The Relationship Between Stakeholder Communication in Mission Statements and Shareholder Value

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Which stakeholders are addressed in mission statements, and what is conveyed to them? Is stakeholder communication related to shareholder value? These questions were explored in a computer-aided textual analysis of 352 Fortune 500 firm mission statements. The missions were classified according to their attentiveness to five primary stakeholders, and attentiveness was compared to shareholder value as operationalized by market value-added (MVA). MVA was associated with employee and shareholder attentiveness across the sample, and with societal and customer stakeholders in two of ten industry sectors, suggesting that stakeholder communication may be related to competitive advantage and shareholder value through stakeholder trust.

INTRODUCTION

Recently a growing segment of stakeholder theory research has involved investigations of the instrumental nature of stakeholder management. That is, a number of researchers have investigated the relationship between stakeholder management and corporate performance with an underlying premise that better stakeholder management leads to better stockholder performance (Agle, et al., 2008). Stakeholder management consists of the attitudes, structures, and processes that require simultaneous attention to the legitimate interests of all stakeholders (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Agle, et al. (2008) note that a common finding within this research is that corporate performance is the same, with or without a stakeholder focus. Yet the definitions of corporate performance in these studies have not been consistent, as researchers have explored the relationships between stakeholder management and accounting, shareholder, and corporate social performance (e.g. Agle, Mitchell, & Sonnenfeld, 1999; Bartkus, Glassman, & McAfee, 2006; Hillman & Keim, 2001). The results of this research have therefore provided a promising although incomplete representation of this relationship. This study seeks to expand this representation by exploring the relationship between stakeholder communication in corporate mission statements and shareholder value.

The literature suggests that the primary purposes of mission statements are to define the firm's present or future focus, and serve as the foundation for strategic planning (Abell, 1980; Ireland & Hitt, 1992; Pearce, 1982). An underlying assumption is that the mission has a substantive role, that is, its purpose is to distinguish one firm from another by conveying a real and unique set of organizational objectives, values, and future actions. This article offers an alternative view of missions by investigating their use as stakeholder signaling media; missions may also serve a symbolic role (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Glynn & Abzug, 2002; Spence, 1974). More simply, I seek to explain how organizations communicate with their stakeholders in mission statements, and investigate the relationship between mission statement language and shareholder value. Communicating with stakeholders in missions may be one way that firms build relationships with their primary stakeholders (c.f. Jones, 1995). These relationships, in turn, could become intangible assets that lead to competitive advantage (Hillman & Keim, 2001). Dervitsiotis (2003) argues that building trust through conversation with internal and external stakeholders is needed for sustainable excellence.

But which stakeholders are addressed in mission statements, and what is conveyed to these stakeholders? Is stakeholder communication related to shareholder value, and if so, communication with which stakeholder? These questions are explored in a computer-aided textual analysis of the mission statements of 352 Fortune 500 firms. The missions were classified according to the degree of stakeholder attentiveness to five primary stakeholders. These classifications were then compared to shareholder value as operationalized by market value-added (MVA). Results of the analyses for stakeholder attentiveness showed distinct differences across the sample, and also according to Global Industry Classification Standard (GICS) sector. Mission language varied with respect to which stakeholders were addressed and what was conveyed to them. MVA was related to shareholder and employee attentiveness across the firms, and also to societal and customer stakeholders in two GICS sectors, supporting the notion that stakeholder communication may be related to competitive advantage and shareholder value through stakeholder trust. In the next sections, the purposes of mission statements and their multiple roles are addressed, followed by a discussion of mission language and shareholder value. Next is a description of the research methods used in the study, followed by the findings and their interpretation. The article concludes with the implications of this research.

STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION IN MISSION STATEMENTS

Mission statements serve multiple roles, but their development is widely considered to be the first step in strategic planning (Abell, 1980) and the basis or starting point for all activities in formulating strategies (David, 2001). The mission statement provides the framework needed for strategic decision-making, is broadly defined, and distinguishes a business from other firms of its type (Pearce, 1982). The literature therefore advises that the primary purpose of the mission statement is to demonstrate distinctiveness. Because missions help focus the organization on what matters (Ireland & Hitt, 1992), the process of developing a mission statement should create an "emotional bond" and "sense of mission" between the organization and its employees (Campbell & Yeung, 1991). It can be inferred from goal setting theory (Latham & Locke, 1979) that through involvement in the process of developing a mission statement, managers and employees typically become more committed to the organization because they understand more fully what the firm is striving to achieve. A mission statement might therefore be the basis for a path to competitive advantage.

Missions may also be used by organizations to express their identity. An effective mission statement may create an organizational identity larger than the limits placed on the firm by any individual (Pearce & David, 1987). Organizational identity, the central, distinctive, and enduring characteristics of an organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985), is formulated and expressed through words and often exists in official company documents, such as mission statements or codes of ethics (Rindova & Schultz, 1998). The expression of an organizational identity is a way that organizations describe themselves to stakeholders and the way that those stakeholders develop images of organizations (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). An identity that creates a distinctive image in the minds of customers or other constituencies can have positive reputational impacts that can be a source of competitive advantage (Stimpert, Gustafson, & Sarason, 1998).

Thus, the literature suggests that mission statements are the beginning point on the path to competitive advantage, first as a direction-setting mechanism, and second as an image-building mechanism. In this article, I suggest that the mission may also be used as a relationship-building mechanism to recognize the needs, values, and claims of stakeholders. Although Pearce (1982) and Ireland and Hitt (1992) have noted the role of missions in acknowledging and prioritizing stakeholder claims, very little research has investigated this function. The few studies in this area (Bartkus, et al., 2006; Campbell, Shrives, & Bohmbach-Saager, 2001; Greenley & Foxall, 1997; Omran, Atrill, & Pointon, 2002) have focused on which stakeholders are addressed, but have not analyzed the language used to target stakeholders or the outcome of that targeted language.

Recently researchers have begun to notice the importance of building trust and relationships with stakeholders in order to secure their support and meet their expectations while earning competitive advantages (Dervitsiotis, 2003; Jones, 1995). Jones (1995) argues that firms that build relationships with their stakeholders through mutual trust and cooperation will have advantages over those that do not – it is less efficient to curb managerial opportunism than it is to contract with stakeholders on the basis of trust. Dervitsiotis (2003) raises the importance of trust further by asserting that firms must go beyond meeting the needs of stakeholders by demonstrating commitment to them so that they become bonded to the organization and form a relationship that becomes a basis for sustainable excellence.

Hence, the mission statement may serve a symbolic role (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Glynn & Abzug, 2002) when used to nurture relationships with stakeholders. Language is a powerful tool of social influence (Pfeffer, 1992) as rhetoric may be used to persuade audiences and coordinate social action (Green, 2004). Mission language may fulfill an important rhetorical need for both firms and their stakeholders. It may allow firms to be judged on their intent, or the symbolism of what they are seeking to accomplish, rather than their actions (Pfeffer, 1992). Whereas it may satisfy stakeholders by building trust and appealing to individuals' identities, serving an important sense-giving function that leads to socially complex relationships with stakeholders and long-term value (Pfeffer, 1981). Organizational claims in mission statements may be a way for firms to increase their stakeholders' perceptions of dependency on the organization (Scott & Lane, 2000).

The first research question to be explored in this study is therefore:

Which stakeholders are addressed in mission statements, and what is conveyed to them?

Stakeholder Communication Motives

Firms may have differing motives for communicating with stakeholders in mission statements. These include legitimacy management (Suchman, 1995), reputation building (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990), or even impression management (Elsbach, Sutton, & Principe, 1998). The mission, along with top management and structural arrangements, serves a key symbolic function by obtaining environmental support through the demonstration of the consistency of organizational values with those of the larger society (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). In addition to meeting the needs of shareholders, companies must demonstrate that the needs of many different stakeholders are being served (Bart, 1997).

Legitimacy management relies heavily on the communication between the organization and its various audiences (Suchman, 1995), so an important task of the published mission statement is to signify which stakeholders and what interests will capture organizational attention (Campbell, et al., 2001). Suchman (1995) defines legitimacy as the generalized perception that an entity's actions are desirable, proper, or appropriate within a system of norms, values, or beliefs. Instead of revealing actual organizational objectives and activities in the mission, organizations might portray their objectives and values as being consistent with those of their constituents (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Richardson, 1985).

Missions may also be used to rationalize and explain firm behavior to build reputation, as stakeholders assign reputational status by comparing corporate practices across firms (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). "Being good may not be good enough if it is not communicated (Dollinger, Golden, & Saxton, 1997, p. 138)." Additionally, firms may use mission language as an anticipatory impression management tactic to influence stakeholders' perceptions of upcoming events (Elsbach, et al, 1998).

Commonalities in Mission Language

Despite these differing motivations for communicating with stakeholders, I also expect to find common mission statement language, since firms may target stakeholders that are shared with other firms. Stakeholder recognition and concern might be similar within industries as the survival of some organizations might be dependent on how well the organization manages the demands of internal and external relationships (e.g., employees and suppliers), while for others survival might be more dependent on the ceremonial demands of institutional environments (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Mission statement content might become part of an organizational macroculture, or idiosyncratic organization-related belief system that is shared among top managers across organizations (Abrahamson & Fombrun, 1994). There might also be common ways of operating or competing that become industry recipes (Spender, 1989) that are followed by most firms and is reflected in their mission statements. The norms of mission statement content might vary by industry because organizational concern for legitimacy varies by industry (Deephouse, 1996; Glynn & Abzug, 2002) and because firms might attempt to mimic high status / higher reputation firms within their industry and satisfy stakeholders that provide access to resources (Porac, et. al, 1995).

I also expect that mission statement language will be similar to some degree across the broad institutional environment of firms (Glynn & Abzug, 2002). At this level of analysis, industry power and political pressures are muted, allowing institutional conformity to cross industry borders (Glynn & Abzug, 2002). Shared understandings and norms are general, and broad societal expectations permeate organizations (Dacin, 1997). Within the broad institutional environment, although organizations might not be directly connected, they operate under similar conditions and so exhibit similar characteristics (Scott, 2003). It might not be premature to believe that the mission statement itself has become institutionalized. Common mission language may explain why some mission statements are perceived as failing to provide direction and lacking specificity (Bart, 1997; Leuthesser and Kohli; 1997).

STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION AND SHAREHOLDER VALUE

Why may stakeholder communication be related to shareholder value? Jones (1995) notes that instrumental stakeholder theory describes what will happen if managers of firms behave in certain ways. Unless managers address the needs of stakeholders, there will be an adverse effect on company performance and on shareholder returns (Freeman, 1984; Omran, et al., 2002). As discussed above, firms that build stakeholder trust through cooperation will have advantages over those that do not (Jones, 1995). Firms must at least meet stakeholder needs, but would be better off exceeding them in order to develop mutually beneficial relationships (Dervitsiotis, 2003; Freeman, 1984). Hillman and Keim (2001) argue that the development of long-term relational exchanges with stakeholders rather than transactional exchanges "can constitute intangible, socially complex resources that may enhance firms' ability to outperform competitors in terms of long-term value creation. (p. 127)." Dervitsiotis (2003) agrees and maintains that organizations build trust through relationship building, effective coordination in plan execution, and effective methods for exposing opportunities. He states that at the center of these methods are conversations with stakeholders that contribute to the long-term success of an organization. Effective communication and conversations create shared meanings and "enable people in a human interaction to be open, creative, and constructive (Dervitsiotis, 2003, p. 518)." Pfeffer (1981) also notes that management's effect is primarily through expressive or symbolic action, and to a lesser extent substantive action. Consequently, I expect to find mission language that targets stakeholders to be related to shareholder value.

In spite of this, there is likely to be a wide variation in the priority and attention given to stakeholders across companies (Greenley & Foxall, 1997; Oliver, 1991; Scott & Lane, 2000). The relative level of attentiveness to stakeholders' beliefs, values, and needs and the responsiveness to those demands may vary considerably across organizations (Oliver 1991; Scott & Lane, 2000). Scott and Lane (2000) predict that organizations will be more attentive to stakeholders that are perceived as "salient." Salient stakeholders are those that managers pay attention to in order to achieve certain ends; these stakeholders are perceived as powerful, and have legitimate and urgent claims (Mitchell, et al., 1997). Yet Wright and Rwabizambuga (2006) observe that "… firm-specific characteristics may influence the way in which different firms interpret and react to similar institutional pressures (p. 110)." For these reasons, and because firms serve multiple stakeholders, each applying different criteria in evaluating corporate performance, (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Freeman, 1984), I expect that there will be a relationship between stakeholder communication and shareholder value. Firms that are responsive to stakeholders in ways that are appropriate to their values, needs, and claims, are likely to be rewarded with continuing relationships that may be difficult to duplicate in the short term (Hillman & Keim, 2001). These relationships may in turn lead to enhanced shareholder value.

The second research question to be explored in this study is therefore:

Is stakeholder communication related to shareholder value?

RESEARCH METHODS

Sample and Stakeholder Selection

Since not all firms publish or use a formal mission statement, I wrote directly to the CEOs of the 2005 Fortune 500 firms asking for a copy of their mission or vision statement. For those firms that did not respond, a student assistant visited the company web site and/or searched annual reports in the Lexis/Nexis database for the company missions. This procedure resulted in a sample of 352 mission statements.

Organizations have a wide variety of stakeholders as a stakeholder may be defined as any individual or group that can affect or is affected by an organization (Agle, et al., 1999; Freeman, 1984). Stakeholders may also be defined as primary if an organization's success depends on them, or as secondary if they at least influence an organization (Clarkson, 1995; Donaldson & Preston, 1995). I chose to use the definition of Agle, et al. (1999) for the analysis. This definition addresses Freeman's (1984) generic stakeholder groups: shareholders, employees, customers, government bodies, and community/charitable groups (later referred to as "society").

Computer-Aided Textual Analysis

Stakeholder Identification

The 352 mission statements were coded and analyzed with NVivo 8 qualitative data analysis software. Data coding consisted of several steps, coinciding with the objectives of investigating stakeholder communication. First, the mission data were coded according to their targeted stakeholder audiences. I conducted a text search to find the missions that used the name and/or synonyms of each of the five stakeholders studied (shareholder, employee, customer, government, and society). Both singular and plural word forms were searched, and the search results were checked to verify that the content did refer to the respective stakeholder in context. For example, for the stakeholder "customer," I searched for the words buyer, client, consumer, customer, patron, purchaser, shopper, and all plural forms. This search did not always return applicable content. A company might discuss customer in their mission although not as a stakeholder, but out of context as in the following example: "To strengthen and grow our leadership position by providing storage products across a range of market segments, including desktop computers, midline and nearline storage systems, high-performance servers and consumer electronics." In the few cases like these, I did not code the missions as addressing the stakeholder. When the mission language did address the stakeholder in context, the mission statement was coded accordingly. I searched and coded for the other four stakeholders in a similar manner.

Symbolic or Substantive Language

The second step coded mission language as either *symbolic* or *substantive* in order to reveal the role of each mission statement. Symbolic language is espoused theory (Nicholson, 1994) and may used by organizations in a number of ways. Firms may rationalize their behavior to signal social status (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Pfeffer, 1981; Spence, 1974). They may also use impression management to construct beneficial organizational images (Elsbach, et al., 1998) or express organization identity to allow stakeholders to develop their own images of the firms (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Through symbolism an organization portrays its values and beliefs as consistent with those of its stakeholders or the broader society, suggesting legitimacy or relative reputational status (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Richardson, 1995).

Organizational communications like mission statements remind stakeholders of their affiliation with a firm and the firm's attractiveness (Scott & Lane, 2000). Substantive language is theory in use, or justification before or after an event (Nicholson, 1994). Through substantive language an organization describes real, material change in organizational structures or processes (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990) to conform to stakeholder values or expectations (Richardson, 1985). Firms may also justify decisions or actions that effect stakeholders, either before or after the event (Nicholson, 1994).

Attentiveness

The third coding step involved coding the mission statement language according to the degree of *attentiveness* to stakeholders. This step sought to discover how companies satisfy or balance shareholder, employee, customer, societal, and governmental interests through language. Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997) argue that differing degrees of power, legitimacy, and urgency may be used to classify stakeholders, but that stakeholder salience – the degree to which managers give priority to competing stakeholder claims – may be one way for researchers to identify what stakeholders win managerial attention. Thus, mission language might target or "speak to" stakeholders that management perceives as most salient.

I coded the mission statement language into three categories of stakeholder attentiveness based on Scott and Lane's (2000) proposals that extended Mitchell et al.'s (1997) work. Scott and Lane (2000) propose that in constructing images managers give most attention to stakeholders that they perceive as powerful and as having legitimate and urgent claims. Likewise, they propose that expectant stakeholders would be perceived by managers to have only two of these three attributes, whereas latent stakeholders would be perceived as possessing only one of the three attributes. Similarly, I coded the missions according to three degrees of attentiveness to each stakeholder. The mission text was coded 0 if the stakeholder was not identified, 1 if the stakeholder was identified (mentioned), 2 if the stakeholder's needs, values, or claims were identified, and 3 if the mission identified how the stakeholder's needs, values, or claims would be met. The Appendix presents selected examples of language type (symbolic or substantive) and attentiveness observed and coded in the data set, while Table 1 presents the frequencies of language type and attentiveness as observed in the entire data set.

TABLE 1
LANGUAGE TYPE AND ATTENTIVENESS FREQUENCIES*

Stakeholder	Symbolic language	Substantive language	Not identified	Identified	Needs, values, claims	How meet needs, values, claims
Society	107, 30%	9, 3%	241, 68%	23, 7%	64, 18%	24, 7%
Shareholder	134, 38%	14, 4%	221, 63%	27, 8%	61, 17%	43, 12%
Government	4, 1%	0, 0%	348, 99%	1, 0%	3, 1%	0, 0%
Employee	161, 46%	10, 3%	206, 59%	65, 18%	56, 16%	25, 7%
Customer	280, 80%	8, 2%	96, 27%	82, 23%	105, 30%	69, 20%

* Note that frequencies and percentages for language type may represent multiple references to stakeholders; percentages refer to the percentage of missions in the data set (352)

Measures and Statistical Analysis

So that I could make comparisons across industry environments, I categorized the Fortune 500 mission statement data according to Global Industry Classification Standard (GICS) sectors. This step collapsed the original 69 industries of the sample into ten economic sectors, allowing for more straightforward comparisons across the sample. GICS is a classification system that identifies a company according to its business activity (http://www.standardandpoors.com).

I operationalized *shareholder value* as market value-added (MVA) (Hillman & Keim, 2001), defined as the difference between market value and capital (debt plus equity) at December 31, 2004. Hillman and Keim (2001) indicate that MVA captures the relative success of firms in maximizing shareholder value, without being subject to asset valuation difficulties as is Tobin's *Q*, another measure of net present value. Data for MVA was obtained from the *Compustat* database.

Research question one was explored by analyzing the mission texts with the aid of NVivo 8 qualitative software, whereas question two was explored using the Kruskal-Wallis analysis of variance test. The Kruskal-Wallis test is a nonparametric test that requires few data assumptions as it uses the rankings of scores on variables rather than the actual observations. This test was necessary to account for skewness of the dependent variable. Cases from the groups were combined and ranked, and when there were ties, average ranks were assigned. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test (the H statistic) can be interpreted similarly to the Analysis of Variance tests (Norusis, 1990).

RESULTS

Research question one asked: *Which stakeholders are addressed in mission statements, and what is conveyed to them?* As demonstrated in Table 1, *customer* was the stakeholder most targeted by the Fortune 500 sample (73%), whereas *government* was the least targeted (1%). The *society*, *shareholder*, and *employee* stakeholders were targeted by 32%, 37%, and 41% of the firms, respectively. With respect to what was conveyed, or the level of attentiveness, most firms either only identified stakeholders (level 1), or identified the needs, values, and claims of the stakeholders (level 2). Very few addressed how they intended to meet the needs, values, and claims of stakeholders (level 3); this level of attentiveness was the highest for the *customer* stakeholder at 20%. Also shown in Table 1 is that *symbolic* language was used by the great majority of firms in the sample. Only four percent (or less) of the companies described real actions in the mission statement.

Research question two asked: *Is stakeholder communication related to shareholder value?* Table 2 reports the results of the Kruskal-Wallis analyses of variance of MVA by degrees of attentiveness across the entire sample. As reported in the table, MVA was marginally significantly different for *shareholder* (p = .062), and significantly different for *employee (p = .027)*. MVA was not significantly different for *society*, *government*, or *customer*.

TABLE 2
KRUSKAL-WALLIS ANALYSES OF VARIANCE
MVA BY ATTENTIVENESS*

Stakeholder	Not identified	Identified	Needs, values, claims	How meet needs, values, claims	*H*, d.f., *p* level
Society	155.76	142.9	147.82	150.52	.69, 3, .876
Shareholder	161.94	146.04	150.25	121.39	7.349, 3, .062
Government	152.4	111.0	227.33	-	2.372, 2, .305
Employee	158.9	122.55	166.2	160.05	9.168, 3, .027
Customer	154.45	149.19	157.02	149.14	.455, 3, .929
* Mean rankings reported					

Table 3 reports the results of the Kruskal-Wallis analyses of variance of MVA by degrees of attentiveness according to each GICS sector. For space-saving reasons, only the significant Kruskal-

Wallis analyses of variance are reported, as full reporting would require 50 rows of data. As shown in Table 3, MVA is significantly different by degree of attentiveness for *employee* in the industrials, consumer staples, and financials sectors. It is also significantly different by degree of attentiveness for *shareholder* in the consumer discretionary and consumer staples sectors. These sector differences appear to be driving the overall significance levels as reported in Table 2. Also shown in Table 3 is a significant difference for *society* in the materials industry sector, and for *customer* in the consumer staples sector.

TABLE 3
KRUSKAL-WALLIS ANALYSES OF VARIANCE
MVA BY ATTENTIVENESS, BY GICS SECTOR*

GICS sector	Stakeholder	Not identified	Identified	Needs, values, claims	How meet needs, values, claims	*H*, d.f., *p* level
15 Materials	Society	11.73	17.00	23.89	21.25	9.791, 3, .02
25 Consumer discretionary	Shareholder	33.94	25.14	26.11	17.33	7.929, 3, .048
30 Consumer staples	Shareholder	21.67	32.00	13.36	24.50	6.766, 3, .08
20 Industrials	Employee	22.77	13.07	29.00	22.33	11.386, 3, .01
30 Consumer staples	Employee	24.89	12.67	17.57	19.00	7.389, 3, .06
40 Financials	Employee	16.13	13.00	21.75	7.00	7.558, 3, .056
30 Consumer staples	Customer	23.00	27.56	17.40	10.67	9.376, 3, .025
* Mean rankings reported; only instances of $p < .10$ shown						

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to show that in addition to demonstrating organizational distinctiveness, corporate mission statements might be used to communicate legitimacy, reputation, or beneficial images to stakeholders through differing degrees of attentiveness. I also explored the relationship between differing degrees of attentiveness and shareholder value as operationalized by MVA. I suggested that I might find similarities and differences in stakeholder communication, and the relationship between stakeholder communication and shareholder value. Firms are subject to a variety of institutional pressures and may respond to stakeholder needs, values, and claims in different ways due to industry norms, or simply due to firm-specific differences. Stakeholder communication may influence shareholder value as stakeholders either support or withhold support from firms in response to firms' addressing of their rhetorical needs.

As discussed above, mission language appears to be both similar and different across the Fortune 500 firms – most addressed the *customer* stakeholder, while very few addressed *government*, and few were attentive to how the needs, values, and claims of stakeholders would be met. Attentiveness to *society*, *shareholder*, and *employee* varied widely across the sample, yet was more consistent in certain sectors. Thus, the relative salience of primary stakeholders appears to be partially driven by industry-specific factors. These results suggest that mission statements that appear to be "rife with clichés" (Leuthesser & Kohli, 1997) or "hype and hysteria" (Bart, 1997), might indeed be meaningful. They might be an important way for firms to provide evidence of their awareness of constituents' concerns, and their responses to those concerns (Pfeffer, 1981). I expect that missions written to challenge and inspire organizational direction setting will have company-specific language, thereby explaining the variance in attentiveness across *society*, *shareholder*, and *employee* stakeholders.

The findings for differences in shareholder value by degree of attentiveness supports the idea that building stakeholder trust through stakeholder communication might be instrumental in attaining competitive advantage. These findings support the literature's suggestion that meeting and/or exceeding the needs of stakeholders has a positive impact on corporate performance (Dervitsiotis, 2003; Freeman, 1984; Hillman & Keim, 2001; Jones, 1995). Stakeholder relationship building through communication may indeed provide intangible resources to firms that provide them advantages over competitors. These findings suggest that the outcomes of language symbolism may be assessed by sentiments of affect, satisfaction, or values and beliefs (Pfeffer, 1981). If firms are attentive to their stakeholders, perhaps stakeholders become more enthusiastic and committed to the organization, giving firms more flexibility in pursuing competitive advantage. That is, they may be judged more on what they are attempting to achieve rather than on their actions (Pfeffer, 1992).

For managers, the findings suggest that there appear to be unique industry profiles of mission language that managers should be aware of when preparing or revising their own company mission statements. Managers, while crafting mission statements, must carefully balance what appear to be multiple ends of the mission statement – the expression of organization distinctiveness and the demonstration of organizational legitimacy or reputation building. A managerial challenge is to draft a mission statement that both challenges and inspires the firm and pleases critical organizational constituents. Deephouse's (1999) theory of strategic balance suggests that to be successful firms must compete (differentiate) and respond to their environments in ways that provide them advantage without sacrificing legitimacy. Firms must therefore be responsive to their multiple constituents in order to meet the demands of their industry and institutional environments. Mission language therefore appears to serve crucial internal and external roles.

This study is not without limitations. Although I found significant differences in the missions analyzed, the broad-brushed nature of the research approach used may not have been sensitive to all the similarities and differences in language that exist in the Fortune 500 missions. Reeves, et al. (2005) note that unregulated organizational documents like mission statements may not be best for describing characteristics found in organizations. Similarly, Swales and Rogers (1995) state that sufficient anomalies between text and context may exist so that reliance only on textual interpretation may be incomplete. The cross-sectional rather than longitudinal nature of this study is also a limitation, as I am not able to provide evidence that mission language leads to increases (or decreases) in shareholder value. Last, shareholder value is only one measure of organizational performance. Other stakeholders are likely to use alternative measures of performance to judge organizations.

Overall, this study suggests that much more research is needed on the communicative nature of mission statements and its impact on corporate performance. The results of this research suggest that missions are used for multiple reasons, but additional research is needed to explore the implications of the findings more deeply. Desmidt, Prinzie, and Decramer (2011) note that determining the specific benefits of communicating a mission statement might help to unravel the complexity of the relationship between mission statements and performance. They call for research that links performance indicators directly to mission statements. For example, researchers could assess the relationship between organizational values stated in missions and degrees of stakeholder support. Finally, perhaps future research could examine word choice and usage in mission statements in order to identify language themes used by firms; firms may "speak" differently to their various stakeholders.

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APPENDIX
EXAMPLES OF LANGUAGE TYPE AND STAKEHOLDER ATTENTIVENESS*

Stakeholder(s)	*Language*	*Attentiveness**	*Example*
EM, CU	Symbolic	ID - EM, ID - CU	Our most valuable assets are our people and our customers. (Archer Daniels Midland)
SO	Symbolic	NVC - SO	The betterment of our society is not a job to be left to a few; it is the responsibility to be shared by all. (Hewlett-Packard)
SH	Symbolic	HNVC - SH	We pledge our dedication to responsibly increasing the shareholder value of your company based upon continued growth, strong finances, productive collaborations and innovation in research and development. (Bristol-Myers Squibb)
SO	Substantive	ID - SO	Adhere to the highest standards of ethical business conduct, treating fairly, and with respect, all those we touch as a company. (Sara Lee)
CU, SH	Substantive	NVC - CU, HNVC - SH	Customers determine when our products are great. A great business serves their needs. In a great business, all product offerings and supporting activities are of high quality and deliver exceptional operating performance through continuous improvement. This means, over the business cycle, a 20% operating return on operating assets for equipment operations and 15% return on equity for non-transfer priced financial services. The result is sustained shareholder value added. (Deere)
CU, EM, SH	Substantive	HNVC - CU, HNVC - EM, HNVC - SH	And profitable growth is what all our stakeholder groups—client, employee, shareholder—desire most from us. Our goal is to grow our business by 15 percent, every year. (Jacobs Engineering Group)
EM	Symbolic	NVC - EM	Mission in being the first in healthcare worker safety, what it has done, and what are its plans for the future. (Becton Dickinson)
CU	Symbolic	HNVC - CU	To be the best…serving our customers by providing peace of mind and enriching their quality of life through our partnership in the management of the risks they face. (Allstate)
SH, EM	Substantive	HNVC - SH, ID – EM	To grow profitably, maximize shareholder value and sustain industry leadership, our diverse team of associates will capitalize on the relationships between our businesses, emphasize applying advanced technology to products and processes, and provide unmatched customer service. (Timken)
SH, EM	Substantive	NVC - SH, NVC - EM	Our goal is to provide superior returns to our shareholders. Profitability is critical to achieving superior returns, building our capital, and attracting and keeping our best people. (Goldman Sachs Group)
* CU = customer; EM = employee; SH = shareholder; SO = society; ID = identify stakeholder; NVC = identify needs, values, claims; HNVC = identify how meet needs, values, claims			