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Abstract

This paper examines the reasons why business organizations often fail to achieve anticipated results from their highly-regarded strategic plans, and this information is then used to determine what educators can do to help executives provide leadership in the firm's total strategic management activities. The focus of the paper is on the importance of aligning executive education with the firm's business strategy through "mission control."

The Current Situation

The Promise and Failure of Strategic Management

The highly competitive global business environment in the 1970s caused lower profits and survival issues for American businesses. Former approaches to long-range planning were not capable of handling the new threats, so business leaders and scholars looked for new solutions. From this search, a new concept called "strategic planning" appeared to be a promising way for executives to effectively deal with the rapid and discontinuous changes occurring in the environment. This concept provided a framework, a set of bounds and limits, and specific objectives for future business activities. A key component of the concept was a mission--a document setting forth the aims, values, and purpose of the organization. The mission served as a guide for decision making in the development and implementation of strategies that would lead to a desirable future state of the organization (Bennis&Nanus, 1985).

In the latter part of the 1980s, the concept of vision, embodied in the new leadership model "visionary leadership", offered the opportunity for an interchange between the fields of leadership studies and strategic planning (Nanus, 1992). The addition of vision, a mental image of a possible and desirable future, to the company's mission gave the mission new power to specify direction, resolve major operational issues, and attract and inspire loyal followers (McNay, 2008). This combination of vision and mission became a major component of the firm's strategic planning process, now called strategic management. Mintzberg (1998) stated that a strategic plan with an inspiring mission is the key feature of the modern definition of executive's leadership and without it; a firm has little chance of survival.

The principles of strategic management are now widely used in most business firms, as well as in many other kinds of organizations and institutions, with the expectation that they will provide specific direction, clear objectives, problem identification, and solutions that will set them apart from other organizations in the same field of work. A strategic plan created by the top executive and supported by the firm's employees is said to enable a firm to identify and pursue new opportunities, withstand competitive challenges, achieve desired results, reinforce follower commitment, and allow a firm to adapt to changing conditions. Most textbooks and scholars boldly state that with a well-crafted and well-executed strategy, the chances are high that the company will be successful (Thompson, Peteraf, Gamble & Strickland, 2012).

Nevertheless, strategic management has not been the panacea that business leaders have been seeking. Researchers report that even though most companies invest large amounts of time and effort in formal strategic planning programs, many see little benefit from the investment (Kaplan &Beinhocker, 2003). Strategic failures are common but not unique to poorly managed companies; even the largest, well-managed firms have incurred heavy losses in recent years due to flawed missions and ill-conceived strategies. Studies by Bossidy and Charan (2002) have shown that only a small percentage of company strategies are effectively planned and implemented. Abraham (1995) has found that approximately seven out of ten companies do not create a mission beyond some general statement of excellence, such as gaining market share or becoming more profitable. Even worse, some executives have developed missions and strategies that benefit only themselves, not their organizations (Naughton, Stone, &Perano, 2002).

There are many reasons why companies are not successful in strategic management activities-- deficiency of knowledge of customers and competitors, weak product and service offerings, over-estimation of available resources, poor communications, and (of significant impact) failure to obtain commitment of employees. However, as significant as these failures may be, the root cause of a large number of them lies elsewhere. Management literature is replete with complaints that the attention given to strategy formulation detracts from strategy implementation, or that the attention given to implementation detracts from strategy formulation (Thompson et al, 2012). But, as this paper argues, the basic problem in strategic management failures does not occur in strategy formulation or in implementation, but at the very beginning of the strategic management process with the failure of executives to create well-crafted, inspiring missions. And, this situation is aggravated during the strategic process by subordinate managers failing to utilize the mission in their day-to-day decision making.

Responsibilities of Top Executives for Strategic Management

Most management writers agree that top executives must be the prime architects of their organizations' strategic plans, and that the success of these plans is directly related to the personal commitment of these individuals (Ryans&Shanklin, 1985). The accepted thinking today is that the chief executive *is* the corporation, and that he or she is responsible for the strategic performance of the business (their immense salaries and bonuses reflect this thinking.) Kotter (1996) points out that assigning responsibility for strategic management to these executives has been a logical choice because of their proven capabilities, existing power base and key role in the organization. He argues that lower-level and middle-level managers do not have the power necessary to break through cultural and traditional barriers to bring about needed change, and further, that most top executives already have the experience, knowledge, and passion needed to lead in these important undertakings.

Thus, it is generally accepted that top executives initiate the strategic management process by overseeing the creation of a mission, which conveys information on the purpose of the firm, a challenging and desirable vision of the future, where the firm is to go, and what it will look like when it gets there. The mission contains other information providing definition of: the current business, accepted values and philosophy of the firm, the needs and wants of major stakeholders, and specific, non-quantified objectives which Drucker (1954) describes as requisite for any business organization to be successful and survive. A survey of current and past strategic plans by Abrahams (1995) reveals that company missions vary widely in content from executive-to-executive and from company-to-company.

The mission is expected to serve as a guide, monitor and control during of the organization's strategic activities, especially during the formulation of the company's business strategy and subsequent implementation plans. The strategy formulation process taught to both managers and executives in business schools generally follows a common pattern (Hamel &Prahalad, 1994): first, managers and specialists conduct detailed analyses of the firm's competitive environment, internal strengths, weaknesses, and potential threats; second, top managers seeks a fit between organizational capabilities and potential opportunities (identified and evaluated through the use of qualitative tools); next, the top executive and key subordinates develop a strategy that will best position the firm against competition.

After the firm's strategy has been formulated, a judicious allocation of available resources is made by senior managers and communicated to the organization. Detailed operational plans are then developed by functional managers and key employees for the implementation phase of the strategic management process. From that point on, all members of the organization are expected to work cooperatively in executing specified programs, projects, and activities (Mintzberg, 1998).

Reasons for Strategic Management Failures

Failure of Executives to Take Charge

Ansoff (1965), other scholars, and several progressive companies (particularly the General Electric Company) introduced the concept of strategic planning in the 1960s. Top management, overwhelmed by the new global environment and unsure of what to do, delegated responsibility for development of their company's strategic plan to newly assigned specialists, called "strategists". The strategists, not really understanding the firm, its markets, its internal operations, or its people, would create a mission for the firm based on their limited information, decide what opportunities and strategies were best for its long-term success, and deliver a fully defined strategic plan for the organization to execute. Functional managers, already busy with company's day-to-day operations, and not having been consulted during the creation of the strategist's plan, did not readily accept the document given them. Consequently, most of these plans were never properly implemented, and the results were often dismal or even disastrous failures (Mintzberg, 1998).

A similar dilemma exists today. The responsibilities facing executives often require knowledge and skills beyond those acquired on the way up the corporate ladder; however, most executives have not received the experience or education needed, usually having worked previously in only one or two functional areas (marketing, finance, production, etc.). In such situations, executives turn to key subordinates or senior functional managers to take responsibility for creating the missions and interpreting them for other members of the organization throughout the strategic management process, but in most cases the results have not been fruitful. The strategic plans so created tend to be focused on the personal interests of an individual or on a particular functional area and, again, are not accepted or supported by lower-level managers and employees during later phases of the program (Kouzes& Posner, 1993).

Failure to Create Strong, Clear Missions

Pearce and Robinson (2003) have noted that although the responsibility of executives to insure the creation of strong missions is stressed in strategic management literature, the lack of attention devoted to the creation of this key element in executive education makes it one of the most neglected and misunderstoodtasks in the entire strategic management process. Nanus (1992, p. xix) found that many books have been written on the components of mission and how to implement them, but they offer quite limited guidance in forming one in the first place. Most executives are well-educated and business schools have a solid reputation for preparing them for new responsibilities, but the information needed to develop strong, inspiring missions does not generally appear in most strategic management courses and programs, as evident by the scantiness of material needed for their creation in popular, widely used textbooks.

Although no studies or definitive research has been found on the percentage of executive education given to teaching mission creation or its use in controlling decision making during the strategic management process, one can evaluate the importance placed on these tasks by the amount of material (or the lack thereof) presented in most textbooks used in executive programs. Generally, the term mission itself does not usually appear in most textbooks beyond the first chapters. For example, one of the most used and admired textbooks, the 18th edition of Thompson et al (2012), stresses the importance of missions but has only a few pages devoted to their specific role, with almost no mention made of how they are created and used, except for a few references in later chapters to one of the mission components. Drucker (1974) viewed mission creation as one of the most difficult and risky parts of the strategic process because it is rarely given sufficient attention and thought.

There are various other reasons why the intellectual work needed to develop strong, inspiring missions is not being done including: executives do not have an extensive knowledge of their own business and its employees; they fail to include in their mission a clear, credible set of guidelines; and do not specify common core values that employees will accept and support. Mintzberg (1994) adds that the problem is aggravated by the fact that most missions are focused on the interests of shareholders or appeal to the political concerns of multiple stakeholders, thereby providing something for everybody but having limited interest for those directly involved in day-to-day activities.

The general practice in most companies is to state missions in short, catchy, and easily remembered phrases, nice sounding but vague statements of a few sentences instead of a multi-page document that can convey specific direction and guidance. Such limited "mission statements" are not capable of conveying the leader's dream and passion to other participants in the process. A fully detailed, documented mission is needed to help lower-level managers and other employees internalize the leader's message and passion, and use it in making decisions (Mullane, 2002). If the mission is not well-created, communicated, and accepted by all members of the organization, it will not be effective in providing direction and guidance for the work ahead.

Failure to Use Missions in Strategy Formulation

Business schools have done a credible job educating managers and executives to identify and meet competitive threats, to overcome technological challenges, and handle other managerial responsibilities, but, generally, have not stressed the importance of using mission during the entire range of strategic activities, particularly in the strategy formulation process. Existing information for developing strategies in most textbooks, if followed explicitly, <u>could</u> lead to the development of effective strategies, but in reality, this does not usually happen. Sawyer (1986) argues that a basic problem is that the formulation process is not fully defined or explored in sufficient depth in most textbooks. Hamel (1997, p. 80) goes further and states that "the dirty little secret" of the strategy industry is that it doesn't have any theory of strategy creation.

In most textbooks, strategy formulation relies on a multitude of models and tools, such as the SWOT analysis, grand strategy selection matrices, and other non-quantifiable techniques that over-simplify the selection of the firm's strategy (Audebrand, 2010). The process is generally described as seeking a fit between the organization's mission, its capabilities, and its opportunities, and most use a SWOT analysis as their centerpiece in the selection of opportunities and strategies (Hamel &Prahalad, 1994). The SWOT method identifies key internal factors (Strengths and Weaknesses) and critical external factors (Opportunities and Threats) that are common to all firms.

The work of strategy formulation using the SWOT approach has been accurately described by Mintzberg (1998) and other writers as taking place in a "black box". Inside the black box are a multitude of lists and endless discussions to decide which strength would help achieve each opportunity and which weakness would hinder. A major failing of SWOT is that it presents the lists uncritically without clear prioritization so that weak opportunities may appear to balance strong threats, and thus over-simplifies the inherent complexity of the process.

Proponents of the SWOT approach claim that when the SWOT analysis is completed, a fully defined strategy is readily apparent which the organization can implement easily and effectively, but this has not proven to be the case (Sawyer, 1986). A survey by Hill and Westbrook (1997) found that of 50 companies surveyed, almost half used a SWOT analysis, yet not one subsequently used the outputs of the analyses during the later stages of the strategic process. The continuing emphasis on the key role of SWOT in most organizations has led to strategy formulation results that are of dubious value, which can take the organization in directions different from that prescribed by the vision.

Failure to Use Missions in Strategy Implementation

The final phase of the strategic management process involves execution of the selected strategy. Executives have generally looked down upon this phase of the process as unworthy of their personal attention, and, consequently, this view is reflected throughout the organization. Bossidy and Charan (2002) noted that if top executives do not take personal interest in implementation activities, lower-level managers and other employees will have an equally low concern for the work to be done. And, if the mission does not compel a feeling of shared interest, something to be proud of, or a sense of purpose that ties all participants together in pursuit of a common goal, there is little likelihood that the average employee will give the mission the high priority it deserves (Sufi & Lyons, 2003).

In large companies it is difficult for executives to provide guidance and maintain control throughout the process because they cannot be present in all places at all times, particularly in strategy implementation where many people at various levels are involved in making decisions. The situation becomes more confusing when strong-minded individuals make decisions based on their own interpretation of the firm's direction and strategy, which can lead to conflict, resentment, and confusion. When this occurs, there is a tendency for implementation work to deviate or drift from the mission, going down different paths requiring minor accommodations (Mintzberg, 1994). The problem is that after a number of these "reasonable" accommodations, the changes can cause significant drift from the mission or even result in a distorted view of the mission itself. Mission drift creates confusion and uncertainty during critical periods and is a constant danger in every organization that should be avoided if at all possible.

Fulfilling the Promise through Mission Control

Creating a Mission for Mission Control

A major emphasis in this paper is that top executives must accept ultimate responsibility for the creation of clear, inspiring missions to guide and control strategic decision making in all situations and at all levels, and that the role of educators is to provide the executives with the knowledge required to handle this responsibility. Kotter (1996) has observed that without an adequate mission, the strategic work of the organization can dissolve into a time-consuming mess in which leaders become little more than spectators or cheerleaders. The question then arises as to what is the best way to create effective missions, and the answer is "there is no best way". Drucker (1992) argues that each mission must be unique—fulfilling the aims of the leader, the purpose of the organization, the desires of major stakeholders, the needs and wants of its people--something that all can believe in and stand united to achieve.

The mission-creation process is initiated by the top executive and senior managers with an assessment of the external environment seeking a realistic picture of the firm's needs and capabilities in all arenas. Kouzes and Posner (1993) contend that with this knowledge the chief executive will be able to align the legitimate concerns and interests of major stakeholders with a mission capable of guiding and controlling key strategic activities. An idealized mission might begin as a seed in the mind of an entrepreneur or in the passion of a well-prepared executive seeking a better future for his or her organization (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004).

A key step in creating the mission is the development of a vision--the dream of a desirable and inspiring future for the organization. The executive's vision, tempered by the views and ideas of multiple people inside and outside the organization, is one of the most important components of the mission. Nanus (1992) claims that the right vision grows out of the needs of the entire organization and, thus, becomes owned by all, one that resides within the organization and does not reflect anyone's personal aims or interests. Vision brings to the mission, specific direction, shared values and beliefs, and commitment by energized people. With an inspiring vision as a major component, the mission becomes a living document, one that can guide and control strategic operations (Gallos, 2008).

A mission should contain, as appropriate, the following strategic elements and areas of responsibility (Pearce & Robinson, 2003; Thompson et al, 2012):

1. The organization's vision.
2. Specification of the firm's basic products or services, principal markets and technology areas.
3. Company philosophy--its self-concept, standards of behavior, and community relationships.
4. Desired public image.
5. Identification of stakeholder interests (with specific concerns for the needs and wants of employees).
6. Key objectives and measures of performance--market standing, innovation, productivity, profitability, and effective use of physical and financial resources, as specified by Drucker (1954).

After evaluating these mission components and other contributions from members of the organization, the CEO chooses the firm's mission from the alternates considered. As can be seen from the amount of information and meaning to be conveyed to decision makers in the organization, the final mission published must be a multiple-page document of three to five (or more) pages, not a one-paragraph statement. When properly formed and communicated to the organization, the mission becomes the guide and inspiration that will enable members of the organization to make decisions applicable and consistent with the organization's culture and within the dream and philosophy of the organization's leaders. Also, it is highly important for the top executive be the one identified with the mission to give it greater credibility and legitimacy (Bennis&Nanus, 1985).

However, as Martin (2010) argues, the executive's responsibility doesn't end there; executives must be made aware of the need to communicate the mission, and insure that it is used in as phases of the strategic management process. If the mission is not heard, understood, and accepted by members of the firm, it doesn't exist. One of the current means of controlling strategic activities, called "strategic control", is to monitor and adjust ongoing activities, primarily in the implementation phase of the program, and take corrective action as required (Hill & Jones, 1998, p. 382). The mission-control concept introduced here is a further means of insuring that the aims and intent of the organization's mission is fully utilized in making decisions during the strategic management process. It is a way of guiding and controlling the thinking (intellectual activity) of managers in decision making, principally during strategy formulation and implementation, to insure they are aligned with the end objectives identified in the mission.

Education for Mission Creation

A first step in educating executives for mission creation and using the missions for guidance and control in the strategic management process is to insure that executives and senior managers have a thorough knowledge of their industry, their own organizations, and the people participating in the work of their organizations. Mintzberg's account of a highly successful Canadian grocer provides an excellent illustration of the breadth of knowledge and experience that business executives must have to envision the future and effectively manage their businesses (1998, p. 140). He described the depth of knowledge of the grocery-chain's CEO, "He knew every aspect of his business--he knew the industry, he knew his merchandise, he understood future trends, he knew costs, he knew customers, he knew his people, he knew everything!

Thus, educators have an initial responsibility to help executives understand what information is needed and where it can be found. In most companies the information needed for the creation of missions already exist in the executive or somewhere in the organization, but is not in a format in which it can be readily used. When this information has been identified and made available, educated executives will be able to oversee the creation of missions that provide the key ingredients for success--foresight, sense of direction, business knowledge, operational targets, and concern for the firm's stakeholders. Mintzberg (1994), and Nanus (1992), and other management scholars have provided frameworks that educators can use to teach executives the form and components of a mission, but the creation of missions depends in large part on the knowledge, experience, and passion that top executives bring to the task--their own and that which is obtained from other participants inside and outside the organization.

Nanus (1992) argues that the right mission for any company must begin with a deep understanding of the needs and wants of the enterprise and its major stakeholders He states that one of the least understood components of mission is the needs and wants of stakeholders, especially the employees. Most people, including executives, think because they have worked with various people or groups over time that they understand them, but this is usually not true. For mission purposes, executives must have a good understanding of human nature, but this knowledge is not stressed in most strategic management textbooks, in which employees are treated as human assets, human capital, or intangible resources, not as full human beings. To overcome this deficiency, executives may need additional information on basic human needs and wants, which can be obtained through additional readings in existing courses in the nature of and the differences between human beings.

Educators also have a responsibility to include in their courses and programs the opportunity for students to reflect deeply on their existing and newly acquired business knowledge and use it to insure the creation of strong, clear missions in the short periods of time they have available for additional learning. The real value of executive education lies in blending the students' academic programs with their own experience. Mintzberg (2004) claims that real learning begins when students step back from the action and reflect thoughtfully on the knowledge and experience they already have. Thus, executive learning should be focused on making better use of the knowledge and experience they already have and not on building new courses into the curriculum within existing executive-education programs.

Kouzes and Posner (1993) argue that the requisite knowledge for creating missions cannot be learned solely from a formal course or from a book, but must come from close association with the work to be done. Mintzberg (2004) has long been a proponent of the belief that to be properly educated, executives and managers need some form of experiential learning, which is, in essence, the process of making meaning from direct experience. In these "action learning" experiences, educators focus on specific needs of executives by providing knowledge utilizing the leader's own experience. McNay (2009) describes a clinical approach in which executives learn what has to be done, not by reading or hearing about it, but by actually participating in the activities that have to be done to ensure a successful venture. An important benefit of the clinical approach is that when executives are knowledgeable about the activities involved in the strategic activities, they gain confidence in themselves and in their missions, which will lead to greater respect, trust and loyalty from employees.

Garvin's (2007, 366)) study on the difference between teaching executives and teaching MBAs showed that executive teaching demands far more attention be paid to explicit information and knowledge transfer and far less emphasis on skill development than does MBA teaching; MBA programs are designed to improve students' job and career prospects. Garvin found that executive teaching involves more explicit connections to practical applications and company problems, and less time devoted to skills and foundations. Executive education generally emphasizes providing students with focused business knowledge on pressing business activities; executives want to learn how to handle the job they already have. So, in most cases, executive education programs are better equipped than MBA programs to educate executives on the kind of work involved in mission creation and its use in strategy formulation and implementation activities.

Role of Mission Control in Strategy Formulation

Strategy formulation, one of the most important and difficult commitments a company can make, drives the firm's subsequent plans and actions; yet, as discussed earlier, it is often a little understood undertaking--a black box situation. There is a wealth of literature relevant to the need for effective strategy development, but little of this knowledge is incorporated into existing executive-education programs. Most strategic management articles and books offer good ideas for conceptualizing strategies, but provide little guidance on the actual process to be followed beyond the usual SWOT analysis method. And, as mentioned previously, the limited guidance provided by SWOT is usually not subsequently used in developing strategies that are in alignment with the organization's mission (Audebrand, 2010; Collins &Porras, 1996).

Nanus (1992) states that maintaining a strong focus on mission is the best way for executives to overcome three major problems; disagreements among key decision makers, employee resistance to change, and the undue influence of strong-minded individuals and functional interests in strategic choices. Mullane (2002) believes that missions are valuable strategic tools that can be effective in the strategy formulation process as a means of assuring that all decisions are consistent with the firm's strategic intent. However, this objective can only be achieved only when educators offer and teach new methods and approaches for creating and applying missions in day-to-day operational decision-making.

As a step in this direction, the writer has developed and used a new strategic tool SWMT that brings mission into the initial phase of the strategy formulation process--opportunity identification, evaluation, and selection. The method uses a matrix in which opportunities are entities evaluated in terms of their compatibility with the organization's capabilities and intent of the leader's vision. The firm's mission thus becomes a qualifying factor along with the strengths, weaknesses and threat factors identified during the initial assessment period. Inclusion of mission in strategy formulation provides a definite voice, influence, and control by top management in the selection of opportunities and strategies, something not possible under the SWOT approach. An additional, important benefit of SWMT is that it uses numbers in the evaluation process, thereby providing a quantitative approach, in addition to the qualitative analysis normally used to develop the organization's grand strategy.

Role of Mission Control in Strategy Implementation

In the final phase of the strategic management process, detailed implementation plans are developed by functional managers and key specialists to insure that required programs, projects and activities will be properly executed. However, as Mintzberg (1998) has pointed out, implementation of strategic plans is challenging and difficult because the work does not conform to neat leadership theories and practices; by its very nature, it is usually complex and messy. Even though executives are not expected to personally perform implementation tasks or micromanage the work of others, they, never-the-less, have a major responsibility during this critical phase to keep members of the organization working together and focused on the firm's mission (Mintzberg, 2004).

James McGregor Burns, an early proponent of executive leadership, observed that whatever the separate interests persons might hold, when they are united in the pursuit of common goals they will achieve desired significant results (1978, p 425). This is a concept that many writers have expressed in different ways over the ages, and most scholars agree that a "common purpose" provides the means by which all can work willingly with vigor and enthusiasm to achieve success for the organization (Bennis&Nanus, 1985). Mary Parker Follett, an early management philosopher, stated that a common purpose is needed to bring together the people in any organization (1987, p. 55). She wrote that when the leader of a group identifies a common purpose, puts it before the group, and shares his values and convictions with them, they possess the authority to make decisions knowing that the resulting actions will be considered legitimate and productive by all those who share the leader's dream. She concludes that the common purpose becomes an "invisible leader", a unifying force that can form a coherent group.

The mission's major components--a vision of a better future; concern for the interests of employees; a clear, well-articulated set of values; and identified organizational objectives--make it an excellent candidate to serve as a common purpose. With a shared focus on organizational direction and outcomes, decision makers at all levels will be able to distinguish between what is good and what is bad, making it possible for them to make difficult decisions without having to appeal to higher authority. A common purpose also serves to establish respect and trust between all levels of management and employees, fostering group commitment in which all share and work together. Loyalty to the common purpose gives the strongest bond of unity and control because all participants will be working for the same cause (O'Reilly &Pfeffer, 2000).

Summary and Conclusion

The main thesis of this paper is that the key to achieving success with strategic management programs lies not in applying, for example, new data-mining techniques for strategy formulation or more stringent project management rules for implementation, but in creating clear, inspiring missions and using them to guide and control the total strategic management process. Executives have heard and accepted the dictum that missions set the basic direction and rules for generating and implementing new strategies, but, in most cases, executives have not given missions the attention and commitment needed to make them effective forces of control. It is rather ironic to note that although the great successes of legendary leaders have been attributed to the internalization of their missions in the minds and hearts of every member of their enterprise, modern-day executives seem content to just post their company's missions on bulletin boards or in annual reports, and seldom utilize them to engage the minds and hearts of organizational members in day-to-day strategic activities.

A primary responsibility of educators in correcting this situation is to insure that executives have a thorough knowledge of their own business and the industry in which it competes, the wisdom to interpret and work with interrelationships among competitive forces in both the external and internal environments, and an empathetic understanding of the needs and wants of all the people involved in the enterprise. Only when executives have this knowledge will they be able to create missions that are capable of guiding and controlling the activities involved in every phase of the strategic process. Educators must also re-examine the tools and systems they use in evaluating opportunities and formulating strategies to insure that when completed, they accurately reflect the aims and needs of the organization.

The term "mission control" has been used in this paper to emphasize the importance of aligning executive learning and strategic activities through the use of a compelling mission in which is embedded the dream, wisdom and passion of the chief executive and other engaged members of the organization. When the mission is understood and accepted by all participants, it becomes an invisible leader that empowers people at all organizational levels to contribute their knowledge, skills, and passion to the common purpose; and, of great importance, serves to keep decisions and actions focused on the mutually accepted direction, values, and objectives expressed in the mission.

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