvement with an impartial outside facilitator rather than a leadership sponsor from within the organization. Strategic planning facilitators also know the strategic plan and its objectives well and can explain how it works to anyone in the organization. They need to have the trust of sponsors, champions, and line staff. They have a detailed understanding of the functions of each section and how their specific contributions relate to the strategic plan. They have an ability to help groups overcome challenges with the plan. Facilitators not only understand the tasks of the plan, but they also understand the unique social and emotional characteristics of the organizational groups implementing the work. Although facilitators are enthusiastic about the plan, they have an understanding of major sticking points that can prevent progress. They have an ability to help resolve conflict constructively when disagreements arise over operational approaches. They are able to facilitate victories by those in the organization. They ensure that performance is timely in meeting deadlines. They congratulate and encourage good work and progress.
- Fostering collective leadership and followership—This leadership task directly relates to successful strategic planning as being a collective organizational endeavor. Bryson (2018) pointed out that "many people contribute to its success, sometimes by leading, other times by following" (p. 368). One of the

recommended collective leadership approaches is strategic planning team

development. The benefit of group knowledge from a team can often outweigh

the contribution of an individual. Teams can also be constructed from diverse

internal and external stakeholders, which can increase buy-in and commitment to

the strategic plan. The task of public leaders, in a broader sense, is to build a

sense of community that is mutually beneficial to the organization, collaborative

partners, and the public. Casting a wider collective leadership net expands what

Bryson called "a community of interest, an interorganizational network that often

transcends geographic and political boundaries and is designed to address

transorganizational problems" (p. 370). An added benefit of collective leadership

is that it creates a mechanism for sharing power, responsibility, and

accountability. "Doing so can foster participation, trigger information and

resource flows, and help commitment to plans and strategies and their

implementation. Strategic planning teams, strategic issue task forces, and

implementation teams are typical vehicles for sharing power" (p. 371).

- Using dialogue and deliberation to create a meaningful process—Bryson (2018)

described the creation of a meaningful strategic planning process in the context of

visionary leadership. He stated, "Sometimes it results in a vision of success for

the organization (initiative, program, collaboration, community), but in the

present discussion, visioning covers a broader range of outcomes; it is a verb

more than a noun" (p. 371). Thus, Bryson described leadership vision as action.

Visionary leaders have an understanding of the organization's need for change.

They encourage commitment to collective group mission and actively articulate

desirable strategies that will change current conditions. Visionary leaders

effectively communicate through dialogue and deliberation. They create shared

meaning with members of the organization to help them visualize a more

desirable future. This is often facilitated through free-flowing strategic planning

forums where different ideas and views can be expressed. At times, however, the

organization can become discouraged or lose direction. Throughout the process,

leaders remain focused on the critical vision of the future that needs to be

addressed. Bryson suggested that effective leaders understand the history of the

organization and can share stories of how the future of the organization will be

improved. He stated, "These stories link people's experience of the present

(cognitions), what they may do about the situation (behaviors), and what they may

expect to happen as a result (consequences), including the preservation of

enhancement of public value" (p. 373).

- Making and implementing decisions in arenas—Leaders of public agencies must

  manage their organizations under various forms of oversight. This is primarily

  provided by responsible political directing bodies. Bryson (2018), however,

  stated, "The key to success, and the heart of political leadership, is understanding

  how intergroup power relationships shape decision making and implementation

  outcomes" (p. 374). Leaders must therefore understand that there are other

  groups besides political oversight bodies that can exercise power and shape

  decisions and outcomes of a strategic plan. Examples of these other arenas can

  include the media, partnering local, state and federal agencies, contractors,

  community advocates, and employee unions. Leadership skill is required to

transition the lessons learned from these collaborative insight arenas to the formal

decision-making process. Conflicting agendas among strategic planning

stakeholders is also a common challenge, and leaders must maintain focus on the

strategic plan's vision and mission to encourage unity of purpose. Another arena

leadership skill is understanding where political influence lies with regard to

controlling resources. Bryson stated, "The first requirement for influencing

political decision making may be knowing whom to influence. Who controls the

agenda of the relevant decision-making body—a city council, a board of directors,

or some other group?" (pp. 375-376). Once the leader determines who controls

the resources, the task becomes building and sustaining winning coalitions that

will influence support for the organization.

- Enforcing principles and norms, settling disputes, and managing residual

  conflicts—In spite of best leadership efforts to minimize conflict and disputes,

  Bryson (2018) pointed out that "the decisions made in arenas are unlikely to cover

  all the details and difficulties that may come up during implementation. These

  residual or subsidiary conflicts must be handled constructively" (p. 377).

  Therefore, leaders responsible for strategic planning must understand legal and

  regulatory mandates of their organizations. This can include the process for

  arbitrating and mediating disputes or the possibility of formal litigation if disputes

  cannot be resolved. It is also important for a leader to incorporate standards of

  ethical behavior, which can be a proactive means of avoiding unnecessary

  conflict.

In summary, Bryson (2018) highlighted the relationship between strategic planning and the complex tasks of leadership. He stated, "Effective strategic planning is a collective achievement, typically involving sponsors, champions, facilitators, teams, task forces, and others in various ways at various times" (p. 379). These roles and tasks establish a direct relationship between an effective strategic plan and committed leadership.

Vision—Relationship to Leadership Theory

Vision is generally accepted as an important leadership concept and a critical element of strategic planning. As such, it has a direct relationship to leadership theory and strategic management theory. The following background provides foundational information from literature about vision and its specific relationship to leadership theory.

The purpose of leadership vision is to improve the current conditions of an organization to a more desirable future. Every public agency faces the challenge of a changing environment, and the need for vision is ever-present. A significant emphasis has been made in leadership literature regarding the importance of organizational vision. Nanus (1992) stated that "if there is one thing that can profoundly increase a leader's chance of success, it is developing and sustaining a compelling organizational vision" (p. xviii). He went on to describe a historical context for vision as the guiding light and the organizational force for "political leaders such as Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln, for great business leaders such as Henry Ford and Alfred P. Sloan, and for a range of other great leaders from Moses to Martin Luther King" (p. xviii). Thus, there is an established historical reference for past leaders of vision.

In the context of today's organizations, Nanus (1992) described vision as the key to leadership. He stated, "There is no more powerful engine driving an organization toward excellence and long-range success than an attractive, worthwhile, and achievable vision of the future, widely shared" (p. 3). He defined organizational vision as a "realistic, credible, attractive, future for your organization. It is your articulation of a destination toward which your organization should aim, a future that in important ways is better, more successful, or more desirable for your organization than the present" (p. 8).

Kouzes and Posner (2017) similarly identified the leadership ability to have a vision about the future as the key element to making extraordinary things happen in organizations. They stated, "Being able to envision the future is decidedly important, and has a tremendous impact on people's motivational levels and workplace productivity" (p. 99). They suggested that leadership vision should be a collaborative process rather than an executive edict:

> Don't adopt the view that visions come from the top down. You have to start engaging others in a collective dialogue about the future. You can't mobilize people to travel willingly to places they don't want to go. No matter how grand the dream of an individual visionary, if others don't see in it the possibility of realizing their hopes and desires, they won't follow voluntarily or wholeheartedly. You must show others how they, too, will be served by the long-term vision of the future and how their unmet needs will be satisfied. (p. 109)

Vision is often equated with leadership, and therefore, organizations often assume that vision is the sole responsibility of the leader to chart the future. What Kouzes and Posner suggested is the importance of finding common purpose. This means that a leader must

have more than just a great vision. No matter how relevant a leader's vision may be, if others in the organization don't see the vision in the context of their own hopes and desires, then the vision will not be followed with any significant commitment. Members of an organization, therefore, seek to incorporate their own future vision, including personal ideals and aspirations. To achieve this, the authors described the leader's process of developing a shared common vision, listening to others, appealing to common ideals, and connecting to what is meaningful to others.

A sense of shared vision has long been recognized by Drucker (1954). To motivate organizational peak performance, Drucker made the following observation:

> The worker will assume responsibility for peak performance only if he has a managerial vision, that is, if he sees the enterprise as if he were a manager responsible, through his performance, for its success and survival. This vision he can only obtain through the experience of participation. (p. 307)

Drucker suggested that workers must be kept informed to understand organizational vision and personally share responsibility. In far too many organizations, information is shared only in the interest of the agency rather than a consideration of what is important to the individual to encourage his or her performance. In short, workers must not only be kept informed of the organization's vision, but the vision must also become a personally meaningful reality.

The theme of a shared strategic vision unifying an organization was expressed by Hax and Majluf (1984). They suggested that vision can challenge organizational units while communicating ideals, inspiration, motivation, and a sense of achievement. The strategic vision is to be in unifying alignment with the ethics and values of the

organization. Hax and Majluf further suggested that vision is not temporary and stated, "The vision of the firm is a rather permanent statement articulated primarily by its Chief Executive Officer" (p. 45). They further established vision as the first step in the strategic planning process to achieve the following:

1. Communicate the very nature of existence of the organization in terms of corporate purpose, business scope, and competitive leadership.

2. Provide a framework that regulates the relationships between the firm and its primary stakeholders: employees, customers, shareholders, suppliers, and the communities in which the firm operates.

3. State the broad objectives of the firm's performance in terms of growth and profitability. (p. 45)

Other perspectives on shared vision have been developed by Senge (2006). These perspectives explore why shared vision matters, suggesting that most visions are those of a single person or group. The vision is then imposed on the entire organization. He stated, "Such visions, at best, command compliance—not commitment. A shared vision is a vision that many people are truly committed to, because it reflects their own personal vision" (p. 192). Here Senge pointed out an important historical perspective on leadership vision in traditional organizations. He went on to state,

> In the traditional hierarchical organization, no one questioned the vision emanated from the top. Often, the big picture guiding the firm wasn't even shared—all people needed to know were their "marching orders" so they could carry out their tasks in support of the larger vision. (p. 199)

This requires a conscious leadership approach to vision that may be overlooked by public organizations today. Organizations may need to do more than continue using a traditional top-down approach. Successful visions need to generate energy and commitment, which is more likely when visions are shared. In this context, Senge suggested a holistic approach to leadership vision where individuals in an organization feel that they have an important piece of the whole. They have a unique contribution to make, which can help the overall vision of the organization succeed. It is the leader's role to encourage that unique sense of contribution and belonging.

Parnell (2014) emphasized a leader's responsibility to articulate organizational vision in a way that is easily understood, stating that "vision statements have little impact on organizations if they are not sufficiently focused and articulated clearly" (p. 299). He suggested that vision is linked to strategy, and if the leadership vision is not clearly understood, it can create negative implications for strategic planning as well. Therefore, clearly disseminating vision throughout the organization is a key function of leadership and its relationship to strategic planning.

Also discussed by Parnell (2014) is the importance of transformational leadership in the context of organizational change. He stated that effective communication and sharing vision among organization members are important considerations in implementing organizational change:

> Once the need for change is established, leaders must inspire organizational
> members with a vision of what the organization can become if its members are
> willing to change. . . . The change effort is not as likely to be successful when
> members of the firm do not share the same vision for the company's future

organization. . . . Transformational leaders must also effectively communicate

their vision to all members of the organization. (p. 304)

Therefore, the concept of transformational leadership has a significant relationship to

shared organizational vision, clear articulation, shared inspiration, and effective

communication. Moreover, organizational performance is enhanced when workers feel

autonomous with personal responsibility for the success of outcomes.

These leadership perspectives are aligned with Burns (1978) who introduced the

concept of transformational leadership where leaders and followers help each other to

achieve a higher level of morale for the organization. He suggested a leader's role in

transformational leadership is to understand the wants and needs of the followers in the

organization, which empowers both the leaders and followers to achieve positive change.

Unlike transactional leadership, where leaders and followers have separate agendas,

transformational leadership strives to achieve mutual support for a common purpose.

Burns (2003) in subsequent literature stated, "Nothing offers so clear—and urgent—a

challenge to leadership, nothing tests it so decisively, as human wants and needs.

Leadership has its origins in the responsiveness of leaders to followers' wants" (p. 146).

Thus, a transformational leadership understanding of shared human wants and needs can

have a positive impact on organizational vision.

Similar observations about transformational leadership and its relationship to people and

vision have been made by Northouse (2019). He stated,

As its name implies, transformational leadership is a process that changes and

transforms people. It is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and

long-term goals. It includes assessing followers' motives, satisfying their needs,

and treating them as full human beings. Transformational leadership involves an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them. It is a process that often incorporates charismatic and visionary leadership. (pp. 163-164)

Therefore, the successful implementation of vision can be enhanced by the commitment of transformational leaders and organization members toward overall "visionary leadership."

Bennis and Goldsmith (2010) developed a perspective linking shared vision, and transformational leadership. They suggested that perhaps the most dangerous leadership myth of all is to assume that it is the leader alone that controls, directs, and manipulates others. They stated, "On the contrary, leaders have visions that they communicate to attract and pull others to join their endeavors. They understand they will not be successful if they try to push or coerce would-be followers" (p. 24). Therefore, successfully achieving organizational vision means that effective leaders allow individuals to personally take their own initiative to solve shared problems. This approach not only impacts the leader but also transforms the feelings of followers to a more empowering culture for the organization.

Strategic vision and transformational leadership were further developed by Bass and Riggio (2006), who suggested that empowerment can have a positive transforming effect in promoting organizational commitment, loyalty, and involvement. The authors suggested that empowerment is a product of individualized consideration:

As much as possible, followers are allowed and encouraged to enable, direct, and control themselves in carrying out their responsibilities in aligning their goals

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with the goals of their leader and the larger organization. At the heart of transformational leadership is the development of followers, with much of this occurring through effective empowering of followers by leaders. (p. 193)

Thus, a common theme of the literature on transformational leadership suggests the importance of developing a shared commitment to organizational vision. Transformational leaders must also understand the personal wants and needs of followers to encourage and empower collective achievement toward that common vision.

Mission—Relationship to Leadership Theory

In addressing *The Five Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask About Your Organization*, Drucker (2008) established the first most important question as, "What is Our Mission?" (p. 2). With specific regard to social sector institutions, he stated that the mission of these organizations is to

Make a distinctive difference in the lives of individuals, and in society. Making this difference is the mission—the organization's purpose and very reason for being. . . . A mission cannot be impersonal; it has to have deep meaning, something you believe in—something you know is right. A fundamental responsibility of leadership is to make sure that everybody knows the mission, understands it, lives it. (p. 13)

Drucker also emphasized that mission should be a top priority with regard to leadership integrity. Mission serves as a guideline for the organization to make principled decisions. An organization's mission should never be compromised for financial gain or any expedient activity that detracts from principled purpose.

Today's organizations operate in an ever-changing environment, and Collins (2008) provided some additional perspectives on the need for mission stability during dynamic circumstances. He suggested that mission represents continuity and that "every truly great organization demonstrates the characteristic of *preserve the core, yet stimulate progress*" (p. 17). In this context, mission represents a core purpose or fixed principle that remains constant, even in the midst of a changing world around it. Collins suggested that the paradox this creates is that organizations best equipped to handle rapidly changing environments are those that adhere to a purposeful mission that doesn't change. As examples, Collins (2008) observed that "the most enduring churches understand that the core ideology of the religion must remain fixed while the specific practices and venues of worship change in response to the realities of younger generations" (p. 18). He made similar observations about principles of Judaism remaining intact for centuries in spite of discontinuity created by the Diaspora.

Organizations will, therefore, always face challenges that can distract from intended purpose and mission. At times, these distractions may even appear as opportunities for financial gain or perhaps favorable political consideration. Yet distractions cannot be allowed to detract from organizational purpose. Therein lies the challenge for leadership in the context of strategic mission. Effective leaders should never lose sight of organizational mission—they keep the main thing, the main thing. Collins (2008) made the observation that an organization committed to its uncompromising mission also creates confidence in its people:

> The question of mission has become, if anything, even more important as our
> world becomes increasingly disruptive and turbulent. No matter how much the

world changes, people still have a fundamental need to belong to something they

can feel proud of. They have a fundamental need for guiding values and sense of

purpose that give their life and work meaning. . . . More than at any time in the

past, people will demand operating autonomy—freedom plus responsibility—and

will simultaneously demand that the organizations of which they are a part stand

for something. (p. 19)

The importance of mission in the context of change was discussed by Pollard

(2002) who observed that people in organizations have a natural aversion to rapid and

ongoing change. In the absence of a meaningful mission, it is said that this can have a

negative demoralizing effect on an organization and its people. Mission transcends

change with stability and hope with implications for transformational leadership:

Leaders must communicate their organization's mission to all parts of the

organization. The mission provides a reference point, an anchor, and a source of

hope in times of change. When it connects to people's values, it brings purpose

and meaning to those who are fulfilling the mission, and provides the impetus for

creativity, productivity, and quality in the work and in personal development. (p.

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Thus, Pollard aligned organizational mission with transformational leadership by

connecting with an individual's personal values and development to create communities

of integrity and hope. With regard to the responsibility of leaders, he stated, "Our

ultimate job is to be champions of the mission of the firm and, more important, to live

that mission. We also must recognize that our values and character will be tested in the

process" (p. 54). The unifying effect that mission can have on leaders and followers in an

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organization can be powerful. Burns (2003) discussed this transformational impact in a similar way, stating,

> Vigorous interactions between transforming leaders and their followers is itself a powerful causal force for change. . . . Leaders take the initiative in mobilizing people for participation in the process of change, encouraging a sense of collective identity and collective efficacy, which in turn brings stronger feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy. (p. 25)

Literature then suggests that organizational missions can be more than perfunctory elements of strategic plans. If missions are thoughtfully developed with members of the organization in mind, they can be stabilizing foundations in times of turbulence and change. If leaders remain true to values of the mission, such as organizational integrity, they can provide hope and confidence. If organizational missions are lived out and modeled in leadership practice, they can have a transformational impact on encouraging collective identity and feelings of individual value as part of the larger organization.

Regardless of whether the leadership discussion is on the organization's strategic vision or mission, Blanchard and Hodges (2005) emphasized the importance of servant leadership and the interests of others above self:

> A heart motivated by self-interest looks at the world as a 'give a little, take a lot' proposition. People with hearts motivated by self-interest put their own agenda, safety, status, and gratification ahead of those affected by their thoughts and actions. Cutting people off on the freeway or church parking lot, punishing those who disagree with you or challenge your position, and exploiting the weaknesses

and fears of others to get what you want are all actions that come from a self-

motivated heart. (p. 40)

Ethical leadership is often called into question in today's organizations. Indeed, as the

authors suggest, leaders can become motivated by their own interests, agendas, status,

and need for self-gratification. Thus, as leaders consider developing and living out the

strategic vision and mission statements for their organizations, it should always be done

in the spirit of a servant's heart for others.

Stakeholder Analysis in Vision and Mission Development

The importance of considering stakeholders as part of leadership theory and

vision and mission development is a consistent theme in the literature. Stakeholders are

those with power to exert influence on the organization in significant ways.

Nanus (1992) suggested that vision development must always include

consideration of the organization's most critical stakeholders. In the context of public

organizations, this often means the communities served, those who advocate for quality

public service, and those who provide political oversight and control:

The scope of your vision must be similarly defined and reality tested. . . . For an

organization, the scope is defined first by considering the needs of those who have

important stakes in the organization . . . Every organization has major

constituencies or stakeholders, whose needs are ignored at the organization's

peril. (p. 62)

Nanus further suggested that stakeholders include both those who are external customers

of the organization as well as those working inside the organization. After identification

of the most important stakeholders, their expectations and interests for the future vision

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of the organization must be identified. Opportunities or threats to the organization based on those expectations can then be prioritized for strategic action.

As a helpful means of developing an organizational vision statement, Allison and Kaye (2015) encouraged emphasis on the impact the organization has on its most important external stakeholders:

> The external vision focuses on how the world would be improved if the organization achieves its purpose. Too often, vision statements merely focus on the internal vision—what the organization would look like in the future. . . . But these statements avoid answering the question: "To what end? . . . The focus of an effective external vision statement should first be on the client to be served or the constituency whose lives are to be impacted by the organization. (p. 101)

Thus, external strategic vision considerations must not lose sight of the organization's most important stakeholder, those who are to be served.

Although external stakeholders are important to conceptualizing vision, Quigley (1993) discussed the importance of considering and empowering internal stakeholders. It is internal stakeholders who ultimately translate the vision into action. He stated, "Power flows from vision. The leader's power is suboptimized [sic] unless it empowers others" (p. 11).

With regard to external stakeholders in the mission development process, Rughase (2007) suggested that too often, organizational mission is conceived and developed by executive leadership without consideration of the external stakeholders who are actually served by the organization. He stated, "What a company 'should do' is related to the purpose (mission) of a company, which cannot be determined without an

understanding of stakeholder's impact, especially those stakeholders who are critical to the company, such as customers" (pp. 8, 10). Moreover, internal stakeholders, the staff who actually do the work that achieves organizational purpose, can also be overlooked as contributing partners to mission development. He suggested that it is the members of the organization, its internal stakeholders, who inherently perform the duties that define the organization. In discussing specifications of a mission's design, Rughase suggested that "these specifications should cover all aspects of an organization's structure, operations, and relationships with stakeholders" (p. 59).

The importance of stakeholder analysis when engaging in mission development is also emphasized by Bryson (2018), who stated, "Stakeholder analysis is a valuable prelude to a mission statement. . . . Indeed, I usually argue that if an organization has time to do only one thing when it comes to strategic planning, that one thing ought to be stakeholder analysis" (p. 127). Regardless of the sector—private, public, or nonprofit, Bryson suggested that the satisfaction of key stakeholders matters. He further stated that "building on a series of stakeholder analyses can lead to far greater fulfillment of the mission" (p. 128). If an organization is not aware of what its key stakeholders think is important, then the chances of establishing and achieving purposeful mission is greatly diminished. Bryson made a special note of future generations as a key stakeholder of organizational mission. He emphasized the importance of responsible government stewardship in leaving the world in as good, if not better condition, than they found it. He quoted Theodore Roosevelt as saying, "We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children" (p. 131).

Bryson (2018) also made observations about stakeholder analysis in the context of collaboration. Few organizations serving the public can achieve their missions alone. He suggested that networking with like-minded stakeholders can provide partnerships and resources to enhance organizational mission.

Linden (2010) agreed, pointing out that collaborative stakeholders are vital to the success of public sector organizations. Whether the challenge is a cleaner environment, family well-being, education, or healthcare, no single organization can handle the task alone. He stated that the challenges facing society today are complex, "yet none of them can be solved by any one agency or skill set: complexity by its very nature requires a variety of perspectives. That is to say, it requires collaboration" (p. xix).

Scott et al. (1993) also emphasized considering the perspectives of both external and internal stakeholders in developing the mission statement. They explained that this process emerges from input received from the actual customers of the organization who are familiar with the level of service currently provided. In the business sector, this is commonly achieved through surveys of customers. Some public sector agencies use surveys to measure customer satisfaction as well. Other means of obtaining external stakeholder perspectives that public agencies may use can include town hall meetings with the community, reported customer service suggestions and concerns, lawsuits filed against the organization, issues raised by community advocates, observations by the media regarding organizational performance, union concerns, and recommendations by collaborative partners. The opinions of these stakeholders are important, and their input and perspectives regarding an organization's mission statement can be valuable.

Although collaborative stakeholders are generally discussed in a positive context, organizations should also be aware of stakeholders who may pose threats or be critical of the organization. At times, the news media, political boards, collaborative partners, oversight commissions, community groups, and legal advocates can point out shortcomings of a public organization's performance. These stakeholders, who can be perceived as detractors, are often ignored or disregarded. Yet their perspectives of the organization's service can provide valuable insights about whether or not the vision or mission of an organization is being achieved.

Constructing Strategic Vision and Mission Statements

Literature supporting the importance of vision and mission statements in the context of strategic management and leadership theories has been the initial focus of this chapter. Also discussed was the importance of stakeholder analysis in strategic vision and mission statement development. Discussion now proceeds to the numerous views on how strategic vision and mission statements should be constructed.

Lack of Consensus in Constructing Strategic Vision and Mission Statements

Strategic vision and mission statements are generally regarded as foundational elements to the framework of strategic management and strategic plans. Yet there is no consensus in the literature as to which of the two occupies the position of primary importance. There is also no consensus on which of the two statements should be developed first in the organizational strategic planning process.

 In the context of public and nonprofit organizations, Valcik (2016) suggested that establishing strategic vision must be the first priority:

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An organization's vision has to be in place before anything else can be

established. . . . A vision should indicate what the organization is tasked with for

duties, responsibilities and development. In strategic planning, the vision would

provide long-term, mid-range, and short-term planning for the organization. . . .

Once the vision has been established, the next critical step is to formulate a

mission for the organization. (p. 15)

Thus, Valcik's position is that vision comes first, followed by the organizational mission.

D'Angelo (2012) shared the same perspective that vision comes first, stating,

"Everything starts with vision. Vision is the process that brings imagination to creation.

Every function, everything that is, was created from something that wasn't there" (p. 1).

He further posited that leadership vision allows organizations to compare their current

state of existence vis-à-vis a picture of what they someday hope to become.

Scott et al. (1993) also addressed the question, "Mission or Vision—Which is

First?" (p. 67). They expressed the view that oftentimes vision statements are developed

internally without first having the benefit of external information of customer experience.

Therefore, their view is that it is mission, and not vision, that comes first:

Many groups have experimented with developing an image of the future—their

vision—without referring to their mission. What tends to happen is that the image

becomes impractical when it is not grounded in the specific mission of the

organization. Because the mission statement is directly linked to a broad analysis

of the customers and environment, it makes sense imagining the future in the

context of the mission, because it comes from information. (p. 67)

Bryson (2018) also placed mission development ahead of vision. He described the

primary importance of mission in stating, "An organization's mission . . . provides the

organization's most obvious *raison d'etre* and social justification for its existence. . . . the

ultimate organizational end of creating public value" (p. 44). After the mission has been

developed, Bryson placed strategic vision development toward the end of the planning

process, suggesting that organizations are perhaps better positioned to determine vision

after other parts of the plan have been established.

Yet another perspective was offered by Keffer (2014) who placed neither vision

nor mission statements in the first position but rather suggested that the value statement is

the starting point. She explained,

When I work with organizations, I ask them to start by developing their value

statement, then move to vision statement, and finally end with the mission

statement. Why not jump right in to the mission statement? Well, I believe

before you can fully answer what you do, you must answer what you stand for.

Think of the value statement as the foundation upon which your organization

stands. . . . If you know what your organization stands for, building the vision and

the mission statements will flow more easily. (p. 33)

Still another view was expressed by Rieches (n.d.) in a corporate context. When

responding to the question of what comes first, vision or mission, he stated,

Actually, neither—purpose comes first followed by vision and mission. . . . Our

research has confirmed that most corporate execs are unsure of the difference

between vision or mission, purpose or cause. Most CEOs agree that these types

of guiding statements are necessary, but a company-specific model or set of best

practices to build upon has not been clearly defined. Start by following this

model:

A PURPOSE statement answers WHY we exist

A VISION statement answers WHAT we aim to achieve

A MISSION statement answers HOW we plan to achieve this vision. (paras. 1, 3)

In short, it is evident from this sample of views that there is no consensus. A

variety of opinions exists in the literature regarding the primary position and order of

development of vision and mission statements in the strategic planning process. Indeed,

some literature has suggested that both vision and mission statements are secondary to

other considerations such as values or purpose. It is not the intent of this study to resolve

these differences but rather to explore how county public health and human services

administrators perceive and experience strategic vision and mission statements that exist

in their own work settings.

Framework and Prevalence of Vision and Mission Statements

Angelica (2001) emphasized the importance of an organization understanding the

value of a strategic vision statement to establish its future direction and purpose. He

stated, "An effective vision statement keeps the organization moving by describing the

organization's desired future" (p. 3). He likewise expressed the importance of mission

statements, suggesting, "A well-crafted mission statement helps an organization stay

focused by clearly stating what business the organization is in" (p. 3). Valcik (2016) also

expressed the importance of both strategic vision and mission statements in encouraging

synergistic organizational effectiveness. He suggested that the strategic planning

framework, as well as organizational resources, should be aligned with its strategic vision and mission statements.

In spite of the importance suggested in the literature about strategic vision and mission statements, their application varies considerably in practice. Abrams (2007) reviewed the "mission statements" of 101 top companies. A review of these companies indicates that only 24 of the 101 had both vision and mission statements. Forty of the 101 companies had only mission statements, and 21 of the companies had only vision statements. The remaining 16 companies had no formal vision or mission statements. They substituted values statements or otherwise described their vision or missions as credos, promises, philosophies, strategies, or other terms for their organizational purpose.

Thus, there is much variation in how corporations develop and apply strategic vision and mission statements. Although Abrams (2007) focused solely on the practices of private-sector companies, similar variations in the application of vision and mission statements exist in the public sector as well. Website reviews of the 34 Los Angeles County departments (https://dpss.lacounty.gov/en.html) indicate that 16 had both vision and mission statements. Eleven of the 34 had only mission statements, and none had only vision statements. The remaining seven had neither formal vision nor mission statements. These findings are listed by each department on Table 1.

Table 1

Los Angeles County Departments—Vision & Mission Statements on Department Websites

Department	Vision & mission	Vision only	Mission only	Neither
Agriculture weights & measures			X	
Alt. pub. defender			X	
Animal care & control	X			
Assessor	X			
Auditor controller	X			
Beaches & harbors	X			
Chief exec. off.	X			
Child support			X	
Children family services			X	
Consumer & business affairs			X	
County counsel	X			
Development authority				X
District attorney			X	
Exec. off. BOS	X			
Fire	X			
Health services	X			
Human resources	X			
Internal services				X
Library				X
Coroner	X			
Mental health			X	
Military affairs				X
Natural history museum				X
Parks and rec	X			
Probation	X			
Public defender			X	
Public health	X			

Table 1 (*continued*)

Department	Vision & mission	Vision only	Mission only	Neither
Public social services	X			
Public works	X			
Reg. planning				X
Registrar recorder			X	
Sheriff				X
Treasurer tax collector			X	
Workforce development			X	
Total 34	16	0	11	7

The challenge this points out is that beyond general definitions in the literature of what vision and mission statements are, there is significant variance in how the statements are implemented in practice. This lack of consistency applied to both private sector companies as well as public agencies in Los Angeles County. For this reason, a more in-depth literature review of how strategic vision and mission statements are developed and constructed would be worthwhile.

Strategic Vision Statement Development

Literature often suggests that organizational vision is a key component to guiding the future direction of an organization. Although Keffer (2014) started the strategic planning process with developing a values statement, she suggested that strategic vision serves as the roadmap, which provides guiding foundational leadership direction for the organization. She described vision as the overarching concept under which vision statements, mission statements, and value statements are a part. Her vision statement model is primarily aimed at private sector companies but can be applicable to public

sector organizations as well. She stated that the vision "provides the foundation for the set of rules with which our organization will operate. In a sense, the vision runs the company, providing the direction for all of our activities" (pp. 24-25).

Keffer (2014) further suggested that although most people have typically heard of mission statements, fewer are familiar with strategic vision statements. She stated that "this is partly due to the mission statement being more public, while the value and vision statements are more internal, informing employees how to live out the mission" (p. 14). Thus, Keffer suggested that strategic vision statements are geared more toward internal members of an organization. This may explain why some organizations may not openly post vision statements.

With specific regard to how a vision statement should be developed, Keffer (2014) emphasized focus on the future and what the organization hopes to become. She encouraged creative thought and boldness rather than simply settling for the current realities of the organization. Oftentimes, things are wrong in organizations, and those conditions evolve over time. After a while, even if contrary to the strategic vision, those conditions can become part of the organizational culture and don't seem wrong anymore. Leaving current conditions behind creates vision possibilities for a better future. She encouraged organizations to set aside established definitions and assumptions about the organization. These can include the following:

- Your current markets and customers

- Your core competencies and capabilities

- Your geographic area

- Your history

- Your competitors

- Your industry

- Your governance (public, private, shareholders)

- Your level of leadership, excellence, service, and quality

- Your reputation

- Your public image

- What you are known for doing/being. (p. 51)

It may be difficult for an organization to set aside this list of current organizational

identities. Yet upon closer review, it can be seen that each of Keffer's defining

characteristics can take on a fresh view of future possibilities rather than a view of

accepting current or past conditions. Although this can be a challenging exercise in

vision statement development, it may be a worthwhile framework to consider.

For example, taking her list of organizational definitions in order, perhaps current

markets or customers could be expanded upon to create greater opportunities for

improved service. Future staff development training could be improved to enhance core

competencies and capabilities. Existing geographic boundaries could perhaps be

expanded to consider new areas of underserved or disadvantaged community members.

The organization may be resting too heavily on historic practices with resistance to doing

things differently in the future. Competitors, be they contractors or other public agencies,

may be advanced with more efficient technology that the organization has yet to

implement. Perhaps academic research has demonstrated that there are better practices

for a vision that an organization should explore further. Current organizational priorities

may not be aligned with the governing stakeholders, and they may have visions of a

future that should be understood better. An organization may need to consider evaluating its leadership structure to determine its ability to manage future needs. Perhaps it should openly conduct a stakeholder analysis to determine what the public thinks about the quality of service it provides and how the public's vision for improved service might be achieved. Perhaps the organization should assess its reputation and public image vis-à-vis accounts by the public, media, oversight commissions, or political boards to determine current areas of criticism or concern and ways public perception could be improved in the future. In consideration of what the organization is known for doing or being, the organization can assess its strengths while improving on weaknesses that would improve its future.

An additional perspective of Keffer (2014) is that a strategic vision statement should be brief and to the point. She stated, "The vision statement is a very short phrase or sentence that sets an exciting tone for planning the future of the organization. It is the organization's shared hopes, dreams, and image of the future" (p. 16). As an example of pointed brevity, she described past and current vision statements of Nike, "Crush Adidas," and "To be the number one athletic company in the world" (p. 16).

In short, Keffer's (2014) approach to vision statement development is to make it more internally focused on encouraging members of the organization and emphasize creativity and boldness. A suggested approach to vision statement development is setting aside where the organization currently is and replacing it with a future focus on what it hopes to become. Finally, the strategic vision statement should be brief and to the point, making it clearly understood.

While acknowledging that it is not a favored approach, Ebener and Smith (2015), similar to Bryson, place the creation of the strategic vision statement toward the end of the strategic planning process. They stated, "Starting with a vision statement does create an end point, a destination for the process. But it is difficult for most people to articulate a vision at the beginning of the process" (p. 96). Despite its position toward the end of the strategic planning process, the vision statement remains a key strategic planning element, and they further emphasized its importance, stating,

> Vision provides direction. It paints a picture of the future. It points to where the organization is going. It identifies a destination. Articulating a clear vision and gaining a sense of ownership among others is one of the most important functions of a leader.
>
> Vision inspires confidence and courage. People can go much faster, with more confidence and courage when they can see where they are going. (p. 94)

In their strategic planning guide, Ebener and Smith (2015) described an interactive process of leadership characteristics that are key to developing an organization's vision statement. This includes passion about the organization, eloquence to describe a future people can see, an honesty that generates trust, inspiration that motivates, persistence, and the ability to be forward-looking. The authors used the example of a statement made by John F. Kennedy on May 31, 1961, when "He told a joint session of congress that he envisioned, '. . .landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth by the end of the decade.' His vision became a reality on July 20, 1969, when Apollo 11 commander, Neil Armstrong stepped onto the moon's surface" (p. 95). It is also

noteworthy that Kennedy did not see the vision become a reality, yet it generated

perseverance toward a highly visionary yet challenging achievement.

Ebener and Smith (2015) established the following criteria for developing a good

organizational strategic vision statement:

It is clear. People can understand it. No one needs to explain what it means.

It is short. A vision statement is just that—a statement. It is not a page or two of

rambling paragraphs. Few will read a long vision statement. Even fewer will

understand, appreciate or remember it.

It can be accomplished. It is hard to get people behind something they know

they can never achieve. A moon landing was far-reaching, but it was within

reach.

It challenges the imagination. The vision should stretch people. It should not

seem impossible to attain. Nor should it seem too easily accomplished.

It describes the future. A vision statement paints a picture of the future. It is

often confused with a mission statement, which describes the present. (p. 96)

The authors further explained that this guideline for strategic vision statements that are

clear, short, accomplishable, challenging to the imagination, and future oriented also

creates an effective foundational framework for the organizational strategic plan.

As previously discussed in a general context, Bryson (2018) prioritized mission

over vision. In discussing his 10-step strategic planning process, vision was not

mentioned until Step 8, toward the end of the process. He acknowledged that some might

question the development of vision toward the end of the strategic planning process, yet

he suggested that stages of organizational development can differ. Some organizations

are able to clearly develop what he described as their "vision of success" (p. 58) earlier in the process than others. Therefore, he felt that vision development may occur at any time in the strategic planning process. He further suggested that most organizations face a number of critically important challenges, and addressing those as a priority can significantly improve performance. Therefore, he suggested that determining a vision of success may even be optional. He stated,

> Some organizations may start with a visionary statement. Others may use visions to help them figure out what the strategic issues are or to help them develop strategies. And still others may use visions to convince key decision makers to adopt strategies or plans, or to guide implementation efforts. The further along in the process a vision is produced, the more likely it is to be more fully articulated. . . . Further, for most organizations, development of a vision of success is not necessary in order to produce marked improvements in performance. . . . Most organizations simply do not address often enough what is truly important; just gathering key decision makers to deal with a few important matters in a timely way can enhance organizational performance substantially. For these reasons, the step is labeled optional. (p. 59)

In defining a vision of success, Bryson (2018) described it as being what the organization would look like when it reaches its full potential. He went on to explain that vision is conceptually broader than mission. He made the observation that although most public and nonprofit organizations today have clear and useful strategic mission statements, fewer have meaningful vision statements. Bryson went on to explain that "a mission outlines the organizational purpose; a vision goes on to describe how the

organization should look when it is working extremely well in relation to its environment and key stakeholders" (p. 269).

Thus, Bryson (2018) observed that vision is broader than mission and provides a future look at what the organization would look like if it reached its full potential. He also placed vision development toward the end of the strategic planning process. Yet he suggested that, depending on the organization, vision development can take place at any time in the process. He further observed that most public and nonprofit organizations have mission statements, but fewer have vision statements. Finally, vision development may be optional as addressing important challenges to the organization may have a more immediate impact on performance.

Another observation about vision was made by Thornberry (1997) who reminded planners that a vision statement should be a strategic obligation, not just rhetoric. Oftentimes organizations can create a strategic vision statement as part of an obligatory planning exercise, but the vision needs to be a true commitment to action. Thus, he saw strategic vision as an obligation and commitment rather than an optional process. He concluded that a strategic vision statement must give organizational guidance. It must lead and guide followers in a direction that will take the organization to a better place. Leaders must use strategic vision statements to plan not for the short-run but rather for meaningful long-term success.

Vision statements should also be crafted well to communicate effectively. By this, Thornberry (1997) meant that the vision statement can be clearly understood and be personally significant to organization members. He suggested that vision statements should convey a forward positive direction. Vision requires leadership courage and

willingness to risk. Vision works best as a shared phenomenon through unit management

ranks rather than being the possession of senior management leaders alone. These

conclusions by Thornberry make contributing observations about the importance of

organizational vision and strategic vision statements.

Parnell (2014) also emphasized the importance of vision as part of strategic

management and planning process. He stated,

> The vision serves as a rallying cry for the organization to align its efforts behind a
>
> clearly understood goal. . . . To get everyone in the organization behind the
>
> strategy, it is vital to communicate the strategy across all levels and functions in
>
> the organization. This is the role that the vision plays. (p. 212)

He went on to suggest that effective vision statements often have a "hook," which can be

a color, a number, or phrase, that is easy to remember and connects people to the

organization. This practice is common in the private sector business world, and Parnell

used the Lipton Tea vision statement of "Paint the world yellow with Lipton" (p. 212) as

an example of an easy-to-remember vision that communicates a bright, sunshine

beverage experience. Although this hook perspective may be challenging for a

government agency to incorporate, there may be an undeniable benefit to having a vision

statement that inspires both internal and external stakeholders of the organization with a

memorable vision that won't be forgotten.

Allison and Kaye (2015) offered perspectives regarding the importance of

organizational vision. They referred to vision as "a guiding image for success" (p. 84). It

refers to a future condition, not yet obtained, of what success might look like. They

suggested that vision statements should be inspirational and gave examples such as

Martin Luther King's "I have a Dream" vision that changed a nation. They stated, "That famous speech is a dramatic example of the power that can be generated by a person who communicates a compelling vision of the future" (p. 84).

With regard to practical approaches for crafting an organizational vision statement, Allison and Kaye (2015) identified a number of important considerations: A vision statement is future oriented. It describes what organizational success would look like. It is a shared image of both leaders and organization members. It motivates people to work together. It is compelling. It challenges and inspires. It stretches capabilities to achieve purpose. It focuses on how the world would be improved if the organization met its vision.

Much of the literature on strategic vision addresses theoretical implications for organizations. Although there is value in theory, it is important to consider the practical application of strategic vision as well. A review of organizational strategic plans indicates that although many have both strategic vision and mission statements, some have only vision statements, and some have only mission statements. Price (2001) discussed the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, as modified by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which recommended that strategic vision statements be included in the strategic plans of all federal agencies. Thus, it is noteworthy that at the federal government level, the OMB feels that the formal inclusion of strategic vision statements in strategic plans can improve the commitment and performance of federal agencies.

The journal, *Nonprofit Communications Report* ("Make Time to Evaluate Your Mission, Vision Statements," 2018) recognized the importance of vision and mission

statements, but suggested that organizations should not assume that they are current.

Time should be taken to periodically evaluate mission and vision statements. With

specific regard to vision statements, it is recommended that it be future oriented, and

broadly cover the organization's core activities. The vision statement should not be a

short-term objective but rather, an enduring vision statement that will last while

addressing the following needs:

1. Draw people together for a shared goal.

2. Inspire a better future.

3. Motivate community members to "realize their dreams through positive,
   effective action."

4. Serve as a starting point for continued action planning. (p. 4)

Strategic Mission Statement Development

It would seem that putting an organization's strategic mission statement together

would be a simple process. Strategic planning resources are highly accessible today, and

an organization might consider finding a standardized mission statement template and

filling in the blanks with the agency's name and purpose. However, upon further review

of literature on strategic mission statements, the task becomes more challenging. There

are varying opinions about how the mission statement should be developed and

constructed and to what extent the perspectives of internal and external stakeholders

might be included. Another consideration would be whether organizational values and

philosophy should be included in the mission statement, or might these be better

articulated in a separate values statement. Also considered might be the organization's

response to its purpose, that is, the reason the organization exists and how it will use its

mission to pursue future vision. Finally, in addition to the different perspectives on what should be included in an effective mission statement, opinions also vary on the statement's length.

For example, Drucker (2008), in describing an effective mission statement, stated, "The effective mission statement is short and sharply focused. It should fit on a T-shirt. The mission says why you do what you do, not the means by which you do it" (p. 14). From this description, the mission statement would not get into explanatory details of how the organization will address or respond to issues. The mission statement should be concise and focused on the organization's purpose. A mission statement that cannot be recalled by organization members is of little value, and an added benefit to a short mission statement is that it is easy to remember. Drucker went on to suggest that a short and sharply focused mission statement should be clear and inspirational. It should be broad yet personally relatable in such a way that all members of the organization know what it is and feel a contributing connection to it.

After a review of Los Angeles County department mission statements, a number were found to be consistent with Drucker's (2008) recommendation of being short and sharply focused. An example is the mission statement of the county Department of Public Health (DPH), which states that their mission is, "Advance the conditions that support optimal health and well-being for all" (County of Los Angeles, n.d.). This brief and impactful mission statement appears clear in purpose, is relatable, and can be easily remembered.

Abrams (2007) compiled a list of 101 mission statements from top companies. The mission statements of many of these companies are aligned with Drucker's short and sharp focus:

- Lockheed Martin—"To achieve Mission Success by attaining total customer satisfaction and meeting all our commitments" (p. 89).

- Microsoft Corporation—"At Microsoft, we work to help people and businesses throughout the world realize their full potential. This is our mission. Everything we do reflects this mission and the values that make it possible" (p. 96).

- Sara Lee Corporation—"To simply delight you . . . every day" (p. 114).

From these examples, we can see that short and sharply focused mission statements have been effectively applied to both public agencies and business corporations. Scott et al. (1993) also shared the perspective that mission statements should be brief and focused with passion. In discussing pitfalls of creating mission statements, they stated,

> Stay away from crafting the words of the mission too much. Make sure the statement evokes feeling and passion. The statement should say who you are and why you're passionate about it. Put your attention toward a broad focus on the spirit of what you do. Make it short—try not to have more than three sentences. (p. 68)

The authors also emphasized individual connections to organizational strategic mission statements. They suggested that an effective organizational mission statement is a collection of personal missions, stating that "matching individual and organizational missions often makes the difference between a high performing organization, and one

that is just getting by. When people find an organization that is a vehicle for their personal mission, their energy and excitement are multiplied" (p. 62).

Scott et al. (1993) further described three basic components that an organizational mission statement must have: "What you do . . . For whom . . . Your uniqueness" (p. 63). The "uniqueness" component of a mission statement is seen as particularly important:

> Your mission statement should distinguish your business from others, making clear what is unique about what you do. It tells, from the customer's perspective, what you offer. The mission statement is a guiding tool for the employees of the organization. It helps them make decisions and know what course of action to take. It provides a consistent focus from which the visioning process proceeds."
>
> (p. 63)

Without this distinction, an agency seeking to develop a quick and easy mission statement could simply insert their name on the contents of another organization's mission statement. Including a unique quality in a mission statement can create the feeling that the organization is distinctive and set apart from all others.

Evans (2010) provided a very clear and succinct definition of strategic mission statements and how they should be constructed:

> What Does A Mission Statement Do?
>
> - Defines the present state or purpose of an organization
> - Answers three questions about why an organization exists
>
> WHAT it does
>
> WHO it does it for
>
> HOW it does what it does

- Is written succinctly in the form of a sentence or two, but for a shorter

  timeframe (one to three years) than a Vision statement

- Is something that all employees should be able to articulate upon request.

Some businesses may refine their mission statement based on changing economic

realities or unexpected responses from consumers. For example, some companies

are launched to provide specific products or services; yet, they may realize that

changing WHAT they do, or WHO they do it for, or HOW they do what they do,

will enable them to grow the business faster and more successfully.

Understanding the Mission gives employees a better perspective on how their job

contributes to achieving it, which can increase engagement, retention, and

productivity. (paras. 11-12)

With regard to constructing effective mission statements, the journal, *Nonprofit*

Communications Report ("Make Time to Evaluate Your Mission, Vision Statements,"

2018) suggested that strategic mission statements focus on two essential functions of the

organization—what it does, and why it matters. These two elements are incorporated

into the following format:

1. It must be succinct. One sentence is typically sufficient.

2. It must describe what your nonprofit will do and why it will do it.

3. Make sure your statement is outcome-oriented. In other words, what is your

   organization hoping to achieve?

4. It needs to be comprehensive. A mission statement needs to address all key

   goals and include those involved with your organization. However, be sure it

does not limit potential strategies or community sectors that may become

involved in the future. (p. 4)

The above recommendation of a succinct, one-sentence mission statement appears to

support a short and focused theme. However, if the mission statement "needs to address

all key goals and include those involved with your organization," a succinct mission

statement may not be possible.

Succinctly written mission statements are not suggested by all. Bryson's (2004)

perspective on developing a mission statement states, "A mission statement should grow

out of discussions aimed at answering the six questions that follow" (p. 114). The six

questions are as follows:

1. Who are we?

2. What are the basic social and political needs we exist to meet, or what are the

   basic social or political problems we exist to address?

3. In general, what do we do to recognize, anticipate, and respond to these needs

   or problems?

4. How should we respond to our key stakeholders?

5. What are our philosophy, values, and culture?

6. What makes us distinctive or unique? (pp. 114-117)

Bryson then presented mission statement examples and stated that the following one from

the Amhurst Wilder Foundation is "somewhat lengthy but also clearly authorizes and

prompts the foundation to seek the biggest impact it can in its chosen domain" (p. 118).

The mission statement reads as follows:

[The foundation's purpose is] to promote the social welfare of persons resident or located in the greater Saint Paul metropolitan area consisting of the counties of Ramsay, Washington, Dakota, and Anoka, by all appropriate means, including relief of the poor, care of the sick and aged, care and nurture of children, aid of the disadvantaged and otherwise needy, promotion of physical and mental health, support of rehabilitation and corrections, provision of needed housing and social services, operation of residences and facilities for the aged, the infirm and those requiring special care, and in general the conservation of human resources by the provision of human services responsive to the welfare needs of the community, all without regard to, or discrimination on account of, nationality, sex, color, religious scruples or prejudices. (p. 119)

This mission statement example answers to the six questions Bryson identified as impacting its domain:

1. Who are we? The Amhurst Wilder Foundation.

2. What are the basic social and political needs we exist to meet, or what are the basic social or political problems we exist to address? Relief of the poor, care of the sick and aged, care and nurture of children, aid of the disadvantaged and otherwise needy, promotion of physical and mental health, support of rehabilitation and corrections, provision of needed housing and social services, operation of residences and facilities for the aged, the infirm and those requiring special care, and in general the conservation of human resources.

3. In general, what do we do to recognize, anticipate, and respond to these needs or problems? Promote the social welfare of persons.

4. How should we respond to our key stakeholders? . . .by all appropriate means.

5. What are our philosophy, values, and culture? . . .without regard to, or discrimination on account of, nationality, sex, color, religious scruples or prejudices.

6. What makes us distinctive or unique? . . .serving persons resident or located in the greater Saint Paul metropolitan area consisting of the counties of Ramsay, Washington, Dakota, and Anoka. (pp. 114-117, 119)

What is apparent from these initial perspectives and examples is that literature on how mission statements should be constructed can vary considerably in recommended length and content. Literature examples support short, sharply focused mission statements as well as those which are lengthy and more comprehensively developed. This develops further interest in exploring how public managers perceive and experience strategic vision and mission statements.

Abrams (1999) suggested that constructing a strategic mission statement can be a daunting task for any organization. He suggested that although most organizations are made up of talented people with a variety of skill sets, few have a clear understanding of how to put together an effective mission statement. He recommended the following five-step guide:

Step 1: Decide who is going to write the mission statement

Is this a solo task or a group effort? Take a lesson from real-life examples of other companies and consider the advantages of creating a committee with representatives from every department in your company. That way, everyone will

have a chance to feel like they had a voice in the statement's creation and will be more likely to embrace its content and spirit.

Step 2: Agree on when the statement is going to be written

During business hours or in evening sessions? In a single weekend? At the office or off-site where there will be fewer distractions? And how much time will you allow? A single afternoon or evening? A weekend? A month? Six months? A year? Impose a deadline and stick to it.

Step 3: Determine the target audience(s)

Employees of your company? Customers? Suppliers? Stockholders? The general public? You have to figure out *who* you're talking to before you can figure out *what* to say.

Step 4: Decide what kind of language is appropriate

Start with a list of key words and phrases that apply to your business. Bring a group of people together, roll out an easel, invite a free flow of ideas, and write down words and phrases that come to mind. Refer to the list of key words provided earlier. . . . It's ultimately up to you to decide the nature, length, and tone of the document.

Step 5: Adopt a format

Will the mission statement be presented to the target audience in the annual report? Beautifully printed on quality paper, designed for framing and distribution? In a brochure or pamphlet? As a wallet-size card? Embedded in a Lucite paperweight? Printed on a company calendar or coffee mugs? Silk screened on T-shirts? Emblazoned on a banner? Engraved in granite? Displayed

at the front door? If you're proud of your official mission statement, you'll want

to communicate its message in a variety of ways that reflect your company's

distinctive culture. (pp. 43-44)

Abrams (1999) further suggested that both organizations and people can develop a

common mission to their mutual benefit:

Corporations as entities and people as individuals share certain characteristics.

Over time, they develop personalities that shape their philosophies and motivate

their actions. And, without a purpose or a mission, both a person and a company

will flounder. . . . As a unifying touchstone, a mission, likewise provides the

company and its employees with a sense of identity. (p. 8)

The Problem with Vision and Mission Statements

Significant literature supports the importance of strategic vision and mission

statements as key components of strategic management and planning. Yet those strategic

vision and mission statements are often thought to be confusing and ineffective. As

described and cited in the introduction, too often, strategic vision statements are said to

lack coherence, be out of focus, and not clearly defined (Bennis & Nanus, 1997; Kouzes

& Posner, 2017). Likewise, strategic mission statements are too often said to be

meaningless, forgettable, lacking essential direction, and totally ineffective (Ireland &

Hitt, 1992; Perkins, 2008).

In addressing the "Seven Chronic Problems" of organizations, Covey (2003)

discussed the fact that organizations face acute challenges on a regular basis (p. 163).

These problems, like acute illnesses in people, have a rapid onset, can be painful, but are

hopefully resolved. However, chronic organizational problems, like chronic illnesses,

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can be persistent and difficult to overcome. It is noteworthy that of the seven chronic

problems identified by Covey, the first four relate to either strategic management, vision,

or mission:

1. No shared vision and values: either the organization has no mission statement
    or there is no deep understanding of and commitment to the mission at all
    levels of the organization.

2. No strategic path: either the strategy is not well developed or it ineffectively
    expresses the mission statement and/or fails to meet the wants and needs and
    realities of the stream.

3. Poor alignment: bad alignment between structure and shared values, between
    vision and systems; the structure and systems of the organization poorly serve
    and reinforce the strategic paths.

4. Wrong style; the management philosophy is either incongruent with shared
    vision and values or the style inconsistently embodies the vision and values of
    the mission statement. (pp. 165-168)

With regard to the first problem, Covey (2003) suggested that most leaders do not

realize the importance of developing an effective mission statement and its relationship to

shared vision and values. He pointed out that putting together an effective mission

statement "takes patience, a long-term perspective, and meaningful involvement—and

few organizations rank high in those virtues" (p. 165). The end result is a highly

ineffective mission statement with no organizational commitment. He further observed

that "many organizations have a mission statement, but typically, people aren't

committed to it because they aren't involved in developing it; consequently, it's not part

of the culture . . . [not] understood and implemented by all levels of the organization" (p. 165)

The second problem identified by Covey (2003) is an ill-defined organizational strategic direction, commonly caused by an ineffective mission statement. He suggested that in the past, organizations followed a "road map" model with clear ends, means, and directions addressing a clear and predictable environment. Today's changing, unpredictable environment, which Covey referred to as "the stream" requires a "compass" model and a corresponding mission statement with flexibility. Unfortunately, Covey explained that many mission statements create a reactive organizational environment instead of one that encourages a new model that "calls for people to use a compass and a set of principles and values to create ways to achieve the ends" (p. 166).

The third problem is what Covey (2003) described as poor alignment between structure and shared values, vision, and strategic mission. Covey suggested that this is a very common problem in organizations where a mission statement exists, yet the structure of the agency pays very little attention to it:

The alignment problem is prevalent everywhere. Ask yourself: "Is our mission statement a constitution? Is it the supreme law of the land? Does every person who comes into the organization make a commitment to the allegiance to that constitution? Is every program, every system, even our organizational structure, subject to the constitution?" If the answer is "No"—and it usually is—you have an alignment problem. (p. 167)

Covey suggested that the organization needs to be aligned in structure and practice with a shared value system and common mission.

The fourth problem suggested by Covey (2003) is that of wrong style, which relates to a leadership approach or philosophy that is inconsistent with the vision and values of the organizational mission statement. Every leader has a unique style, and Covey pointed out that each will react differently to visions, values, and missions of the organization. He stated,

> With so much diversity and mobility in our society, it's often a challenge to make your own style congruent with the vision and values of your organization. You may need to adapt your style to some degree. That's why principle-centered leadership is so vital. If you're principle-centered, you can be flexible, very fluid, on the surface of your life, as long as the style is congruent with those principles. (p. 169)

In summary, Covey (2003) highlighted four chronic organizational problems that are directly related to strategic vision and mission. First, the problem of mission statements is that they are either missing or there is no real emphasized commitment to the importance of organizational mission. Second, mission statements are commonly ill-defined and ineffective, particularly with regard to providing flexibility needed to serve as a compass to navigate through the challenges of changing environments. Third, there is poor alignment between mission statements as established and commitment to the mission in actual structure and practice. Fourth, there are personal leadership characteristics that can be a chronic problem when there is incongruence between the mission statement and leadership style.

Covey (2003) further suggested that one of the best ways to address these chronic problems is to create shared organizational vision through the development of an effective mission statement. He stated,

> One of the best ways I know of bringing about this shared vision is creating a mission statement. I don't mean a mission statement that was cranked out over a weekend at an executive retreat, but one that is the product of effort and input from every level of the organization. Most organizational mission statements are nothing more than a bunch of lovely PR platitudes framed on a wall. (p. 184)

Thus, a mission statement has the potential to consolidate the forces of values important to the organization. The shared collaborative process of mission statement development also has the potential of creating value of greater importance than the statement itself. Yet Covey suggested that ineffective vision and mission statements are embedded among the seven chronic problems facing organizations today.

Evans (2010) is a strategic planning consultant who has observed, first hand, confusion regarding vision and mission statements. She expressed similar views with regard to ineffective strategic vision and mission statements:

> For over 18 years, I have facilitated strategic planning initiatives with many diverse organizations. From my experience, I believe there is a lot of confusion regarding the difference between a Vision and Mission statement. I regularly see Vision statements that are actually Mission statements and vice versa—from Fortune 500's, nonprofits, and government agencies. I also see well-intended Vision and Mission statements that are uninspiring, confusing, and so long that they are impossible for anyone to remember!

Why does it matter if there is confusion about Vision and Mission statements, or if they are written in a certain way? For the same reasons it is fundamental and valuable for any organization to have a strategic plan as a roadmap for success, it is important to develop a plan around a clearly defined and well written Vision and Mission. Both serve important, yet different roles as core elements of a strategic plan. (paras. 2-3)

She suggested that when an organization does not have a vision or a mission statement or has statements that are poorly written, it can create negative consequences. These may include difficulty in attracting and retaining talented staff and difficulty in building a strong organizational culture. She further pointed out that organizations with clearly defined vision and mission statements outperform those without them.

Evans (2010) further explained that in spite of either the total absence of or poorly written vision and mission statements, many organizations are simply resistant to fixing the problem. Through her experience, she stated she has heard many of the following excuses:

- "It takes too much time to develop them."
- "We will never reach consensus."
- "Our CEO wrote our Vision, which we know is more like a Mission statement with our values mixed in, but no one is going to question it."
- "Everyone that works here already knows what we do, so what is the benefit of writing a statement about it?
- "We have our goals, who needs a Vision or Mission?
- "It's expensive to take people away from their real job to focus on it."

- "Actually defining our Vision and Mission will mean changes in the organization, who has time to deal with more resistance to change?"

In my opinion, none of these reasons outweigh the benefits of having a well-written Vision and Mission statement. If an organization cannot define its "reason for existing" (Mission) or "where it is going" (Vision), how can it align people, processes, products or services towards a successful future? (para. 16-17)

Literature Review Summary

A review of literature suggests that we live in a society that is constantly changing with complex, ambiguous, and unpredictable challenges (Bryson, 2018; Covey, 2003). Government, in large part, is responsible for meeting and overcoming these challenges, which makes the need for effective strategic management more important than ever (Bryson, 2018; Parnell, 2014).

In turn, strategic management and its process of assessing the changing environment can lead to the development of effective strategic plans (Allison & Kaye, 2015; Drucker, 1973; Hill et al., 2015; Quigley, 1993; Valcik, 2016). These strategic plans help the organization create an improved, visionary future. This is achieved by working with input to assess current conditions external to the organization, clarifying vision, mission, and developing internal goals and objectives to achieve greater public value.

Literature suggests that two critical elements of the strategic planning process are vision and mission statements. Although they are elements of strategic management theory and the strategic planning process, strategic vision and mission statements also have strong relevance with their contributions to leadership theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006;

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Bennis & Goldsmith, 2010; Bryson, 2018; Burns, 1978, 2003; Collins, 2008; Drucker, 1954; Hax & Majluf, 1984; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Nanus, 1992; Northouse, 2019; Parnell, 2014; Pollard, 2002; Rughase, 2007; Senge, 2006). The relationship of vision to leadership theory emphasizes the improvement of an organization from its current position to a more desirable future. Vision is also related to transformational leadership in the context of common purpose, which is shared among leaders and organization members. From a leadership perspective, an organizational mission statement serves as a guideline to make principled decisions to achieve organizational purpose. A mission statement can reflect an organization's leadership integrity and encourage principled decision-making. In turn, this can encourage confidence in its people and offer stability in times of uncertainty.

Stakeholder analysis is another important strategic management and leadership consideration emphasized in the literature (Allison & Kaye, 2015; Bryson, 2018; Linden, 2010; Nanus, 1992; Quigley, 1993; Rughase, 2007; Scott et al., 1993). Understanding what internal and external stakeholders experience and expect from the organization can assist greatly in effective strategic planning and developing vision and mission statements. Leaders are also most effective when they serve as examples to stakeholders of the organization of living out the vision and mission (Covey, 2003).

Literature on vision statement development varies significantly (Allison & Kaye, 2015; Angelica, 2001; Bryson, 2018; D'Angelo, 2012; Ebener & Smith, 2015; Keffer, 2014; Parnell, 2014; Price, 2001; Thornberry, 1997) with many opinions and variations of how vision statements should be constructed. Understanding that there are exceptions, general agreed upon guidelines for vision statements include future orientation; broad

overarching leadership direction for the organization; and making the vision clear, concise, and inspirational.

Likewise, literature on mission statement development varies significantly (Abrams, 1999, 2007; Bryson, 2018; Drucker, 2008; Evans, 2010; Scott et al., 1993; Valcik, 2016). Again, with many variations and approaches considered, general guidelines for mission statements include a focus on organizational purpose. General consensus suggests that the mission statement should be brief and include who the organization serves, what it will provide, and the distinct or unique manner in which the service will be provided.

Finally, some literature suggests that there are significant problems with both vision and mission statements. Depending on the organization, literature suggests that many vision and mission statements can simply be missing altogether or described as ineffective. More specifically, descriptions of these ineffective vision and mission statements include the following observations: confusing, lacking coherence, too long for anyone to remember, out of focus, unclear, meaningless, forgettable, without essential direction, poorly aligned, inconsistent with organizational structure, mere platitudes, not collaboratively developed, not relatable to staff, incorrectly defined, and failing to meet realities of the environment (Bennis & Nanus, 1997; Covey, 2003; Drucker, 2008; Evans, 2010; Ireland & Hitt, 1992; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Perkins, 2008; Senge, 2006). Literature presented in this chapter suggests the potential value in exploring how county health and human service managers perceive strategic vision and mission statements and how they perceive those statements as guiding philosophies to achieve organizational purpose.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore how county human service managers perceive and experience strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements. The specific contextual setting for this study was two departments within Los Angeles County government, the Department of Public Health (DPH), and the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS). These health and human service departments serve a demographically diverse county population of over 10 million residents. The perceptions and experience of these county managers were explored in the context of literature-based strategic management theory. The study also explored literature-based leadership theory and how these county managers perceive the effectiveness of strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements as guiding directive philosophies to achieve organizational purpose.

Significant literature has addressed the importance of vision and mission statements in the context of strategic management theory (Allison & Kaye, 2015; Bryson, 2018; Clegg et al., 2017; Hill et al., 2015 Parnell, 2014; Pearce & Robinson, 2012). Leadership theory also suggests the importance of guiding strategic direction, which leaders achieve through effectively communicating vision and mission statements with members of the organization. Leadership literature suggests that strategic vision and mission statements can be effective when they are easily understood, personally meaningful, and relate to the wants and needs of staff for desired organizational purpose to take place (Abrams, 2007; Angelica, 2001; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Bennis & Goldsmith, 2010; Burns, 2003; Drucker, 1973; Northouse, 2019). Yet in spite of the potential effectiveness of strategic vision and mission statements, some literature suggests that

these statements can be out of focus, lack coherence, meaningless, forgettable, or totally ineffective (Bennis & Nanus, 1997; Evans, 2010; Ireland & Hitt, 1992; Perkins, 2008). Further exploring these strategic management and leadership perspectives related to vision and mission statements can expand our knowledge and insight about organizational effectiveness.

Beyond the introductory overview of this study, the focus of this chapter includes a description and reason for selecting a qualitative phenomenology research approach, research questions, participant interview questions, research methodology, and research description and operational considerations. The research methodology includes research design, research instrumentation, operational considerations of population and sample, obtaining informed consent, steps for data collection, confidentiality and data protection, scientific merit, dissemination of study results to participants, and reflexivity concerns.

Qualitative Research Approach

In considering the best methodology for this study, a number of research approaches were reviewed. The study objective was to develop ontological insight from county health and human service managers in the context of their perceptions and experiences with strategic vision and mission statements. It was anticipated that there would be a great deal of subjectivity in their lived experiences and responses, which would be primarily descriptive in nature. It was also determined that this would not be a study of quantifiable degrees. There would be neither measured variables, nor an analysis of numeric data. This study would be focused on experience, with open-ended questions about meaning, feeling, understanding, and essence. Therefore, a qualitative phenomenology approach was selected as the most effective means of exploring how

county managers perceive and experience strategic vision and mission statements as realities in their respective organizations and work lives.

Research Questions

The question of whether or not strategic management, strategic planning, and strategic vision and mission statements are important to organizational success becomes somewhat rhetorical upon review of strategic management and leadership literature. It is a generally shared perspective that strategic vision and mission statements matter. However, what is less clear is how these vision and mission statements are perceived and experienced by county health and human service managers, and how they feel the statements motivate and serve as guiding philosophies for organizational effectiveness. Based on the desire to explore further insight, two general questions for this study were

1. How do county health and human service managers perceive and experience strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements?

2. How do county health and human service managers perceive strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements as guiding philosophies to motivate and achieve organizational purpose?

Interview Questions

Prior to the start of the interviews, each participant was given a copy of the strategic vision and mission statements for their department. The strategic vision and mission statements for the Los Angeles County Departments of Public Health and Public Social Services are as follows:

Los Angeles County DPH:

- Vision statement: Healthy people in healthy communities

- Mission statement: Advance the conditions that support optimal health and well-being for all

Los Angeles County DPSS:

- Vision statement: By 2017, DPSS will be a technologically advanced department that provides social services with a greatly reduced need for customers to go to a DPSS facility and for staff to work from a DPSS facility.

- Mission statement: To enrich lives through effective and caring service

Based on the overarching research questions for this study, interview questions were developed to qualitatively explore the lived experience of county health and human service managers with their department strategic vision and mission statements. These interview questions were designed to determine the following participant perceptions:

1. How aware were participants of their strategic vision and mission statements?

2. How clearly were the statements defined, and how clearly did they communicate?

3. How did statements make participants feel from a leadership standpoint with regard to motivation or inspiration?

4. How did the statements communicate departmental direction as a guiding philosophy of organizational purpose?

Phenomenological Methodology

To best address the variables of this qualitative research study, a phenomenological data approach was used. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained phenomenology as research that "describes the lived experience of individuals about a phenomenon as described by the participants. This description culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon" (p.

13). Aligned with this perspective, Los Angeles County health and human service administrators participating in this study shared their lived experiences with both strategic vision and strategic mission statements.

Durdella (2019) expanded on this description in stating that "one way to understand phenomenology as a qualitative research tradition is to focus on feelings—feelings as they are felt and experienced in the moment and understood and made sense of after they are felt and experienced" (p. 106). This study addressed strategic vision and mission statements in two different health and human service county departments. Although, in a general sense, an assumption might be made that public sector managers should have similar feelings and experiences toward strategic vision and mission statements, it is possible that those feelings might differ depending on the county department. It may also be possible that a public sector manager would have different feelings about a strategic vision or mission statement depending on the way it is constructed or how clearly it communicates. Durdella also pointed out that experience and feelings "in the moment," depending on the current environment, could be different than feelings of the past. Therefore, it may be important to consider how well a vision or mission statement developed in the past holds up over time, and remains relevant to the study participants in the current environment. Thus, there are multiple variables potentially impacting strategic vision and mission statements that could impact the phenomenological experience of study participants.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) suggested that phenomenological research is typically conducted with a small number of subjects. They further stated, "Phenomenology typically involves several in-depth interviews with the individuals who

have experienced the phenomenon of interest. The purpose of this type of interviewing is

to describe the meaning of a concept or phenomenon that several individuals might

share" (p. 101). Therefore, qualitative phenomenology through in-depth interviewing

was selected as an effective means to engage health and human service managers to

develop an understanding of their feelings and experience with strategic vision and

mission statements. The approach of this phenomenological study was transcendental or

descriptive in nature, where participants described their personal lived feelings or

organizational experiences. This provided the researcher with a deeper level of

understanding about the perceptions of each participant.

Research Instrumentation

Individual one-on-one interviews were selected as the primary instrument to be

used for this study as they appeared well-suited for this qualitative phenomenological

study. Personal interviewing is a basic means of understanding the essence of a person's

experience. Seidman (2015 stated,

> The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to test hypotheses, and not to
>
> "evaluate" as the term is normally used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an
>
> interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning
>
> they make of that experience. (p. 9)

If conducted effectively, the primary advantage of one-on-one interviews is to make the

participants feel comfortable enough to express their true feelings about a topic or

experience. Rather than discussing questions in a group setting, the one-on-one nature of

individual interviews makes it easier for the participant to speak freely about experiences

without fear of offending other participants or the organization. As part of the informed

consent process, participants were assured that no other personnel from their department would be present during the interview.

All participants were asked to answer four general questions regarding their lived experiences, perceptions, beliefs, and feelings about their department strategic vision and mission statements. The participants were assigned alphanumeric codes to ensure anonymity of collected information.

Institutional Review Board Approval

This research study was submitted and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of California Baptist University. Initially, the interviews were meant to be conducted in-person at each participant's work location. During the course of developing this research study, the Covid-19 virus pandemic of 2020 impacted public health policies globally as well as in the United States. Many states, including California, issued executive orders limiting personal contacts to minimize the spread of infection. For that reason, an amendment was submitted to the IRB to conduct one-on-one interviews remotely with telephone interviews rather than face-to-face. This request was supported and approved by the IRB. The participant interviews were recorded on a digital recording device and professionally transcribed by a third-party agency.

Population and Sample Size

The following criteria were used to determine which Los Angeles County departments were suitable for study consideration:

- The primary mission of the department was health or human services.
- The department must have a strategic plan with strategic vision and mission statements.

- The department has at least 4,000 employees.

- The department has a management population agreeable to the study.

To obtain permission to conduct this study, the directors of both the Los Angeles County DPH and DPSS were personally contacted and provided with a description of the research. Both departments agreed to participate in the study, and participants were recruited in cooperation with policies and standards of the subject county departments. No recruitment was initiated without prior permission.

The sample size of participants for this phenomenological study followed accepted methodological guidelines. Creswell and Creswell (2018) reviewed the general number of participants for a qualitative study such as this. They stated, "From a review of many qualitative research studies, we have some rough estimates to advance. . . . phenomenology involves a range of 3-10" (p. 186). Therefore, general phenomenology sample size guidelines were followed, and approximately three to 10 managers were anticipated to be interviewed for this study.

Another consideration for this sample of participants was gender balance and ethnic diversity. Given the diversity of the general Los Angeles County population, the researcher sought to achieve gender balance and as much ethnic diversity as possible in the population sample. Therefore, 10 self-identified ethnically diverse participants were selected from a larger list of surveyed managers who had expressed possible interest in the study. Gender balance was also achieved with five male and five female participants.

The participants used in this study were public administrators in the Los Angeles County DPH, and the Los Angeles County DPSS. The DPH administrators were responsible for managing community health programs such as health equity, maternal,

child, and adolescent health, violence prevention, health impact evaluation, and public health planning. The DPSS administrators were welfare-to-work employment managers, social service program policy planners, and public assistance district managers.

These county managers averaged 17.5 years of department experience each, with a number of them having had prior experience in the private or nonprofit sector. With regard to the educational background of the participants, nine of the 10 participants had master's degrees, and two of the 10 had doctoral degrees. The demographic characteristics of study participants are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	DPH	DPSS	Full sample
Gender			
Female	3	2	5
Male	2	3	5
Ethnicity			
White	2	1	3
African American	1	1	2
Hispanic	1	2	3
Asian	1	1	2
Education			
Some college		1	1
Master's degree	3	4	7
Doctoral degree	2		2

Informed Consent

Obtaining informed consent from Los Angeles County DPH and DPSS administrators followed this five-step process:

Step 1: The principal investigator (researcher) contacted the directors of the Los Angeles County DPH and DPSS to request consent to conduct public administration research in their departments. The departments agreed, and a survey was conducted of upper-level managers to determine those expressing an interest to participate.

Step 2: The principal investigator reviewed the department list of interested participants to establish gender and ethnic balance to the extent possible. An introductory email was then sent to potential participants. The email included an informed consent form, which provided the following information:

- The identification of the principal investigator, educational institution, and purpose of the study, which was to investigate personal perceptions and experiences of the participant with their department's vision and mission statements.

- It was explained that participation in the project was unpaid and voluntary, with the option to withdraw and discontinue the study at any time without penalty. There would be no disclosure to the department if the participant withdrew from the study.

- Phases of this study were conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic with public health policies in effect limiting face-to-face contact. Therefore, participants were advised that interviews would be conducted remotely by

telephone. To assist with interview accuracy, participants were advised that notes would be written during the interview, and an audio recording of the interview would be made and professionally transcribed by a third party. Authorization to be recorded was a requirement of the study.

- It was explained that participants would not be identified by name in any reports using information obtained from the interviews and that confidentiality as a participant in this study would remain secure. Subsequent use of records and data would be subject to standard data policies that protect the anonymity of individuals.

- Administrators from the participating departments would neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution prevented individual comments from having any negative repercussions.

- In the event of questions or the need for further information, the principal investigator's name, email address, and mobile phone number were provided.

- The email was sent to the participant approximately 5 business days prior to the scheduled interview session.

- If participants agreed to participate in the study, they were advised to sign and return the informed consent form, while keeping a copy for themselves.

Step 3: Upon receipt of participant consents to participate, a diverse convenience sample was selected, and a follow-up confirmation was sent via email to confirm an appointment time for interview.

Step 4: At the beginning of the interview session, the participant was provided the opportunity to ask any questions they might have about the research study.

- After all questions from the participant were answered, the participant was given a final opportunity to consent or withdraw from the study.

Step 5: Start interview, with consent.

Deception, Risk, Confidentiality, and Data Protection

All participants were informed of the study's true purpose, which was to qualitatively analyze their lived experience and perceptions of strategic vision and mission statements. No deception was used.

Most participants interviewed for a study of this type find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking and without risk. However, the potential for uneasiness had to be considered in the event that a participant felt the need to express experiences perceived as reflecting negatively on their department. All participants were therefore advised that if they felt uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, they had the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview. Additionally, participants were advised that in the event that the interview created an abnormal level of stress, the County of Los Angeles provides professional counseling services through their Department of Human Resources Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and an appropriate referral could be made for follow-up professional evaluation if needed.

The responses to interview questions were kept confidential. At no time was the actual identity of the participants, their job title, or management assignment revealed. Participants were assigned an alphanumeric code to ensure anonymity. During the interview process, participants were acknowledged only by their codes, and no identities of participants are disclosed in the documentation of this study.

All data were stored in a locked secure location accessible only to the researcher. Likewise, all information transcribed by third party services assured confidentiality and data protection.

Scientific Merit and Dissemination of Research Results

The scientific merit of this study was to explore and develop a greater qualitative understanding of organizational strategic planning and its foundational components of strategic vision and mission statements. The leadership and management findings developed by this research have the potential to improve organizational performance.

Upon request, research results created by this study will be available to participants and disseminated to the participating Los Angeles County departments. Based on the study findings, those departments will have complete discretion to utilize any results they deem helpful to advance the policies related to their strategic planning process or strategic vision or mission statement development.

Reflexivity

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2017), "Reflexivity is the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher" (p. 143). The researcher is a former public administrator in Los Angeles County who is studying public administrators in Los Angeles County and must reflect critically on his personal feelings as a researcher. It was important for biases to be set aside to the extent possible. Preconceived assumptions about the participants and their organizational environments were also possible, and those needed to be set aside as well. Finally, the researcher needed to be mindful of his former position as department head for the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services and how that could influence the objectivity of his analysis.

As an adjunct professor of strategic management and organizational leadership, the researcher also has knowledge from academic literature about strategic planning and vision and mission statements. It was important that the interview questions be kept as objective as possible and focused on the lived experiences of the participants rather than leading or directing participants toward any preconceived perspectives on strategic management or leadership theory.

Research Methodology Summary

This study explored how county health and human service managers perceived and experienced strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements. Literature has established relational ties of vision and mission statements to leadership and strategic management theory. The two research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1. How do county health and human service managers perceive and experience strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements?

2. How do county health and human service managers perceive strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements as guiding philosophies to motivate and achieve organizational purpose?

The methodology used in this study was qualitative phenomenology to explore the perceptions, lived experience, and feelings of participants in the study. In-depth one-on-one interviews were the primary study instrument applied, and four interview questions were developed to explore the perceptions of the participants.

A convenience sample of 10 participants was used for this study. Five of the 10 participants were from the DPH, and five were from the DPSS. To the extent possible, gender balance and ethnic diversity were prioritized in the participant selection process.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, no deception was used in the study, and confidentiality and data protection were maintained to protect the identity of all participants. Research results of the study were available upon request to all participants and their departments.

The scientific merit of this study is to explore and develop a greater qualitative understanding of the effectiveness of strategic vision and mission statements. The leadership and strategic management findings developed by this research have the potential to improve performance in health and human service organizations.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Strategic vision and mission statements are recognized as important to organizational strategic management and leadership theories. Yet an identified problem suggested by literature is that strategic vision and mission statements are not always clearly understood. Moreover, how these statements are experienced and serve as organizational guiding and motivating philosophies can be confusing and elusive. The purpose of this research was to explore qualitative perceptions and experience of Los Angeles County health and human services public administrators regarding strategic vision and mission statements.

In-depth qualitative phenomenological interviews were conducted with five managers from the County Department of Public Health (DPH) and five managers from the County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS). Their perceptions and lived experiences with strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements were a means to better understand how these strategic statements contributed to their feelings about the following two research questions:

1. How do county health and human service managers perceive and experience strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements?

2. How do county health and human service managers perceive strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements as guiding philosophies to motivate and achieve organizational purpose?

These two research questions address the theories of this study: strategic management and leadership. The first research question relates to strategic management theory and how managers experience an awareness of strategic vision and mission statements, which

are foundational to the strategic plans of their respective departments. The second

question relates to leadership theory and how managers experience a sense of leadership

through vision and mission statements, which motivate and guide them as philosophies

toward organizational purpose.

Aligned with the two research questions, each participant was asked four general

interview questions. The following four interview questions were designed to determine

participant perceptions regarding awareness, clarity, motivation, and guiding purpose of

their respective vision and mission statements:

1. Awareness

- How aware were participants of their strategic vision and mission statements?

2. Clarity

- How clearly were the statements defined, and how clearly did they communicate?

3. Motivation

- How did statements make participants feel from a leadership standpoint with

   regard to motivation or inspiration?

4. Guiding Purpose

- How did the statements communicate departmental direction as a guiding

   philosophy of organizational purpose?

Participant Sample and Characteristics

The researcher initially planned to follow general phenomenology sample size

guidelines by selecting approximately three to 10 managers from one county health or

human service department for this study. However, while attempting to determine which

county department to select, the researcher noted that the manner in which vision and

mission statements were constructed varied widely from department to department. For this reason, the researcher felt that deeper insight might be gained by interviewing managers from two separate departments, each with different approaches to developing their respective vision and mission statements.

DPH and DPSS were chosen as the two departments for study, and an equal number of five participants was selected from each department to be interviewed. The researcher was provided a list of surveyed managers who expressed a willingness to participate in the study. These managers all held responsible leadership positions in community health and social welfare programs. From this list, a convenience sample of interested participants was selected. Gender balance and ethnic diversity was considered as part of the selection process. The participants in this study averaged 17.5 years of county government experience, and a number had prior diverse employment backgrounds in other public, private, or nonprofit organizations. With regard to the educational background of the participants, nearly all had postgraduate degrees. Nine of the 10 participants had master's degrees, and two of the 10 had doctoral degrees.

The interviews were all conducted between June 4, 2020 and June 11, 2020. As originally designed, the researcher planned to conduct face-to-face interviews at each manager's work site. However, because of state and county health department safe-distancing requirements related to the Covid-19 viral pandemic, in-person interviews could not be conducted. Therefore, all initial interviews were done remotely by telephone. In situations where subsequent questions arose or initial comments required further clarification, follow-up communication was made with the participant via email.

All initial interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by an independent third-party contractor.

Each of the participants was asked four general research questions, which serve as the framework for this study. The participants all seemed at ease and willing to share their perspectives and experiences with their respective department vision and mission statements. All participants provided informed consent to participate in the study. During the in-depth interviews, the participants, at times, shared personal life experiences that they felt contributed to feelings about their jobs, and department vision and mission statements.

It is important to note that a number of participants from both departments had explained that they had engaged in a stakeholder process to solicit input from staff regarding strategic vision and mission statements. DPH explained that they had recently completed a highly comprehensive review of their vision and mission statements. The following detail was shared by Participant PH-01:

> We started with a townhall. . . . Now we have 4,000 staff, so does everyone go to
> the townhall—no, but we had several hundred people at the townhall where part
> of the agenda was a brainstorm of key concepts people wanted in the mission. . . .
> We asked for people's ideas for key concepts for vision, mission, and values . . . I
> think there were like 500 people maybe who contributed that way. We then sent
> out a survey—a survey monkey out with—with more—even more questions
> about key concepts . . . to every single program in the department and got . . .
> maybe over a thousand—maybe like 1,100 responses. We asked people to do it in
> groups, in their teams, and for one person to respond on behalf of the team, but

we captured the number in each team. And then we went to our executive work

group and leadership team . . . the top two management bodies in DPH and

they . . . had two or three meetings with those bodies to refine, further whittle

down, etc.

It is also noteworthy that during the process of vision and mission statement

development, DPH explained that the department had taken the time to clearly provide

their department's definition of strategic vision and mission statements. This created a

high degree of consistency among DPH responses regarding their understanding of

definitions and the relationship between their strategic vision and mission statements. In

a follow-up email, PH-01 went on to explain,

I would surmise that the reason for this consistency is that we began our process

with definitions of vision, mission and values . . . and also at a DPH all-staff

meeting attended by hundreds of DPH staff that launched our vision, mission,

values re-visiting process.

Although not as comprehensive, DPSS had also considered reevaluating their

strategic vision and mission statements. This process was in consultation with Disney

and concentrated on organizational purpose. The department selected a cross section of

14 DPSS employees to participate in a retreat, which took place in November 2018. It is

important to note that DPSS recognizes the need to reevaluate its current vision and

mission statements, and this remains a work in progress. The following details were

shared by PSS-02 about their process:

The initial thinking around the Disney engagement was to learn more about their

customer service philosophy. Our goal was to report back on Disney strategies

that DPSS could adopt to standardize our customers' experiences across the department. As result of the training, Disney recommends solidifying or developing a clear organizational purpose, because—as they believe—this is the foundation of all quality customer experiences. As our group discussed this, we thought it was important for the department to define a clear purpose. Our executives agreed, and thus we started on the path toward our new purpose.

PSS-02 further explained that at this point, the DPSS purpose to "Inspire hope, working today to create a better tomorrow" has been established although if it will replace or be incorporated with the current strategic vision and mission has yet to be determined. "We have more communication and message focusing that we need to do as a department" (Participant PSS-02).

Interview Question 1

How aware were participants of their strategic vision and mission statements?

It might be assumed that any member of an organization would be aware of its strategic vision and mission statement. However, as suggested by literature and the problem statement of this study, some organization members may not be aware of their strategic vision or mission statements. Therefore, this becomes the basic fundamental issue of the first question.

For purposes of this study, the researcher provided advance copies of both the department vision and mission statements to all participants. They were then asked whether they could have stated their departmental strategic vision and mission statements prior to seeing them. Participants did not have to give a verbatim quote of the vision or mission statements but rather, generally express the content of the statements. The

researcher gave considerable thought about whether or not to provide advance copies of the vision and mission statements to the participants. It seemed plausible that more participants would be "caught" unaware of their vision and mission statements if no advance prompts were provided. On the other hand, each participant, through the informed consent process, was made aware of the subject matter of the study in advance. This could have prompted some participants to familiarize themselves with the subject matter prior to the interviews. In the final analysis, the researcher decided that giving all participants the same advance information about their vision and mission statements was the best approach. It was felt that the importance of all participants starting from the same point of common reference was a more important overarching research consideration. Although dependent on the honesty of the participant to disclose prior awareness of the statements, the researcher hoped that participants would give honest responses. Indeed, the researcher did sense that responses to this question were candidly expressed.

The respective strategic vision and mission statements of DPH and DPSS are as follows:

Los Angeles County DPH

- Vision Statement: Healthy people in healthy communities

- Mission Statement: Advance the conditions that support optimal health and well-being for all.

Los Angeles County DPSS

- Vision Statement: By 2017, DPSS will be a technologically advanced department that provides social services with a greatly reduced need for customers to go to a

DPSS facility and for staff to work from a DPSS facility.

- Mission Statement: To enrich lives through effective and caring service

Key Findings of the Combined Participant Sample

One-half of the participants (50%) indicated that they were aware of their department's vision statement. A majority of the participants (80%) were aware of their department's mission statement. Less than half of the sample (40%) were aware of both their department's vision and mission statements.

With only 40% of the overall sample of participants indicating an awareness of both their department's strategic vision and mission statements, the general indication is that awareness of both vision and mission statements can be limited. However, a more in-depth review of specific responses from each department identified some noteworthy polarizing patterns. Among the DPH participants, there was a strong awareness of both their strategic vision and mission statements. Among DPSS participants, there was very limited awareness of the strategic vision statement. Yet, there was complete awareness of the DPSS mission statement. A more detailed review of the participant responses from each department follows.

Key Findings of Department of Public Health Participants

The DPH management participants generally expressed a strong awareness of their department vision and mission statements. Four of the five managers stated they were aware their vision statements, and three of the five were aware of their mission statements.

When asked about an awareness of the strategic vision statements, Participant PH-01 stated, "Maybe not verbatim, but in general, yes, the essence." The participant

went on to express that the awareness was based on a very positive opinion of it—"I think our vision of healthy people in healthy communities is—is fabulous."

Participant PH-03 stated, "Yes, I feel—yes, I could have told you that . . . while I couldn't tell you verbatim . . . I could have told you the general gist of it." The participant went on to express the teamwork benefit of the vision statement: "sort of the vision to get everybody kind of collectively looking in the same direction."

Participant PH-04 pointed out that the simplicity of the vision statement made it easy to recall and relate to: "I mean, definitely the vision. It is very simple, right? 'Healthy people and healthy communities.' It's very straightforward and words that I think most people understand and connect with."

In expressing awareness of the vision, Participant PH-05 did quote it verbatim: "The vision, probably—healthy people in healthy communities."

With regard to the DPH mission statement, PH-01 expressed an awareness of the department mission because of its relationship to supporting the vision. PH-01 stated that the "mission is the role of your organization in contributing toward—contributing to that vision."

PH-04 expressed an awareness of the DPH mission statement because of its alignment with the department's purpose. PH-04 also expressed an awareness of the mission statement in spite of the fact that it had recently been revised and was relatively new: "definitely agree that our new mission statement fits sort of what we do as a department much more exactly and globally."

Key Findings of Department of Public Social Services Participants

The responses from DPSS management participants were highly polarized with regard to their awareness of department vision and mission statements. Only one of the five managers said that they were aware of their department vision statement. Yet all five of the managers expressed complete awareness of their department mission statement. Although not specifically able to recall the vision statement, one participant mentioned that the current vision statement was outdated and therefore felt that a relevant current vision did not exist. The following response was expressed by Participant PSS-01:

> I don't believe that there's a sound, clear vision right now. I don't know that
>
> there's—or at least I don't get the sense that we have a firm sound vision that's
>
> really been set in stone and that we're moving towards. Everything is just kind of
>
> fluid it feels like to me.

The one DPSS manager, PSS-02, who was the only one aware of the department vision statement, clarified that it was because the participant had been working on a department project to review the vision and mission statements. PSS-03 simply expressed their unawareness of the department's vision statement: "As managers for the department, we were also given the department strategic plan, which included the vision. . . . I would not be able to repeat to you the vision." PSS-04 briefly stated without elaboration, "I would say 'no' to the vision, but 'yes' to the mission." The participant acknowledged that compared to the mission, which was simple and straightforward, the vision was not easy to remember.

Contrary to the vision statement, all five of the DPSS department managers expressed an awareness of the strategic mission, at times quoting it verbatim: "Well, I—

obviously I'm familiar with it. . . . 'To enrich lives with effective and caring service' . . .

so we're familiar with that. It's on our badges" (Participant PSS-01). The fact that the

DPSS mission statement had been long established also reinforced awareness among the

managers: "I could tell you . . . the mission statement, and that's only because we have

known about it for a very long time" (Participant PSS-03).

PSS-04 shared an awareness of the DPSS mission statement in a similar way.

The participant stated, "Well, definitely I would have been able to repeat the mission

statement to 'enrich lives through effective and caring service,' because that's really been

one of our missions for a very long time."

Interview Question 2

How clearly were the statements defined, and how clearly did they communicate?

As indicated through some literature presented in this study, a vision statement

can be defined in strategic management theory as an overarching desirable future

condition of the organization. A mission statement, in turn, has been defined as the

organizational purpose and actions which are aligned with achieving the strategic vision.

However, as also pointed out in the literature review of this study, there are varying

views about the development and strategic positioning of vision and mission statements.

The purpose of Interview Question 2 was not to resolve these differences but rather to

determine how health and human service managers perceived and defined their strategic

vision and mission statements. The question also sought to determine whether

participants felt the vision and mission statements communicated clearly.

Key Findings of the Combined Participant Sample

One-half of the participants were able to express a definition of strategic vision and mission statements. Seventy percent of the participants responded positively that their strategic vision and mission statements were clear and easy to understand.

Although this overall combined sample generally indicates some positive perceptions of vision and mission statements with regard to understanding and clarity, a closer review indicates that nearly all of the positive perceptions about strategic vision and mission statements were from DPH. The more limited perceptions about understanding and clarity of vision and mission statements were all expressed by DPSS participants. A closer look at each group of participants follows.

Key Findings of Department of Public Health Participants

There was a great deal of consistency in the manner DPH participants defined strategic vision and mission statements. All of the DPH participants expressed a perceived understanding of the differences and relationship between strategic vision and mission. This understanding was that the vision statement was the broader guiding direction or overarching big picture for the department and that the mission statement was the purposeful means of attaining that vision. It is possible that this consistency was attributed to a shared understanding of vision and mission that was provided during the stakeholder input process. In addition to understanding the definitions of strategic vision and mission, DPH participants also felt that the statements were clear and communicated well. For example, PH-01 stated,

Vision is what you're working towards, probably something that you'll never achieve. . . . It's like what your ultimate goal is, like, your—it's your North

Star . . . I would definitely say it's broader. It's just—it's where—where you're

moving. . . . Mission is the role of your organization in contributing toward—

contributing to that vision. . . . Mission is narrower because it's what your

particular agency is doing to reach that vision. There are many people in LA

County working with us towards the vision of healthy people and healthy

communities.

PH-01 also expressed a perception that the DPH strategic vision and mission statements

communicated well. This was attributed to the fact that the statements were short and

clear. For example, the vision statement of "healthy people in healthy communities"

came to mind very quickly for PH-01 as well as for other DPH participants. With regard

to the DPH mission statement, again, being short and clear was emphasized. PH-01 was

of the opinion that wordy mission statements just do not work: "It's just clunky. People

don't even want to look at a mission statement that's too wordy."

PH-02 shared very similar perspectives with regard to the difference between

strategic vision and mission statements:

Okay, the vision is sort of like the overarching goal. What do we want to see

happen in the community that we're serving? That's the vision. That's the

purpose of vision. The mission, again, I say this based on especially my current

work experience—the purpose of mission is . . . to communicate to the public

health staff as well as to the community on what we are doing to fulfill that

vision.

PH-02 also expressed perceptions about how clearly the strategic vision and mission

statements communicated:

So, vision—healthy people and healthy communities, I do believe in sort of

keeping it simple, because I don't think it needs to be really complicated. It needs

to be communicated to everybody. And I'm also thinking about sort of how

would you translate that. I think that it's clear. I think it is easy to understand.

The mission—yeah, advancing the condition to support one's health and well-

being for all . . . so, I think it's simple; I think it's clear. The priority is straight

for both.

Participant PH-02, therefore, expressed that the simplicity of both the strategic vision and

mission statements made it clear and easy to understand, with both directing a priority

that was straightforward. Participant PH-03 explained that their office was particularly

attuned to vision and mission as they were currently updating their own strategic plan.

The participant went on to define perspectives on strategic vision and mission statements:

I'm in the throes of developing our strategic plan for the office of [the

participant's program] . . . so I have some thoughts about that. And I do think—

you know, obviously the vision statement is—it—it very loosely describes the

ideal future state, a very broad big picture. This is the ideal future state for the

organization, for the populations that it serves . . . and sort of the vision to get

everybody kind of collectively looking in the same direction . . . to a mission

statement which is really just a tool to help an organization frame the work that

it's doing and . . . ground people in common elements we're working towards. I

think it makes sense to have the vision be the bigger, broader statement that kind

of, here's where we're moving. . . . This is the state we hope to achieve. . . . This

is what we want. . . . It's healthy people, healthy communities in LA County. I

think the vision comes first and then I think the mission comes after that . . . more

detail . . . what our specific mission is within that framework of—of whatever

ideal we're trying to achieve. (personal interview, June 8, 2020)

As expressed by PH-03, a strategic plan was being developed for the participant's own

administrative section. The larger organizational strategic plan seemed to assist in

creating a framework for supportive strategic plans within the department. With regard

to how clear the strategic vision and mission statements communicated, PH-03 continued,

Of how that looks . . . I think they are clear, and I think they're understandable.

I mean again, the vision is the bigger picture, broader language around that,

right . . . here's where we're moving and give everyone hope, but I think in, you

know, the mission then kind of has that detail that sort of fills that out more. But,

I think our vision and mission are very clear, and I think it creates a roadmap.

(personal interview, June 8, 2020)

PH-03 expressed then that the strategic vision and mission statements complemented

each other in creating a guiding direction for the department. PH-04 was very concise

about defining strategic vision and mission. The participant simply stated, "I feel like

vision is where we want to go, and mission is how we are going to get there." Consistent

with all other DPH managers, PH-05 defined strategic vision and mission statements in

much the same way:

So, vision is a loftier statement of the way you envision an ideal future based on

the work and mission of your organization. And so, healthy people and healthy

communities speaks to the fact that a public health department is ultimately

concerned with the health of residents of the county. . . . The vision is a nice lofty

goal of what you envision, but your mission is what you are trying to do.

PH-05 also shared the feeling that the strategic vision and mission statements were easy

to understand and communicated well: "Yeah, they are. To me, absolutely. They are . . .

pretty straight up and clear to me."

Key Findings of Department of Public Social Services Participants

The responses of the DPSS participants varied considerably with regard to their

definitions of the department's vision and mission statements. They had varying

perceptions about the strategic purpose of each and the specific relationship between

strategic vision and mission statements. None of them expressed the feeling that the

vision statement was clear although some affirmed the clarity of the mission statement.

In alignment with all of the DPH participants, PSS-01 also stated the perspective

that the vision statement was the overarching goal, with the mission statement being the

means to achieve the vision:

Well, to me having a vision statement is to try to give us a goal, an objective to

reach. And the mission statement would be what we're doing to drive ourselves

to get to the vision or goal. So, that's what I would interpret those two to the

intent of what they're for.

With regard to the clarity of how the vision and mission statements communicated, PSS-

01 expressed that the strategic vision was difficult to envision. The participant continued,

Okay, and again, this is my perspective. . . . It's not easy to envision. If you want

people to actually really internalize your vision, then you really have to paint what

that vision is. And that's something that I struggled with the vision because I

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have an idea of what I believe the vision to be but it's not clear from the statement

what the vision is. I mean especially when it says here "technologically advanced

department." Well, what does that mean, right?

PSS-01 also expressed feelings that the vision statement seemed disconnected from the

mission statement, leading to a lack of clarity for both:

See, I don't know that the mission really ties into the vision. I mean, "To enrich

lives through effective and caring service," that's like our meaning, our purpose,

right? It's the—you hope that that's gonna be the end effect of having a

technologically advanced department . . . but they don't seem to be married

completely with each other.

The perception, then, of PSS-01 was that the mission of "enriching lives through

effective and caring service" seemed like "our meaning, our purpose." Yet, having a

"technology advanced department" didn't seem related, or "married" to that.

PSS-02 explained that DPSS had sponsored a retreat within the past year or so in

an effort to better define its overall purpose by "recasting not so much the vision

statement, but mission statement for the department." One thought for this possible new

purpose statement was "To inspire hope, working today to create a better tomorrow."

Therefore, the department is in somewhat of a transition period of evaluating now

perspectives on vision, mission, and purpose. When asked the question regarding the

definition of strategic vision and mission statements, PSS-02 provided the following

explanation:

In my mind, the mission statement is how the organization is anchored. And we

strive to be more intentional in calling it a purpose, a statement of what the

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department or organization exists for. That's kind of what I see as the mission, where the vision is much more aligned to the strategic plan of the department and can change from strategic plan year to strategic plan year. Whereas the vision of where an organization might go or what they might look to accomplish in those strategic plan years might change. It is always aligned in the mission or purpose of that organization.

This definition of strategic vision and mission statements was inconsistent with the perspective of PSS-01 and the general perspectives of the DPH participants. PSS-02 felt that the strategic mission statement is the organizational anchor, and the vision statement is a temporary part of the strategic plan which might change from year to year. PSS-02 continued with perspectives concerning how clearly the existing DPSS strategic vision and mission statements communicate:

I think, at least for me, when I see something like we are striving to be an organization that relies more on technology, and for example the piece that talks about having our employees work from home, certainly the pandemic has really charged and prepped the organization to realize that so much more quickly than may have been outlined in the strategic plan. . . . But I'm also marrying that to my experiences of the organization on a daily basis, and those two things sometimes don't match up in terms of, well, if this is where we intend to go, what is keeping us from accomplishing that? For me, the mission to provide effective and caring service is a little flat, and I think that, that might have been some of the thinking around re-evaluating what that means for our organization today. It rings hollow

for me. . . . It was never something that struck me as reflective of the mission and

people who carry out the work that happens at DPSS every day.

During the interview with PSS-03, the participant defined strategic vision as being the big

picture, or the organization's "most important thing." The mission, as some others have

stated, is the means of achieving the vision. The participant, however, expressed

difficulty reconciling a mission (enriching lives) that seemed to the participant to be more

important than the overarching vision (advancing technology). PSS-03 stated,

The direction that we're gonna move into is more of a virtual environment

utilizing more technology to reach out to the community while alleviating some of

the workload that we had to normally do. . . . I read the vision that it appears

technology should be the priority. But, in our current environment, the customer

is still the priority. The customer needs are still the priority. And everything

technology that we develop or implement is based on customer needs. . . . And

when you start talking about kind of the specifics of like IT and cutting down on

the number of people, in that context it sounds like maybe a management goal or

an objective that you might do. . . . But, the bigger picture is to overall serve the

community better, as the mission statement suggests.

Thus, to participant PSS-03, the DPSS vision and mission were perceived to be

backwards, with enriching lives and meeting customer needs being the highest vision

priority that could be facilitated with a mission that was focused on advanced technology

as a means to achieve that highest priority. Participant PSS-04 expressed a general

awareness of the strategic vision and mission statements and provided the following

definitions:

The vision, to me means this is something that I visualize on the future happening

to the department. I know it has a date associated with the vision, but it's almost

like something I strive to obtain, where the mission statement is something I'm

currently doing. . . . To me, my mission statement is what we actually provide to

our participants, to our recipients, the people that we serve, and also to each other,

internal and external customers.

PSS-04 continued, stating that both the vision and mission statements were generally

understood although the participant felt the vision was less clear, stating, "I know I

wouldn't be able to be like, Okay, what does it actually say . . . because . . . it's a little bit

wordy." The interview with PSS-05 was noteworthy because the participant clearly

expressed a definition of both the DPSS strategic vision statement and mission statement,

describing them as follows:

The vision statement, I see it as the common goal that everyone is striving to

work. It's not something you can touch, but it's more something that is a sense

or a feeling people have, and that motivates them to work. . . . Our vision

statement talks about enriching people's lives so that it's not a specific project,

but rather it's an abstract goal, in my view that we're all working towards. Now,

on the other hand, the strategic mission, it's a defined project that helps us achieve

that goal. In this case for example, in the technological aspect, we have many

changes . . . streamlining the process for the public.

Participant PSS-05 clearly stated that the vision statement was the "common goal" of the

department "our vision statement talks about enriching people's lives. . . . It's an abstract

goal . . . that we're all working towards." The participant then described the mission

statement as a "defined project that helps achieve that goal." Although PSS-05 clearly

perceived "enriching peoples' lives" as the overarching visionary goal of the department,

the participant was actually describing the mission statement. Conversely, the

participant's view of the "defined project" as improving technology to reduce office

traffic as being the mission statement was actually describing the vision statement. Thus,

as was also pointed out by PSS-03, the DPSS vision statement was at times perceived as

a more detailed means of actually supporting the broader mission statement. In turn, the

DPSS mission statement was perceived to be broader in context and a better fit as the

vision statement. PSS-05 did not express the perception that the two statements were

reversed but literally recited the vision as the mission and the mission as the vision.

Interview Question 3

How did statements make participants feel from a leadership standpoint with

regard to motivation or inspiration?

Leadership theory suggests that strategic vision and mission statements can both

motivate and inspire members of an organization. The purpose of this question was to

explore how health and human services managers perceived motivation, inspiration, and

organizational leadership through their strategic vision and mission statements.

Key Findings of the Combined Participant Sample

Upon reviewing the responses from all participants in the sample, 50% felt, from

a leadership standpoint, that their department's vision statement had a motivating or

inspiring impact. The overall sample perceptions of the strategic mission statements

were more positive as 70% felt that their mission statement had a motivating or inspiring

impact. Again, however, upon further review by department, nearly all of the positive

leadership perceptions about strategic vision and mission statements were from the DPH participants. The perceptions about vision and mission statements providing a motivating or inspiring impact expressed by DPSS participants were far less positive.

Key Findings of Department of Public Health Participants

All of the DPH participants perceived their strategic vision statement as motivating and inspirational from a leadership standpoint. Likewise, all five DPH participants perceived their mission statements as being motivating and inspirational. Beyond the influence of a vision or mission statement motivating and inspiring a manager from an organizational standpoint, a number of participants expressed how the statements also appealed to their personal passion for public service in healthcare:

Well, I think people come to the Department of Public Health very much out of a sense of passion for creating healthy and just communities. So having a [vision and mission] that you believe in is motivating in that sense because you're coming to do good work and make your community stronger. So, I—I think there's like a—how do you feel? I think it feels—I think it's powerful to feel that you personally align with the mission [and vision?]—same thing. (PH-01)

PH-02 carried personal passion about strategic vision and mission back to memories of childhood experience. The participant thoughtfully recalled growing up in an ethnic minority setting and how that experience of the environment influenced the participant's initial thoughts of a commitment to a career in medicine. Instead, that later evolved into a career in public health and the hope of creating stronger communities:

So, I'm going to try . . . so let me . . . when you talk about lived experience and the vision and mission, I think what drew me like growing up in the community I

grew up in . . . I think the reason I struggled between sort of medicine and public health is because, in general, I saw environmental conditions that . . . that I felt were . . . could not be addressed by sort of families just going in and sort of getting it corrected by a physician. It was water quality; it was air quality. It was big babies born with partial brain and spinal cord all due to sort of different types of pollution. . . . sort of lived . . . growing up in a community like that and getting sick myself and what are the sources of that sickness was all sorts of population-based public health. . . . So that's what drew me to the field of public health, to study it. And so, when I see a vision and mission statement like this that takes into account conditions, that takes into account communities . . . it absolutely dovetails with my lived experience. . . . So, I'm constantly thinking about sort of equity. I'm constantly thinking about inclusivity. . . . Also, we have leadership that sort of follows that and pushes transparency as well. That's huge. I hope that answers.

Another participant who grew up in a minority environment also shared perspectives related the DPH vision and mission statements in the context of social equality contributing to healthier communities. This was perceived as being consistent with the overall commitment of department leadership. Participant PH-03stated,

You know, it's really about the social determinants of health and the root causes, and so that if you go down to that, then we have a clear understanding of how, in order to achieve the mission, you have to address the root causes of health and that those are embodied in all of these things whether it's access to employment or quality education or any of those things. Also, I think, what's not outright said

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here but definitely within the strategic plan and definitely within all of the

framing that . . . that she [department director as leader] provides is—is really

looking at everything with the health equity, race equity lens, so I think that's part

and parcel of it too. . . . Dr. [department head] does this so beautifully in framing

it for us . . . as our . . . DPH leadership . . . so when I look at this vision, mission

and values, I know that's who she is.

Participant PH-04 shared a perspective about management challenges in DPH, pointing

out that public health agencies often administer disparate programs which can leave one

feeling disconnected from the department. The participant felt that effective strategic

vision and mission statements can help support a unifying motivation:

I definitely feel like it [the DPH vision and mission statements] engenders a

feeling of camaraderie and that we are all in this together. This is what our work

is designed to do. I do see it as a rallying cry and . . . a clarity about what we are

doing whether our work is disparate from one another that we're all . . . it's all

being done towards the same goal.

Finally, PH-05 summed up feelings of how the department's vision and mission

statements provided motivating inspiration from both the perspective of personal values

and respect that it creates for DPH leadership:

Yeah, well, it motivates me. I have a natural social justice orientation that I've

always had because of my work. And so, this idea that we're addressing

conditions supporting health, that speaks to me and it's like a call to action. So, I

think that the mission provides a good—something that the leadership can grab

onto as they are communicating with all of us, and they do often. I think what's

communicated in this mission statement and the vision statement are things that
our leadership lives and breathes every day and that's built into the way they
communicate with us. So, yeah, I think it works from a leadership standpoint as
well. . . . Again, I hear this vision and mission echoed all the time in the way that
they lead.

Key Findings of Department of Public Social Services Participants

From the leadership perspectives of motivation and inspiration, the responses of
the DPSS participants generally did not reflect positive perceptions of their department
strategic vision and mission statements. None of the participants expressed positive
perceptions of the vision statement although two of the five affirmed motivational
leadership qualities of the mission statement. There were a number of noteworthy
perspectives shared by DPSS participants.

Participant PSS-01 reiterated the importance of a vision statement being currently
relevant. Rather than the DPSS vision being a big picture idea of the future, supported by
actions of the mission statement, the vision had a due date of 2017 and had lost its
relevance. In turn, this seemed to create frustration rather than motivation and
inspiration. The participant stated,

We're talking about a vision statement written in 2017 which is now 3 years old,
if anything . . . is a bit of a disappointment and—I don't know if anxiety is the
right word but certainly disappointment and frustration. Frustration is a better
word because I am somebody that really contends we should be moving quicker
and faster towards getting to a technologically advanced stage. I think we could
have certainly really advanced some of the vision by having taken some different

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direction. . . . I'll give you an example. . . . Within the last 18 months the

department deployed brand new desktops throughout the department to everyone.

. . . I would have told you don't do a desktop. Why can't we do a laptop . . .

right? And the reason I say that is because then that lends yourself to a nimble

workforce that can easily be shifted if you need . . . a platform in which people

can begin to telework if that's also part of your vision. So, here we are 3 years

later in the middle of a pandemic . . . in a very challenging spot because to deploy

telework was gonna be challenging when the department's not gonna be able to

dole out laptops to everybody to go to work at home. But that's what I'm saying

is like to me is frustrating is if our vision is to be technologically advanced, then

we really need to put that front and center and work towards getting there and not

allow the status quo to inform us on the decisions we're making.

The frustrations expressed by PSS-01, therefore, extended beyond the outdated relevance

of the strategic vision statement. The participant also cited a lack of alignment of the

vision statement and actual management direction pursued by the department. Indeed,

aligned with target dates of 2017 to achieve the vision, DPSS now has more staff working

at home and fewer citizens coming into the office, but the participant stated it was not a

result of conscious strategic planning. It was rather a reactive response to an infectious

pandemic that prompted the action contained in the vision statement.

With regard to leadership implications of the DPSS vision and mission

statements, PSS-02 expressed similar observations about the lack of intentionality in

aligning the statements to organizational practice. When asked specifically how

motivating and inspirational the DPSS vision and mission statements were from a leadership standpoint, the participant stated,

> Yeah . . . my answer on this is going to be not at all. But, that's not separated from the potential that they could have . . . I think that it's because so much of the exercise in determining a mission or vision statement or a strategic plan feels like a checkmark or just a task that you have to do and then, it's put back on the shelf. And so, it doesn't live with leadership on a daily basis. It's not embodied in the work that happens at those levels within the organization. And so, I don't feel any connection to it as it relates to our leadership task kind of requirements, responsibilities, on a day-to-day. . . . I think it all depends on the level of intentionality behind their development, and then incorporation into the day-to-day aspects of the organization.

Therefore, based on the perceptions of participant PSS-02, it appears that strategic organizational statements can lose their leadership impact if not aligned with day-to-day vision and mission-related management actions. Participant PSS-03 agreed that the leadership connection of a vision and mission statement to actually motivate and inspire must extend beyond the words:

> So, I would say that—depending on the situation that I'm in—so, if I was in a room and we are doing some sort of leadership training or leadership workshop, the vision statement and mission statement is very inspiring. Those are feel-good statements. And I would say that in the daily work environment, it doesn't even register because of all the things that go on throughout the day. It doesn't even register for me. . . . To me, effective and caring service is making every effort you

can to provide the services that you should be providing them. . . . And so, I

would say it resonates a little bit more than the vision statement, but in day-to-day

work life, I would say both statements do not resonate that much.

Participant PSS-04 shared feelings similar to participant PSS-01 and PSS-02. Although

more staff are now working remotely from home, and in-person traffic in DPSS offices

has been eliminated, it was not strategically planned. Environmental circumstances have

now created the need for more technology-based processing, which is gaining more

acceptance by management:

We were able to provide services to our participants without them even coming

into our office. And I think prior to . . . May 15th when we closed our doors, I

think the department was a little afraid to take that extra step to really embrace the

vision and make it happen. But, when we had to close our doors with the Covid-

19 incidents going on now, it allowed us to say, wow, we really have the

technology to make that happen. As a leader, I embrace that. (Participant PSS-04)

From the perceptions expressed by PSS-04, it appears that major organizational changes,

regardless of whether strategically planned or not, can create leadership uncertainty.

Interview Question 4

How did the statements communicate departmental direction as a guiding

philosophy of organizational purpose?

Leadership theory suggests that strategic vision and mission statements can

provide transformational connections between leaders and members to direct a guiding

philosophy for the organization. The intent of this question was to determine how health

and human service managers perceived their respective vision and mission statements as guiding philosophies of organizational purpose.

Key Findings of the Combined Participant Sample

Upon review of responses from all participants, 50% felt that their department vision statements communicated a guiding philosophy of organizational purpose. Seventy percent of the participants felt that the mission statement communicated a guiding philosophy of organizational purpose. The pattern of these responses matched those of the previous question regarding leadership motivation and inspiration. Nearly all of the positive leadership perceptions about strategic vision and mission statements were from DPH. The perceptions about vision and mission statements providing a guiding philosophy of organizational purpose were far less positive from DPSS.

Key Findings of Department of Public Health Participants

All of the DPH participants perceived their strategic vision statement as communicating a guiding philosophy of organizational purpose from a leadership standpoint. All five DPH participants also perceived their mission statements as communicating a guiding philosophy of organizational purpose.

To participant PH-01, a guiding philosophy of organizational purpose means that every member of the department has a role to play. But those roles, while diverse, find common purpose in vision and mission:

> You know, there's so many aspects of leadership that help convey clarity to an organization, but, the—the overarching role of—of mission and vision to make sure everyone is working toward the same this is—is strong. I think the fact that our mission is not just healthy people, but healthy people and healthy

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communities helps—helps every staff person understand their role that some

people are working on the healthy community side, some people are working on

the healthy people side. But, it all works together synergistically. You can't have

healthy people if your communities aren't providing people with the resources

and opportunities they need to thrive. So, I—I do think it's powerful, I think

the—the mission about advancing the conditions that support optimal health and

well-being similarly as our understanding of the role of all the nonhealth sectors

impacting health, you know, housing and education and criminal justice . . . And

so, our language in our mission and vision very much validates our work in these

upstream arenas, as well as the more conventional arenas of—of one-on-one

treatment.

Thus, PH-01 also emphasized that beyond one-on-one personal health are community

dynamics and other arenas addressed by DPH, such as adequate housing and educational

concerns. Participant PH-02 referenced the current Covid-19 pandemic as an example of

a specific organizational priority that has emerged for public health. Yet the participant

shared the perception that the vision and mission of the department did not exclude

anyone from aligning their specific role to achieve organizational purpose:

I mean, especially in a pandemic right now or in a crisis, I think it's so important

to add something. That we repeat and reiterate why every single sort of

department program that's been engaged or reassigned . . . everyone has like an

important job to do in order to get—in order to address this. . . . Like so I'm

throwing something out like finance, right? It's always important period, right?

But, if you're talking about programs that are working on the front lines or

whatever in terms of acute communicable disease, especially now, like if they

need certain things, finance needs to be at the table and doing certain work. So,

all the pieces need to be working together. That's why it is really magnified . . .

not just in times of emergency, but throughout.

The perception that PH-02 expressed is that there may be disparate functions within DPH

such as communicable disease control or financial management. Yet an organization

working under well-crafted vision and mission statements can unify common purpose in

spite of disparate functions. Similar thoughts of the strategic vision and mission

statements encouraging common organizational purpose were expressed by PH-03:

I think what . . . vision and mission are really important to providing . . . where

we're all moving and where we're all going . . . in a department of 4,000 plus

people and with various programs ranging from food and nutrition, nurse/family

partnership month, prevention such as these, you know like with such diversity

across the department, no matter what role you play, whether—whether you're in

contracts or grants . . . or whether you're doing TB services . . . it creates . . . a

common focal point for us to move towards and have that in common across a

broad spectrum of services, programs, divisions, personalities, roles, functions

from strictly finance, we're all moving towards the same thing. So, that if you are

in finance, you're doing your job well because the support that you use to provide

to a program then helps to create healthier communities and healthier people in

LA County. It creates that commonality that goes across the board no matter

what your role. And, we need that, otherwise people could be like, I'm a numbers

person, I'm going to sit here. . . . I don't mean to pull out finance . . . it's just one

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example that comes to head in my mind. But whether I'm doing [the job title of

my current position] or I'm in the nuts and bolts of it . . . it creates a common

place for us to go. It's a rallying cry. . . . It's what we're trying to achieve no

matter what our role.

According to the perspectives expressed by PH-03, the organizational purpose of the

DPH vision and mission statements create a "broad spectrum" under which all programs

find common ground. It applies to front line services as well as administrative functions

such as finance. PH-03 not only mentioned function, but also "personalities," which can

be diverse—yet all have the potential to feel included in a well-crafted strategic vision

and mission statement.

PH-04 expressed a perception about the way the DPH vision and mission

statements were developed and how that contributed to communicating a guiding

philosophy of organizational purpose. The participant stated that the solicitation of input

from internal stakeholders such as employees and agency managers helped frame

philosophical direction and purpose:

Our team and office of planning created a structure of which they could get

feedback across the department. So, all of the program directors or supervisors

were required to have a meeting and center a meeting around this topic and input

from their staff members. And so, definitely hosted a meeting and carved out

time from our team meeting to talk a little bit about the vision and mission and

gave feedback and ideas, and some of the proposed mission and vision ideas that

were given. That was then sent to all the meetings and collated it and then

prioritized these thoughts of wide department feedback.

Given the deliberate process that DPH used to solicit internal stakeholder input and buy-in, it appears that their strategic vision and mission statements would likely reflect common support of philosophy and purpose.

Participant PH-05 made the observation that organizational purpose can change with the environment. Yet with a broad department vision and mission of meeting the health needs of individuals and the community, members of the organization can be flexible in adjusting tasks to meet operational needs:

> You got me thinking about all of the various programs and divisions within our department, and even if we're responding to Covid, I think all of our people are working so hard in our infectious disease program . . . which we're all now all infectious disease people right now. Conditions in terms of social distancing, the ways that businesses set up in order to support minimal transmission of Covid, we're working with skilled nursing facilities . . . we are focused a lot on environmental conditions like access to fresh fruits and vegetables . . . menu labeling, all the kinds of things in environments that impact health. . . . So, I'm trying to think of any particular branch of our department for which this mission would be a harder fit. . . . I think it works really well across the board.

However, Participant PH-05 also pointed out that ensuring that strategic vision and mission statements continue to communicate organizational purpose requires conscious management effort to keep the guiding philosophy of the department regularly communicated:

> I think organization is needed in a vision and a mission statement. They need to be revisited periodically. I've been in organizations, sometimes they're a little bit

more compelling than others. But in this particular case, yeah, for a lot of the

reasons I've described thus far, this vision and mission communicate the

philosophy that we are not just controlling germs and doing restaurant checks and

promoting hygiene, but we are actually looking beyond that at the social

conditions that determine population health. And so, that's the philosophy of the

field of public health and that's what's embodied in this mission statement. . . .

That's absolutely what should be driving a public health department in its role and

its public service to the community.

Key Findings of Department of Public Social Services Participants

From the leadership perspectives of communicating guiding philosophy and

organizational purpose, the responses of the DPSS participants did not reflect positive

perceptions of their department strategic vision statement. None of the participants

expressed positive perceptions of the vision statement although two of the five did affirm

that the mission statement communicated a guiding philosophy of organizational purpose.

There were a number of noteworthy perspectives shared by DPSS participants.

Particularly with regard to the DPSS vision statement, participant PSS-01 felt that

the vision was so narrowly conceived, applying only to staff in public contact welfare

offices, that it became irrelevant to many managers in the department who were

performing other administrative functions:

In the literal sense of how the vision is written . . . it's not relevant to say

somebody that's in budget or even contracts for example possibly. It's not. . . .

For example, if you're in budgets or you're in program, does it really necessitate

that you have to continue to hold in-person meetings? Does it really necessitate

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that you need to be in the office Monday through Friday? So, those are like

organizational changes that can be changed within those sections to also improve

the efficiency of what they're doing and changing their work life to be more

technologically advanced. So, that's where the vision I think misses the point is

that it's not just to the customer but it's also internal. So, you would really have

to read into that but the way it's written, it certainly would not apply to probably a

third of the directors [managers generally in charge of a major program,

administrative section, or line operations] that are in DPSS. . . . I do feel there's

this disconnect, right? I mean, the vision and the mission are out there, but I don't

know that there's any guiding principles that are leading us there. So, in that

respect, I don't know that this is really guiding me anywhere.

In addition to the perspective from PSS-01 that the vision would not apply to "a third of

the directors," the participant did not express that the vision and mission provided any

guiding principles. Another participant, PSS-02, felt the current strategic vision and

mission statements provided little alignment with DPSS organizational purpose. The

participant expressed optimism, however, that the current process of vision and mission

reevaluation could change things:

It's a good question. I think even if we took each and kind of stood them on their

own . . . I would say that I don't know that the vision or mission statement, as

they currently exist, do anything to really advance or connect people to the

purpose of the organization. And that could be because the department has never,

until recently, had to think about what the purpose of the organization was. . . . I

don't know that there's much given to thinking about how this all ties in to the

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purpose of the organization. . . . I think it can be a galvanizing force. And then, when you think about our organization specifically—we're well over 13,000 employees who are impacting the lives of three and a half million people annually. And so, you're talking about huge potential there if used appropriately and thought about intentionally throughout the organization.

As stand-alone statements, PSS-02 perceived that the current DPSS vision and mission statements did little to connect people to organizational purpose. This perception was similarly perceived by PSS-03 who felt the need for a unifying purpose which would be known and understood personally by each employee in the department:

So, I think what we lack in our department is how to ensure that this has instilled some sort of purpose in each employee, and make that relatable to the vision and mission, because everybody's definition is different. It's hard for them to relate to the vision and mission. . . . There needs to be some sort of link to their purpose to the mission and vision, and right now, I don't think there's a clear link there. . . . I feel that those two statements were created as a concept, but there is no link on how a staff can achieve any of that, or how some direction or steps to achieve that and to align themselves to that. So, right now, when staff go through training . . . with the department, it's always about, well, here's the personnel policies, here's the program policies. But nothing about their purpose, nothing about what they're doing relates to the mission and vision.

In addition to the need for personally unifying purpose, PSS-03 suggested the need for a common understanding to the department's vision and mission "because everyone's definition is different." Returning to the question of what is the purpose of DPSS and

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who are they actually supposed to be benefitting was the concern of PSS-04. Given the

assumption that a strategic vision represents a future ideal state, the participant perceived

that the vision did not focus primarily on the well-being of the community and was

therefore out of step with organizational purpose:

> So, I would think that if your vision is to be a technologically advanced
>
> department and provide social services with a greater reduced . . . maybe you
>
> should add . . . which will enrich lives of our participants we serve. . . . If you're
>
> gonna do this, I can see how it's benefitting the department internally. I can see
>
> without a doubt how it's benefitting us. [But] how is it benefitting our public? . . .
>
> you are not having participants coming into our offices. How are they benefitting
>
> from that? Are they able to get their services faster, or quicker, or more efficient?
>
> How will our services improve by you reducing the number of participants
>
> coming in through our doors because just because they're not coming in our doors
>
> doesn't necessarily mean they're getting their benefits more timely or more
>
> efficient. What's our error rate? . . . You're telling me I'm reducing something,
>
> and I'm gonna do that. But, what is the outcome of that if you reduce it?

In addition to concerns about vision statements prioritizing organizational philosophy and

purpose, PSS-04 went on to express that the mission statement was sufficiently broad, but

the DPSS vision statement was too narrowly focused to generate guiding direction for the

entire department:

> But, you know, DPSS not only just has line offices. And I think when it comes to
>
> a vision and mission statement, sometimes you forget about [the program
>
> administered by the participant], or you forget about welfare fraud, or you forget

about IHSS [In Home Supportive Services]. That's also a part of DPSS. So, I

think when you're looking for the vision of a department, you should look at all

aspects of the services that you provide and come with something where it

encompasses—the umbrella would encompass all of us. And I think being in [the

program administered by the participant], sometimes we feel like a stepchild. . . .

with the mission statement . . . it doesn't matter . . . I'm going to provide effective

and caring services, no matter where I go, but the vision . . . I read the vision and I

work in program as well. So, when I read that vision, I'm like, oh well, that

vision doesn't apply to me because I don't have any customers come into

program.

This perspective shared by Participant PSS-04, "I'm like, oh well, that vision doesn't

apply to me," seemed to emerge as an unexpected theme shared by other DPSS

respondents as well. The question itself was meant to address how vision and mission

statements guide organizational purpose. Yet the perception of some participants was

that vision and mission statements can also make parts of the organization excluded.

Participant PSS-05 expressed the perception that the DPSS strategic mission

statement communicated the best guiding philosophy of purpose: "It is shorter, and it's

easier for everyone to remember . . . easier for them to be able to connect to it. . . .

Everyone in the department strives toward that." Enriching the lives of community

members with effective and caring service seemed to represent the most important

philosophy of guiding purpose. The participant went on to explain, however, that the

DPSS vision, with a narrow technology focus, had shortcomings with regard to big

picture guidance:

So, I think that when we move the department in that direction, it applies to

everyone in that sense. When it comes to the public, I think that not everyone will

leverage technology or certain processes simply because they may not have a

computer, they may not be technology savvy. So, they'll still have to come into

the office, or they'll have more of a need to be engaged in a face-to-face person

interview with someone.

The concern, therefore, raised by PSS-05, was that the DPSS vision statement should be

focused on serving the most vulnerable segments of the community as its guiding

philosophy and purpose. Yet it was directed at internal department purpose, technology,

without adequate consideration for access by the community.

Summary of Research Findings

Literature suggests the importance of strategic vision and mission statements as

they relate to strategic management and leadership theories. The purpose of this study

was to qualitatively explore how county human service managers perceive and

experience strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements. This chapter

presented findings addressing two research study questions:

1. How do county health and human service managers perceive and experience

    strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements?

2. How do county health and human service managers perceive strategic vision

    statements and strategic mission statements as guiding philosophies to motivate

    and achieve organizational purpose?

    In-depth phenomenological interviews were conducted by phone with 10 Los

Angeles County health and human services administrators who volunteered as

participants to determine their perceptions and lived experience with strategic vision and mission statements. Extensive quotations from each of the participants have been included in this study to provide an accurate representation of their more personal transcendental phenomenological feelings, passions, perceptions and experiences. The overall participant sample was ethnically diverse and gender balanced. Five of the participants were from the DPH, and five were from DPSS.

Both county departments had existing strategic vision and mission statements. However, there were significant differences in the way the vision and mission statements were developed and designed. DPH had recently reevaluated its strategic vision and mission statements. They had developed a relatively extensive internal stakeholder input process involving an estimated 1,100 of their 4,000 staff. During the evaluation process, DPH provided their definitions of strategic vision and mission statements so that all participants were in aligned agreement.

Although DPSS has an existing vision and mission statement in place, they are currently in the process of reevaluating their strategic vision and mission statements. An initial group of 14 staff from a cross section of the department has worked with Disney to develop a new "purpose" statement. This remains a work in progress.

Upon completion of the interviews, all responses were transcribed and reviewed. After evaluating and coding responses from both departments, three general findings emerged that reflected the perceptions and experiences of the participating administrators:

1. The manner in which vision and mission statements are developed and constructed can impact organizational awareness and commitment.

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2. Effective vision and mission statements motivate and inspire by appealing to personal passion, and a sense of inclusive relevance to all.

3. The guiding philosophy and organizational purpose established by vision and mission statements are enhanced by leaders who model shared beliefs and an alignment with strategic decisions and actions.

First Finding

The manner in which vision and mission statements are developed and constructed can impact organizational awareness and commitment.

This initial finding relates to the first research question and first and second interview questions regarding the awareness each participant had about their respective vision and mission statements. This initial finding also relates to each participant's perceived understanding of what strategic vision and mission statements actually are and their perceived relationship to the organization.

Stakeholder Involvement and Input Increases Awareness and Consistent

Understanding of Vision and Mission Statements

DPH had recently concluded an extensive stakeholder input process to develop their strategic vision and mission statements. They spent a lot of time and effort on this process, which solicited views from a cross-section of staff. The process included town hall meetings, formal surveys, and on-site staff team meetings. It was estimated that this process involved over 25%, or approximately 1,100 DPH staff. This relatively high rate of participation appeared to be a major contributing factor to the awareness DPH managers seemed to have of their vision and mission statements. Clearly explaining terms during the stakeholder input process also seemed to create a consistent

understanding of the definition of vision and mission statements and their purposes for the organization.

DPH participants seemed to perceive their strategic vision and mission statements as clear and easily understood. PH-05 captured the general feeling of all the DPH participants in stating, "Yeah, they are. To me, absolutely. They are . . . pretty straight up and clear to me."

Although not as extensive, DPSS met with consultants from Disney in 2018 to develop a statement of department purpose. This stakeholder input was solicited from a cross-section of 14 department staff. This process of evaluating vision and mission that is initially focused on organizational purpose remains a work in progress. However, the current status of uncertainty seems to have contributed to a lack of clarity expressed by the DPSS participants.

None of the DPSS participants viewed their current vision statement as being clear. Although all expressed an awareness of their mission statement, most felt that there was a lack of alignment between the vision and mission. There was a lack of consistency among DPSS participants in their understanding of what vision and mission statements actually were. At times the vision was described as the overarching direction. At other times, the mission was described as the overarching direction and was therefore more suitable as the vision. Others appeared to suggest that the two statements should be reversed. As further developments evolve on the DPSS purpose statement, it may create an opportunity for the organization to clarify purpose in the context of organizational vision and mission.

This is not to suggest that there is one best way to define or develop strategic vision or mission statements. It has already been seen that there are differing opinions about this in the literature. What the findings may suggest, however, is that regardless of how vision and mission statements are ultimately designed, a formalized internal stakeholder engagement process that clearly provides the organization's definition of strategic vision and mission may contribute to consistency and better shared understanding. This consistency was demonstrated by all of the DPH participants. The DPSS participants expressed conflicting definitions of their strategic vision and mission statements. Given the current DPSS commitment to further review vision, mission, and purpose, clarifying definitions may be worth consideration.

Clear and Concise Statements were Perceived as More Effective

Participants from both departments expressed favorable perceptions of vision and mission statements that were clear and concise. Participants also shared that simple statements that are clear and known by all contribute to a sense of organizational unity and a sense that everyone is working toward a commonly understood goal.

When designing their vision and mission statements, DPH made a conscious effort to make their vision and mission statements simple and clear. The statement of PH-02 seemed to capture the responses of all DPH participants: "Simple; I think it's clear. The priority is straight for both."

Conversely, for DPSS, the length and detail of their vision statement was perceived as too wordy and a reason why it was difficult to recall. Yet the clear and concise mission statement to "Enrich lives through effective and caring service" was known by all. Therefore, participants in this study perceived that regardless of the

content of a vision or mission statement, clear and concise construction increases awareness.

Second Finding

Effective vision and mission statements motivate and inspire by appealing to personal passion and a sense of inclusive relevance to all.

This second finding relates to the second research question, and third and fourth interview questions regarding leadership, motivation and inspiration. As participants discussed their perceptions of strategic vision and mission statements, it became apparent that statements that were aligned with personal passions and beliefs inspired the most motivating appeal. Conversely, the opposite effect was created when participants felt that a statement was either irrelevant or personally excluded them or their program.

Personal Passions and Beliefs were a Major Influence on how Participants Perceived Their Departmental Vision and Mission Statements

All of the DPH participants perceived that the vision and mission statements were aligned in some way with past experiences, or personal passions. One participant, PH-02, mentioned how the vision of making people and communities healthier was personally motivating because of childhood memories that brought to mind consequences of unhealthy conditions in his own community.

Another participant (PH04) perceived that the vision and mission statements created a motivating sense of unity in working together as an organization to achieve public health and well-being. Yet another participant (PH-05) was motivated by their own passion and sense of social justice and equity which was perceived to be manifested in the vision and mission statements.

The DPSS participants perceived that their vision and mission statements were far less motivating and inspiring. This seemed to be primarily because of a disconnect to the strategic vision. Although the DPSS participants may have shared similar passions and concerns of their DPH counterparts, the strategic vision did not seem to connect. As expressed by PSS-04, using technology to reduce foot traffic in welfare offices was perceived more as a management objective rather than having a motivational or inspiring appeal to personal passion or creating a greater good for the public.

One participant, PSS-02, also shared the perception that the strategic vision and mission statements were simply a formality as check marks aligned with impersonal management tasks. Thus, it appears that vision and mission statements that appeal to a one's personal passions and beliefs can have a strong motivating impact on organization members.

Effective Vision and Mission Statements Should be Inclusive and Relevant to All in the Organization

DPH participants all perceived that their vision and mission statements were personally inclusive and relevant to them. The statements were conceived in ways that were broad enough to be applicable to their individual programs and tasks. For example, the strategic vision focus on healthy people and healthy communities was repeatedly referenced as universally applicable to all department staff, from front line to finance. Broad and relevant vision and mission statements also allow the organization to be flexible to adjust to changing environment needs. DPH participants referred to the current Covid-19 pandemic as an example of a new challenge that has changed the work assignments of many in the department. Yet the vision and mission statements still

resonate as being relevant to the purpose and guiding direction for every member of the organization to ensure healthy people and communities.

In contrast, the DPSS vision statement date of 2017 to achieve technology goals was perceived as outdated with lost relevance. The narrow department vision perspective of reducing in-person traffic in welfare offices with more staff working remotely was also meaningless to many department employees. For example, DPSS participants stated that staff working in program analysis, finance, governmental relations, welfare fraud investigations, In Home Supportive Services for the frail and elderly, and employment services are not at all concerned about reducing welfare office traffic. PSS-04, managing one of the excluded programs, suggested that the strategic vision statement simply didn't apply to them. Another concern raised was that the strategic vision statement was more focused on internal technology operations of the department rather than the well-being of the public. The DPSS participant who raised this issue, PSS-05, also questioned whether the public would have the resources and technology access to remotely comply with the vision statement.

Although some of the DPSS participants perceived the DPSS mission statement of enriching lives through effective and caring service as being broad and inclusive, they felt the mission and vision did not complement each other. Therefore, a relational alignment between vision and mission was perceived as essential to guiding effective organizational purpose.

Third Finding

The guiding philosophy and organizational purpose established by vision and mission statements are enhanced by leaders who model shared beliefs and an alignment with strategic decisions and actions.

This finding relates to the second research question and Interview Question 4 regarding the impact that strategic vision and mission statements have as guiding philosophies of organizational purpose. All of the DPH participants affirmed their perception that the DPH vision and mission statements directed a guiding purpose for their organization. Participants also seemed motivated by leadership that shared and modeled a commitment to the vision and mission statements.

None of the DPSS participants affirmed their vision statement as a good guiding philosophy for their department's purpose. Two of the five participants perceived their mission statement was a good guiding philosophy for the department.

Leadership That Models a Commitment and Passion for the Strategic Vision and Mission Statements Appears to Generate Positive Organizational Influence

A recurring perception pattern of DPH participants was that agency leadership also believed in the strategic vision and mission statements that served as further inspiration to the organization. A number of DPH participants shared that comments and actions by department leaders reflected consistency with the vision and mission theme of creating healthier communities. This included comments by department leadership encouraging inclusivity and racial health equity. These comments by leadership supporting the department vision and mission statements were perceived as a genuine and transparent personal commitment.

Although the DPSS strategic plan remains in development, the fact that the department is committed to a newly defined purpose statement has generated hope in this current leadership initiative and the potential that lies ahead. It was noted that the consultation with Disney, which was initiated by department leadership, allowed the participants to again focus on a purpose of why the department exists and hope for further progress.

Organizational Vision and Mission Statements Should be the Guiding Philosophy for All Department Decisions and Actions

It was noted by DPH participants that vision and mission statements are clearly understood and aligned with department actions and purpose. This point was said to be emphasized by department leadership as well. This resulted in a strong feeling of organizational unity toward common purpose that was understood by all.

Some DPSS participants perceived that the department vision had limited impact on department decision or actions. At times, actions were taken that seemed contrary to the vision. At other times, the vision was perceived as meeting internal technology needs without sufficient concern for community well-being and access, which the participant thought was the higher priority.

In short, perceptions from all participants expressed the sense that an organization's guiding purpose should be directed by intentional commitment and alignment of strategic vision and mission. The vision and mission of an organization were perceived as prioritized commitments that should remain at the forefront and guide all organizational planning and actions. These perceptions are further analyzed in

Chapter 5 in the context of related literature and the researcher's conclusions and

recommendations.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH ANALYSIS

This study explored strategic vision and mission statements in the context of strategic management and leadership theories. These statements are considered key components to strategic planning and organizational effectiveness. Yet at times, these strategic vision and mission statements are thought to be confusing and ineffective. As described and cited in this study, too often, strategic vision statements are said to lack coherence, be out of focus, and not clearly defined to members of the organization and public stakeholders (Bennis & Nanus, 1997; Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Likewise, strategic mission statements are too often said to be meaningless, forgettable, lacking essential direction, and totally ineffective (Ireland & Hitt, 1992; Perkins, 2008). The effectiveness of strategic vision statements and mission statements has been questioned, and how they are perceived by managers in public health and human service agencies is less clear, which has prompted the need for further qualitative inquiry.

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore how county human service managers perceive and experience strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements. Strategic management and leadership theories were the focus of the following two research questions:

1. How do county health and human service managers perceive and experience strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements?

2. How do county health and human service managers perceive strategic vision statements and strategic mission statements as guiding philosophies to motivate and achieve organizational purpose?

Based on these two research questions, the following four summarized interview questions were developed for this study:

1. How aware were participants of their strategic vision and mission statements?

2. How clearly were the statements defined, and how clearly did they communicate?

3. How did statements make participants feel from a leadership standpoint with regard to motivation or inspiration?

4. How did the statements communicate departmental direction as a guiding philosophy of organizational purpose?

The first two interview questions were related to strategic management theory. The second two questions were related to leadership theory. The findings of this study were based on the phenomenological responses to these research and interview questions.

Initially, the researcher planned to select approximately three to 10 managers from one county health or human service department for this study. However, after noting that the manner in which vision and mission statements were constructed varied widely from department to department, the researcher selected two different county departments for study. Because each department had distinctly different approaches to the development and design of its strategic vision and mission statements, it provided deeper insight into the perceptions and experiences of the participants.

Between June 8, 2020 and June 11, 2020, in-depth phenomenological interviews were conducted by phone with 10 Los Angeles County health and human services administrators. Five of the participants were from the Department of Public Health (DPH), and five were from the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS). These administrators generally shared a number of common characteristics:

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1. All worked for Los Angeles County government under the same political and executive administrative structure.

2. All worked in the same common field of health and human services.

3. The overall sample was gender balanced, and both groups were ethnically diverse with White, African American, Hispanic, and Asian participants.

4. Nearly all (90%) had advanced educational degrees.

5. All participants had management responsibility for major public health or public welfare programs.

Given the general homogeneity of these two health and human service participant groups, it could be reasonably assumed that there would be consistency in the manner in which their strategic vision and mission statements would be perceived and experienced. This was not the case. It was noteworthy that different patterns emerged from each department. In some instances, particularly in DPSS, the participant perceptions were highly polarized.

As examples, both the strategic vision and mission statements of DPH attracted a high degree of awareness by their participant managers. On the other hand, while all of the DPSS participant managers were aware of their department mission statement, only one of them was aware of their vision statement. All DPH participants were generally consistent in the defined clarity and understanding of their strategic vision and mission. This was less true of the DPSS participants. There was a very high perceived level of personal motivation generated by the DPH vision and mission statements. Yet this was less true of the DPSS participants. Finally, the DPH participants felt a very high degree of organizational guiding purpose provided by their strategic vision and mission

statements. This was less true of the DPSS participants. A summary, by department, of the positive response patterns that emerged from the four interview questions is included as Table 3.

Table 3

Positive Response to Interview Questions by Department

	Aware of vision	Clarity of vision	Motivated by vision	Purpose guided by vision	Aware of mission	Clarity of mission	Motivated by mission	Purpose guided by mission
DPH mgrs.	4	5	5	5	3	5	5	5
DPSS mgrs.	1	0	0	0	5	5	2	2
Total (N = 10)	5	5	5	5	8	10	7	7

The findings of this study, as expressed by its participants, were evaluated vis-à-vis established theoretical literature on strategic management and leadership. It was the further intent of this study for the researcher to interpret why the subject participants may have perceived and experienced strategic vision and mission statements as they did. For that reason, participants were quoted extensively to accurately capture their expressed perspectives and feelings.

Qualitative inquiry is a highly subjective process, and the researcher wishes to note that study limitation. Findings are based solely on participant responses of perceptions and lived experiences. The small sample size of 10 participants is also a major delimitation of this study. There are multiple ways in which these findings may be analyzed, and the interpretations presented in this study are but one perspective.

However, a deeper understanding of these feelings may encourage ways for organizations to more effectively develop future strategic vision and mission statements, strategic plans, and outcomes for the public.

Three Analytic Categories

The participant responses to the four interview questions were coded by themes and evaluated. The following three analytic categories, with themes, are summarized in Table 4.

1. The manner in which vision and mission statements are developed and constructed can impact organizational awareness and commitment.

2. Effective vision and mission statements motivate and inspire by appealing to personal passion and a sense of inclusive relevance to all.

3. The guiding philosophy and organizational purpose established by vision and mission statements are enhanced by leaders who model shared beliefs, and an alignment with strategic decisions and actions.

The following analyses also provide detailed quotations from participants to provide descriptive information, which is then discussed in the context of relevant literature. The chapter concludes with the researcher's own analysis of the analytic categories with conclusions and recommendations. Further study recommendations are also presented.

Analytic Category 1

The manner in which vision and mission statements are developed and constructed can impact organizational awareness and commitment.

Table 4

Analytic Categories—Summary of Coded Themes

Category 1	Category 2	Category 3
The manner in which vision and mission statements are developed & constructed can impact organizational awareness & commitment.	Effective vision & mission statements motivate & inspire by appealing to personal passion, & a sense of inclusive relevance to all.	Guiding philosophy & organizational purpose of vision & mission statements are enhanced by leaders who model shared beliefs, & an alignment with strategic decisions and actions.
Theme 1: Stakeholder involvement & input increase awareness & understanding.	Theme 1: Personal passions & beliefs were a major influence on participants.	Theme 1: Leaders who model shared beliefs in the strategic vision and mission statements appear to generate positive influence toward organizational purpose.
Theme 2: Clear & concise statements were perceived as most effective.	Theme 2: Effective vision and mission statements should be inclusive & relevant.	Theme 2: Organizational vision & mission should be in alignment with strategic decisions & actions.

The researcher determined that this initial finding was fundamental to organizational awareness and commitment to strategic vision and mission statements. DPH had recently completed a highly collaborative process of developing their strategic vision and mission statements. Recognizing that their vision and mission statements were outdated, DPSS had also begun a reevaluation process. This created somewhat of a disadvantage to DPSS participants because their statements remain a work in progress.

An analysis of participant responses disclosed two themes that appeared to increase organizational awareness and commitment of strategic vision and mission statements. The first theme was that a collaborative development process with internal stakeholder involvement created a sense of ownership to the organization's vision and

mission. The second theme that strongly emerged was the perceived design of the vision

and mission statements. Simple and concise statements were perceived as far more

effective than more complex, wordy statements.

Stakeholder Involvement and Input Increase Awareness and Consistent Understanding

of Vision and Mission Statements

The process of internal stakeholder engagement to develop the organization's

strategic vision and mission statements appeared to have a positive impact on the

perception and awareness of DPH participants. PH-01 described in detail how DPH

made a conscious effort to involve a cross section of employees to solicit input to develop

their strategic vision and mission statements:

We started with a townhall . . . we had several hundred people at the townhall

where part of the agenda was a brainstorm of key concepts people wanted . . . we

asked for people's ideas for key concepts for vision, mission, and values . . . I

think there were like 500 people maybe who contributed that way. We then sent

out a survey—a survey monkey out with—with more—even more questions

about key concepts . . . to every single program in the department and got . . .

maybe over a thousand—maybe like 1,100 responses. We asked people to do it in

groups, in their teams, and for one person to respond on behalf of the team, but

we captured the number in each team. And then we went to our executive work

group and leadership team . . . the top two management bodies in DPH and they . .

. had two or three meetings with those bodies to refine, further whittle down, etc.

This extensive stakeholder input process involving a large sample of employees resulted

in the perception of DPH participants that they were personally involved in the strategic

vision and mission input process. Another DPH participant, PH-04, also acknowledged

the process of giving feedback to develop the statements:

> Our team and office of planning created a structure of which they could get
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> feedback across the department. So, all of the program directors or supervisors
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> were required to have a meeting and center a meeting around this topic and input
>
> from their staff members. And so, definitely hosted a meeting and carved out
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> time from our team meeting to talk a little bit about the vision and mission and
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> gave feedback and ideas, and some of the proposed mission and vision ideas that
>
> were given. That was then sent to all the meetings and collated it and then
>
> prioritized these thoughts of wide department feedback.

During this input process described by PH-01, and PH-04, there was also a high degree

of consistent understanding among DPH participants regarding their department's

definition of strategic vision and mission statements. For example, PH-01 stated, "Vision

is what you're working towards . . . it's your North Star . . . I would definitely say it's

broader . . . mission is narrower because it's what your particular agency is doing to

reach that vision." PH-02 defined vision and mission in a similar way, "Vision is . . .

the overarching goal. . . . The purpose of mission is . . . what we're doing to fulfill

that vision." The definition provided by PH-03 was, again similar, stating, "The

vision statement is . . . the bigger, broader statement that kind of, here's where we're

moving. . . . I think the vision comes first and then I think the mission comes after

that . . . more detail." PH-04 was aligned with these definitions, but stated it more

succinctly, "I feel like vision is where we want to go, and mission is how we are going to

get there." PH-05 defined strategic vision and mission by stating, "So, vision is a loftier

statement. . . . an ideal future . . . concerned with the health and residents of the county . . . mission is what you are trying to do."

As the researcher reviewed these participant responses from DPH, it was noted that there was a high degree of consistency in the definitions of strategic vision and mission statements. For example, each DPH participant had generally defined the vision statement as the North Star, overarching goal, bigger, broader statement, where we want to go, or the loftier statement. Given the differing definitions and perspectives in the literature regarding vision and mission statements, the researcher wanted to further explore why all DPH participants would be in such consistent agreement. A follow-up contact was therefore made to DPH. Participant PH-01 clarified that during the vision and mission statement development process, all participants were provided with the department's agreed upon definition for developing new vision and mission statements. The participant explained, "The reason for this consistency is that we began our process with definitions of vision, mission and values." It, therefore, appears helpful to the development process when a guiding framework of definitions for vision and mission statements is provided by department leadership.

In short, based on perceptions expressed by DPH participants, the process of wide stakeholder engagement appears to have created a strong awareness of the department's strategic vision and mission statements. It also appears that defining strategic vision and mission as part of the development process contributed to a clearer framework of consistent understanding.

Although DPSS is currently in a transition period and reviewing their strategic vision and mission statements, they have also initially engaged in a stakeholder input

process. This initially involved 14 staff who met at a retreat with Disney. According to PSS-02, the group developed the following purpose statement: "To inspire hope, working today to create a better tomorrow." DPSS staff participating in this initial process generally expressed optimism about the potential to better define organizational purpose. PSS-02 went on to further explain that the new purpose statement could replace the mission statement "to be more intentional in calling it purpose, a statement of what the department or organization exists for."

While initiating a retreat to start the development process of defining department purpose was perceived as a good start, it appeared that uncertainty remained among DPSS participants with regard to defining their strategic vision and mission statements. PSS-02 stated, "In my mind, the mission statement is how the organization is anchored. . . . Whereas the vision of where the organization might go . . . might change from year to year."

In evaluating the DPSS vision and mission, PSS-03 perceived the vision, rather than the mission as being the big picture, or what the participant termed the "most important thing." Yet the participant went on to explain that in evaluating the actual DPSS vision and mission statements, it seemed clear that the big picture, or "most important thing" was actually the department commitment to "enrich lives with effective and caring service," which was the mission statement. That "mission" seemed to be a more important big picture priority to PS-03 than the vision to "greatly reduce the need for customers to go to a DPSS facility and for staff to work from a DPSS facility." Thus, PSS-03 perceived that the two statements were backwards. This uncertainty seemed to

be further perceived by PSS-05 who defined the vision and mission statements as follows:

> The vision statement, I see it as the common goal that everyone is striving to work. It's not something you can touch, but it's more something that is a sense or a feeling people have, and that motivates them to work . . . our vision statement talks about enriching people's lives so that it's not a specific project, but rather it's an abstract goal, in my view that we're all working towards. Now, on the other hand, the strategic mission, it's a defined project that helps achieve that goal. In this case for example, in the technological aspect, we have many changes . . . streamlining the process for the public.

Interestingly, although there was a clear perception in PSS-05's mind about what vision and mission statements were supposed to be, the participant went on to describe the actual DPSS vision as the mission and the mission as the vision. In essence, PSS-05 appeared to substantiate the same perception of PSS-03 that the DPSS vision and mission statements were backwards.

Related Literature. The perspectives of these DPSS participants appear to reflect the problem identified in this study. Literature supports the importance of strategic planning and its key components of strategic vision and mission statements. Yet those strategic vision and mission statements are often thought to be confusing. This observation was expressed by Evans (2010), who stated,

> I have facilitated strategic planning initiatives with many diverse organizations. From my experience, I believe there is a lot of confusion regarding the difference between a Vision and Mission statement. I regularly see Vision statements that

are actually Mission statements and vice versa—from Fortune 500's, nonprofits,

and government agencies. (para. 2)

After a review of responses from both departments, it appears that there was consistency

of understanding among DPH participants who had vision and mission statements

defined and clarified prior to their development process. DPSS participants were less

consistent in their understanding and perceptions of vision and mission. It is apparent

from literature on vision and mission statements that this can commonly occur in

organizations, and this was substantiated by some of the participant responses.

In the context of stakeholder analysis, significant literature supports the approach

of engaging organizational members to develop vision and mission statements. Kouzes

and Posner (2017) addressed vision by stating,

Don't adopt the view that visions come from the top down. You have to start

engaging others in a collective dialogue about the future. You can't mobilize

people to travel willingly to places they don't want to go. . . . You must show

others how they, too, will be served. (p. 109)

Nanus (1992) suggested that vision development must always be done in consideration of

both external citizens served, as well as internal staff of the organization. "Every

organization has major constituencies or stakeholders, whose needs are ignored at the

organization's peril" (p. 62). Quigley (1993) expressed the view that it is ultimately the

members of the organization, the internal stakeholders, who translate the strategic vision

into action. He posited that the power of vision works best from a committed inside

perspective, which emphasizes the importance of input from "internal constituencies, i.e.,

managers, employees" (p. 11).

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In discussing mission statement development, Abrams (1999) proposed the advantage of putting together a committee of representatives from every department of the organization: "That way, everyone will have a chance to feel like they had a voice in the statement's creation and will be more likely to embrace its content and spirit" (p. 43). This view is shared by Covey (2003) who suggested that it is important to create a mission statement in an environment of collaborative input. He stated,

> I don't mean a mission statement that was cranked out over a weekend at an executive retreat, but one that is the product of effort and input from every level of the organization. Most organizational mission statements are nothing more than a bunch of lovely PR platitudes framed on a wall. (p. 184)

He further observed that "many organizations have a mission statement, but typically, people aren't committed to it because they aren't involved in developing it; consequently, it's not part of the culture. . . . understood and implemented by all levels of the organization" (p. 165).

The importance of stakeholder input during mission statement development is also emphasized by Bryson (2018), who stated, "Stakeholder analysis is a valuable prelude to a mission statement. . . . Indeed, I usually argue that if an organization has time to do only one thing, that one thing ought to be stakeholder analysis" (p. 127). In this context, some of the stakeholders he referred to were external to the organization. However, he also further emphasized the importance of considering the collaborative input of employees in mission development. "It is very important for key employee groups to be explicitly identified. . . . There are different groups with different roles to play who will use different criteria to judge organizational performance" (p. 131).

Bryson (2018) also offered perspectives related to the consistency and understanding DPH participants expressed in defining the strategic context of their vision and mission statements. As part of his identified strategic planning leadership roles, he emphasized the importance of facilitating the process well. He suggested that the organization's strategic planning facilitator should:

Know the strategic planning process and explain how it works at the beginning and at many points along the way. Participants can easily get lost as they proceed through the planning process. Facilitators play a key role throughout in explaining to participants where they are, where they can head, and how they might get there. (p. 367)

In this context, it appears that DPH did a good job of facilitating their strategic vision and mission development process right from the start. Their office of planning, in consultation with their executive management team, carefully coordinated the effort. They explained the stakeholder input process. They clarified how DPH would define and solicit input for their vision and mission. In spite of different perspectives, which has been seen in the literature, each DPH participant seemed to have a clear understanding of their department's definition of vision and mission statements, which created a unifying impact on pursuing organizational purpose. As has been seen in an earlier review of literature, there are many different views on how strategic vision and mission statements should be developed and strategically positioned. It appears from this successful example from DPH that the more critical issue may be for all to begin with the same definition and frame of reference for vision and mission statements and how they relate. In consideration of the fact that DPSS may be engaged in future vision or mission

development in the context of organizational purpose, they may wish to consider relevant

literature on stakeholder input and facilitation as well. They may also wish to consider a

larger cross-section of organizational stakeholders to provide input on their purpose,

vision, or mission development.

Clear and Concise Statements Were Perceived as More Effective

An analysis of perceptions from participants in this study showed that the manner

in which strategic vision and mission statements are constructed matters. Participants

from both departments expressed favorable perceptions and greater awareness of vision

or mission statements that were clear and concise.

In some instances, the participant could actually quote the vision or mission

statement verbatim. For example, PH-01 stated, "I think our vision of healthy people in

healthy communities is—is fabulous." With regard to the department mission statement,

the participant went on to say that the DPH mission was also easy to remember because it

was short and clear, explaining that wordy mission statements just don't work. "It's just

clunky. People don't even want to look at a mission statement that's too wordy."

PH-03 was aware of the department vision statement, and also quoted it from

memory: "I mean, definitely the vision. It is very simple, right? 'Healthy people in

healthy communities.' It's very straightforward and words that I think most people

understand and connect with." PH-04 expressed a strong connection to the new DPH

mission statement because the participant felt was highly relevant to department purpose.

"Definitely agree . . . our new mission statement fits sort of what we do as a department

more exactly and globally."

DPSS responses on this issue were highly polarized. Four of the five participants

could not recall the vision statement, yet all five were familiar with the mission

statement. In conversations with participants about the possible reasons for this, it

appeared that the clear and concise construction of the mission statement versus the

wordy vision statement was a major factor. Another factor that seemed to adversely

impact the perception of the vision statement was that it made reference to 2017 target

dates, and therefore seemed outdated and irrelevant. PSS-01 stated,

> I don't believe that there's a sound, clear vision right now. I don't know that
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> there's—or at least I don't get the sense that we have a firm sound vision that's
>
> set in stone and that we're moving towards. Everything is just kind of fluid it
>
> feels like to me.

PSS-03 also expressed an unawareness of the DPSS vision statement, "As managers

for the department, we were given the department strategic plan, which includes the

vision . . . I would not be able to repeat to you the vision." Although PSS-04 also shared

an unawareness of the vision statement, the participant was very familiar with the mission

statement, "I would say 'no' to the vision, but 'yes' to the mission."

In contrast to the vision statement, all participants were familiar with the DPSS

mission statement. Some, such as PSS-01, quoted it verbatim: "Well, I—obviously, I'm

familiar with it . . . 'To enrich lives with effective and caring service' . . . so we're

familiar with that. It's on our badges." PSS-03 also expressed familiarity with the

mission statement, which was based on its long history: "I could tell you . . . the mission

statement, and that's only because we have known it for a very long time." PSS-04 was

able to quote the statement, also in the context of long-standing history: "Well, definitely

I would have been able to repeat the mission statement, 'To enrich lives with effective

and caring service' because that's really been one of our missions for a very long time."

PSS-05, in describing the DPSS mission statement, explained the perception that clear

and concise statements communicate best: "It is shorter, and it's easier for everyone to

remember . . . easier for them to be able to connect to it . . . everyone in the department

strives toward that." It therefore appeared from the DPSS responses that their awareness

and familiarity with the mission statement were related to the fact that it was long-

standing and easy to remember compared to the wordy vision statement.

    Related Literature. The correlation between clear and concise vision and

mission statements and their awareness by organization members is supported in the

literature. With specific regard to vision statements, Keffer (2014) stated, "The vision

statement is a very short phrase or sentence that sets an exciting tone for the future of the

organization" (p. 16). Ebener and Smith (2015) shared this perspective of clear and

concise vision statements. They stated,

> It is clear. People understand it. No one needs to explain what it means. It is
>
> short. A vision statement is just that—a statement. It is not a page or two of
>
> rambling paragraphs. Few will read a long vision statement. Even fewer will
>
> understand, appreciate or remember it. (p. 96)

Similar perspectives for clear and concise mission statements appear in the literature as

well. Drucker (2008) described a simple standard for developing effective mission

statements. He stated, "The effective mission statement is short and sharply focused. It

should fit on a T-shirt. The mission statement says why you do what you do, not the

means by which you do it" (p. 14). Evans (2010) likewise favors a clear and concise

approach to mission statement construction. She stated, "It is written succinctly . . .

something that all employees should be able to articulate upon request" (paras. 11-12).

Analytic Category 2

Effective vision and mission statements motivate and inspire by appealing to

personal passion and a sense of inclusive relevance to all.

Aligned with leadership literature, an analysis of study findings suggests that

effective vision and mission statements can motivate and inspire members of an

organization through appealing to personal passion. In the descriptions that follow,

participants described how these statements appealed to them on a very personal level.

A second theme that emerged in this category was the perceived importance of

developing vision and mission statements that are inclusive and relevant. Effective

vision and mission statements that are broad enough to capture the contributions of

everyone in the organization appeared to have a positive impact on participants.

Personal Passions and Beliefs Were a Major Influence on How Participants Perceived

Their Departmental Vision and Mission Statements

The DPH vision and mission statements appeared to have a highly motivating and

inspirational impact on the participants of this study. All of the participants affirmed that

both their vision and mission statements motivated and inspired them. PH-01 strongly

expressed this view by stating how the vision and mission aligned with the participant's

personal passion:

> Well, I think people come to the Department of Public Health very much out of a
>
> sense of passion for creating healthy and just communities. So, having a [vision
>
> and mission] that you believe in is motivating in that sense because you're

coming to do good work and make your community stronger. So, I—I think

there's like a—how do you feel? I think it feels—I think it's powerful to feel that

you personally align with the mission [and vision?]—same thing.

Participant PH-02 also shared a personal passion about the DPH vision and mission

statements in the context of recalling memories of childhood experience. The participant

stated that past observations of community inequities and the DPH vision and mission

statements suggesting healthy communities for all had an inspirational impact:

So, let me . . . when you talk about lived experience and the vision and mission, I

think what drew me like growing up in the community I grew up in . . . I saw

environmental conditions that . . . could not be addressed by sort of families just

going . . . getting it corrected by a physician. . . . it was water quality; it was air

quality. It was big babies born with partial brain and spinal cord all due to sort of

different types of pollution. . . . so that's what drew me to public health.

Although Participant PH-02 was passionate and motivated and inspired by the DPH

vision and mission improving conditions experienced in childhood, Participant PH-05

was motivated by the sense of social justice provided in the vision and mission:

Yeah, well, it motivates me. I have a natural social justice orientation that I've

always had because of my work. And, so, this idea that we're addressing,

conditions supporting health, that speaks to me, and it's like a call to action.

From these examples, it appears that the DPH vision and mission statements created

passion with department participants in a variety of ways, including making communities

stronger, childhood observations of unhealthy communities needing improvement, and a

motivating passion for social justice. These were different personal passions, yet each was motivated and inspired by the same vision and mission statements.

Participant responses from DPSS, particularly with regard to the department's vision statement, appeared to provide far less passionate motivation and inspiration. For example, PSS-01 felt that rather than being a clear big picture of the future, the 2017 due date of the vision statement made it seem irrelevant and not very motivating. The participant stated,

> We're talking about a vision statement written in 2017 which is now 3 years old, if anything . . . is a bit of a disappointment and—I don't know if anxiety is the right word, but certainly disappointment and frustration . . . Frustration is a better word.

Participant PSS-02 also express a lack of appeal in the DPSS vision and mission statements. The participant felt that reviewing the vision and mission was more of a bureaucratic exercise. When asked how the DPSS vision and mission statements motivated and inspired, the response of the participant was

> Yeah . . . my answer on this is going to be not at all. . . . I think that it's because so much of the exercise in determining a mission or vision statement or a strategic plan feels like a checkmark or just a task that you have to do and then it's put back on a shelf. And so, it doesn't live with leadership on a daily basis.

Similar to the feelings of PSS-02, participant PSS-03 also felt disconnected from the DPSS vision and mission statements although the participant did feel more of a motivating connection to the mission statement. Overall, however, limited impact was expressed:

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Those are feel-good statements. And I would say that in the daily work

environment, it doesn't even register because of all the things that go on during

the day. It doesn't even register for me. . . . To me, effective and caring service is

making every effort you can to provide the services that you should be providing

them . . . I would say it resonates a little bit more than the vision statement, but in

everyday work life, I would say both statements do not resonate that much.

Based on these shared perspectives from the two departments, it appears that depending

on how they are constructed, vision and mission statements may or may not create a

personal motivating and inspirational connection to the organization.

A review of literature, which follows, validates the importance of a shared

personal connection to vision and mission and how it can create motivation and

inspiration for organizational purpose. Also included is literature addressing the

importance of making vision and mission statements inclusive and relevant to all.

Related Literature. In the context of strategic vision statements, Nanus (1992)

stated, "There is no more powerful engine driving an organization toward excellence and

long-range success than an attractive, worthwhile, and achievable vision of the future,

widely shared" (p. 3). The perspective of vision and its motivational impact was

expressed by Kouzes and Posner (2017). They stated, "Being able to envision the future

is decidedly important, and has a tremendous impact on people's motivational levels and

workplace productivity" (p. 99).

Organizational motivation created by shared vision was also addressed by Senge

(2006) who emphasized the personal connection we have seen expressed by the DPH

participants: "A shared vision is a vision that many people are truly committed to,

because it reflects their own personal vision" (p. 192). Burns (2003) also emphasized the connection to organization member's wants and needs in the context of transformational leadership. He stated, "Nothing offers so clear—and urgent- a challenge to leadership, nothing tests it so decisively, as human wants and needs. Leadership has its origins in the responsiveness of leaders to followers' wants" (p. 146).

Literature suggests that effective mission statements must also connect the organization to the personal feelings of its members. It cannot be impersonal. Drucker (2008) stated that the mission of social sector agencies is to

> Make a difference in the lives of individuals, and in society. Making this difference is the mission—the organization's purpose and very reason for being. . . . A mission cannot be impersonal; it has to have deep meaning, something you believe in—something you know is right. A fundamental responsibility of leadership is to make sure that everybody knows the mission, understands it, lives it. (p. 13)

Pollard (2002) emphasized the connection of mission to the personal values of organizational members: "When it connects to people's values, it brings purpose and meaning to those who are fulfilling the mission, and provides the impetus for creativity, productivity, and quality in the work and in personal development" (p. 53).

Effective Vision and Mission Statements Should be Inclusive and Relevant

A common perception expressed by DPH participants was that their strategic vision and mission statements created an inclusive sense of unity. This is because in spite of the many functions within the department, the statements were written broadly enough to be relevant to all. For example, PH-04 stated,

I definitely feel like it [the DPH vision and mission statements] engenders a feeling of camaraderie and that we are all in this together. This is what our work is designed to do. I do see it as a rallying cry and clarity about what we are doing whether our work is disparate from one another, that we're all . . . it's all being done towards the same goal.

Participant PH-02 used the Covid-19 pandemic a good example of a major environmental change that altered job assignments throughout the department. Yet the motivation and inspiration contained in the DPH vision and mission statements remained relevant to everyone in the department:

I mean, especially in a pandemic right now or in a crisis, I think it's so important . . . that we repeat and reiterate why every single sort of department program that's been engaged or reassigned . . . Everyone has like an important job to do in order to get—in order to address this. . . . Like so I'm throwing something out like finance, right? It's always important period, right? But, if you're talking about programs that are working on the front lines or whatever in terms of acute communicable disease, especially now, like if they need certain things, finance has to be at the table and doing certain work. So, all the pieces need to be working together. That's why it's really magnified . . . not just in times of emergency, but throughout.

The functions of finance and acute communicable disease control was pointed out by PH-02 as examples of disparate management tasks within DPH. Yet they both directly relate to the organizational purpose of the vision and mission statements. PH-03

expressed similar thoughts of how the vision and mission statements align common organizational purpose:

I think what . . . vision and mission are really important to providing . . . where we're all moving and where we're all going . . . in a department of 4000 plus people and with various programs ranging from food and nutrition, nurse/family partnership month, prevention such as these, you know like with such diversity across the department, no matter what role you play, whether—whether you're in contracts or grants . . . or whether you're doing TB services . . . it creates . . . a common focal point for us to move towards and have that in common across a broad spectrum of services, programs, divisions, personalities, roles, functions . . . we're all moving towards the same thing. . . . It creates that commonality that goes across the board no matter what your role.

Somewhat in contrast to these DPH perspectives, a number of the DPSS participants expressed concerns about relevance and inclusiveness, specifically with regard to their vision statement. PSS-01 observed that the strategic vision was so narrowly written, that it was estimated to be irrelevant to a third of the managing directors of the organization:

In the literal sense of how the vision is written . . . it's not relevant to say somebody that's in budget or even contracts for example possibly. It's not . . . the way it's written, it certainly would not apply to probably a third of the directors [managers generally in charge of major program, administrative or line operations] that are in DPSS. . . . I do feel there's this disconnect, right? I mean, the vision and the mission are out there, but I don't know that there's any guiding

principles that are leading us there. So, in that respect, I don't know that this is

really guiding me anywhere.

It is noteworthy that although DPH participants discussed "finance" and "acute

communicable disease" as aligned in common purpose under their vision and mission

statements, PSS-01 felt that "budget or even contracts" were not relevant to the DPSS

vision. This same concern was expressed by PSS-04 who made the point that vision or

mission statements that are narrowly constructed can leave some in the organization

feeling excluded:

But, you know, DPSS not only just has line offices. And I think when it comes to

a vision or mission statement, sometimes you forget about [the program

administered by the participant], or you forget about welfare fraud, or you forget

about IHSS [In Home Supportive Services]. That's also a part of DPSS. So, I

think when you're looking for the vision of a department, you should look at all

aspects of the services that you provide and come with something where it

encompasses—the umbrella would encompass all of us. And I think being in [the

program administered by the participant], sometimes we feel like a stepchild. . . .

so, when I read that vision, I'm like, oh well, that vision doesn't apply to me

because I don't have any customers come into program.

From these shared perspectives, it appears that inclusive relevance has emerged as an

important consideration in strategic vision and mission statement development.

Participant PSS-05 expressed a different concern about the narrow focus of the

DPSS vision statement from the perspective of how the community was being served.

The vision statement was perceived as making overly optimistic assumptions that those in

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need of public assistance would all have internet access and resources available to remotely do business with the county:

> When it comes to the public, I think that not everyone will leverage technology or certain processes simply because they may not have a computer, they may not be technology savvy. So, they'll still have to come into the office, or they'll have more of a need to be engaged in a face-to-face person interview with someone.

Therefore, Participant PSS-05 made an important observation that strategic vision and mission statements should not lose sight of also remaining relevant to the public as well as internally to the department.

In short, as expressed by some of the DPH participants, inclusive relevance creates a sense that no one is excluded with teamwork and unity established as a priority for common purpose. Some DPSS participants expressed the perception that the current strategic vision of the department was so narrowly focused that it simply did not apply to them.

Related Literature. Significant literature emphasizes the importance of vision and mission statements being relevant to all. In the larger strategic planning context, Bryson (2018) suggested a coalition model that emphasizes teamwork, which involves building an inclusive sense of community:

> Leaders should recognize that coalition development depends on following many of the same guidelines that help develop effective teams . . . valuing the diversity of coalition members and their various ideas and special gifts. . . . In a broader sense, public leaders should work to build a sense of community—that is, a sense of relationship, mutual empowerment, and common purpose. (p. 370)

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The suggestion here is that a public agency has many diverse parts with gifted expertise. A sense of inclusive teamwork is needed to build a sense of common community where each member is contributing to an overall unified purpose. The inclusive value of vision and mission being shared throughout an organization has also been addressed by Senge (2006), who stated,

> If any one idea about leadership has inspired organizations for thousands of years, it's the capacity to hold shared pictures of the future we seek to create. One is hard-pressed to think of any organization that has sustained some measure of greatness in the absence of goals, values, and missions that become deeply shared throughout the organization. (p. 9)

Senge's perspective of holding pictures of the future shared by all can create common inspiration for the entire organization. Inclusive communication to all parts of the organization was also emphasized by Pollard (2002) as an important leadership aspect of mission development:

> Leaders must communicate their organization's mission to all parts of the organization. The mission provides a reference point, an anchor, and a source of hope in times of change. When it connects to people's values, it brings purpose and meaning to those who are fulfilling the mission, and provides impetus for creativity, productivity, and quality in the work and in personal development. (p. 53)

Therefore, strategic vision and mission statements must be inclusive and able to reach all parts of the organization. Vision and mission statements that are too narrowly constructed can seem irrelevant to some members of the organization.

Analytic Category 3

The guiding philosophy and organizational purpose established by vision and mission statements are enhanced by leaders who model shared beliefs and an alignment with strategic decision and actions.

Perceptions expressed by DPH participants suggested that their department leadership shared a strong commitment to their newly developed strategic vision and mission statements. DPSS leadership recognizes the need to revisit their vision and mission statements, and this is currently a work in progress.

A second related theme that emerged during this study was the expressed perception by study participants that strategic vision and mission statements should be consistently aligned with all department decisions and actions. This guiding philosophy, as put forth by the department vision and mission statements, then aligns all decisions and actions toward organizational purpose.

Leaders Who Model Shared Beliefs in the Strategic Vision and Mission Statements Appear to Generate Positive Influence Toward Organizational Purpose

While exploring the perceptions and experience of the health and human service administrators in this study, the theme of leadership behavior began to emerge from DPH. A number of DPH participants described how they felt a genuine commitment to the department's vision and mission from the leadership of the organization. While discussing public health in the context of achieving the strategic mission through social and environmental determinants such as employment and quality education, PH-03 stated,

I think . . . definitely within the strategic plan, and definitely within all of the

framing that . . . that she [department director as leader] provides is—is really

looking at everything with the health equity, race equity lens, so I think that's part

and parcel of it too . . . Dr. [department head] does this so beautifully in framing it

for us . . . as our DPH leadership . . . so when I look at this vision, mission, and

values, I know that's who she is. (person communication, June 8, 2020)

PH-05 also expressed the sense that DPH leadership was not simply stating a

commitment to the strategic vision and mission but actually living it with them every day:

So, I think that the mission provides a good—something that the leadership can

grab onto as they are communicating with all of us, and they do often. I think

what's communicated in this mission statement and the vision statement are

things that our leadership lives and breathes every day and that's built into the

way they communicate with us. So yeah, I think it works from a leadership

standpoint as well. . . . Again, I hear this vision and mission echoed all the time in

the way that they lead.

Although responses regarding the motivation and inspiration of the DPSS vision

and mission statements were mixed, it seemed that some participants were hopeful about

future developments. PSS-02, who had detailed the retreat initiated by current DPSS

leadership to work with Disney to redefine the department's purpose, appeared optimistic

about, "the potential that they could have."

Participant PSS-04 made the observation that some of the current department

technology initiatives to process public assistance applications and redeterminations

remotely were aligned with the department strategic vision. Although acknowledging

that this was due more to the pandemic rather than conscious strategic planning, the participant stated that it did create somewhat of a leadership connection to the department's vision:

> When we closed our doors, I think the department was a little afraid to take that extra step to really embrace the vision and make it happen. But, when we had to close our doors with the Covid-19 incidents going on now, it allowed us to say, "Wow, we really have the technology to make that happen." As a leader, I embrace that.

Statements such as these from DPSS participants suggest an optimism that a motivating and inspired connection can be made to strategic purpose, vision, or mission statements in the future.

Related Literature. The importance of this leadership connection to organizational vision statements was discussed by Parnell (2014), who emphasized effective communication which shares that vision among organization members:

> Once the need for change is established, leaders must inspire organizational members with a vision of what the organization can become if its members are willing to change. . . . The change effort is not as likely to be successful when members of the firm do not share the same vision for the company's future organization. . . . Transformational leaders must also effectively communicate their vision to all members of the organization. (p. 304)

At different stages of development, both DPH and DPSS appear to have recognized a need for change, which has led to a reevaluation of their respective vision and mission statements. As expressed by Parnell, recognizing the need for change is an important

first step, which leads to the importance of the leader communicating that change vision. Leadership communication and its transformational impact on organizational change has been discussed by Burns (2003):

> Vigorous interactions between transforming leaders and their followers is itself a powerful causal force for change. . . . Leaders take the initiative in mobilizing people for participation in the process of change, encouraging a sense of collective identity and collective efficacy, which, in turn, brings stronger feelings of self-worth, and self-efficacy. (p. 25)

At this point, the literature examined has emphasized the role of effective communication and leadership to encourage participation toward collective organizational efficacy. However, the DPH participants in this study (PH-03, PH-05) also expressed the perception that the strategic vision and mission were modeled by their leadership—that their actions demonstrated that they, too, believed in the vision and mission. Burns continued,

> Most of these theories ignore or underplay the force that may be the most important in shaping most leaders: *learning*. Learning from experience, learning from people . . . learning from leaders . . . behavior is learned not only by conditioning but by imitating persons with whom the learner identifies and whom he takes as models. (p. 63)

Learning, imitating, and modeling then become important. In this context, Pollard (2002) pointed out the challenge to leaders of being good models who live out the standards set by the organization. As organizations such as DPH and DPSS seek to redefine their mission statements, he discussed the importance of leaders setting such an example: "Our

ultimate job is to be the champions of the mission of the firm and, more important, to live that mission. We also must recognize that our values and character will be tested in the process" (p. 54).

To "model the way" is the first exemplary leadership practice described by Kouzes and Posner (2017) to encourage organizational effectiveness. Leaders must be role models. Their behaviors should clearly demonstrate the ideals of the organization. They stated, "Exemplary leaders know that if they want to gain commitment and achieve the highest standards, they must be models of the behavior they expect of others" (p. 14). Thus, based on the perceptions of the participants, as well as literature, the role modeling of leadership matters. The commitment and beliefs modeled by leaders can greatly influence the perceived legitimacy of the strategic vision and mission statements of the organization.

Organizational Vision and Mission Should be in Alignment With Strategic Decisions and Actions

DPH participants expressed the perspective that the strategic decisions and actions of their department were aligned with their vision and mission statements. PH-01 provided tangible examples of this strategic alignment:

> It all works together synergistically. You can't have healthy people if your
> communities aren't providing people with the resources and opportunities they
> need to thrive. So, I—I do think it's powerful, I think the—the mission about
> advancing conditions that support optimal health and well-being similarly as our
> understanding of the role of all the nonhealth sectors impacting health, you know,
> housing and education, and criminal justice . . . and so, our language in our

mission and vision very much validates our work in these upstream arenas, as

well as the more conventional arenas of—of one-on-one treatment.

The Covid-19 pandemic was mentioned by some DPH participants as an example of a

major environmental shift in the focus of their department. Yet, as pointed out by PH-05,

this had no impact on the alignment and actions of staff to meet the department's vision

and mission:

Even if we're responding to Covid, I think all of our people are working so hard

in our infectious disease program . . . which we're all infectious disease people

right now. Conditions in terms of social distancing, the ways that businesses set

up in order to support minimal transmission of Covid, we're working with skilled

nursing facilities . . . we are focused a lot on environmental conditions like access

to fresh fruits and vegetables . . . menu labeling, all kinds of things in

environments that impact health . . . so I'm trying to think of any particular branch

of our department for which this mission would be a harder fit. . . . I think it

works really well across the board.

Although PH-05 perceived that the DPH strategic vision and mission statements did a

good job of providing actionable guidance for the community during the Covid-19

pandemic, the participant also mentioned the need for it to be a part of a regular internal

management communication and commitment as well:

I think organization is needed in a vision and mission statement. They need to be

revisited periodically. I've been in organizations, sometimes they're a little bit

more compelling than others. But, in this particular case, yeah, for a lot of the

reasons I've described thus far, this vision and mission communicate the

philosophy that we are not just controlling germs and doing restaurant checks and

promoting hygiene, but we are actually looking beyond that at the social

conditions that determine population health. And, so, that's the philosophy of the

field of public health and that's what's embodied in this mission statement. . . .

that's absolutely what should be driving a public health department in its role and

its public service to the community.

In this context of aligning the strategic vision and mission statements with department

decisions and actions, some of the DPSS participants expressed the perception that they

were not always in alignment. PSS-01 shared the following experience:

I'll give you an example. . . . Within the last 18 months the department deployed

brand new desktops throughout the department to everyone. . . . I would have told

you, don't do a desktop. Why can't we do a laptop . . . right? And the reason I

say that is because then that lends yourself to a nimble workforce that can easily

be shifted if you need . . . a platform in which people can begin to telework if

that's also part of your vision. So, here we are 3 years later in the middle of a

pandemic . . . in a very challenging spot because to deploy telework was gonna be

challenging when the department's not gonna be able to dole out laptops to

everybody to go work at home. But that's what I'm saying is like to me is

frustrating is if our vision is to be technologically advanced, then we really need

to put that front and center and work towards getting there and not allow the

status quo to inform us on the decisions we're making.

Placing the vision statement "front and center" was the perception PSS-01 had of

aligning the vision with the actions of the department. Yet the participant felt that the

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technology actions of the department did not match the vision statement. PSS-02 also expressed the perception that there was a disconnect between the DPSS vision and mission statements, and actual day-to-day operations:

> It's not embodied in the work that happens at those levels within the organization. And so, I don't feel any connection to it as it relates to our leadership task kind of requirements, responsibilities, on a day-to-day. . . . I think it kind of depends on the level of intentionality behind their development, and then incorporation into the day-to-day aspects of the organization.

Although the two departments expressed different views about the extent to which their strategic vision and mission statements were aligned with organizational decisions and actions, participants from both departments voiced the importance of prioritizing the vision and mission. Participant PH-05 suggested that management should keep the vision and mission at the forefront, fulfilling a "need to be revisited periodically." Participant PSS-01 stated that the vision should be kept "front and center and work towards getting there."

Related Literature. Literature supports these participant perceptions of aligning strategic vision and mission statements with decisions and actions of strategic planning. Bryson's (2018) perspective is that strategic planning provides "a deliberative, disciplined approach to producing fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why" (p. 8). Thus, as foundational elements of the strategic plan, vision and mission statements provide a guiding priority and alignment for all department decisions and actions.

Valcik (2016) also shared this perspective of strategic planning, and is quite specific with regard to alignment with vision and mission. Strategic planning is not vision and mission alone. It also includes a call to action, commonly described in the strategic plan's goals and objectives, which should be in alignment with the strategic vision and mission statements. Strategic planning is therefore a synergistic framework of guiding vision and mission statements that direct the actions of the organization. Valcik defined a strategic plan as a means to meet public and political expectations by providing "a framework, which defines the required resources (current and future), business processes, and organizational policy guidelines. These resources must be aligned with vision and mission statements established by the organization" (p. 3). Thus, strategic vision, mission, and actionable goals and objectives are aligned within the same strategic planning framework.

The importance of aligning strategic mission with the direction and action of the organization is expressed by Parnell (2014). He stated, "An explicit mission statement is essential because it provides necessary direction for the firm and gives members a sense of appropriate boundaries for organizational activity" (p. 118).

In addressing the "Seven Chronic Problems" of organizations, Covey (1990), identified "Poor Alignment" as a major concern. By poor alignment, Covey suggested that organizations have their established visions, missions and values. Yet too often, they are not aligned with any commitments or actions of the organization. He made the following observations with specific regard to strategic mission statements:

The alignment problem is prevalent everywhere. Ask yourself: "Is our mission statement a constitution? Is it the supreme law of the land? Does every person

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who comes into the organization make a commitment of allegiance to that

constitution? Is every program, every system, even our organizational structure,

subject to the constitution?" If your answer is "No"—and it usually is—you have

an alignment problem. (p. 167)

This third analytical category suggested perceptions from the participants that leadership

commitment matters and can have a positive influence on how the organization relates to

its vision and mission statements. Study participants also expressed the perception that

leadership decisions and actions that are aligned with vision and mission statements

create a greater sense of consistent commitment to organizational purpose.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The researcher's conclusions and recommendations are aligned with the three

analytic categories of this study. The analytic categories were developed based on

patterns of perceptions and experiences expressed by the participants of this study. Each

category was supported by two associated themes, which were explored in the context of

related literature. The analytic categories and themes were then evaluated, and

conclusions and recommendations were developed. The analytic categories, with their

conclusions and recommendations, are summarized in Table 5.

Category 1

*The manner in which vision and mission statements are developed and
constructed can impact organizational awareness and commitment*.

Based on the perceptions and experiences by study participants, this first category

addresses the first research question of this study regarding how strategic vision and

mission statements are developed and constructed.

Table 5

Analytic Categories—Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

Category 1	Category 2	Category 3
The manner in which vision and mission statements are developed & constructed can impact organizational awareness & commitment.	Effective vision & mission statements motivate & inspire by appealing to personal passion, & a sense of inclusive relevance to all.	Guiding philosophy & organizational purpose of vision & mission statements are enhanced by leaders who model shared beliefs, & an alignment with strategic decisions and actions.
Conclusions: Stakeholder input increases awareness & understanding. Clear, concise vision & mission statements work well.	Conclusions: Vision & mission statements aligned with personal passions & inclusiveness were important to participants.	Conclusions: Positive influence comes from leaders who model commitment & align decisions & actions with the strategic vision & mission statements.
Recommendations: Involve stakeholders with clear definitions & guidelines. Make vision & mission statements clear & concise.	Recommendations: Vision & mission statements should appeal to personal passions, & be inclusive & relevant to all.	Recommendations: Leaders should model personal commitment & align strategic vision & mission to all organizational decisions & actions

First Finding

The first finding of this category was that vision and mission statements that are collaboratively developed with input from internal stakeholders are perceived to generate a higher level of awareness and commitment. This is particularly true if a clear understanding and definition of vision and mission statements is established at the outset of the development process.

Conclusion. The researcher concludes that a well-developed input process involving multiple stakeholders within the organization works well. A process which

clearly defines terms and parameters can produce effective vision and mission statements for the organization.

Recommendation. The researcher recommends that health and human service organizations apply broad stakeholder input rather than executive only perspectives in developing vision and mission statements. The process should provide participants with clear, consistent definitions and objectives.

Second Finding

The second finding is that clear and concise vision and mission statements were perceived by participants as being more effective. Participants from both departments expressed a stronger awareness of clear, concise statements that were simple and easy to remember.

Conclusion. The researcher concludes that a stronger awareness and commitment to organizational vision and mission can be achieved with statements that are clear and concise. A strategic vision or mission statement that no one in the organization can remember is of no value.

Recommendation. The researcher recommends that organizational strategic vision and mission statements be constructed in a clear and concise manner that is easily understood by all.

Category 2

Effective vision and mission statements motivate and inspire by appealing to personal passion and a sense of inclusive relevance to all.

This second category addresses the first research question of this study regarding how strategic vision and mission statements are perceived. The second research question

is also addressed regarding how the vision and mission statements guide and motivate organizational purpose.

First Finding

The first finding was that vision and mission statements that were aligned with personal passions and beliefs were important to participants. This is particularly true in the context of passions and beliefs that inspire and motivate. The participants gave examples of these personal passions, which they connected to the larger community, such as enriching lives, improving air and water quality, and creating social justice.

Conclusion. The researcher concludes that vision and mission statements that establish a connection to shared personal passion and beliefs can encourage an inspiring motivational commitment to the organization.

Recommendation. The researcher recommends that strategic vision and mission statements be designed with qualities that appeal to the personal passion of organization members.

Second Finding

The second finding of this category was that effective vision and mission statements should be inclusive and relevant. DPH participants perceived that their vision and mission statements were highly relevant and created a strong sense of unity toward common purpose. Some participants in DPSS perceived that their vision statement had a very narrow focus that was irrelevant to an estimated one third of the managers in the organization. This created the feeling that they were excluded from the strategic vision of the organization.

Conclusion. The researcher concludes that vision and mission statements that are broadly designed to be inclusive create a sense of unity in the organization. Narrowly focused statements can run the risk of creating feelings of exclusion—that the vision or mission does not apply to some organization members. This can detract from motivating the organization toward common purpose.

Recommendation. The researcher recommends that strategic vision and mission statements be thoughtfully constructed to remain broadly relevant in changing environments while also being inclusively relevant to all in the organization.

Category 3

The guiding philosophy and organizational purpose established by vision and mission statements are enhanced by leaders who model shared beliefs and an alignment with strategic decision and actions.

This third category relates to the first research question regarding how participants perceive leadership commitment to the strategic vision and mission. The category also addresses the second research question of aligning strategic vision and mission to organizational decisions and actions.

First Finding

As expressed by the participants of this study, the first finding is that leaders who model shared beliefs in the department strategic vision and mission statements appear to generate positive influence and unity toward organizational purpose.

Conclusion. The researcher concludes that leaders who model shared commitment to the organization's strategic vision and mission statements can significantly encourage the overall staff commitment to vision and mission as well.

Recommendation. The researcher recommends that leaders regularly communicate and model their personal commitment to strategic vision and mission to motivate common organizational purpose.

Second Finding

A second finding expressed by participants is that the decisions and actions of the organization should be aligned with their strategic vision and mission statements. Members of the organization expressed more confidence in policies and decisions that were consistent with the vision and mission statements.

Conclusion. The perception expressed by study participants strongly supports the significance of organizations that consistently align decisions and actions with their vision and mission statements.

Recommendation. The researcher recommends that all department decisions and actions should be aligned with the organization's vision and mission statements. Applying this alignment practice reinforces a sense of consistency and alignment in pursuing and achieving organizational purpose.

Recommendations for Further Study

During the course of this research, two additional potential themes emerged, which may be considered for further study. These two themes are strategic value statements and ethnic considerations impacting perspectives about strategic vision and mission statements.

Strategic Value Statements

Although the focus of this study was the qualitative perspectives of strategic vision and mission statements, references in the literature cited strategic value statements

as well. Indeed, one literature reference (Keffer, 2014) placed the importance of value statement consideration ahead of vision and mission statement development as part of the strategic planning process. Some of the study participants also made reference to strategic values when responding to questions about vision and mission.

From a practitioner perspective, the researcher has some personal reflections with regard to the potential importance of value statements on organizations. It is important for organizations to have vision statements of an improved future and mission statements to guide operational purpose. Yet too often, the bigger problem is their practiced values, that is, how public organizations actually behave. The public expects their organizations and the people who manage them to use resources to serve the public, not for personal gain. They expect no sexual misconduct inside the organization or imposed on the community. They expect the fair and equitable application of authority. When these expectations fail, confidence in the values of public organizations is compromised. Beyond practitioner observations, the importance of value statements has also been established in literature. Therefore, strategic value statements, their relative importance to strategic planning, and their perceived phenomenological impact on organizations may be worth further consideration.

Ethnic Perspectives About Strategic Vision and Mission Statements

Another consideration that emerged during the interview phase of the study were qualitative perspectives shared by its ethnically diverse participants. Some participants described specific experiences in ethnic communities that shaped their perspectives of public service and feelings about organizational vision and mission statements. Although ethnic diversity was a purposeful delimitation of this study, it was not the primary focus

of inquiry. Yet a number of unexpected ethnic perspectives emerged during the interviews.

Over the years, the researcher has observed many of the concerns raised by some of the participants regarding the lack of resources provided to some ethnic communities. Some of these concerns, such as toxic industrial contamination, continue to persist today and can have harmful effects on local populations. Changing demographic trends in ethnic populations can also create dynamic circumstances requiring adjustments by public agencies. Further investigation may be worthwhile to determine the possible significance of ethnic perceptions by organization members as well as perceptions of the ethnic populations served by our public agencies. These ethnic considerations may impact perspectives about strategic vision and mission statements and the direction and purpose of public organizations.

Final Researcher Reflections

In closing, the researcher wishes to reflect upon the significance of this study and some lessons learned. It was the prior observations of others that prompted this inquiry about strategic vision and mission statements. If vision and mission statements of many organizations were considered unclear, out of focus, meaningless, forgettable, and totally ineffective, then a significant problem existed that was worth further exploration.

An appreciation has been gained about the nature of phenomenological research. Learning directly from public administrators who manage programs in health and human services has been a rewarding experience. It has been helpful to learn through their perceptions how vision and mission statements can make people in organizations feel motivated, inspired, excluded, or irrelevant. For that, the researcher is grateful. It is

hoped that their insights have expanded the body of knowledge regarding the nature of

strategic vision and mission statements and how those statements may create

opportunities for improved levels of public service.

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