

Mission Statement – a Component of the Strategic Management of University (on The Example of German Universities)

Abstract

Mission statement is an element of the strategic management, the basis for the strategic development of university. Mission statement provides orientation and increases the motivation of the members of university. The results of the research prove that the mission statement of universities must be developed in an open discussion with the participation of the members of university. The most popular commitments of the mission statement are equal rights and opportunities for men and women, internationality, unity of research and teaching, quality assurance, interdisciplinarity. Analysis of the content of mission statements which were formulated during the last years shows that they propose a partnership relationship between the administration of university and its members.

Keywords: *mission statement, strategic management, internationality, interdisciplinarity, orientation, motivation*

1. Introduction

Mission statement development is a component of the strategic management of higher education institutions. It is necessary to distinguish mission from mission statement, the latter is just a written product of the former (Scott 2006). In the 1930s American universities began to define and publish mission statements in their catalogues. British, German and other European Universities have been

defining their mission statements since the 1990s to show their accountability to the public.

Today's mission statements are often based on the triad (the 20th-century) mission of university: teaching, research, and public service (Scott, 2006). The problem of mission statement is that only a very small number of the members of university take part in the process of its establishment and he thinks that in reality mission statement has little influence on the management of higher education institutions (Peeke, 1994).

The requirement for the accreditation of a higher education institution in Germany is that university must present documentation which concerns the management structures, mission statement and profile of university, study courses and defined quality goals and the system of quality management of education.

The mission statements of German higher education institutions contain goals and objectives of higher education, which are defined in the Laws for the Universities of the Federal States.

The mission statement of a higher education institution is defined as a normative goal, that is why it is a part of normative management (Zechlin, 2007).

Researchers (Kosmuetzky, 2010) distinguish the following functions of the mission statement of German university:

- provision of a basis for the objectives of university and the specific profile of the higher education institution;
- promotion of the strategic management and marketing of university;
- quality assurance in higher education.

The core elements of the mission statement are mission, vision and principles (Behm B. and Bertold Ch., 2011). "Mission statement should provide brief and clear information about the distinctive profile of university and the core tasks ("mission" – "What is our business?"), as well as the long-term development goals of the entire institution ("vision" – "What do we want to become?")". (Behm B. and Bertold Ch., 2011, p. 15).

Behm B. and Bertold Ch. (2011) formulated three main functions of the mission statement:

1. Orientation and steering. Mission statement must set guidelines for the subsequent strategic process.
2. Motivation. As a mission statement has a visionary character it should motivate institution members to identify with their institution.
3. Legitimization and promotion. Mission statement presents the profile and objectives of the institution to external shareholders.

They state that mission statement helps the university to formulate its strategy.

Behm B. (2011) asserts that the mission statements of German universities are very similar and they do not distinguish one higher education institution from another, in her opinion they must be developed on the basis of tradition, respond to the current situation and possibilities of university and contain a realistic vision. Mission statement must be developed in the process of open discussion with the participation of the members of the university. The university staff must understand the content of the mission statement and accept it, that is why it must be short and clear.

2. The aim of the research

The aim of the research is to determine how universities define themselves in order to be distinguished from other higher education institutions, to determine the functions and the main commitments of mission statements, to analyze the process of formulation of the mission statements of German universities and to find out the most preferable methods for the development of the mission statement.

3. Research Methods

The object of research is the mission statements of 30 German higher education institutions. The selection was made only from among those universities whose mission statements are publicly available.

The methodology applied in this study is the content analysis method of the mission statements of German universities.

4. Results of the research

The sample consisted of the mission statements of 30 German higher education institutions. The structure and the forms of the mission statements are characterized by diversity because there are no official requirements concerning the structure content of a mission statement. The structure of 27% of the mission statements consists only of the fields of activity or text without any structural units, other 63% represent different combinations of such structural units as preamble, current situation.

Table 1. The structural units of the mission statements

Structural units	The number of examinees	Total number percentage
Preamble	5	17
Introduction	5	17
Mission	4	13
Current situation	1	3
Self-understanding	7	23
Principles	4	13
Goals	3	10
Values	2	6.7
Motto or slogan	4	13
Maximums	2	6.6
Vision	2	6.6
Aims and means	1	3.3
Corporate culture	1	3.3
Strengths	2	6.6
Mission statement only with the fields of activity	8	26.6

Among the whole number of universities, only 56% of the mission statements have dates of formulation and reformulation, which range from 2000 to 2012. Two of them were formulated in 2000 and updated in 2012 and 2010. There is information on 30% of the university websites about the process of mission statement formulation and in all these cases it was developed as a result of discussion in which the representatives of all groups of the university participated. There are 4 university websites which contain on-line discussions and give an opportunity to participate in the process of the formation of the mission statement and to express opinions about the existing mission statement.

Analysis of the content of the mission statements shows the following most popular commitments: equal rights and opportunities for men and women, internationality, unity of research and teaching, quality assurance, interdisciplinarity.

Table 2. Commitments of the universities

Commitments	The number of examinees	Total number percentage
Equal rights and opportunities for men and women	26	87
Internationality	25	83
Unity of research and teaching	23	77
Quality assurance	21	70
Interdisciplinarity	21	70
Development of the region	18	60
Responsibility towards society	16	53
Innovations	16	53
Partnership with the sector of economy	14	47
Knowledge transfer	14	47
Development of the personality of the students	14	47
Promotion of young researchers	13	43
Family-friendly university	13	43
Practical orientation of education	11	37
Support of the continuing education and development of the staff	13	43
Participatory management style when all of the members of the university are involved through representatives in the decision-making process	12	40
Lifelong education	11	37
Applied research	10	33
Connection with non-university research institutions	8	27
Preparation of the students for professional life	8	27
Cooperation and communication among colleagues and members of the university	8	27

The commitments which are very rare are effective use of the resources, the third party funds and their allocation according to performance criteria – 17%, suitable conditions for research, creation of modern infrastructure – 17%, raising of the third party funds for research projects – 7%, participation of the students in the research work – 17%, to preserve and defend freedom of research and teaching – 17%, autonomy of the higher education institution – 10%, open access to the education 7%, active fulfillment of duties by the members 7%, commitment to

and orientation on service when all the decisions must be aimed at the benefit of the members and partners of the university 10%, students as partners in the study process and dialogue between students and professors – 7%, promotion of a healthy lifestyle – 3%, help in the adaptation of international students – 13%, scholarships 3%, team-oriented learning – 3%, individual approach to teaching – 3%.

There is a very small percentage of the mission statements which describe and give guidelines about the management of the university. Among the whole number of universities 17% are committed to transparency in administration and decision-making, but 40% admit a participatory management style when all the members of the university are involved through representatives in the decision-making process and when the internal-organization and decision-making processes of the university are based on participation, discourse, consensus, and transparency. At the same time, 3% of the mission statements assert responsibility of the administration of the university, 3% mention legal administrative barriers for research and 3% have intentions to provide suitable conditions for the development of management.

There are 47% of the universities which try to identify themselves in the mission statement with Germany, region, international or research orientation in order to distinguish themselves from other higher education institutions. For instance, 20% assert that they are internationally oriented universities, two of them connect regional and international orientation – internationally oriented university with a regional base and regionally based international university, 10% connect internationality and research and define themselves as a research university of international significance or internationally oriented university and center of research, a research university of international level. 10% of the universities distinguish themselves as cosmopolitan and other higher education institutions give the following definitions of themselves: a leading university in Germany, a modern university with a long-standing tradition, a research university, a comprehensive university striving for science and academic insight.

It is understandable that the mission statement is formulated, first of all, for the inner stakeholders of the university, such as students and the staff of the university and then for outside stakeholders, such as supporters and customers of the university – future students and their parents. In the content of 33% of the mission statements the addressee is defined as all the members of the university, students, researchers and lecturers and the administrative staff.

The functions of the mission statement are defined only in 27% and 17% formulate it as orientation for all the members of the university, policy framework which is aimed at formulation of the inner rules of the organization and basis for further development of the university. The function of the mission statement of

the University of Applied Sciences and Arts in Hannover is to formulate the profile of the university and assure quality management [19].

The mission of Potsdam University asserts that it must provide a basis for the identification of the members of the university, create the concentration of the forces on the stated goals and core values and define priorities [31].

Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences, Berlin, defines the goal of the mission statement as the provision of a basis for the development of the strategic goals and measures with a high level of participation of the university members [25].

Discussion

The process of the development of the mission statement is characterized by broad discussions and participation of the university members. Higher education institutions use different methods of the organization of discussions on the content of the mission statement, e.g., in 2010 Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences, Berlin, established a Worldcafe.

The mission statement of this university is focused on 10 fields of activity which were discussed at the Worldcafe. The most popular was the theme of «quality of learning and teaching». The students were even more active than the professors. The results of the discussion revealed and proved that it was necessary to conduct such discussions regularly according to their informative function concerning the implementation of the mission statement. All the members of the university have access to the discussion and its results on the Intranet. [1]

Regensburg University organized an electronic discussion platform in order to develop a mission statement. There were several directions of discussion: science in society; teaching, learning and research; relationship with each other; management, administration and quality assurance; location, region, internationality; infrastructure and central facilities. The Senate created a team which worked on the results of the discussion.

During three months, 2 266 participants registered at the forum and they expressed their opinions on 57 aspects. The number of the participants was 9% of all the staff and 61% of the participants were students [3]

In 2011, after a two-year development phase, the Senate of the University of Applied Sciences in Esslingen adopted a mission statement. Its content states that the mission statement was formulated, first of all, for inner use and for all the members of the university. That is why there was a discussion among 80 members of the university and on-line discussion on the website [2].

Ernst Moritz Arndt University in Greifswald adopted a mission statement in 2000 and updated it in 2012. A draft of the mission statement was sent by e-mail to all the members of the university and they could express their opinion by e-mail to the Senate within a month [5].

There are only 4 universities which conducted on-line discussions, which were held during 2010 and 2012. It can be considered as a positive tendency in the process of the development of mission statements, which will be more popular in the future.

The analysis of the structural units of the mission statements shows that their content is characterized by diversity and the universities prefer to divide the content of the mission statement into different structural units, which makes it easier to read and to understand the main ideas.

Almost 34% of the mission statements contain an introduction or preamble, where the addressee and the functions of the mission statement or the tradition of the university and current situation are defined. Only 13% of the mission statements contain principles on which the activity of the university is based, their number ranges from 4 to 12. Defining a motto or slogan, 13% of the universities try to formulate their most important quality, which really helps to distinguish one university from others, e.g., the motto of Hamburg University: «Gateway to the world of knowledge», Hannover University: «Shaping the future with knowledge».

The content of the mission statements looks like instructions and guidelines for the staff of the university and students. The most widespread commitments concern internationality, unity of research and teaching, interdisciplinarity, quality assurance, equal rights and opportunities for men and women and the development of the region. It means that most of the universities develop their strategy in these fields of activity and connect their future with research, which is of international significance and can be the basis for high quality education oriented on international standards. Besides internationality, universities try to contribute to the development of the region and perceive themselves as region-based universities, which is a positive tendency.

The mission statements look like guidelines for behavior not only for the staff but even for the students, e.g., «to act with responsibility in scientific, cultural and economic life» (George-August-University, Gottingen) [12].

The mission statements contain information about the relationships between the administration and the staff, e.g., Hannover University states «our staff is the root of our success, encourage personal and professional development» [10]. The mission statements of the universities which were formulated during the last years

propose a partnership relationship between the administration of the university and its members.

The members of the universities are understood as its main resources and as those who implement the principles and values expressed in the mission statement in everyday activity. Taking into account limited resources, the administration of the university understand that they can raise funds only if the staff jointly implement an elaborated strategy, but in turn they must motivate the members of the university to implement the mission statement and they recommend preferable conditions for doing research. Using these conditions the members of the university can participate in collaborative and individual projects raising funds for the university. The university and the staff must have partnership relationships, the personnel depend on the university, but the university admits that it also depends on the researchers and lecturers.

Conclusions

The results show that besides such functions as motivation of the institutional members, quality assurance, presentation of the profile of the university, promotion of the strategic management and marketing of the university, the mission statement has social and communicative functions. The social function of the mission statement is determined by the most popular commitments: equal rights and opportunities for women and men, development of the student's personality, responsibility towards society, family-friendly university. Family-friendliness is quite a new characteristic of the German universities, which becomes rather popular and provides the opportunity to the staff of the university and the students to make career and family compatible.

The communicative function is determined by the establishment of close links between the administration and the members of the university. Even the process of the formulation of the mission statement is aimed at establishment of communication between the management and the members of the university. The results of the research prove that the process of the development of the mission statement must be led by the university management, e.g., the Senate, but all of the groups of the university members must participate in this process. The most preferable method for the development of the mission statement is the combining of on-line discussions and forums with open discussions with the participation of the representatives of all the groups of the university staff. On-line discussion allows for direct participation of all the members of the

university including the students and it also makes the process transparent and clear to all the participants.

Broad participation of the staff in the process of the mission statement creation prevents it from being a set of normative goals developed by the administration of the university; instead, it is jointly established by the administration and the staff. That is why the university members and students have a feeling that they do not implement the decisions of the administration, but they implement a jointly elaborated strategy, they feel like creators of these goals, which is why their participation in the process of the elaboration of the mission statement increases their motivation. The mission statement establishes partnership relationships between the management and the members of the university.

The results of the research prove that the mission statement is a basis for the self-identification of the university because 47% of the universities identify themselves in the mission statement.

The results of the research indicate that mission statement provides a scale for internal and external evaluation and a basis for control. It defines the key guidelines for the measure of the performance of the university.

Mission statements of certain universities promote transparency in the process of decision-making, allocation of funding according to performance criteria and raising of external funding. It proves that the mission statement of the university contributes to the strengthening of its autonomy but, at the same time, the mission statement is a means of accountability of the university to society.

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