

A VISION STATEMENT TAXONOMY: LINKING STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT, STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION, AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Organizational vision statements have typically been studied as part of strategic management. This paper shows they are also part of strategic communication and develops a hierarchical taxonomy. The methodology used includes using text mining and analytics to discover the taxonomy based on natural language rather than predetermined classifications that may contain researcher bias and error. This novel approach created the taxonomy based on characteristics of the statements and, consequently, led to the development of propositions that link vision statements to organizational culture. Thus, this paper extends theory in strategic management, strategic communication, and organizational culture while utilizing a research methodology that is relatively new and less subject to researcher bias.

INTRODUCTION

Vision statements are an important tool in strategic management. Textbooks teach that vision statements, along with mission statements and ethics statements, are an essential ingredient in the formation of strategy (e.g. Hill, Jones, & Schilling, 2015; Grant, 2002). Given this information, the study of vision statements as a component of strategic management is very relevant to academicians and practitioners alike because it articulates the desired future state of an organization.

Unfortunately, while vision is a commonly studied topic, vision statements themselves have not been researched nearly as much. The topic of vision permeates a micro and macro level of multiple management disciplines such as leadership (e.g. Northouse, 2016; Yukl, 2013), organizational behavior (e.g. McShane & Von Glinow, 2015), strategy (e.g. Hill, Jones, & Schilling, 2015; Grant, 2002), and organizational development (e.g. Palmer, Dunford, & Akin, 2009; Anderson, 2017) to name a few. As a result of the diverse disciplines, the topic has been widely studied (e.g. O'Connell, Hickerson, & Pillutla, 2011; Shamsi et al., 2015). The same cannot be said about the vision statement. The vision statement as a written document has been isolated to the topic of strategic management. This paper, while not ignoring strategic management, extends the influence of the vision statement upon the newer field of strategic communication and upon organizational culture.

Part of the reason for the lack of study may be due to vision statements being text statements rather than numerical measurements, making them much more difficult to analyze. One older method for analyzing documents is content analysis where researchers design a coding

system to categorize textual phrases (Neuendorf, 2017). Neuendorf (2017) also states that there is still the potential for error in the coding process. However, with relatively recent developments in computer speed and processing capabilities, text mining and analysis have the capability of analyzing text documents, finding patterns that were not previously recognizable (Chakraborty, Pagolu, & Garla, 2013). This paper employs this newer, more accurate method to analyze a large sample of vision statements to find a taxonomy based upon the patterns found in the vision statements themselves.

Thus, this paper extends theory in several directions. First, this paper develops the study of vision statements by showing how these are not just a strategic management topic, but rather they extend into other areas such as strategic communication and organizational culture. This accomplishment helps explain some of the linkages between the various management disciplines. Second, this paper uses a relatively recent technique of text mining to date not often used in research to study a rather large sample of vision statements. This accomplishment presents a new methodology to researchers for understanding text without resorting to tenuous coding and potential error. Third, this paper develops a hierarchical taxonomy for vision statements. This accomplishment allows vision statements to be seen as having relationships with one another. More importantly, it allows researchers to reduce vision statements to a type that can be coded for quantitative research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section conducts a literature review. The first part takes a look at vision in the literature, but, more importantly, examines how vision statements have been studied. The second part examines some of the literature of strategic communication and develops a succinct definition. The final part combines the two topics to show that vision statements are strategic communication.

Vision Literature

Organizational vision has been a much researched topic with the added liability of a lack of agreement by researchers (Carver, 2011; MacLeod, 2016). This lack of agreement extends to the very definition of vision. Some define vision broadly to include purpose, mission, strategic intent, ideas, goals, and a picture of the future (e.g. Baum, 1994; Kantabutra & Avery, 2010). Others define it simply as a future image of what the organization is to become (Brown, 1998). Arguably, the most direct definition of vision is that of a future state to which stakeholders can aspire (Carver, 2011).

While vision is certainly important, it may not become relevant for an organization until it is communicated; this communication is a necessary but not sufficient condition (Baum, 1994; Kantabutra & Avery, 2010; O'Connell, Hickerson, & Pillutla, 2011). For positive organizational effects, the method in which the vision is communicated to the organization is extremely important (O'Connell et al., 2011) as is the acceptance of the vision by stakeholders (Slack, Orife, & Anderson, 2010). It is in this light that this paper focuses upon the codified vision known as a vision statement.

Vision as a codified statement has not been studied much. One area of focus in the literature has been upon the design of vision statements. About twenty years ago Brown (1998) lamented that 75% of vision statements are of poor quality because they were written poorly or did not proffer clear guidance. Similarly, MacLeod (2016) notes the lack of seriousness behind many vision statements because often the creation of a statement is just an item on a checklist or because someone stated it was important. Arguably, this poor attention to quality was quite noticeable, prompting some researchers to focus on the proper design of the statements. For example, Brown (1998) suggested that statements be future-focused for three to ten years and have characteristics such as brevity, verifiability, focus, understandability, and inspirational. The same year Lucas (1998) found that vision statements should be a living document, providing a motivating and challenging future goal while being detailed enough to provide accountability. The same sentiment was echoed by MacLeod (2016) and Meade and Rogers (2001).

A second area of focus in research has been the implementation of vision statements. Lucas (1998) observed that stakeholders are often not aware of the organizational vision and, therefore, the vision does not play much of a part in guiding the actions of those inside the organization. As a result, Kantabutra and Avery (2010) discovered factors that enable the vision in a vision statement to be realized. These factors include communicating the vision, changing organizational systems to align with the vision, empowering stakeholders to achieve the vision, and motivating stakeholders to achieve the vision. The communication facet of implementing the vision statement was further augmented by Payne, Blackbourn, Hamilton, and Cox (1994) when they posit a vision statement can be implemented, but specific points can be made regarding the vision in order to provide extra clarity.

The final research area of vision statements is that of the organizational effects that statements can have. Kantabutra and Avery (2010) found that vision statements containing solid organizational and motivational goals can bring about higher employee performance by way of employee and customer satisfaction. Lucas (1998) tempers that previous notion by stating when a statement is not taken seriously by those in the organization, company morale and long-term effectiveness can be reduced significantly. Finally, Price (2012) found that wording in a vision statement is very important in creating a desired organizational image.

Strategic Communication

Strategic communication is a relatively new field that is being developed through the intersection of communication theory and management theory (Thomas & Stephens, 2015). As such the definition of strategic communication has not had time to blur and become confusing as in other topics such as leadership. Aggerholm and Thomsen (2012) define strategic communication as the transmission of strategic organizational goals. Hallahan, Holtshausen, van Ruler, Vercic, and Sriramesh (2007) similarly proffer the definition of intentional organizational communication for mission attainment. They further develop criteria stating the communication must be purposeful, created for a specific goal, and delivered to a specifically identified target. Dulek and Campbell (2015), agreeing with the definitions of both, add the focus of this one-way communication shifts from the receiver to the goal of the communication. As a result, this paper adopts a definition that incorporates all of this relevant information: “strategic communication is

unidirectional communication of an intentional message for a strategic purpose” (Allison, 2017, p. 2).

This definition of strategic communication brings together several forms of communication under one general topic. For example, social media communicues by governments for the purpose of transparency, collaboration, and public participation have been studied as strategic communication (Agerdal-Hjermind & Valentini, 2015; Avery & Graham, 2013). Social media has also been suggested as a strategic communication for faculty for integrated communication (Meredith, 2012) as well as for journalists and public relations practitioners (Avery, Lariscy, & Sweetser, 2010). Moving past social media, messages of political figures have also been studied as strategic communication (Hoffmann, Steiner, & Jarred, 2008; Almondari & Isotalus, 2012).

Other uses for strategic communication include responding to customer complaints (Bach & Kim, 2012), broadcasting corporate social responsibility (Coombs & Holladay, 2009; Cho & De Moya, 2016; Bachman & Inghoff, 2017), and shareholder letters (Allison, 2017). One interesting facet to strategic communication has been to segregate management of a firm into a “quasi-organization” and employees of the firm to be in a second “quasi-organization”. For example, Garner (2009) examines employee dissent directed at management to be strategic communication. Heide and Simonsson (2011) take a directionally opposite tactic of viewing employees as the recipients of organizational communication. Thus, strategic communication can be created by one part of an organization and be directed to another part of the same organization. Other intraorganizational examples include ethics statements (Allison, 2015a) and values statements (Allison, 2015b) although these also can be communications to those outside the organization.

Vision Statements and Strategic Communication

Garner (2009) and Heide and Simonsson (2011) have examined management and employees as two separate quasi-organizations that can utilize strategic communication. Thus, management can not only produce strategic communication in the form of annual meetings, shareholder letters, news releases and webcasts as stated by Chandler (2014), but for internal stakeholders management may create strategic communication the form of mission statements, vision statements (Allison, 2015a), and ethics statements (Allison, 2015b). In particular by definition vision statements contain strategic intent (MacLeod, 2060; Kantabura & Avery, 2010; Baum, 1994). Thus, vision statements are a strategic communication device through which management conveys future ideals to employees.

METHOD

This section describes the analytical methodology used to create the taxonomy and the results from using that methodology. The first part describes data collection as well as the methodology used on the sample. The second part details the results from the analytical method used and provides details regarding the classification.

Analytical Methodology

According to Duarte and Sarkar (2011), taxonomic development is a well-defined process. The first step is where a researcher creates a classification system based on existing research. The second step is to use analytical methods, generally cluster analysis, to determine if the elements group in the manner expected. Finally, the researcher creates guidelines for the classification of the elements. However, Duarte and Sarkar (2011) warn that the taxonomy may be useless because of its creation before data collection instead of being created as a result of the data. Additionally, taxonomies created in this way may be subject to researcher prejudice or possibly error. As a result, the taxonomy may be unrealistic and out of line with existing theory (Kuo-Chung & Li-Fang, 2004).

McGee and Howard (1986) suggest a more natural way to create a classification scheme is to utilize the characteristics of the elements to be classified. Autry et al (2008) further state that classification is performed better by using patterns found in the data. Consequently, it would be extremely valuable if there were classification methods that reduced or eliminated researcher error and bias while at the same time basing the classification on data characteristics. Text mining is one such methodology that uses computerized analysis of the data and “helps analysts extract meanings, patterns, and structure hidden in unstructured textual data” (Chakraborty, Pagolu, & Garla, 2013, p. 1).

Text mining and analytics have been used in other research. Xiang, Schwartz, Gerdes, and Uysal (2015) use text analytics to determine customer satisfaction from written comments. Decision-making regarding product development was studied by Markham, Kowolenko, and Michaelis (2015) by analyzing text documents from the decision-making process. Other examples of text analytics in research include analysis of decision-making about drug patents (Yang, Klose, Lippy, Barcelon-Yang, & Zhang, 2014), determining nursing workplace concerns (Bell, Campbell, & Goldberg, 2015), uncovering managerial mental orientations (Helmerson & Mattsson, 2013), and classifying student course drops (Michalski, 2014).

With reference to strategic communication, text analytics has been used to create a taxonomy of mission and vision statements jointly with respect to industry (Alshameri et al. 2012). More recently, Allison (2017) used text mining to discover a taxonomy for shareholder letters. Other classifications in strategic communication include ethics statements (Allison, 2015a) and values statements (Allison, 2015b). The Alshameri et al. (2012) used a predetermined variable to create the classification while the others mentioned do not use any predetermined variables, letting the natural language speak for itself.

The sample for this study was gathered in 2016 by eight text analytics students who gathered the 798 vision statements from organizations, most of whom are based in the U.S. Fewer than 50 organizations were located outside the U.S.; however, their vision statements were available in English. The English language was a requirement since the analytics software available could only analyze statements in that language.

Analysis on the vision statements began after the students submitted the data and the data was combined into one file. The analysis was a two-stage process specifically designed to find the best “fitting” taxonomy. The first stage had the software take the data and create an

unsupervised classification – a classification without any predetermined rules – and create rules for classification. The second stage, a supervised classification, took the data rules previously formulated and then reclassified the original data to see how well the reclassification and the original classification agree. This resulted in a metric called the misclassification rate that is a percentage of the data where the unsupervised classification and the supervised classification do not agree. Once the procedure was established, then each parameter of the software was changed to find the classification with the lowest misclassification rate.

When the above mentioned procedure was applied to the entire data set, several classes formed. However, on inspection it was revealed that one of those classes was created due to the word “vision” in the data. In other words several of the vision statements in the data set had phrases such as “Our vision is...” or “The vision is...” Use of the word “vision” in this context is redundant since everything in the data set was a vision statement and this word was creating a new class for those statements using the word vision. To correct the analysis the word “vision” was omitted from the analysis. Upon reapplying the entire procedure mentioned above, the vision statements formed two classes.

Viewing these two classes as parent classes, the set of vision statements was broken into two sets based upon the assignment of the data to these parent classes. The statements in each of the parent classes were then analyzed using the same procedure as above. For both parent classes, multiple child classes were formed.

RESULTS

Employment of the methodology above resulted in two parent classes and seventeen subclasses for vision statements. As mentioned, the criteria for choosing this classification was whichever variation in the program parameters produced the lowest misclassification rate. For example term weightings in the program can be logarithmic, binary, and no weighting. The data was run under each option to find the lowest misclassification rate. This process occurred for every parameter in the computer program.

The first parent class consisted of approximately 39% of the sample. The top key words for this classification in order are “world”, “company”, “global”, “people”, “energy”, and “customers”. The statements in this first-level class concentrate on either providing a regional influence, whether that region is local, nationwide, or global. One example of a vision statement in this category is from the beverage manufacturer Ambev: “To be the best beer company, bringing people together for a better world.” This type of statement will be called a Spatially Oriented vision statement.

The second parent class consisted of approximately 61% of the sample. The top key words for this classification are “growth”, “partner”, “excellence”, “trusted”, and “committed”. The statements in this other first-level class concentrate on achieving some goal, not necessarily with a regional emphasis, but doing so by being the best. An example of a vision statement in this category is from Brown Forman Corp.: “To be the best brand builder in the industry”. This type of statement will be called an Achievementcentric vision statement.

Each of the parent classes then breaks up into several subclasses. The Spatially Oriented statements contain eight subclasses. The Achievementcentric statements break up into nine

subclasses. The rules for classifying statements into these parent classes are found in Appendix A. Each subclass is explained below.

Spatially Oriented Statements

As mentioned, the Spatially Oriented statement class consisted of about 39% of the original data set which is 310 vision statements. The statements in this parent classification were segregated from the statements in the other parent classification and treated as an individual data set. The same unsupervised-supervised analysis was run on this data set as was run on the original data set. This allowed the finding of subclasses within this parent class. After changing the all the parameters to find the classification with the lowest misclassification rate, eight subclasses emerged. Each class was also examined to see if the original key words clustered again in the child classes. If this had happened, it would have implied the documents in that child class were being overly influenced by the collection of key words that placed them in the parent class in the first place. This influence would have masked subtypes and distorted the creation of classes on the child level. The key words for the parent class were distributed throughout the child classes indicating a better class creation. The rules for classifying these statements are found in Appendix B. Each of these subclasses is explained below.

The first subclass of the Spatially Oriented statements contained about 7% of the data that created the parent class. Some of the key words defining this class are “health”, “care”, “patients”, “serve”, “community”, and “excellence”. The obvious organizations in this class are health care firms which the majority of firms in this class are. One example of a vision statement in this class from the associate degree nursing school at Eastern Kentucky University: “The Department of Associate Degree Nursing will be an innovative leader in preparing nurses who will promote health and well-being, advancing Kentucky and impacting the world.” There are a few non-health care statements in this class that discuss well-being. For example, the vision statement for Hilton states, “To fill the earth with the light and warmth of hospitality.” Thus, as a whole, this subclass discusses some form of prosperity, so this subclass will be known as the Wellness statements.

The second of the subclasses contained about 10% of the Spatially Oriented statements. Some of the key words for this class are “people”, “healthier”, “helping”, “making”, “worldwide”, and “profitably”. As implied by the first key word, all the statements in this class refer to people and making life better. The second key word seems to imply health care again, but few of the statements involve health care. For example, Dupont’s vision statement reads, “Creating sustainable essentials to a better, safer, and healthier life for people.” Thus, there is a concern for people’s health without being a health care provider. One of the few health care organizations in this class is Varian Medical System whose vision statements states, “Reaching out globally, helping more people.” Thus, the message sent by these statements is one of help and assistance to people, so this subclass will be known as the Enablers.

The third subclass of Spatially Oriented statements consisted of 7% of those statements. The top key words for this class are “energy”, “clean”, “reliable”, “development”, “preferred”, “resources”, and “safe”. These key words seem to point to organizations involved in the energy industry and, upon reviewing the vision statements in this class, each one is related to energy, whether it be electricity, gas, or geothermal. One example in this category is PDVSA whose

statement reads, “To become the energy firm of world reference for excellence.” This subclass will be known as the Energy statements.

About 14% of the Spatially Oriented statements clustered into the fourth subclass. The top key words for this subclass are “customers”, “suppliers”, “employees”, “shareholders”, “consistently”, and “investors”. Reading through these visions statements shows a focus upon the stakeholders in a firm. One example in this category is that of Benchmark Electronics Inc. which states, “To create superior value for our customers, employees, and shareholders.” This subclass of statements will be known as the Stakeholder statements.

The fifth subclass consisted of about 18% of the Spatially Oriented statements. Key words for this group are “products”, “services”, “customer”, “continue”, “financial”, “improve”, and “best”. These statements appear to refer to output, whether a product or service, of the firm. Often these statements refer to creating superior output for customers. One example is the statement of Gavilon that reads, “Our vision is to be the most effective provider of essential commodities and services in the world.” This type of statement will be called the Producers.

The Spatially Oriented statements also had about 14% cluster into the six subclass. The key words for this class are “world”, “fully”, “trusted”, “class”, “experience”, “matters”, “seek”, “want”, and “team”. While the parent class statements have the characteristic of focusing upon a geographic area, this subclass specifically focuses upon the world. But there also seems to be a goal of creating a connection between the firm and customers through trust or between other people. Ambev, the beverage manufacturer, has as its vision statement, “To be the best beer company, bringing people together for a better world.” This group of statements will be called the World Unifiers.

The seventh subclass of the Spatially Oriented statements consists of about 17% of the statements. Key words for this group are “global”, “solutions”, “leader”, “supplier”, “industry”, and “provider”. The statements in this category discuss solutions, innovation, and creativity on a global scale. One such statement is from Tenneco: “Pioneering global ideas for cleaner air, and smoother, quieter and safer transportation.” This group will be known as the Global Innovators.

The eighth and final subclass has about 14% of the data. The major key words for this class are “company”, “respected”, “successful”, “leading”, “existing”, “globally”, and “human”. These statements have a theme of becoming the best – whether in image or in product or service. One such statement is from Minerva S.A.: “Our vision is to be the best developing, constructions, and sales company in Brazil.” This subclass will be called Superior Organizers.

Achievementcentric Statements

This section discusses the second parent class of vision statements that were found to have a vision of having a high level goal. Analyzing the documents that clustered into this parent class, nine subclasses emerge. The rules for classifying statements into the subclasses are found in Appendix C. Each subclass is discussed below.

The first subclass that emerged contained 21% of the statements that were Achievementcentric. The first few key words for this class are “bring”, “better”, “productive”, “security”, “social”, “environmental”, and “economic”. These statements go beyond providing a superior goal-oriented product or service to delivering something that is safe and secure. For

example, Nucor Corp. has as its vision statement, “We are driven by our vision of being the safest, most profitable, and most customer-focused rebar contractor in North America.” This subclass will be known as the Safety Deliverers.

The second subclass of the Achievementcentrics contained about 12% of these statements. The main key words for this class are “provider”, “benefit”, “industry”, “preferred”, “related”, “leading”, “services”, and “products”. These statements focus upon becoming a leaders in the industry or group in which the company resides. One example is Pacific Drilling whose statement says, “To be recognized as the industry’s preferred ultra-deepwater drilling contractor.” These statements will be known as the Positionalists.

About 12% of the Achievementcentrics placed into the third subclass. The top key words defining this class are “improve”, “patients”, “solutions”, “market”, “partner”, “trusted”, and “excellence”. While the second word is “patients”, these statements are not completely about health care. The first term, “improve”, seems to capture the meaning of the group. These statements are about improving an existing product or service or about improving life. An example of this type of statement is that given by Indegene Pharmaceutical Solutions, Inc.: “To be a trusted and preferred partner to global healthcare organizations to improve health and business outcomes.” This class will be known as the Improvers.

The fourth subclass of Achievementcentrics consisted of about 11% of those statements. Key words for this class include “growth”, “value”, “sustainable”, “create”, “stakeholders”, “leadership”, and “long-term”. These statement indicate a growth of the firm, whether that be in shareholder value, growth in trust, or growth in leadership. One example of this type of vision statement is from MDU Resources Group Inc.: “With integrity, create superior shareholder value by expanding upon our expertise to be the supplier of choice in all of our markets while being safe and great place to work.” This group of statements will be known as the Growers.

The fifth subclass contained about 6% of the Achievementcentric data. Some of the key words that determine this class are “health”, “care”, “nationally”, “medical”, “system”, “high quality”, and “region”. At first glance this may seem identical to the Wellness subclass in the Spatially Oriented parent class. Unlike the Wellness class, this class is exclusively health care affiliated with the organizations being hospitals, pharmacies, and governmental agencies to name a few. Also unlike the Wellness class, this class has some form of achievement in the vision statement. An example of these comes from Allianz: “Becoming a leading life and health insurer in the country.” This class will be known as the Health Conscious.

The sixth subclass of the Achievementcentrics contained about 9% of the data. The top key words for this class are “business”, “diverse”, “businesses”, “core”, “grow”, “customers”, “operations”, and “clients”. Reading these statements shows a focus upon business, whether it be focusing upon businesses as customers and clients or a focus upon business practices. PepsiCo provides a good example of a vision statement in this group: “At PepsiCo, we aim to deliver top-tier financial performance over the long term by integrating sustainability into our business strategy, leaving a positive imprint on society and the environment.” These statements will be called the Business Focused.

The Achievementcentrics have a seventh subclass that contains about 17% of the data. The top key words for this class are “customer”, “service”, “choice”, “strong”, “building”,

“employees”, and “client”. The message through this class is of building relationships with customers, potentially using satisfied employees to accomplish the goal. One example is from Vectrus Inc.: “Be the customer’s first choice and most trusted partner.” These statements will be called the Relaters.

The eighth subclass of the Achievementcentrics clustered with about 4% of the data. The top key words are “best”, “bank”, “institution”, “attract”, “investment”, “system”, “consumers”, and “driven”. The parent group was typified by a goal and in this subclass that goal is of being the best, however “being the best” is defined for the firm. Every vision statement in this category uses the term “best”. M&T Bank Corp. provides a good example of statements in this class: “M&T strives to be the best company our employees ever work for, the best bank our customers ever do business with, and the best investment our shareholders ever make.” This subclass will be known as the Primo statements.

The ninth and final class of this parent group clustered with about 8% of the data. Key words for this class include “community”, “activities”, “children”, “standards”, “accessible”, “clinical”, and “enabling”. This class tends to focus upon the community in which the organization resides, including elements of that community such as children, families, and drug addicts. One example is the Tompkin’s Consolidated Area Transportation statement which reads, “To become a model community transportation system committed to quality service, employee management collaboration and innovation.” This subclass will be known as the Community Focused statements.

DISCUSSION

The previous section discussed the methodology used to create seventeen subclasses of vision statements divided between two parent classes. The methodology included using text mining to analyze the wording in the sample of vision statements and derive the classification based upon the natural language found in them. This created the two main classes. Each of the parent classes were then examined in the same way to find the subclasses. This relatively new and unique approach has only been used a few times in research such as in Allison (2015a), Allison (2015b), and Allison (2017). Each class and its focus are provided in Appendix D.

Several interesting things were revealed in this taxonomy. The first is that of all the existing industries, only two emerged in the taxonomy – health care and energy. Not all statements from health care firms or energy firms clustered here, but enough did to create these classes. Health care vision statements appeared in the Wellness type statement under the Spatially Oriented statements as well as the Health Conscious type under the Achievementcentric statements. Energy vision statements appeared in the Energy type under the Spatially Oriented statements. The segregation of these two industries’ statements into distinct classes and not others creates the need for an explanation. One explanation is that the statements in these classes are very similar to one another in wording and structure. This may suggest that many firms in these industries are not creating a vision statement to be useful, but just copying other firms’ statements for the purpose of just having a vision statement. This theory is supported by MacLeod (2016), Lucas (1998), and O’Connell et al (2011) who all state that sometimes vision statements are created not to be implemented, exist for appearance only.

Another interesting detail is the similarity of some classes in the Spatially Oriented parent class with some class in the Achievementcentric parent class. Other than the similarity between the Wellness subclass and the Health Conscious subclass mentioned above, the Superior Organization subclass in the first parent class is very similar to the Primo subclass in the second parent class. Thus, there are many organizations that have the vision of being the best in an industry or group, but differ based upon whether they focus on a geographic area or not. The achievement in all the statements is to be the best, but the geographic focus outweighs the achievement focus in the analysis. There also seems to be some similarity in the World Unifiers subclass in the first parent class and the Relaters in the second parent class, again the difference being whether there is a focus on a geographic area.

This taxonomy supports existing theory on vision. Gulati (2016) published findings for a study on the vision statements of 312 acute care hospitals. What is notable here is the finding of two subclasses, one in each parent class, by the methodology above. This limitation may have unwittingly provided more validity in the Gulati (2016) results. In a different manner Price (2012) studied the vision statements of various federal agencies. While all the agencies are under the executive branch of the U.S. government, they all have vastly different missions. Price (2012) found the wording of the vision statements was used to frame each agency in the correct light, supporting the notion at a basic level of a classification of vision statements. Thus, the findings in this study relate to the studies mentioned in this paragraph and support different types of vision statements for organizations with different types of missions.

By examining vision statements through the lens of strategic communication, this study also provides support for literature of that genre. Dulek and Campbell (2014) state that a firm's strategic communication will depend upon its strategic intent. Since vision statements are a form of strategic communication relaying strategic intent, a taxonomy of various types of this strategic communication is natural. Similarly, George, Carlson, and Valacich (2013) develop a contingency approach to the media choice for strategic communication. The media choice is determined by the intent of the communication, which in the case of a vision statement, may be one of two things. First, the statement can be fiction created for the purpose of checking of a box in a things-to-do list (Lucas, 1998; MacLeod, 2016). In this event, the statement may not be communicated at all or in a manner that minimizes implementation and effectiveness. Second, in contrast to Lucas (1998) and MacLeod (2016), the statement can be an intellectually planned document to guide employee decisions. Under this assumption management would choose a medium to thoroughly communicate the statement to all stakeholders and maximize implementation. Consequently, this choice and strategic intent will ultimately require wording variations, thus creating various types of vision statements.

PROPOSITIONS

Vision statements are not only part of the strategic communication by an organization, they are also part of the organization's culture. Organizational culture has been defined as shared values and assumptions of an organization (Schein, 1983; Costanza, Blacksmith, Coats, Severt, & DeCostanze, 2015; McShane & von Glinow, 2015). As a guiding principle for an organization, a vision statement should be a shared assumption about where an organization is heading and

possibly even the values to which the organization wishes to aspire (Daher, 2016; Baum, 1994). This shared inspiration is a necessary component of the statement, often cited in the literature (e.g. Carver, 2011; Kantabutra & Avery, 2010; Meade & Rogers, 2001; Brown, 1998). However, one must be cautious under the discussion proffered thus far.

Caution must be exercised because not every vision statement can be classified as part of culture nor can it be classified as strategic communication. Management can create vision statements for a multitude of reasons, only one of which is for the benefit of the organization. MacLeod (2016) states that vision statements can be created for the purpose of checking off an item on a list. Lucas (1998) also states that vision statements can be pure fiction and not meant to be implemented. The same is echoed by O'Connell et al (2011). These statements then do not contain anything shared, but rather are just words and this attribute places the vision statement outside the context of organizational culture. Similarly, these statements may not exist for a strategic purpose and, therefore, do not qualify as strategic communication, if they are communicated at all. This paper will ignore these "false" vision statements and only examine those that are created for the shared purpose of guiding the firm.

O'Connell et al (2011) states there are three times vision is created: at organizational start up, after management change, and at a perceived need to change organizational course. During start up, management should be concerned with establishing the core values of the organization, partly by creating a culture for the organization that will allow the organization to work (Mariotti & Glackin, 2016). Language is an important part of culture (McShane & von Glinow, 2015) and, thus, may be a determinant in the creation of the vision statement. Based on the findings in the previous section of this paper, there are several types of vision statements based on language. Consequently, the type of vision statement chosen and the type of culture created should be related. The following proposition is made.

Proposition 1: During the initial formation of an organization, each of the vision statement types will be related to a unique organizational culture, all other factors being equal.

Vision can change in two other instances according to O'Connell et al (2011). These points in time are at management change and at a perceived need to change organizational direction. During both of these, organizational culture has already been established and may need to be changed to accommodate the primary change. However, a current vision statement is part of the organizational culture and, if organizational culture is to change, then the vision statement may need to change as well. Macleod (2016) states that vision statements are about intentions and philosophy, both of which often change during management transitions. Furthermore, both changes in management and in organizational direction can imply a change in organizational identity which can be accomplished by new strategic communication (Feldner & Fyke, 2016). Thus, an organization making these changes may want to alter organizational culture and organizational identity.

Changes in culture and identity may be accomplished in part by changing the vision statement. An organization with one type of vision statement portrays a particular culture and identity. To change both of these the organization may have to select a different type of vision

statement. For example, a firm having a Wellness vision statement with a geographic emphasis and related culture will not be able to fully change the culture to that of promoting health care with a goal without changing the vision statement to that of a Health Care statement. Thus, the following proposition is made.

Proposition 2: A firm undergoing cultural change due to management change or a perceived need for direction change may need to change from one type of vision statement to another type of vision statement to help fully implement the cultural change.

The previous two propositions establish a link between the type of vision statement and organizational culture. Each type of vision statement may help create a unique organizational culture. Similarly, the vision statement should focus upon the major direction the organization is trying to achieve implying a necessary alignment with strategy (Brown, 1998). Kantabutra and Avery (2010) discuss how effectiveness of a vision statement is dependent upon its alignment with organizational processes and systems, part of which is organizational structure. From Chandler (1962) one learns that structure must align with strategy. Thus, for an organization to achieve the benefits from the alignment of culture, structure and strategy, the vision statement must be representative of the culture as well as the strategy of the organization.

Proposition 3: In order for an organization to realize fully benefits from the alignment of culture with structure and strategy, the vision statement type should align with the culture type.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper previously discovered a hierarchical taxonomy of vision statements and developed three propositions, the latter developed with the assumption that the vision statement is communicated and implemented in the organization. This work begins to lay the groundwork for expanding the topic of strategic communication through vision statements. There is much theory advancement that still can be done.

Narrowing the discussion to communicated and implemented vision statements, Gulati (2016) found there was a relationship between effective vision statements and performance in the hospital industry. The question arises whether the effective vision statements were all of various types possibly indicating originality and the ineffective statements were of the Wellness or of the Health Conscious type, possibly showing lack of originality. Additionally, the previous discussion raises the issue of the need for an alignment of strategic communication by way of vision statements, strategy, and culture. Thus, research could be examined upon the hospital industry again but focusing upon vision statement type, culture type, and alignment.

Studies like Gulati (2016) have a tendency to focus upon effective decisions instead of ineffective ones. However, a study of effective and ineffective statements may be worth performing. Part of what needs to be examined is effectiveness as a result of several different dimensions. Lucas (1998) states that if a vision statement is “fiction”, then lower effectiveness is a result. This is echoed by O’Connell et al. (2011) who state that management that creates a vision

statement focused on symbolism will concentrate more on implementing the statement rather than creating a quality statement. The seriousness of management about having an effective vision statement exists along a continuum rather than as a dichotomous choice. Secondly, how the statement is communicated is also important (O'Connell et al., 2011); the type of communication can determine effectiveness. Thus, one area of future study is to examine the type of vision statement, the culture type, how the statement was communicated, and the seriousness of management to determine how combinations of each determine effectiveness of the vision statement.

Arguably, the most important part of this research is establishing the link between strategic communication, organizational culture, and strategy. While vision statements do not establish a strong link by themselves, the addition of other documents such as mission statements and values statements can certainly aid in this process. Vision statements, mission statements, and values statements have all been traditionally part of strategic management (e.g. Hill et al, 2015). The performance effects of vision statements (e.g. Carver, 2011), mission statements (Alawneh, 2015), and vision statements (e.g. Jaakson, 2008) have all been studied as part of strategic management. Additionally, all have been established as part of strategic communication (Author, 2015a, 2015b, & 2017). As stated in this paper, the links between these and organizational culture are shared values and language. Using this link and these statements, research can be performed to explore the link between strategy, strategic communication, and culture. More specifically there may be a relationship not only between types of organizational statements, but also between types of statements and types of culture. For example, if Cameron and Quinn's (2006) taxonomy of organizational culture is used, then one could determine if classes of vision statements are related to classes of culture. This is why taxonomies are so important.

SUMMARY

This paper makes a unique contribution to the literature of strategic communication, organizational culture, and strategic management by examining vision statements. This paper develops the hierarchical taxonomy for vision statements by using the natural language found in vision statements rather than relying on predetermined classes. This taxonomy provides an overview of how vision statements are related, but it also provides a way for researchers to classify vision statements for analysis in more quantitative studies. This paper also develops several propositions linking vision statement type to organizational culture. Until now, vision statements have been viewed as a strategic management topic. This paper pushes that topic not only into organizational culture, but also into strategic communication.

The taxonomy developed in this paper allows for extended study. First, the taxonomy allows vision statements to be taught and understood on a much more simple level. Second, the taxonomy could allow empirical studies to be done through classifying vision statements and relating them to some other measurement such as organizational size or effectiveness.

The propositions in this paper extend theory to propose that there is a linkage between vision statements and organizational culture. While there has been literature that discusses the need for alignment between strategy, structure, and culture, the propositions here provide a specific linkage between strategy and culture by way of the vision statement. The type of vision statement

adopted and implemented should align with the organizational strategy and the organizational culture.

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APPENDIX A

The scheme for classifying vision statements into a parent class

- Step 1: If the vision statement has “world”, “company” but not “growth”, “global”, “people”, “energy”, or “customers”, then it is to be classified as a Spatially Oriented statement.
- Step 2: If the vision statement has “partner”, “leadership”, “diversity”, “investment”, “market” but not “customers”, “growth”, “built”, “region”, “teamwork”, “day”, “outstanding”, “cancer”, or “maintaining”, the it is to be classified as an Achievementcentric statement.

APPENDIX B

This is the scheme to classify the Spatially Oriented statements into subclasses.

- Step 1: If the statement contains the word “energy”, then the statement should be classified as an Energy statement.
- Step 2: If the statement contains the word “care”, then the statement should be classified as and Wellness statement.
- Step 3: If the statement contains “leader” but not “innovative” or “solutions”, then the statement should be classified as an Enabler statement.
- Step 4: If the statement contains “world” and does not contain “global”, “company”, “solutions”, “customers”, or “services”, then the statement is classified as a World Unifier.

- Step 5: If the statement contains “suppliers” and “customers” and not “products”, “global”, “energy”, or “industry”, then the statement is classified as a Stakeholder statement.
- Step 6: If the statement contains “company” and not “products”, “people”, “global”, “energy”, or “customers”, then the statement is classified as a Superior Organization statement.
- Step 7: If the statement contains “global” and not “energy”, then the statement is classified as a Global Innovator.
- Step 8: If the statement contains “products” and not “global”, or if the statement contains “customer”, “service”, and “services”, the statement is classified as a Producer.

APPENDIX C

This is the scheme to classify the Achievementcentric statements into subclasses.

- Step 1: If the statement contains “best”, the statement is to be classified as a Primo statement.
- Step 2: If the statement contains “health” or “care”, the statement is to be classified as Health Conscious.
- Step 3: If the statement contains “community”, the statement is to be classified as Community Focused.
- Step 4: If the statement contains “business”, the statement is to be classified as Business Focused.
- Step 5: If the statement contains “growth” or “value”, the statement should be classified as a Grower.
- Step 6: If the statement contains “provider” or “industry”, the statement should be classified as a Positionalist.
- Step 7: If the statement contains “improve”, “patients”, “market” or “partner”, the statement should be classified as an Improver.
- Step 8: If the statement contains “customer”, “service”, or “choice”, the statement should be classified as a Relater.

APPENDIX D

The listing of classes and subclasses in the vision statement taxonomy and the focus of each.

Parent Class	Subclass	Focus
<i>Spatially Oriented</i>		<i>These concentrate on a geographic area.</i>
	Wellness	These focus on customer prosperity.
	Enablers	These focus on helping and assisting people.
	Energy	These focus upon energy creation and delivery.
	Stakeholder	These focus upon various stakeholders.
	Producers	These focus upon superior output for customers.
	World Unifiers	These focus on creating connections between people and organizations.
	Global Innovators	These focus on solutions on a global scale.
	Superior Organizers	These focus upon becoming the best.
<i>Achievementcentric</i>		<i>These concentrate on goal accomplishment.</i>
	Safety Deliverers	These focus upon delivering output that is safe and secure.
	Positionalists	These focus upon become a leader in the organization's group.
	Improvers	These focus upon improving output or life.
	Growers	These focus upon growing some attribute of the firm.
	Health Conscious	These focus upon health care.
	Business Focused	These focus upon businesses.
	Relaters	These focus on building relationships.
	Primo	These focus on being the best.
	Community Focused	These focus upon community elements.