A Community of Missions: Propositions for Personal Mission within an Organization

Carlos Rey

Professor of Business Strategy, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, Spain.

Carlosrey@uic.es

Abstract

Nowadays the concept of personal mission is a growing trend in companies. However, the question about what is the role of personal mission within the organization is still unanswered. This article aims to answer this question by suggesting four propositions that provide clarity to the concept of personal mission in an organizational context.

Keywords: Personal mission, Role mission, Mission Statement, Leadership, Unity.

1. Introduction

"No man can live the dream of another man." With these words, Jeff Gravenhorst – CEO of the Danish multinational ISS Facility Services -, began a worldwide program called "Find your apple", aimed at its more than 500.000 employees in 75 countries. Through this initiative, the company regularly invites its employees to reflect on the raison d'être, the "purpose" of their work.

Nowadays, the idea of a personal mission at work –the "purpose" of people's efforts and dreams (Covey, 2013) – is forcing its way into companies, following what seems to be an upward trend. Through the personal mission, people find greater meaning in their work, thus improving their motivation and efficiency (Frankl, 1959; Wrzesniewski et al. 1997; George, 2001; Grant, 2008; Rosso et al., 2010; Christensen, 2010). Companies such as Unilever, Medtronic and Heineken are well aware of this and invite their employees to reflect on their personal mission, through training and coaching programs (Craig & Snook, 2013). This exercise is also increasingly present in executive MBA programs and business schools.

However, there are several questions about the personal mission that still remain unanswered. What is the role of the personal mission in the context of a business organization? What is the relationship between the personal mission and job functions? What is the role of leaders when employees define their personal mission? How does the mission of each individual relate to other organizational elements, such as objectives and performance assessment? Given the lack of answers, people run the risk of confusing the personal mission with tasks, objectives and functions, leading to the distortion of the mission, or with a merely sporadic motivational exercise that is disconnected from the reality of the company.

This article intends to answer these questions by analyzing the role of the personal mission and its development within the context of the business organization. We start this analysis by conceptually studying the role of the personal mission in organization theory, followed by the perspective of the anthropological organizational theory (Pérez López, 1993) and Management by Missions (Cardona & King, 2006, 2008). We then identify four propositions that help conceptualize the role of the personal mission in the context of the organizational mission.

2. ¿What is an organization?

Despite certain differences, it is commonly understood that administrative management theory is based on three main approaches to management – mechanistic (also known as the classical or bureaucratic management theory), psychosocial (or humanistic management theory) and institutional. The idea of

personal missions, is, however, not covered by any of these theories. Classical and neoclassical theories focus on the objectives, tasks, functions and projects that each person must carry out, and on the values and skills needed to fulfil them. But personal missions, the "purpose" of an individual's work, is something that is not contemplated in traditional management theories.

However, the anthropological approach to organizational theory can provide some insight into this gap by offering a more comprehensive and integral view of the human person. In this organizational conception, each person is seen as something unique and of immense value (Melé, 2009), which is perceived in his deepest "raison d'être": his life mission. This is what some refer to as the anthropological view on organization (Pérez López, 1993; Rosanas, 2008; Argandoña, 2007; Melé, 2012).

Under this anthropological conception, a company is a community of persons (Melé, 2012), to which we will refer as a "community of missions united by a mission". The company is thus seen as the place of development of each member's personal mission (Cardona & Rey, 2008), starting with the mission of the entrepreneur or founder, and fostering the development of the personal mission of all the employees. The company incorporates the individual missions, and beyond tasks and goals, the company *manages by missions* (Cardona & Rey, 2006, 2008).

This anthropological perspective of a company, in essence, corresponds to what many consider the ultimate, and what in the history of mankind has always been the basic form of organization: the family. It is a type of organization that, by nature, is designed to harbor and encourage the development of the personal mission of each of its members. As an organization, it has its own mission, a mission that is formed with the personal missions of each of its members. Throughout history, the comparison of the company as a family has often been made by managers and business leaders.

The four propositions that are made below arise from this anthropological conception and management by missions' theory, which, in summary can be stated as a single proposition: to connect the personal mission and the company mission in a context of freedom, leadership and unity.

P1: Connecting the company mission and the personal mission

Every human being needs a mission, a "purpose" (Frankl, 1959). Psychologists describe it as the main condition for survival in extreme situations. Researchers on happiness identify it as one of its main causes. And in a world that is ever changing, where coordinates indicating the way forward are increasingly blurred, where it is increasingly difficult to determine whether a decision is right

or wrong, our life mission plays the critical role of guiding our way over time (Craig & Snook, 2014).

There is currently a wide range of theories and beliefs covering different areas of spirituality, religion, family, work, community… In so far as the individual is able to discover his mission and live accordingly, his existence is authentic (George, 2001) and makes sense (Rosso et al., 2010). Conscious, preconscious or unconsciously, man seeks to understand his mission and needs it to guide the development of his potential (Christensen, 2010). The personal mission drives higher performance, enhances the use of existing capabilities, and the creation of new skills (Grant, 2008; Craig & Snook, 2014). It is considered to be the main source of human motivation (Frankl, 1959).

There is an intimate relationship between the company mission and its members' personal mission (Cardona & Rey, 2003, 2008). The progress and development of their potential is born from the personal mission of each individual (Frankl, 1959; Christensen, 2010; Covey, 2013), and, as such, it is the source of an organizational mission's progress and development. The company develops its mission through the personal mission of the individual, and, through the company mission, the individual develops a core part of his life mission.

And it is precisely at the junction of both – company mission and personal mission – where the role mission is configured (see Figure 1). For each person, the role mission reveals what the personal mission brings to the company mission and vice versa. It is the contribution that characterizes the identity of each person in their profesional role (Cardona & Rey, 2008). The role mission is, at once, part of the company mission and part of the individual's life mission. Therefore, here we refer to role mission and not "job mission", as two people can share the same job, but have different missions.
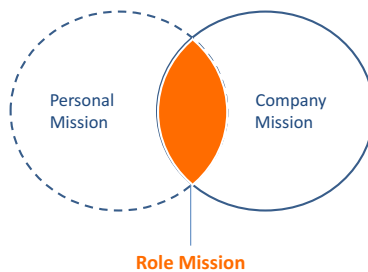

Figure 1. Role Mission

The role mission is the "commonplace" of the company and the individual, where the interests of the company and its members combine to reach its most perfect form. It is not a simple exercise of "self-awareness", disconnected from the company mission. Nor is it an exercise of indoctrination of the corporate mission with no regard for the personal mission. Both extremes generate disappointment, lack of authenticity and loss of work motivation. Hence, it is in the individual's "interest" that the company has a mission, just as it is in the company's "interest" that the individual has a life mission.

P2: The personal mission as an exercise of freedom

One of the mission's key issues is that it cannot be imposed or managed "from outside" the individual. The "why", is an intimately personal concept, as it is connected to identity itself (Campbell & Nash, 199; Cardona & Rey, 2008; Argandoña, 2003). For a team or a company, the mission is an issue that concerns its members, in cannot be imposed (Drucker, 1974). Nobody can obligate a company to have a mission. It is not society, nor the government, nor business associations, nor lobbyists that define a company mission. It is the company itself that discovers and defines its own mission and the only one that can fully assess its scope and meaning (Campbell & Yeung, 1991; Birkinsaw et al., 2014).

The same applies to the mission of the role that each person performs in the company, since the mission of an individual is not something that the company will grant, order, define or request. Missions do not come with the function or position. Nor is it something to be negotiated, as might be the case with salary or objectives. It is not the company that defines the mission of the individual, but the individual who, in a completely free and voluntary way, provides his work with a mission. Missions are born within each person, from their life mission (Frankl, 1959; Covey, 2013; Edmonds, 2014). No one can force an employee to have a mission in his work, just as no one can be forced to have a life mission. It is the individual himself who discovers and defines his role mission – the "purpose" of his work, and he is the only one who can fully assess its scope and meaning (Christensen, 2010). In missions, there are no bosses, superiors, orders or chain of command.

This is something that companies such as Morning Star, USA, fully understand. The company has 2.400 missions – defined freely and voluntarily by its 400 full-time and 2000 part-time workers- and a corporate mission that directs and guides their development. At morning Star, missions do not have a boss, or as they like to put it, the only boss is the company's mission. And with this work method, they claim to have become the most efficient tomato processing company in the world (Gino & Staats, 2013).

At Morning Star, as in many other companies that incorporate the idea of the personal mission in their organizations, each individual has the primary responsibility to seek, define and assess the development of his mission. And, because freedom implies responsibility, each employee must have measurable and objective information on the progress of his mission (Cardona & Rey, 2008; Christensen, 2010; Craig & Snook, 2014; Edmonds, 2014; Covey, 2013). Because, unless an employee sets up the assessment process for his mission, there is hardly no point in developing his role mission.

P3: Missions need leadership support

Leadership is commonly understood as an act of influence, a way to produce a specific effect on another person. In management theories, there are many types of leadership depending on the leader's characteristics and the type of effect produced – transactional, narcissistic, charismatic, transformational, servant, transcendent, etc. –. And, as proposed by situational leadership, there are many recommendations on how to exercise it, according to the situation and the level of maturity of the person who is led.

There is a kind of leadership, however, to which management gurus rarely refer. A form of leadership that takes place in a hidden and intimate way. That is barely appreciated on the outside. Leadership that is sometimes exercised without the leader or the person who is led realizing it. It exerts an influence in the individual's innermost self: in his life mission. It is what some call "true leadership" (Pérez López, 1993). When we speak of a community of missions, the role of this kind of leadership – which is exercised on a shared basis (Carson et al., 2007; Pearce et al., 2007)- takes a central position, which is absolutely necessary for the welfare of the organization.

This is because each person's search for the mission in his work is an entirely personal, but not completely solitary, matter. Developing a mission that is a good guide for an individual, which responds well to the peculiarities of his character and personality, and, in turn, links in with the requirements of his job function and company mission, usually requires the help of others (Covey, 2013; Craig & Snook, 2014; Edmonds, 2013). A friend, co-worker, boss, colleague in another function, someone who is especially admired or someone outside the organization… are usually necessary and essential for the consistent development of an individual's mission.

Missions do not have bosses, but they do have leaders. Leaders who do not necessarily coincide with the chain of command. Exceptionally, this leadership is exercised through concrete actions in which a person helps another with his mission through discernment, contrast with reality and support. But ordinarily, and principally, this leadership is exercised by example (Pérez López 1993) and

love of benevolence (Argandoña, 2013). In this type of leadership, we can see more clearly where managers' responsibility as bosses ends and their responsibility as leaders begins.

For this reason, this type of leadership does not require gifted managers or employees. People who value and respect the mission of their collaborators and colleagues as much as they value and respect their own, suffice (George, 2001). People who are willing and ready to support those who ask for help in the development of their mission, and to respect those who decide not to. Leaders that base the relationships with their colleagues on trust, freedom and respect, as this is the type of trusting relationship that allows a mission to develop (Grant & Sumanth, 2009). And always feel the urge to lead by example, conscious of the fact that their colleagues' mission depends in part on how they live their own. (Marimon et al., 2016).

As stated by Manuel Jimenez, CEO of a major exchange company in the south of Spain which manages by missions: "in our company the warehouse lads and distribution porters – many of them without even basic studies – understand very quickly what leadership is. They have a mission and that is what makes them leaders".

P4. Incorporate unity as a fundamental criterion in decision-making

In a recent Christmas speech, Sergi Ferrer-Salat, CEO of Ferrer -one of the leading European pharmaceutical multinationals - clearly stated: "We are not a group, we are not a corporation, we are not a group of companies: we are ONE". Thus, comparing the company to a family, he presented his managers a challenge that is now a growing trend and need: to promote unity in organizations. Because the higher external uncertainty, the greater the need for internal unity.

Unity is related to a sense of teamwork, harmony, commitment and collaboration – as these are, in part, signs of unity-, but it is something even deeper and more intimate. Unity is an abstract concept that evaluates the relationship between individuals' life missions. When two people share a common mission, it generates a unity between them. And when each of the members of an organization shares a common mission, it generates a united organization (see Figure 2). The level of unity shows the degree in which people identify with the mission of the organization (Argandoña, 2003, 2007; Rosanas, 2008; Cardona & Rey, 2008; Melé, 2012).

Unity is therefore an organizational quality – as is, for example, efficiency-, on which the success of a business largely depends. It is, however, highly unstable and difficult to sustain over time (Cardona y Rey, 2008). Unity cannot be

touched, it cannot be assessed empirically, but its presence radically changes the way events develop. This is something that companies such as Bimbo, clearly understand. This Mexican company is now one of the leading food companies in the world. Shortly after joining the company, its employees take a course to reflect on the connection between their personal mission and values and that of the company. Behind this course, attended by all of its 130.000 employees in 22 countries, is the deep-rooted belief that – as stated by the founder of Bimbo, Lorenzo Servitje- "the company has a soul, constituted by the souls of each of its workers".
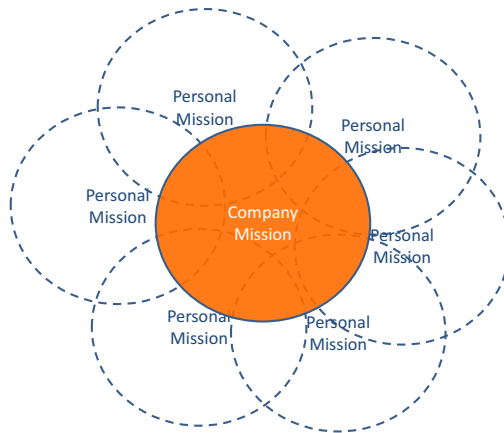

Figure 2. Unity

Unity is achieved from "person to person", each individual counts. Every time that someone integrates his personal mission with the company mission, the company increases its level of unity. And every time someone moves away from the company mission, the level of unity decreases. In fact, the three issues that we have seen in the previous sections – joining the personal and company mission in a context of freedom and leadership- are the main factors that determine the level of unity of an organization. Especially leadership, which, in essence, is the main source of unity in an organization (Argandoña, 2007).

However, the type of context in which the mission of each individual is developed, also greatly influences the capacity to generate unity. We could say that there are types of organization that greatly favor the generation of unity, whereas others damage their members' unity. And the main condition for an organization to generate unity is its degree of consistency with the organizational mission (Marimon et al., 2016). For when a company truly lives its mission, it becomes a "magnet" that attracts the personal mission of its

collaborators (George, 2000; Marimon et al., 2016). Hence the importance of what some call "making connections", showing employees through stories, pictures and examples how their efforts benefit others (Grant, 2011) and, in turn, ensuring that all management systems – strategy, objectives, communication, selection, evaluation etc. – are consistent with the corporate mission (Cardona & Rey, 2006; 2008).

Because ultimately, unity is a criterion for action (Rosanas, 2008). And similar to the way in which an organization that seeks to be efficient must consider efficiency in "everything they do", an organization that seeks unity should reflect on this criterion in all decisions.

3. Conclusion

Incorporating the personal mission in a company offers great potential for the development of organizations, by strengthening the links between the company and the employee, generating meaningful organizations and improving performance (Frankl 1959; Wrzesniewski et al. 1997; George, 2001; Grant 2008; Rosso et al., 2010; Christensen, 2010). But in order to bring these benefits to fruition, a significant change of mentality is needed, both in the way in which the organization is understood and the relationship there should be between managers and subordinates. This means taking it a step further, towards consolidating a way of managing companies that has been brewing for decades, and will, probably, continue to gain strength in the future. Where organizations become increasingly flatter, with less bureaucracy and fewer levels of command, and where each individual has a greater capacity to deploy his potential.

References

Argandoña, A. (2003). Fostering Values in Organizations. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 45(1-2), 15–28. http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/A:1024164210743

Birkinshaw, J.; Foss, N.J., & Lindenberg, S. (2014). Combining Purpose with Profits. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 55(3), 49–56.

Campbell, A., & Nash, L. (1992). A Sense of Mission: defining direction for the large corporation. Addison-Wesley. Wakefield.

Campbell, A., Yeung, S. (1991). Creating a Sense of Mission. Long Range Planning, Aug 91, 24(4), 10-20. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0024-6301(91)90002-6

Cardona, P., & Rey, C. (2006). Management by Missions: How to Make the Mission a Part of Management. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 4(1), 164–174.

Cardona, P. & Rey, C. (2008). *Management by Missions*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9780230598942

Carson, J.B.; Tesluk, P.E., & Marrone, J.A. (2007). Shared Leadership in Teams: An Investigation of Antecedent Conditions and Performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(5), 1217–1234. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/20159921

Christensen, C.M. (2010). How Will You Measure Your Life? *Harvard Business Review*, 88(7/8), 46–51.

Covey, S.R. (2013). *How to Develop Your Personal Mission Statement*. Grand Haven, MI: Brilliance Publishing.

Craig, N., & Snook, S. (2014). From Purpose to Impact. *Harvard Business Review*, 92(5), 104–111.

Drucker, P., (1974). *Management: tasks, responsibilities, practices*. Harper & Row, New York.

Edmonds, S.C. (2014). The Culture Engine: A Framework for Driving Results, Inspiring Your Employees, and Transforming Your Workplace. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Frankl, V.E. (1959). *Man's Search for Meaning*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

George, W.W. (2001). Medtronic's Chairman William George on How Mission-Driven Companies Create Long-Term Shareholder Value. *Academy of Management Executive*, 15(4), 39–47.

http://dx.doi.org/10.5465/AME.2001.5897653

Grant, A.M. (2008). The Significance of Task Significance: Job Performance Effects, Relational Mechanisms, and Boundary Conditions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(1), 108–124. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.93.1.108

Grant, A.M., & Berry, J. (2011). The Necessity of Others is the Mother of Invention: Intrinsic and Prosocial Motivations, Perspective Taking, and Creativity. *Academy of Management Journal*, Feb, 54(1), 73-96.

http://dx.doi.org/10.5465/AMJ.2011.59215085

Kinjerski, V., & Skrypnek, B.J. (2006). Creating Organizational Conditions that Foster Employee Spirit at Work. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 27(4), 280–295. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/01437730610666037

Kristof-Brown, A.L., Zimmerman, R.D., & Johnson, E.C. (2005). Consequences of Individual's Fit at Work: A Meta-Analysis of Person-Job, Person-Organization, Person-Group, and Person-Supervisor Fit. *Personnel Psychology*, 58, 281–342. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2005.00672.x

Marimon, F.; Mas-Machuca, M., & Rey, C. (2016). Assessing the internalization of the mission. *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, 116(1).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/IMDS-04-2015-0144

Melé, D. (2009). Integrating Personalism into Virtue-Based Business Ethics: The Personalist and the Common Good Principles. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 88(1), 227–244. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10551-009-0108-y

Pearce, C.L.; Conger, J.A., & Locke, E.A. (2007). Shared Leadership Theory. *The Leadership Quarterly,* 18(3), 281–288.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.03.009

Rosso, B.D.; Dekas, K.H., & Wrzesniewski, A. (2010). On the Meaning of Work: A Theoretical Integration and Review. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 30, 91–127. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2010.09.001

Siegall, M., & McDonald, T. (2004). Person-Organization Value Congruence, Burnout and Diversion of Resources. *Personnel Review*, 33(3), 291–301. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/00483480410528832

Smart, J.C.; Elton, C.F., & McLaughlin, G.W. (1986). Person-Environment Congruence and Job Satisfaction. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 29(2), 216–225. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0001-8791(86)90005-9

Wrzesniewski, A.; McCauley, C.; Rozin, P., & Schwartz, B. (1997). Jobs, Careers, and Callings: People's Relations to Their Work. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 31(1), 21–33. http://dx.doi.org/10.1006/jrpe.1997.2162

Author's Biographical Notes

Carlos Rey teaches Strategic Management and is the director of the Chair Management by Missions and Corporate Governance at Universitat Internacional de Catalunya. As strategic and change management consultant has worked for important clients such as Sony, Repsol, Abertis o Bristol-Myers Squibb. Currently he is the Director Partner at Dpm Consulting, a global management consultant. Coauthor of the book "Management by Missions" translated into five languages.

Chair of Management by Missions and Corporate Government, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya