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WORKING PAPER

Methodology in mission statement research: where are we, and where should we go? An analysis of 20 years of empirical research

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ABSTRACT:

The study at hand analyses the research strategies applied in empirical articles addressing the concept of mission statements. We systematically scanned eight computerized databases in order to delimit the field of empirical mission statement research. This scanning process resulted in 63 articles. Consequently the detected articles were analyzed by means of a code sheet. The code sheet comprised five general sets of research strategy characteristics: (1) primary data location and means of data collection, (2) level of analysis, (3) sample characteristics, (4) type of analysis / analytic techniques and (5) time frame. The results of the content analysis enabled us to assess the validity and robustness of research conducted within the field of mission statement research. Suggestions are made to increase the level of validity of future research. We claim that the results of the study at hand will contribute to the maturation of the field. They will provide insights into the possible future development of mission statement research methodology and facilitate the transition of the field from predominantly descriptive to empirically grounded.

KEY WORDS:

Mission statements, empirical research, research strategies, content analysis, validity

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years mission statements have become one of the most popular and widespread management tools. Studies indicate for example that over 85% of the North American profit organisations have developed a mission statement (Rigby, 2000, , 2001; Rigby, 1998). Other authors even stated that “[mission statements] appear to have evolved into a prerequisite of doing business (Smith, 2001)“.

We propose that at least five factors have contributed to the popularity of mission statements. One of the main drivers is probably the seemingly low “entry barrier” to engage in the process of developing and implementing a mission statement. At first glance the conception and implementation of an effective mission statement seems to be neither too time nor resource consuming and within the reach of every management team (Bart, 1995, , 2002). Second, there is a profusion of academic literature supporting the claim that mission statements can produce a host of organizational benefits and consequently contribute to the overall performance of an organization (Baetz, 1996; Bart, 1998a; Campbell, 1991, , 1993; Duncan *et al.*, 1994; Dunn, 1994; Ireland, 1992; Pearce II, 1987; Stone, 1996; Weiss, 1999). Or as Morris (Morris, 1996) formulates it: [...] mission statements are equally important for firms in a variety of strategic contents: large versus small, profit versus non-profit, simple versus complex. Third, the virtues of having a well-articulated mission statement are extolled in almost every current management textbook which contributes to the reputation and face credibility of the concept (Bart, 1998b). Fourth, mission statements are a vital building block of numerous management concepts and models such as strategic planning (Larson, 1998; McGinnis, 1981), strategic management (Bart, 1998a; Smith, 2001), the Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan, 1992, , 1996) and the EFQM-model (Ruiz-Carrillo, 2005; Rusjan, 2005). Organizations intending to implement these management techniques will first have to tackle the challenge of developing a mission statement. And last but not least, mission statements have become one of the favorite subjects of the “management fashion setters”. Management fashion setters (for example consulting firms, management gurus, business mass-media publications, and business schools) disseminate the transitory collective beliefs that certain management techniques are at the forefront of management progress and have to be implemented without lingering (Abrahamson, 1996).

Especially the latter two factors boosted the popularity of the concept exponentially. A search for the keyword “mission statement” in citations and/or abstract of articles (published between 1987 and 2004) listed in the computerized database Proquest (no other restrictions), for example, produces no less than 3,786 hits (search performed at 02/08/2005).

INSERT FIGURE 1

However, the attention mission statements has been given in the academic literature seems to be predominantly prescriptive, anecdotic and/or descriptive in nature (Piercy, 1994). Given the wide impact of the concept, it is surprising that in the past 25 years only a modicum of empirical research has been completed on mission statements (Bart, 2001; Smith, 2001). Some authors even state that a reliable and recognized base of empirical research is lacking (Baetz, 1996; Bart, 1998a, , 2003; David, 1989; Klemm, 1991; Wilson, 1992). Others doubt the methodological rigour of the field and question its frequent use of descriptive research designs (Piercy, 1994). Although descriptive research is a fundamental step in identifying emerging theories and delimiting a research field, it is not an endpoint. Descriptive research is only a first step toward establishing a solid body of knowledge. At some point, a field must shift from descriptive to empirically rooted research (Balduck, 2004; Scandura, 2000).

One of the prerequisites to enable the transition from predominantly descriptive to empirically grounded, is a thorough understanding of the emerging methodological patterns within a specific field. Examining the emerging methodological patterns broadens our understanding of the pathways explored and exposes potential gaps in the knowledge base (Balduck, 2004). Given the skepticism about a) the scale of empirical mission statement research and b) its rigorousness, the paper at hand sought to determine which empirical patterns underlie mission statement research and to pinpoint possible shortcomings. According to Scandura (Scandura, 2000) the most suitable instrument to assess methodological patterns and potential knowledge gaps is a systematical review of the research designs employed within the field of interest.

Consequently this paper fulfills the following objectives: (1) to identify all empirical based papers in the field of mission statement research, (2) to provide a detailed analysis of the research methodology applied in the identified articles, (3) to assess the level of validity of the detected research designs and (4) to provide advices for future research filling the gaps in current empirical research on mission statements.

We claim that the results of the study at hand will contribute to the maturation of the field. They will provide insights into the possible future development of mission statement research methodology and facilitate the transition of the field from predominantly descriptive to empirically grounded.

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review strategy applied in this study is based upon a systematic literature review process for management research initialized by Tranfield (Tranfield, 2003) and which was further elaborated in a special issue of the International Journal of Management Reviews (Denyer, 2004; Leseure, 2004; Thorpe, 2005). A systematic review both maps and assesses the relevant literature and provides collective insights through the theoretical synthesis of a research field (Franco-Santos, 2005). A systematic review process differs “from traditional narrative reviews by adopting a replicable, scientific and transparent process [...] that aims to minimize bias through exhaustive literature searches” (Tranfield, 2003). The overall process of the conducted review is summarized in Figure 2.

INSERT FIGURE 2

The following two sections discuss how the systematic review was operationalized in the study at hand.

Setting up the collection process and collecting the data

Prior to beginning the actual review, the review team initiated a scoping study to assess the size of the study and to delimit the subject area. Given the overwhelming body of literature the main objective of the scoping study was to imbed a clear focus in the review. The first hurdle was to delimit the scope of the concept “mission statement”. Not an easy task. Terms such as mission statement, business mission, statement of purpose, vision statement and value statement are often used to underpin overlapping, interchangeable and even distinct concepts (Schwartz, 2001). To avoid being caught in a semantic cobweb, we decided to focus only on articles which use explicitly the term “mission statement” to indicate a formal organizational statement that clarifies the purpose, values, strategy and behaviour standards of the organization (Campbell, 1991, , 1993; Chun, 2001; Hooley, 1992). The term “mission

statement” consequently acted as the central and sole key word. Furthermore the scoping study indicated that the benchmark study of Pearce & David (Pearce II, 1987) into the mission statement components of high and low performing Fortune 500 firms is generally recognized as the first serious attempt to empirically investigate the concept of mission statements. Given the focus of this study the time frame of interest was as a consequence established from 1987 till 2005. The next step was to determine the appropriate citation indexes. Based on comparable studies (Leseure, 2004; Pittaway, 2004) eight computerized bibliographical databases (Emerald, Psychinfo, Worklit, Web of Science, Ebsco (Academic Search Elite, Business Source Premier, and Econlit), Swetswise, Synergy and Proquest) were included in the research design. Finally, to round up the scoping study all research decisions were captured in a formal review protocol. The devised protocol was followed meticulously during the entire data collection process.

The actual data collection process consisted of four stages. In the first stage the key word and the time criterion were entered into the selected electronic databases. As expected the initial search yielded a staggering 11118 citations. In stage two the identified citations were copied into the bibliographic software Endnote. The created data files formed the basis for a more thorough title and abstract analysis in order to filter out irrelevant or duplicate citations (for more details please consult Figure 2) (Thorpe, 2005). Stage two allowed us to decimate the sample collected in stage one. An overwhelming proportion of the initial sample consisted of (a) articles that mention the concept “mission statement” but do not discuss, analyze or research it (for example articles about strategic planning or the Balanced Scorecard) and/or (b) are published in a non-relevant format or source (e.g. book reviews, opinions, editorials, cover stories). As a matter of fact, of the thousands of articles reviewed only 514 citations complied with the prespecified criteria. Next, in stage three, the remaining 514 articles were carefully screened in order to determine whether the article reported any empirical findings. Each reviewed article was assigned a specific code. Code “A” articles report empirical findings. Code “B” articles report empirical findings but were not deemed relevant (appendix 1 lists the various reasons for exclusion). Code “C” articles have no empirical basis and were as a consequence omitted. The “A”-sample contains 63 articles, the “B”-sample 10 articles and the “C”-sample 441 articles. In the fourth and last stage of the data collection process a snowball technique was applied which acted as a comprehensiveness control measure. The references of the 63 “A”-sample articles were analyzed in order to ascertain that the first three

steps of the selection process have identified all relevant empirical articles. Stage four of the selection process did not reveal any additional empirical articles.

Data extraction process

After identifying the relevant empirical articles each of them was analyzed in depth. To reduce human error and bias, a data extraction form was developed. The form was based upon the code sheets used in comparable studies on methodological patterns (Podsakoff, 1987; Randall, 1990; Scandura, 2000). First, five randomly chosen articles were coded independently by the first and the second author. After agreement was reached on coding discrepancies and refinements, the first author rated all 63 articles on five general sets of research strategy characteristics (Podsakoff, 1987; Randall, 1990; Scandura, 2000):

1. Primary location of data and means of data collection
2. Level of analysis
3. Sample characteristics
 - 3.1. Study population
 - 3.2. Sample design
 - 3.3. Sample size and response rate
4. Type of analysis / Analytic techniques
5. Time frame

Second, the second author selected, by means of a random numbers table, sixteen articles (twenty-five percent) and independently coded the selected articles (Randall, 1990). The inter-rater reliability between the two authors was 96, 8%. In a comparable research design Randall & Gibson (Randall, 1990) reported an inter-rater reliability of 97, 1% while Aulakh & Kotabe (Aulakh, 1993) stated that an inter-rater reliability of more than 95% is considered satisfactory for content analysis and categorization.

FINDINGS

General overview of analyzed articles

Although academic interest in the concept of mission statements can be traced back until the early sixties of the previous century (Gilmore, 1962; Jones, 1960; Levitt, 1960), empirical based research is not reported until almost three decades later. The benchmark study of Pearce & David (Pearce II, 1987) into the mission statement components of high and low performing Fortune 500 firms is generally recognized as the first serious attempt to investigate the concept of mission statements empirically. As Figure 3 shows, the ground-breaking research of Pearce & David (Pearce II, 1987) was not the forerunner of an immediate and massive empirical exploration within the field of mission statement research. Until 1995 empirical research remained rather scarce. However, after a slow start empirically based mission statement research carefully began to conquer its own niche within the field of strategic management research. The fact that in almost three decades of empirical mission statement research 43% of the articles were published in the last lustrum seems to indicate that the attention for mission statements is by no means dwindling.

INSERT FIGURE 3

Closer examination reveals that the identified articles are published in no less than 43 different academic journals. Eighteen of these journals are listed in the Social Science Citation Index. Front runners in the publication of empirical mission statement research are Long Range Planning (5 articles), the Health Care Management Review (5 articles) and the International Journal of Technology Management (4 articles). Together these three journals account for almost one fourth of the published empirical articles.

INSERT TABLE 1

Synthesis of applied research strategies in empirical mission statement research

Primary location of data and means of data collection

Table 2 illustrates that the primary location of data in empirical based mission statement research is limited to two sources: survey instruments and archives. Although survey instruments dominate the research field, the high amount of archival research leaps to the eye. Further examination reveals that the identified archival studies employ mostly annual

directories such as the Forbes 500 or the Fortune 500. These annual directories rank organizations based on specific (predominantly financial) criteria and often offer profiles, including the mission statement, of the listed organizations. Other popular archival resources are (collections of) annual reports and internet sites.

INSERT TABLE 2

A similar lack of variety is noticeable in the utilized procedures to collect data. Although researchers have a wide spectrum of procedures (e.g. questionnaires, laboratory tasks, interviews, simulations, observation and Delphi-procedure) for collecting data at their disposal, the research field is dominated by the use of questionnaires and archival research. No less than 68 % of the articles employed a questionnaire to collect relevant data.

Level of analysis

Table 3 presents the level of analysis studied in the researched papers. Considering the predilection for annual directories and annual reports, it is no surprise to see that all of the archival mission statement research is conducted at the organizational level of analysis. Surprisingly however, almost all survey studies are as well characterized by an organizational focus. Further analysis reveals that the majority of the articles employing a survey technique use a mono-method single-informant approach to measure organizational characteristics. The mono-method single-informant approach is based on the assumption that key informants are true representatives of the organization and that their responses can be used as valid representations or indicators of the organizational properties of interest (Phillips, 1981).

INSERT TABLE 3

Table 4 shows that in almost all articles the single informant is positioned at the top of the organizational hierarchy. This is no surprise given the fact that key informants in organizational research are usually chosen because of their formal positions in the organization, familiarity with the organization and (presumed) knowledge of the core issues in the study (Gupta, 2000).

INSERT TABLE 4

Sample characteristics

The adequacy of sampling procedures is central to the objective of cumulating research findings by building on what other researchers have accomplished (Kalleberg, 1990). A well-drawn sample mirrors the population of interest more effectively, allowing relatively accurate generalization of relationships from the sample to the population (Scheaffer, 1996).

Population and sample decisions generally involve four issues: (1) who is sampled (study population), (2) what type of sample is drawn (sample design), (3) what is the sample size, and (4) what is an acceptable response rate (Randall, 1990).

Study population

Table 4 already revealed that the majority of mission statement research is conducted at the organizational level of analysis using annual directories as sampling frame. Consequently the bulk of the identified articles use private sector organizations as a research subject. Overall, almost two thirds of the analyzed articles examined private sector organizations. Only four studies focused exclusively on public sector organizations.

As to the geographic dispersion of the studied populations, one observes a prevalence of samples located in North-America. Almost 60% of the identified articles focus on North-American organizations.

Combined results point out that 58% of the studies focusing on private organizations (23 studies out of 40) were conducted in a North-American setting while mission statement research in not-for-profit and public organizations is an almost exclusive North American concern (13 studies out of 18).

INSERT TABLE 5

Sample design

As it is mostly impossible or simply above the researcher's financial means to survey all elements of a specific population, researchers have, once a study population is selected, the arduous task of selecting an adequate sample design.

Sampling designs are of two basic types: probability sampling (random sampling) and non-probability sampling (non random sampling). Although random samples are often preferred above non-random samples (Randall, 1990), our analysis reveals that mission statement

research is typified by non random research designs (as defined by Kerlinger (Kerlinger, 1986) and Short (Short, 2002)).

INSERT TABLE 6

Closer examination reveals that the bulk of the analyzed articles use either convenience samples or judgmental samples.

Most *convenience samples* use a publicly held third party directory as sampling frame. Considering the predominance of private sector samples in empirical mission statement research, it is evident that various annual directories such as the Times 1000 Index, Business Week 1000 or Fortune 1000, among others, enjoy a high popularity. Most articles using annual directories survey all the listed organizations (for example (Strong, 1997) or (Baetz, 1996) but in some cases authors opt for a sample (for example (Leuthesser, 1997) or (Bart, 2003). Other authors survey all units of a specific sub sample of organizations. Bart & Tabone (Bart, 2000) for example surveyed all English-speaking hospitals listed in the “Guide to Canadian Health care Facilities 1995-1996” while Davies & Glaister (Davies, 1997) mailed a survey to all UK business schools in the higher education sector.

In *judgmental or importance* sampling the probability of selecting a particular unit depends on its importance. The author(s) take the role of “experts” and evaluate the “importance” of particular units (Croucher, 2002). Bart (Bart, 1996), for example, conducted a survey on a judgmental sample 75 senior managers from some of Canada’s largest industrial and advanced technology companies in an effort to determine the impact of the mission statement on firm innovativeness.

Sample size and response rate

Just 6 articles provide a statistical-theoretical underpinning for the selected sample size. As table seven shows the largest sample size registered was 1,500 and the smallest one was 18. The mean number of subjects in the analyzed articles was 334 and the standard deviation 344.

Closely related to the issue of sample size is the topic of *response rate*. 16 out of 25 studies (64%) fail to meet the benchmark suggested by Babbie (Babbie, 1990). Babbie argues that only response rates of 50% or more are satisfactory for analysis and reporting. However, using the findings of Herberlein & Baumgartner (Herberlein, 1978) (response rates for mail

questionnaires typically range from 20 to 61%) and Fowler (Fowler, 1988) (response rates below 30% are prevalent for mail surveys), the detected response rates can be considered low but satisfactory.

Furthermore the analyzed studies show an overall disregard for evaluating the level of non-response bias. In 26 cases it would have been appropriate to assess the level of non-response bias while only 6 articles address the issue.

INSERT TABLE 7

Type of analysis

Examination of the employed analytic techniques reveals that the field of mission statement research relies heavily on univariate and bivariate statistics. 44 % of the articles reported only univariate statistics with 20 articles mentioning only frequencies (mostly articles conducting only a content analysis). Five articles employed bivariate statistics (mostly chi-square or T-test). The remaining 46 % of the detected articles utilized multivariate analysis.

INSERT TABLE 8

Time frame

Another interesting feature of a research design is the employed time frame. An analysis of the employed time frames basically evolves around the question whether a cross-sectional or a longitudinal approach is adopted. The advantages of longitudinal research designs for the study of social and organizational phenomenon are extolled by a large number of authors. Especially its power to facilitate a researcher's attempts to identify causalities between variables is valued (Podsakoff, 1987). In the case of mission statement research we detected a distinct preference for cross-sectional designs. Only one of the identified articles uses a research design that can be classified as longitudinal. Weiss & Piderit (Weiss, 1999) examined the mission statements of 304 public schools together with data about school characteristics and performance before and after the adoption of the mission statement. Knowing that almost all schools drafted and formally adopted a school mission statement in the 1991-1992 school year, Weiss & Piderit gathered information about school performance

of the school years 1990-1991 and 1991-1992, and compared it with performance data of the school years 1992-1993 and 1993-1994. Although Weiss & Piderit deserve all the credit for introducing a longitudinal research design in the field of mission statement research, we could question the relatively short time frame Weiss & Piderit selected. Would the beneficial effects of a mission statement already materialize and be measurable just one or two years after its conception?

THE VALIDITY OF EMPIRICAL MISSION STATEMENT RESEARCH

The objective of accumulating knowledge by building on the empirical findings of other researchers is a central characteristic of all organizational research. The degree to which appropriate inferences can be made from the results of empirical research is determined by its level of validity. Validity reflects the rigor of research methodology used in a specific research field and is a function of four facets, i.e., internal validity, external validity, construct validity and statistical conclusion validity (Buelens, 2005; McGrath, 1982; Scandura, 2000).

In the paragraphs below the four facets of validity will be used as a framework to address the robustness of the analyzed research designs. Based on the data of the conducted literature review we will first discuss the intertwined concepts of internal and external validity. Consequently we will focus on construct validity and statistical conclusion validity respectively.

Internal and external validity

Internal validity focuses on causality. Worded differently: is there robust evidence that the observed relationships reflect the real co-variation between the variables under investigation (Scandura, 2000)? Possible indicators to assess the degree of internal validity are the employed time frame (cross-sectional vs. longitudinal) and research design (experimental or non-experimental) (Buelens, 2005).

The results of our analysis demonstrate that the concern for internal validity in empirical mission statement research is limited. First of all, research strategies with a longitudinal focus are virtually non-existent. Bearing in mind that one of the fundamental hypotheses of mission statement research (i.e. the development and implementation of a mission statement will

contribute to organizational performance) assumes a causal and time-delayed relationship between variables, it is astounding that almost all research designs are cross-sectional in nature. Second, mission statement research is often based on archival data. In spite of the cost and time advantages archival studies offer, the method has some drawbacks that ineluctably influence its degree of internal validity. As Michener & Delamater (Michener, 1999) elucidate: “One major disadvantage of archival research is the lack of control over the type and quality of available information. An investigator must work with whatever others have collected. This may or may not include data on all the variables an investigator wishes to study. There may be doubts too, regarding the quality of the original research design or the procedures used for collecting data.” Third, mission statement research is marked by the absence of experimental designs. Experimental designs enable to control potentially contaminating variables or confounding factors and thus to augment the level of internal validity.

The prevalence of non-experimental designs testifies of a higher attention to external validity in detriment of the general level of internal validity. A focus on external validity reflects a concern for the generalizability of results to different populations, places, measures and circumstances (Buelens, 2005; Scandura, 2000). The choice of a specific research strategy is always a difficult trade-off in terms of internal versus external validity. The choice for a non-experimental design, and thus external validity, is always at the expense of the level of internal validity and *visa versa*. The results of our analysis demonstrate that in the case of mission statement research the scale is definitely tipped in favor of external validity.

Other important aspects of external validity are (a) the nature of the sample and (b) the characteristics of the interviewed subjects (Buelens, 2005).

Our analysis of the nature of the utilized samples demonstrates that mission statement research is primarily conducted at organizational level in detriment of research at individual level. These findings contrast sharply with earlier research of Podsakoff & Dalton (Podsakoff, 1987) revealing that research in organizational studies is predominantly conducted at the individual level of analysis. Furthermore it catches the eye that mission statement research displays a distinct preference for non-random sampling. According to various others the frequent use of non-random research designs undermines the validity of the research field as it offers limited protection against sampling bias (Randall, 1990). However, although non-

random techniques are often associated with a variety of biases, it would be wrongful to consider this technique a priori as inferior to random sampling. In some cases research settings may benefit more from non-random than from random sampling. When examining for example the relationship between mission statement development processes and organizational performance it would probably be more beneficial to select organizations with a high level of mission-organizational alignment (Bart, 2001) than utilizing a random sample of organizations. Notwithstanding the fact that judgmental sampling decreases the representativeness of the sample and thus its level of external validity (Short, 2002), the use of a deliberately biased sample (Kumar, 2002) is sometimes a valuable tool to fathom complex research questions.

Besides the level of analysis and the selected sample method, the nature of the sample is influenced by its sample size, response rate and assessment of non-response bias.

First of all we will address the issue of sample size. Researchers struggling to determine the appropriate sample size often circumvent this treacherous task by adopting the motto “the more the merrier”. Although a large sample size can help minimize sampling error (Randall, 1990), inappropriate, inadequate, or excessive sample sizes continue to influence the quality and accuracy of research (Bartlett, 2001). Adequacy of sample size is after all not simply a function of the number of subjects, but rather depends on such factors as how the respondents were selected, the purpose of the research project, the number of groups and subgroups within the sample that will be analyzed, the required accuracy of the results, the cost of the sample, the variability of the population and the intended data analytic procedures (Kumar, 2002; Randall, 1990). Despite the importance of the selected sample size mission statement research seem to pay little attention to the subject. Only six articles provide a statistical-theoretical underpinning for the selected sample size. In most cases the applied sample sizes seem to depend predominantly on the availability of subjects and/or on the sample sizes used by similar research in the past.

Second, the level of response rate. Compared to the findings of Herberlein & Baumgartner (Herberlein, 1978) (response rates for mail questionnaires typically range from 20 to 61%) and Fowler (Fowler, 1988) (response rates below 30% are prevalent for mail surveys), the response rates in mission statement research can be classified as low but satisfactory. One of the reasons for the rather low response rates could be the high amount of studies conducted

with population census data. Bartlett et. al. point out that "many of the studies based on population census data achieve low response rates. Using an adequate sample along with high quality data collection efforts will result in more reliable, valid, and generalizable results" (Bartlett, 2001). The dominant use of mono-method single informant research designs relying on CEO's as the sole key informant could be an additional cause for the low response rates. Some small and popular target populations (e.g. CEO's, deans at universities) are surveyed so often that their willingness to participate in another survey is generally low (Gupta, 2000).

Closely intertwined with the issue of response rate is the topic of non-response bias. Our analysis indicates that mission statement research shows an overall disregard for assessing the level of non-response bias. This conclusion is especially troublesome in combination with the previous addressed issue of rather low response rates. A low response rate enhances the odds that the data is influenced by extraneous subject variables as those who complete the survey may differ on important attributes from those who do not complete the survey (Shermis, 1999).

When aggregating the analysis results about sample size, response rate and the assessment of non-response bias it seems that the comments of Wunsch (Wunsch, 1986) about business education research also hold water for the field of mission statement research: "two of the most consistent flaws include (1) disregard for sampling error when determining sample size, and (2) disregard for response and non response bias".

Taking a closer look at another aspect of external validity, namely the characteristics of the sample items, it leaps to the eye that mission statement research is primarily conducted with samples of profit sector organizations and that the public sector receives barely any attention. In addition, more than half of the studies are conducted in a North-American setting.

Further analysis of the characteristics of the sample items reveals that mission statement research favors the mono-method single-informant approach. In most cases the informant is situated at the highest echelons of the organizational hierarchy. Unfortunately a lot of researchers utilizing a mono-method single-informant approach make little distinction between respondents and informants. In reality respondents and informants are not necessarily equivalent. Response dynamics among informants may be distinct from dynamics among respondents (Gupta, 2000). First of all the information obtained from key informants can be

tainted by informant bias and random error (Kumar, 1993). Furthermore Venkatraman (Venkatraman, 1986) argues that the assumption that the CEO (or someone in an equal position) can provide information at the organizational level of analysis implies that the respondent is able to make complex organization-level judgments and to report unbiased on group or organizational properties rather than personal attitudes and behaviors. Philips (Phillips, 1981) points out that this assumption is “naïve and unlikely to be justified.”

To recapitulate, our analysis indicates that mission statement research is primarily concerned with external validity in detriment of the level of external validity. Although the focus is primarily on external validity the frequent use of a mono-method single-informant approach is perhaps one of the major shortcomings of the field. The frequent use of a mono-method single-informant approach could pose a treat for the general level of external validity of the field.

Construct validity

Construct validity refers “to the degree of correspondence between a construct and its operational definitions. [Are the] study’s variables adequately defined and measured by appropriate instruments, procedures, manipulations or methods?” (Buelens, 2005).

Just like external validity, construct validity is concerned with the generalizability of study results. But where external validity involves generalizing from a study context, construct validity refers to the degree to which inferences can be made from the operationalizations in a study to the theoretical constructs on which those operationalizations were based. The degree of construct validity can be demonstrated by using indicators like correlations, factor analysis, reliability measures and ANOVA ((Buelens, 2005; McGrath, 1982; Scandura, 2000). The analysis points out that the use of mentioned construct validity techniques in mission statement research is limited as most of the articles are descriptive and are not directed towards the development of empirical theory or the testing of causality.

Statistical conclusion validity

Statistical conclusion validity focuses on the correctness of statistics-based inferences and the appropriate use of statistical tests. Possible indicators for the degree of statistical conclusion

validity are the utilized sample sizes, the level of sophistication of data analytic techniques and reported statistical power (Buelens, 2005; Scandura, 2000).

Our results show that the sample sizes of mission statement research are characterized by a rather large spread. A wide variation was found ranging from as low as 18 to as high as 1500. The average sample size is 344.

Analysis of the utilized statistical techniques points out that mission statement research relies heavily on univariate statistics. No less than 44 % of the articles report only univariate statistics. In general statistical techniques serve three main functions: description, inference, and control (Houston, 1990). The frequent use of univariate statistics indicates that description is a common function in mission statement research and that causal analysis comprises only a small proportion of current research. Furthermore we have to conclude that the employed bivariate and multivariate statistics are, in general, relatively unsophisticated

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The article at hand was set up to fulfill two purposes: (a) to determine the characteristics of the employed methodologies in the field of empirical mission statement research and (b) to assess its level of validity. Utilizing a five dimensional code sheet (primary data location and means of data collection, level of analysis, sample characteristics, type of analysis and time frame) we systematically analyzed the methodology employed in the 63 identified empirical articles. Based on the results of the analysis we consequently assessed the general level of validity (Buelens, 2005; McGrath, 1982; Scandura, 2000).

The primary and major contribution of the conducted review is the fact that it provides empirically support for various assumptions about the nature of the field of empirical mission statement research (Baetz, 1996; Bart, 1998b, , 1998a, , 2001; David, 1989; Klemm, 1991; Smith, 2001; Wilson, 1992). Our systematic review demonstrates that the empirical basis supporting the field of mission statement research is indeed rather narrow. Moreover, the results indicate that a reliable and recognized base of empirical research on mission statements is for the greater part lacking. Most of the identified articles are mere descriptive and not directed towards the development of empirically underpinned theories or at testing causality (Houston, 1990). Furthermore our analysis showed that the methodological anemia of empirical mission statement research has a negative effect on the general level of validity of the field.

Based on these findings we urge the field of mission statement research to focus more on developing conceptual frameworks and to test these concepts and theories empirically. The necessary shift from primarily descriptive to empirically rooted research will force the field to adopt more complex and varied research designs. The adoption of more complex and varied research designs will ameliorate its general level of validity and wipe out the existing shortcomings.

First of all, more complex research designs automatically imply the use of more specialized and sophisticated techniques (Buelens, 2005). When executed with the necessary methodological and statistical rigorousness the level of construct validity and statistical conclusion validity will drastically improve.

Second, the application of more varied research designs will contribute to the level of external and internal validity. Our results indicate that the field struggles to conciliate the different demands of external and internal validity. The predilection of the field for non-experimental research designs resulted in a focus on external validity at the expense of internal validity. In order to restore the balance between internal and external validity future mission statement research can follow several paths. A first option is to focus simultaneously on both types of validity. A method to address both internal and external validity issues is triangulation. Triangulation suggest the combination of different research strategies in one and the same study so that one can build on the strength of each research strategy and minimizes the flaws of any single approach (Scandura, 2000). Another option is to focus on longitudinal research designs as an antidote for the prevalent cross-sectional designs. A focus on longitudinal designs will foster the further exploration of one of the fundamental questions in mission statement research, namely does the development and implementation of a mission statement contributes to the performance of an organization?

Furthermore we suggest broadening the scope of mission statement research. The majority of mission statement research is conducted at organizational level using a mono-method-single-informant approach. Questions can be placed at the appropriateness of this method. Seeing the presumed influence of mission statements on the behavior and/or attitudes of individual organizational members, measurements at the individual unit of analysis seem to be in order. More research at individual level could for example establish the organizational scope of

mission statements. Do mission statements have an impact from the top to bottom of the organization or is its significance limited to senior management? Worded differently: are mission statements an organizational-cultural instrument or an instrument for senior strategy makers? Querying multiple informants at various organizational levels could answer this question.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The generalizability of the study at hand is limited due to the delineation of the research field. The employed research design focuses only on published articles. Non-published papers, conference papers or PhD-studies for example are not analyzed. For future research it would be advisable to expand the scope of the research strategy. Especially the research strategies employed in PhD-studies could provide the tools to nuance the findings of this study or provide insight in the latest research developments within the field.

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Appendix 1: Details of the selection process

Omitted empirical articles:

1. Brabet, J., Klemm, M. 1994. Sharing the Vision: Company Mission Statements in Britain and France. *Long Range Planning*, **27**, 84-94.
2. Chun, R., Davies, G. 2001. E--reputation: The role of mission and vision statements in positioning strategy. *Journal of Brand Management*, **8**, 315-334.
3. Fey, C., Denison, D. 2003. Organizational culture and effectiveness: Can American theory be applied in Russia? *Organization Science*, **14**, 686-706
4. Lewkonja, R. 2001. The missions of medical schools: the pursuit of health in the service of society. *BMC Medical Education*, **1**,
5. Rigby, D. 2001. Putting tools to the test: senior executives rate 25 top management tools. *Strategy & Leadership*, **29**, 4-12.
6. Rigby, D., Crawford, G. 2000. Making the most of management tools and techniques: a survey from Bain and Company. *Strategic Change*, **9**, 269-274.
7. Rigby, R. 1998. Mission Statements. *Management Today*, March, 56-58.
8. Rycraft, J., 1994. The party isn't over: The agency role in the retention of public Child Welfare Caseworkers. *Social Work*, **39**, 75-80
9. Withrow, B. 1995. Manage the management tools. *Canadian Business Review*, **22**, 28-30.
10. Zairi, M., Letza, S. 1994. Corporate Reporting. *Management Decision*, **32**, 30-40

Reasons for omitting empirical articles:

1. The empirical data from the British sample in the article was already reported in an earlier published article by the authors Klemm, M., Sanderson, S. & Luffman, G. (1994 The empirical data from the France sample was so scarcely documented that it was impossible to conduct a proper analysis.
2. The authors of the article use the composed research variable "mission statements and vision statements". It was impossible to deduce with any accuracy empirical data regarding solely mission statements.
3. The authors of the article use the composed research variable "mission statements and vision statements". It was impossible to deduce with any accuracy empirical data regarding solely mission statements.
4. The empirical data from the sample was so scarcely documented that it was impossible to conduct a proper analysis.
5. The author of the article uses the composed research variable "mission statements and vision statements". It was impossible to deduce with any accuracy empirical data regarding solely mission statements.
6. The authors of the article use the composed research variable "mission statements and vision statements". It was impossible to deduce with any accuracy empirical data regarding solely mission statements.
7. The author of the article uses the composed research variable "mission statements and vision statements". It was impossible to deduce with any accuracy empirical data regarding solely mission statements.
8. The author of the article defines "mission" as general concept and not as a formal written statement.

9. The empirical data in the article was already reported in an earlier published article by the author Rigby, R.
10. The article focuses on the content of corporate reports

Appendix 2: Reviewed empirical articles

1. Amato, C., Amato, L. (2002).Corporate commitment to quality of life: evidence from company mission statements. *Journal of Marketing Theory & Practice*, **10**, 69-88.
2. Analoui, F., Karami, A. (2002).CEO's and development of the meaningful mission statement. *Corporate governance*, **2**, 13-20.
3. Baetz, M., Bart, C. (1996).Developing mission statements which work. *Long Range Planning*, **29**, 526-533.
4. Bart, C. (1996a).High tech firms: Does mission matter? *Journal of High Technology Management Research*, **7**, 209-225.
5. Bart, C. (1996b).The impact of mission on firm innovativeness. *International Journal of Technology Management*, **11**, 479-493.
6. Bart, C. (1997a).Industrial firms and the power of mission. *Industrial Marketing Management*, **26**, 371-383.
7. Bart, C. (1997b).Sex, Lies and mission statements. *Business Horizons*, **40**, 9-18.
8. Bart, C. (1998a).A comparison of mission statements and their rationales in innovative and non-innovative firms. *International Journal of Technology Management*, **16**, 64-77.
9. Bart, C. (2000a).The relationship between mission and innovativeness in the airline industry: an exploratory investigation. *International Journal of Technology Management*, **20**, 475-489.
10. Bart, C. (2001a).Exploring the Application of Mission Statements on the Internet. *Journal of Electronic Commerce*, **11**, 360-368.
11. Bart, C. (2001b).Measuring the mission effect in human intellectual capital. *Journal of Intellectual Capital Research*, **2**, 320-330.
12. Bart, C. (2004a).The governance role of the board in strategy: An initial progress report. *International journal of Corporate Governance and Ethics*, **1**, 111-125.
13. Bart, C. (2004b).Innovation, Mission Statements and Learning. *International Journal of Innovation and Learning*, **27**, 544-561.
14. Bart, C., Baetz, M. (1998b).The relationship between mission statements and firm performance: an exploratory study. *Journal of Management Studies*, **35**, 823-853.
15. Bart, C., Bontis, N. (2003).Distinguishing Between the Board and Management in Company Mission: Implications for Corporate Governance. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, **4**, 361-381.
16. Bart, C., Bontis, N., Taggar, S. (2001c).A model of the impact of mission statements on firm performance. *Management Decision*, **39**, 19-35.
17. Bart, C., Hupfer, M. (2004c).Mission statements in Canadian Hospitals. *Journal of Health Organization Management*, **18**, 92-110.
18. Bart, C., Tabone, J. (1998c).Mission Statement Rationales and Organizational Alignment in the Not-for-Profit Health Care Sector. *Health Care Management Review*, **23**, 54-69.
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20. Bart, C., Tabone, J. (2000b).Mission statements in Canadian not-for-profit hospitals: Does process matter? *Health Care Management Review*, **25**, 45-53.

21. Bartkus, B., Glassman, M., McAfee, B. (2002). Do Large European, US and Japanese Firms Use Their Web Sites to Communicate Their Mission? *European Management Journal*, **20**, 423-429.
22. Bartkus, B., Glassman, M., McAfee, B. (2004). A Comparison of the Quality of European, Japanese and U.S. Mission Statements: A Content Analysis. *European Management Journal*, **22**, 393-402.
23. Bhat-Schelbert, K., Lipsky, M., Steele, H., Sharp, L. (2004). Mission statements: What do they tell us about family medicine training programs? *Family Medicine*, **36**, 243-247.
24. Biloslavo, R. (2004). Web-based mission statements in Slovenian enterprises. *Journal for East European Management Studies*, **9**, 265-277.
25. Brightman, H., Sayeed, L. (1994). The impact of organizational level and affiliation on corporate mission priorities. *Journal of Education for Business*, **69**, 167-171.
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28. Busch, M., Folaron, G. (2005). Accessibility and clarity of state child welfare agency mission statements. *Child Welfare*, **84**, 415-430.
29. Campbell, D., Shrivies, P., Bohmbach-Saager, H. (2001). Voluntary Disclosure of Mission Statements in Corporate Annual Reports: Signaling What and To Whom. *Business and Society Review*, **106**, 65-87.
30. Cochran, D., David, F. (1986). Communication effectiveness of organizational mission statements. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, **14**, 108-118.
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33. David, F. (1989). How Companies Define Their Mission. *Long Range Planning*, **22**, 90-97.
34. David, F., David, F. (2003). It's Time to Redraft Your Mission Statement. *Journal of Business Strategy*, **24**, 11-14.
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41. Germain, R., Cooper, B. (1990). How a customer mission statement affects company performance. *Industrial Marketing Management*, **19**, 47-54.
42. Gibson, K., Newton, D., Cochran, D. (1990). An empirical investigation of the nature of hospital mission statements. *Health Care Management Review*, **15**, 35-45.

43. Greengarten-Jackson, J., Choi Yau, S., Gitlow, H., Scabdura, T. (1996).Mission statements in service and industrial corporations. *International Journal of Quality Science*, **1**, 48-61.
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46. Kalis, A., van Delden, J., Schermer, M. (2004)."The good life" for demented persons living in nursing homes. *International Psychogeriatrics*, **16**, 429-439.
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48. Klemm, M., Sanderson, S., Luffman, G. (1991).Mission Statements: Selling Corporate Values to Employees. *Long Range Planning*, **24**, 73-78.
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50. Morris, R. (1996).Developing a mission for a diversified company. *Long Range Planning*, **29**, 103-115.
51. O'Conner, M. (2005).Mission statement: an example of exclusive language in palliative care? *International Journal of Palliative Nursing*, **11**, 190-195.
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56. Richman, J., Wright, P. (1994).Mission impossible or paradise regained? *Personnel Review*, **23**, 61-67.
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60. Vardi, Y., Wiener, Y., Popper, M. (1989).The value content of organizational mission as a factor in the commitment of members. *Psychological reports*, **65**, 27-34.
61. Weiss, J., Piderit, S. (1999).The Value of Mission Statements in Public Agencies. *Journal of Public Administration Research & Theory*, **9**, 193-223.
62. Williams, J., Smythe, W., Hadjistavropoulos, T., Malloy, D., Martin, R. (2005).A study of thematic content in hospital mission statements: A question of values. *Health Care Management Review*, **30**, 304-314.
63. Wright, N. (2002).Mission and reality and why not? *Journal of Change Management*, **3**, 30-44.

Figure 1

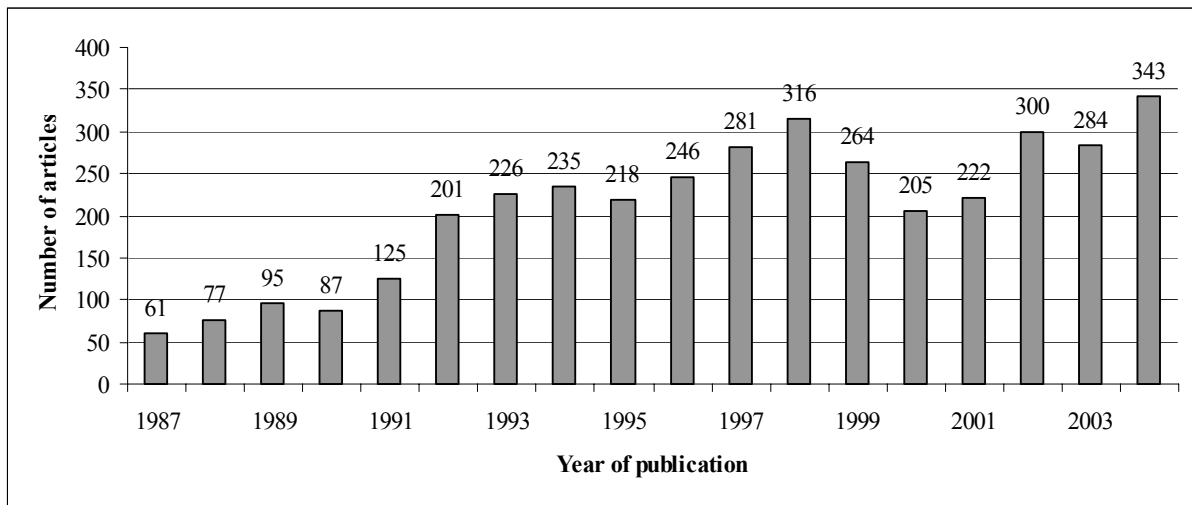


Figure 1
Articles listed in Proquest-database mentioning the concept
“mission statement” in citation and/or abstract (total of 3,786) by year of publication

Figure 2

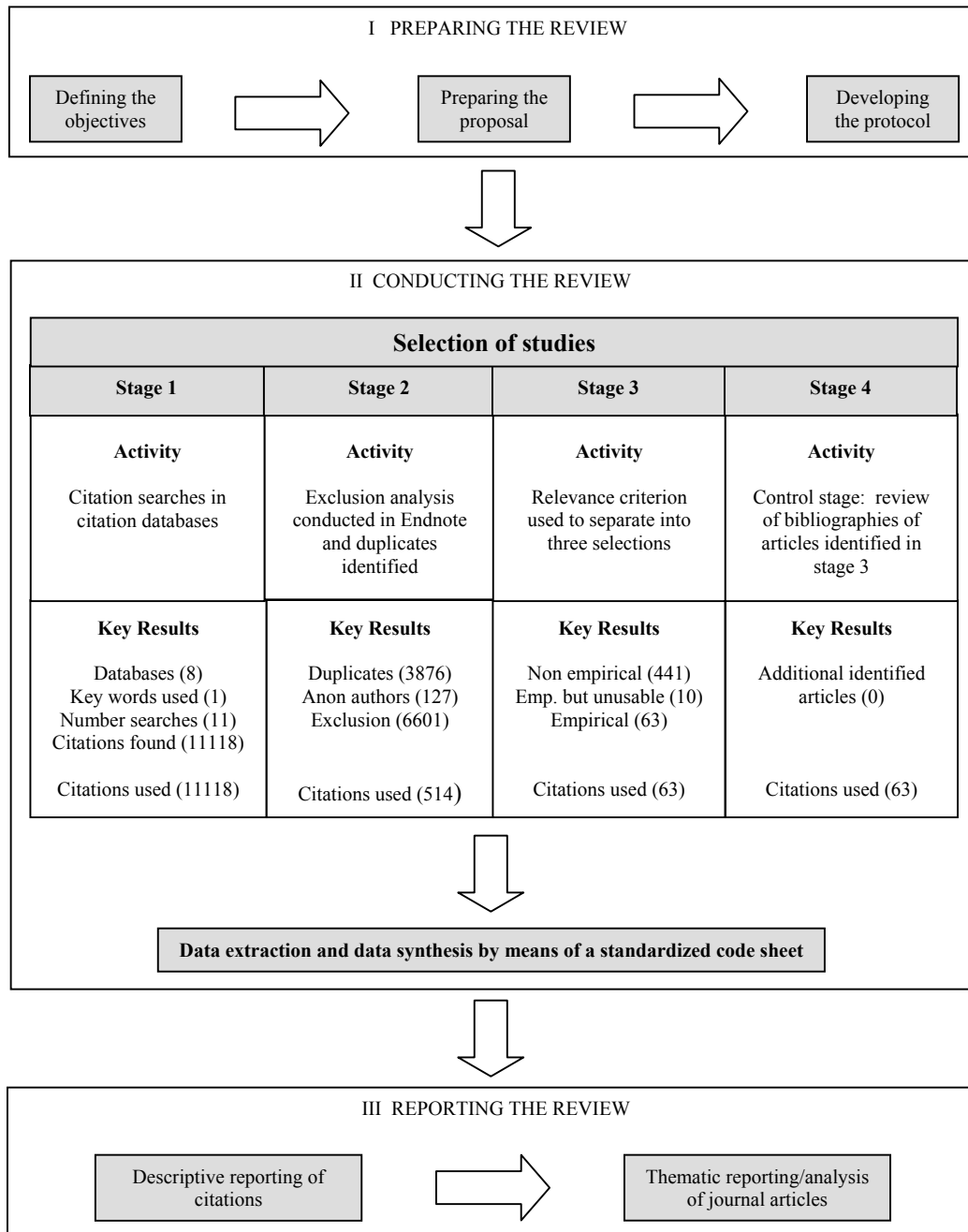


Figure 2
The systematic review process (based on (Thorpe, 2005))

Figure 3

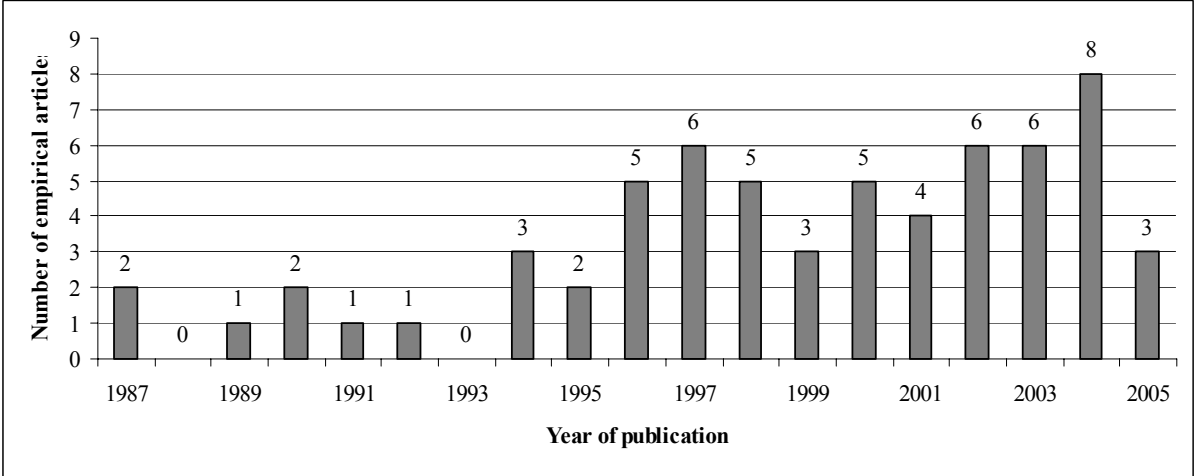


Figure 3
Identified empirical mission statements articles by year of publication

Table 1

Table 1		
Sources of analyzed articles		
	Number of journals	Number of articles
Journals listed in SSCI	18	34
Journals not listed in SSCI but with double blind peer review process	22	26
Other	3	3
Total	43	63

Table 2

Table 2							
Primary location of data and means of data collection							
Primary location of data	Means of data collection						
	Overall		Questionnaire	Archival	Interview	Other	Not Reported
	#	%	#	#	#	#	#
Survey	39	62	38	0	1	0	0
Archival	21	32	5	16	0	0	0
Mix	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Other	1	1	0	0	0	1	0
Not reported	2	4	0	0	0	0	2
Total	63	100%	43	16	1	1	2

Table 3

Table 3						
Level of analysis						
	Setting of study					
	Overall		Survey	Archival	Other	Not reported
	#	%	#	#	#	#
Individual	5	8%	5	0	0	0
Group	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Organizational	58	92%	40	15	0	3
Mixed	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Total	63	100%	45	15	0	3

Table 4

Table 4				
Organizational position of respondent				
	Level of analysis			
	Overall		Individual	Organizational
	#	%	#	#
Top management	29	46%	1	28
Mix management	3	5%	0	3
Mix of all organizational members	4	6%	4	0
Not reported	2	3%	0	2
Not applicable	25	40%	0	25
Total	63	100%	5	58

Table 5

Table 5								
Study population								
Type of sample	Geographic location							
	Overall		Europe	N-America	Asia	Oceania	Mix	Not reported
	#	%	#	#	#	#	#	#
Private sector	40	64%	12	23	0	0	5	0
Public sector	4	6%	0	4	0	0	0	0
Not-for-profit	14	22%	4	9	0	1	0	0
Mixed	5	8%	0	1	0	1	1	2
Not Reported	0	0%	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0%	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	63	100%	16	37	0	2	6	2

Table 6

Table 6				
Sample characteristics				
Sample design	Presence of mission statement			
	Overall		Sample feature	Non sample feature
	#	%	#	#
Non probability	61	97%	32	29
Probability	2	3%	2	0
Total	63	100%	34	29

Table 7

Table 7		
Sample size and response rate		
	#	%
Sample size (N)		
Mean	334	-
Standard deviation	344	-
Largest sample	1500	-
Smallest sample	18	-
Sample spread		
Below 50	8	16%
51-100	14	28%
101 – 250	5	10%
251-500	15	30%
Above 500	7	14%
Not reported	1	2%
Total	50	100%
Spread of response rate		
0%-10%	0	0%
11%-20%	1	2%
21%-30%	9	18%
31%-40%	5	10%
41%-50%	2	4%
51%-60%	3	6%
61%-70%	4	8%
71%-80%	0	0%
81%-90%	2	4%
91%-99%	0	0%
Not reported	1	2%
Not applicable	23	46%
Total	50	100%
Assessing non response bias		
Reported	6	12%
Not reported	22	44%
Not applicable	22	44%
Total	50	100%

Table 8

Table 8	
Type of analysis	#
Qualitative Techniques	
Content analysis	48
Conducted by researcher(s)	35
Conducted by respondents	13
Descriptive Analysis	
Frequencies	43
mean	11
median	5
std	9
Hypothesis Testing	
Cross-tabulation and Chi-square test	15
T-test	14
Anova	7
manova	1
Kruskall-Wallis median test	1
Dimensionality Reduction	
Factor analysis	3
Principal components analysis (PCA)	1
Partial least squares model (structural equation modeling (SEM) technique)	2
Correlation and Regression Analysis	
Correlations	16
Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression	3
Stepwise regression	2