

TEACH^R

Mission and vision statements; a need for effective messaging? An evaluation case study, comparing faith-based and secular organisations' text word count

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Abstract

Given general criticism of protracted mission and vision statements (MVSs), this study focused on investigating the word count of MVSs from a sample of Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church organisations and institutions around the globe. As part of a summative evaluation, the numerical data from the SDA sample are compared with data from other faith-based as well as secular counterparts and also, notably, with data from 'recognised' MVS exemplars. The findings may challenge some administrators to give more careful attention to effectively communicating the purpose and aspirational statements of their establishments, differentiating between the two text types and, more importantly, the length format in which these are expressed.

Introduction

Mission and vision statements are now 'part and parcel' of contemporary organisations. In a competitive corporate world, MVSs, brand image, and identity are seen as being axiomatic to survival; being known, functioning effectively, and thriving. Businesses, government and non-government organisations, service providers and other entities, nowadays, signal to multiple audiences about what they stand for and accomplish (or intend to) through their mission and vision statements. Schools, colleges, universities, churches, hospitals, and charities also engage in this endeavour.

What underpins the pervasiveness, wide acceptance, and usage of MVSs?

Claimed advantages

The main reason for the popularity of MVSs appears to be the positive claims made for MVSs. These include:

- "... unify[ing] the organization and keep[ing] everyone focused on what really matters ..." (Law, 2022, p. 1).
- "Having a clearly articulated mission statement gives one a template of purpose that can be used to initiate, evaluate and refine one's activities" (Jones, 1996, p. xi).
- Vision statements provide a picture of, "What success looks like to you." (Culbertson, 2018; para. 8).
- Motivating and influencing decisions, actions and reactions (White, & Yingling, 2005).
- "... harness[ing] employees' energies and focus[ing] company resources" (Bart, et al. 2001, p. 33).
- "A well-crafted and thought-out mission statement or vision statement is one of the best ways to reach and connect with your audience" (SEO Design Chicago, 2022 p. 4), which represents an identified 'target' (McCormick, 2023).
- Assisting in effecting organisational change, and acting as a potential recruiting tool (Jones, 1996).
- Differentiating the organisation/institution in a crowded marketplace (Cox, 2023).
- Providing "a clear guiding framework for strategic decision making on what to do and what not to do" (Jackson, 2024, p. 8).

It is helpful, at this point, to define the two principal terms and consider some of their preferred elements and attributes.

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Definitions

Atlassian (n.d.) notes, “Sometimes the terms “mission statement” and “vision statement” are used interchangeably or even combined into a single statement. But they mean two very different things” (p. 2, emphasis supplied); a point recognised in this research study and others (e.g., Allison, 2019). The terms thus being differentiated, yet, as claimed by Fairhurst et al. (1997), may be seen as interdependent because of their assumed, reciprocal support or interplay and complementarity.

Also, while there are no authoritative or recognised standard definitions for the two terms, the following working definitions are used in the present study: A *mission statement* simply encapsulates why an organisation, or institution exists; its purpose, whom it can serve and/or its goals, values and culture. A *vision statement* is an inspirational, aspirational, future-oriented declaration that records an imagined ideal state; of what an organisation or institution will have achieved.

Forthwith, it is appropriate to ask, what makes a fit-for-purpose mission and vision statement?

Characteristics

A number of suggested criteria have been proposed about salient characteristics—preferred elements—of effective MVSs.

An effective mission statement, for Cox (2023), integrates physical, emotional and logical elements that connect with the target audience, summing up the organisation’s *raison d’être*; its purpose, values and goals. Acting as a counterpart, an effective vision statement is bold, ambitious and inspirational, but also achievable and practical. In short, MVSs should inform clients, customers and the general public (as well as remind an organisation’s own employees) why they exist, whom they can serve, and what they intend to accomplish. Pacor (2022) compacts this into an organisation’s *why* and *how*, while Jackson, (2024) refers to *purpose* and *impact* statements as alternative terms to MVSs. Olson (2021) asserts that MVSs should be foundational, original and motivational.

More specifically, for impact and effectiveness, MVSs are consistently recognised in the literature and on websites as being short, specific, focused, concise, clear, bold and memorable. Peak (2020) recommends, “no longer than a sentence or two” (p. 4); similarly, Gorton (2023), while Treadaway (2022) puts an upper limit of 35 words on the length of MVSs. Henry (n.d.) claims, “A vision statement that’s longer than 20 words is probably too long” (p.

2). Jones (1996) goes as far as, “A good mission statement can be recited by memory—even if someone was holding a gun to your head (p. 4) The greater the mission, the more simply it can be stated” (p. 5). According to West (2021, p. 5) “... the best ones [MVSs] are short. Less is more!” Brevity, simplicity, clarity, memorability (the latter being contingent on the former three) and portability to be communicated through different media—are thus perceived as key format/length criteria for impactful, effective MVSs. For organisations that claim to have a part in the *missio Dei*, it is essential to take this knowledge on board.

Purpose, significance of, and rationale for the study

Bearing in mind the previous assertions and that “Peter Drucker famously advised customers that your mission statement should be short and compelling enough to fit on a t-shirt your staff could actually wear” (Olsen, 2021, p. 5), the purpose and focus of this study becomes:

To examine and evaluate the effectiveness of a sample of mission and vision statements from Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church organisations/ institutions in terms of their word count and compare these with a sample from exemplar and other Christian, and secular counterparts.

On the micro level, this study contributes to a call by Braun et al. (2012, p. 442) to engage in research that fills gaps in the MVS literature. Also, it ‘speaks’ to Alegre’s (2018) overarching conclusion “... that mission statements are widely used in practice but poorly researched in theory” (p. 456). In particular, the study seeks to investigate whether the above length recommendations (Peak, 2020) and suggested word limits (Treadaway, 2022) characterise the selected faith-based/associated sample of organisations, or if the effectiveness of their MVSs has been ‘lost in length’. No published research, to the researcher’s knowledge, has been conducted in this specific domain.

The rationale underpinning evaluation – long recognised – is its value in providing information for decision-making (Stufflebeam, 1973) and that, in organisations it “... can have a profound effect on discussion of policy and practice” (Parlett, 1981, p. 221). More recently, Russ-Eft and Preskill (2009) view evaluation as seeking “... to address critical questions concerning how well a program, process, product, system, or organization is working” (p. 6), which is augmented by the American Evaluation Society’s (2014, p. 1) perception that, “Evaluation is a systematic process to determine merit, worth, value or significance”.

Two other points are also noteworthy. First,

“*In short, mission statements should inform clients, customers and the general public why they exist*”

evaluation involves, "... examining and weighing a phenomenon (a person, a thing, an idea) *against some explicit or implicit yardstick*" (Weiss, 1997, p. 3; emphasis supplied). Second, Vedung's (1997) understanding of evaluation (often taken for granted) that the assessment of the merit, worth, or value relating to administration or the output/come of programs or projects is a *retrospective* assessment, which may have implications for the future.

Limitations, assumptions, and delimitations

The study is limited to the mission and vision statements sourced from Mclver et al. (2020, pp. 547569); a secondary data source. It is assumed that the MVSs represent a cross-section of SDA Church organisations/institutions globally, notwithstanding that the institutions are all situated in anglophone countries.

A second assumption is that the sourced MVSs are accurate and current. Conversely, the study has been delimited specifically to the text length/word count (constituting a sub-group of content and format) of MVSs. It is acknowledged that there are other factors, e.g., the conceptual content, creative language – voice and tone – that have a bearing on MVSs' efficacy; some of which will be touched on in the literature review.

Also, a space limitation: The referenced MVSs are not reproduced here but may be accessed through Mclver, et al. (2020) and/or available on listed organisations' websites.

Background

History links mission and vision statements to the mottos of the Middle Ages; a time known for its heraldry and chivalry. Emblazoned on coats of arms in pithy Latin phrases, mottos declared the professed maxims of rulers and noble families. However, mottos date back even further. Ancient Greece's motto was "Freedom or death", while the Roman Empire declared its supremacy through its motto, "Invicta" – invincible.

Even modern nations still have un/official mottos such as America's "In God we trust", or France's "Liberty, equality, fraternity". The late 20th century saw mottos morphing into mission and vision statements and entering public consciousness, accelerated in 1974 by Drucker's *Management tasks, responsibilities and practices* (Braun et al., 2012).

Commentary – positive, negative and neutral

Saken Khalifa (2011) refers to research in this field as being beset by contradiction and confusion. On the one hand, the confident claims made for

using MVSs (as already noted), on the other hand, one 'hears' numerous discordant notes ranging from adverse appraisals (Holmes, 2018) and the depreciation of "corporate buzzwords and politically correct terminology" (Cady et al., 2011, p. 76) to the gap between Mission statement (MS) ideal and reality (Wright, 2002) seen in the misalignment of organisations' MSs and member behaviour (Desmidt et al., 2011). According to Stephenson (2023), core values need to be evidenced in lives and workplaces, otherwise MVSs become pointless (MacLeod, 2011).

On a neutral note, conducting a word content analysis of Universities' MVSs, Cortez-Sanches (2017) notes that MSs were longer than Vision statements (VSs).

Employee non-ownership of MVSs

In-depth interviews by Kopavena (2016) in 22 organisations found a disconnect between employees' work and their companies' MVSs and an unawareness or ignorance of the latter (perhaps a forgivable shortcoming; one reported mission statement was 346 words long!). These findings are 'echoed' by Burger's (2014) research and also Ganu's (2013) who reported that less than 50% of employees/staff in a sample of tertiary education institutions in Ghana knew their institution's mission statement.

Similarly, but on a larger scale, the survey results of Achievers North American Workforce Study (2015) showed, that "61% don't know their company's mission. ... And only 40% knew the vision their company is striving toward" (p. 3). Thus, little appears to have changed over two decades.

MVSs and organisations' performance

Do MSs deliver a performance benefit for organisations? The answer is a contested matter. Empirical studies on the affirmative side – in different countries and organisations – include, e.g., Jonyo et al. (2018), Erol and Kanbur's (2014), Hirota et al. (2010), and Yazhou and Jian (2011) found that mission statements play a positive role in promoting organisational performance.

Among examples on the negative side are Alawneh's (2015) study and that by Duygulu et al. (2016) which indicated some performance benefits of particular components of mission statements, this positive result is questionable if not contradictory, because the authors found, "Ironically, the overall performance of SMEs [small and medium enterprises] *without* any mission statement [50% of the sample] was found to be slightly higher than those *with* a mission statement" (p. 702, emphasis supplied).

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Advancing the MVS knowledge base

Some studies have progressed the understanding of MVS effectiveness and performance. Braun et al. (2012) identified predictors related to MS effectiveness and impact. The starting point for improved individual and organisational performance being clarity about the reasons, development and implementation of MSs and satisfaction with their format and content, including flow-on organisational reward systems.

More explicitly, Allison (2019) in statistically analysing taxonomic groups developed from 798 MSVs from diverse organisations, concluded that MS which were most effective concentrated on the quality of life for the target audience through treatment or education linked with VSs that met audience needs and provided benefits in geographic contexts.

The research of Slatten et al. (2022) involving 1,008 Norwegian hospital employees revealed that two factors explained almost 40% of employees' performance. Employees' exhibited service efforts were linked positively to (1) employees responding confidently to and acting in harmony with their organisation's vision, as part of their workplace role; and (2) employees' level of positive resources and personal internal strengths. The researchers' closing advice to organisational leaders about organisational performance, is to be aware of the impact of both personal and environmental factors.

Faith-based institutions and MVSs

Firmin and Gilson (2010) examined 107 mission statements from institutions of Christian Higher Education. Content analysis of the MSs resulted in the emergence of frequent themes. Foremost were, *education, Christian service and society*. The study, however, focused on text themes *vis a vis* text length.

It is instructive that Ganu's (2013) study, mentioned above, dealt with apparent employee indifference to, or non-familiarity with MSs in faith-based institutions. This may be particularly disturbing. Why? Accepting that mission statements provide direction and guide decision-making, but if less than 50% of staff show familiarity with their respective MS, how will religious institutions, contends Ganu (2013), "... be able to maintain a sharp and distinct identity ... [because] ... without a critical mass of employees to drive the mission-centred institutions, faith-based universities will simply be in name only" (p. 27).

Two recent research studies, Vasudeva and Mogaji (2020) and Coker (2022) did mention MVS text length. However, neither study focused on it. The former study reported a word range of eight

to 267 words ($M = 47.14$; $SD = 62.83$) for their sample of African universities. The latter listed a range of three to 53 words, with a mean of 29.88 for some mid-western United States public school system districts, with a range of three to 236 words for another group for which no mean or standard deviation (SD) was given.

In general, what can be learned about mission and vision statement efficacy from looking at the literature?

Summary

First, there is no established consensus regarding the matter; claims and counterclaims being extant. Second, the assertions are variously based on opinion, second-hand experience, or research. The latter, with studies coming down on either side, diverging in focus; methodology; and organisational type (size, global location, national culture and level of economic activity). Third, encouraging attempts are underway at theorising, to bring together and make sense of the disparate pieces of research evidence, some of which are still missing or not clear; in part justifying the present study. Fourth, the credibility gap between protagonists and antagonists regarding MVS efficacy appears to be one between idealism and realism. Hopefully, that gap will be reduced through targeted research.

Methodology

First, the mission and vision statements of 38 SDA Church organisations/institutions were examined, in total all of the organisations being non-profit or not-for-profit. The sample was taken from McIver et al. (2020) and a *word count* of each entity's MS and VS was recorded and then aggregated into eight categories for practical and ethical reasons.

Ethical considerations were taken into account when arranging the data. Rather than identifying institutions or organisations individually, they were clustered into categories, e.g., health, publishing, education, media, etc. These 'sensitivity measures' were intended to avoid any potential embarrassment or discrediting of specific entities; the downside being that any deserved acclaim is not explicitly attributed either. However, Appendix A records each organisation in its respective category.

Next, various websites mention organisations, companies, or businesses as *exemplars* of effective mission and vision statements. Frequently occurring names on these websites were used to compile a second sample (see Appendix B) that was used for comparison purposes. Again, a word count of each entity's MS and VS was recorded.

Further, the mission and vision statements

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Mission Statements which were most effective concentrated on the quality of life for the target audience
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of a sample of other faith-based organisations, non-SDA non-profit or not-for-profit, were treated similarly; as also was a sample from secular humanitarian and service-oriented organisations. These organisations (with published MVSs on their websites), listed in Appendix C, were selected randomly from the internet, and broadly reflect the characteristics (location, number, purpose, etc.) of the SDA sample, to provide context and enable some justifiable comparisons.

Following this, the data collection and statistical analyses employed in the study became:

1. To calculate, analyse, and compare the mission and vision statement word count range (Rng), mean (M), and standard deviation (SD) of the SDA organisations/institutions sample, of eight distinct organisational categories.
2. To statistically compare the total word count from the sample of SDA and exemplar organisations by employing a *t-test*, to test the null hypothesis (H0) of no difference between the population means relating to the two groups' mission and vision statements.
3. To calculate, compare and analyse the

mission and vision statement word count (Rng; M; SD) of categories of sample SDA, non-SDA faith-based and secular (humanitarian and service-oriented) organisations.

The study took the criterion of 26 words as the *upper* limit of effective MSs and VSs, being an average of the suggested limits by Treadaway (2022) and Henry (n.d.) in the literature.

Results and discussion

Table 1

The data show that, surprisingly, four of a total of 38 (10.5%) SDA Church organisations/institutions had no mission statements. These bodies belonged to the school systems, tertiary institutions and publishing houses categories.

The MS word count of the seven categories of SDA organisations varied considerably. The word count range (Rng) of the Church administration/executive category i.e. General Conference, Divisions etc.– of the SDA Church was the largest range (Rng = 1–206 18–206), with a standard deviation (SD) of 59.1 and a mean (M) of 74.7

Table 1: *Comparisons of categories of SDA Church faith-based/associated organisations, institutions, entities: Mission statements and vision statements data*

Category of: Organisation Institution Entity	T	MS	Word Count			VS	Word Count			Add.
			Range	M	SD		Range	M	SD	
Admin./Ex. Units: G.C., Div., Union, Conference	7	7	18-206	74.7	59.1	4	17-37	29.0	7.3	3
Health Systems & Hospitals	4	4	3-21	10.3	6.8	1	31-31	31.0	0.0	3
Health Food Companies	2	2	14-44	29.0	15.0	1	9-9	9.0	0.0	1
School Systems	4	3	5-117	71.0	47.8	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	4
Tertiary Education Institutions	9	8	21-37	29.6	5.9	4	19-25	33.7	14.0	4
Media Productions & Networks	2	2	24-33	28.5	4.4	1	16-16	16.0	0.0	0
Aged & Residential Care Providers	6	6	12-37	23.5	9.2	1	11-11	11.0	0.0	3
Publishing Houses & Presses	4	2	50-51	50.5	0.5	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	2

Key: N – number of; MS – mission statement; Range – lowest to highest; M – mean; SD – standard deviation; VS – vision statement; Add. – number of additional or supplementary explanations provided; n/a – not applicable

Note: 34/38 organisations/entities had mission statements; 12/38 had vision statements and 20/38 provided supplementary explanations

words. Another high-scoring category was school systems with $Rng = 5-117$; $SD = 47.8$ and $M = 71.0$. In contrast, the recorded data of the health systems and hospital group being, $Rng = 3-21$; $SD = 6.8$ and $M = 10.3$; with several groups occupying a sizeable 'middle ground.' What do these data, together with reference to the actual MVSs, reveal and suggest?

On the one hand, in the Church administration/executive category, some administrators appear to regard mission statements as opportunities to preach sermonettes, or as information exercises for public consumption. For instance, one particularly long MS conveyed who Seventh-day Adventists are, what they believe, the biblical source of their wholistic message for a global audience, and their humanitarian work, among other material. Similarly, a school system's MS of two paragraphs length does not 'speak' of effective MS messaging. The creators of such MSs appear to have misunderstood the essence, intent and function of mission statements. In this context, *more is not better!* Interestingly, one school system effectively split its mission statement into three parts. First, by referring to the MS of its superordinate organisation, then stating its own MS, followed by an 'expansion' of what the school system's leadership would enable its constituency to accomplish. Again, such strategies do not augur well for effective MS messaging in light of advice offered in the literature. Indeed, it raises new questions: Should the MS (and VS) of subordinate organisations be the same, a subset of, align with, or merely complement the MS (and VS) of its 'parent' organisation; or might the MS (VS) be quite different? Only the contexts might provide us with suitable answers.

On the other hand, the Health Systems and Hospital (HSH) category stands out for the parsimony of its MSs. While an MS of 206 words, as noted earlier, is surely 'over the top', a three-word MS (e.g., "Christianity in action") stands at the other end of the text length continuum. The referenced example articulates the health ministry's purpose, but is its distinctive brevity and memorability in fact limiting? Does it sufficiently *differentiate* itself, for instance, from organisations dealing with social work, food banks, financial counselling, prisoner rehabilitation, etc.? In this organisational category, another HSH institution's MS, "To share God's love by providing physical, mental, and spiritual healing" (a text length of 11 words), contrastingly incorporates greater clarity and explanatory power. Increased messaging effectiveness, in terms of text length, thus lies in avoiding the extremes of over-reach and underwhelming and also aiming for a "sweet spot/

range" of text length that meets suggested literature criteria.

In looking at the vision statement data in Table 1, it is astonishing that in total only 12 (32%) of the same sample cohort provided vision statements. One may ask: Is this an acceptable situation? The Church administration/executive category and the tertiary education institutions category with 57% and 44% respectively were the least offending bodies. These data, the absence of 68% of VSs, cannot be written off as oversight, but suggest that if leadership is unable/unwilling to imagine, endorse, and/or articulate a future ideal state for their organisation, it may point to a level of leadership skill sets, morale, and effectiveness where an enterprise could greatly benefit from education, revitalisation or renewal. Organisational leadership would be well advised to reflect on the scriptural admonition, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18, KJV).

A closer examination of the MVS data (Rng , M , SD) reveals that VSs tend to be shorter than MSs, confirming Cortez-Sanches' (2017) findings. The Church administration and executive category and the tertiary education institutions category registered relatively similar VS means (29.0 and 33.7 respectively), but the latter category had a greater SD of 14.0 *vis a vis* 7.3 of the former. Several VS categories only had one datum, thus not providing a useful M .

Table 2

The table presents the combined mission statement word count data from 34/38 of the SDA Church organisations and institutions, showing a range of 3206, a mean of 40.3 and a standard deviation of 38.6.

For exemplars, the comparable data were $Rng = 8-33$; $M = 15.6$ and $SD = 6.0$. From this sample, only 1/21 MSs exceeded 26 words, whereas their counterparts scored 20/34 exceeding MSs.

A statistical analysis of the MS data resulted in the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0); with a t value of 2.846, $df = 53$, with $p = 0.01$, indicating a significant difference between the word count length/brevity of the two groups, in favour of exemplars.

With regard to the combined vision statements of the SDA group, reduced to $N = 12$, its scores were [with exemplars shown comparably in brackets]: $Rng = 9-51$ [730]; $M = 26.5$ [14.3] and $SD = 12.6$ [6.1]. Of the SDA sample's VSs, 6/12 (50%) exceeded 26 words *vis a vis* 1/21 (less than five percent) for exemplars.

An identical statistical analysis of the VS data resulted, also, in the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0); with a t value of 3.388, $df = 31$, with $p = 0.01$. It indicated, once more, a significant difference in

“*Organisational leadership would be well advised to reflect on the scriptural admonition, “Where there is no vision, the people perish”*”

Table 2: Comparison of exemplars and SDA Church faith-based/associated organisations, institutions and entities: Mission statements and vision statements data

Organisation Institution Entity	Mission Statements Word Count				Vision Statements Word Count			
	TN	Range	M	SD	TN	Range	M	SD
SDA Church faith-based / associated	34	3-206	40.3	38.6	12	9-51	26.5	12.6
Exemplars	21	8-33	15.6	6.0	21	7-30	14.3	6.1

Key: TN – total number of; Range – lowest to highest; M – mean; SD – standard deviation

the VS word count between the two samples, again, favouring exemplars over the VSs from the cohort of SDA Church faith-based organisations.

The data suggest that exemplar MSs and VSs expressed the intended message with significantly greater conciseness, simplicity, and enhanced memorability. Thus, on this criterion, exemplar MSs and VSs are likely to make a superior impact on target audiences.

Also, it is ironic that some of Jesus’ followers appear not to have learned from the brevity and clarity of his model MS, “... the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10, TEV), or the conciseness of his consummate VS, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10, ESV); powerful messages in few words. In view of some of his followers’ lengthy (and ineffective) MVSSs, Jesus might well chide, as he did millennia ago, “... the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light” (Luke 16:8, KJV).

Table 3
Because of some low category group counts (see also Table 1) and to make meaningful, valid comparisons, only three categories of the SDA Church faith-based/associated, non-SDA Church faith-based, and secular (humanitarian and service-oriented) organisations and entities were investigated and listed. The categories were Church administration and executive bodies, tertiary education institutions and aged and residential care.

A sweep of Table 3 data leaves one with the impression of a pattern of ‘broad similarities’ of text length in the various categories, with some vision and mission statement exceptions. About the latter, there is a decided difference between the MSs of SDA Church administration and executive bodies’ word count and their secular (humanitarian and service-oriented) counterparts as shown by the data

of the former, with their counterparts in brackets: Rng = 18–206 [12–29]; M = 74.7 [21.3]; SD = 59.1 [4.5]. Likewise, a difference is noticeable when comparing secular MS text length data with that of non-SDA faith-based organisations, in favour of the secular group. Indeed, a reading of the former group’s MSs and VSs showed that 75% had a word count of more than 26 words.

A second impression gained is that vision statements, on the whole, are distinctly lower in word count than mission statements (as in Table 1) as indicated by the Rng, M and SD data. Further, organisational aspirations and visions of the future are not only couched in fewer words but on numerous occasions are not stated at all, the latter particularly applying to SDA Church organisations.

What did a further examination of actual MSs and VSs additionally reveal? The tertiary education institution category of the organisation types had an MS excess word count (over 26 words) of 66.5%, 60% and 55% of the respective organisational types; VSs, in contrast, had a lower count.

Aged and residential care performed as the most positive category overall; only the SDA Church group with an MS score of 50% over 26 words stood out as a low performer.

What can one conclude from such results?

Conclusion and recommendations

The results of this case study shed light on a number of matters and also raised some questions.

To express their *raison d’etre* and aspirational future in a succinct, clear, and memorable format, remains a challenge for various categories of SDA organisations and institutions. Entities are doing themselves a disservice by not employing best practice in crafting text-length effective mission and vision statements that should enhance their contribution to the *missio Dei*. Other faith-based and some secular entities also could ‘lift their game’ in

“it is ironic that some of Jesus’ followers appear not to have learned from the brevity and clarity of his model mission statement”

Table 3: Comparisons of selected categories of SDA Church faith-based/associated, non-SDA faith-based, secular service-oriented organisations, institutions and entities

Category of: Organisation Institution Entity	Groups	Mission Statement Word Count				Vision Statement Word Count			
		N	Range	M	SD	N	Range	M	SD
Administration Units & Executive Bodies	SDA Church faith-based/associated	7	18-206	74.7	59.1	4	17-37	29.0	7.3
	non-SDA Church faith-based/associated	7	20-71	41.3	6.8	4	8-40	27.5	12.0
	Secular, humanitarian service oriented	7	12-29	21.3	4.5	7	8-24	11.8	5.1
Tertiary Education Institutions	SDA Church faith-based/associated	8	21-37	29.6	5.9	4	19-51	33.7	14.0
	non-SDA Church faith-based/associated	9	9-79	30.1	20.9	8	13-32	19.0	5.6
	Secular	9	11-57	30.0	11.7	9	9-37	18.4	10.3
Aged & Residential Care Providers	SDA Church faith-based/associated	6	12-37	23.5	9.2	1	11-11	11.0	0.0
	non-SDA Church faith-based/associated	6	9-37	18.6	9.9	6	3-28	15.7	9.9
	Secular, for profit service oriented	5	8-50	25.6	18.0	5	8-18	12.8	3.3

Key: N – number of; Range – lowest to highest; M – mean; SD – standard deviation

fashioning effective text-length MVSs.

Overall, MSs, characteristically, were much longer than VSs (of which, noticeably, many in the SDA sample were missing); MSs being the main focus in faith-based organisations. Insofar that 65% of the SDA sample lacked a VS is a sad commentary on leadership across the categories; a few even had no MS. Further, because of excessive word count, the message clarity and memorability of almost 60% of MSs and 50% of VSs were potentially either severely compromised, or negated. Contrastingly, exemplar MSs and VSs exceeding the upper limit of 26 words were minimal (totalling only two), resulting in a statistically significant less word count and shorter text length.

It is evident that exemplar organisations, many of them businesses, show exceptional awareness of the importance of MVSs and their potential impact on target audiences, company brand, profitability, and also employee morale. Palpably, these organisations have put considerable thought and effort into constructing their MVSs, and through them, are displaying a *genre* mastery in reaching their audiences.

Reflecting on the different text lengths of MVSs, it may be asked, who crafted the MVSs? Were they crafted by small groups or individuals – senior

administrators and their assistants or even public relations companies and consultants; or by creative individuals? To what extent were employees and stakeholders involved in the process? Was the latter merely a perfunctory public relations exercise that needed to be ‘ticked off’? And had the end result been given a ‘real life test run’ before being voted for acceptance? While the present study’s focus, as stated, was elsewhere, nonetheless it is recommended that these related matters be given thoughtful consideration by organisational leadership, given the text-length efficacy level of MVSs, particularly in faith-based entities. A qualitative study involving interviews would shed light on this area.

Because MVSs are only a means to an end, Michael Frost’s (2016) advice is particularly pertinent: “... designing [mission statements and] vision statements, teaching values and teaching strategies can be wasted unless people have a clear understanding of what *actual* behaviors are required” (p. 25). To be operationalised, Frost claims, the behaviours that MVSs embody must be understood, practised and internalised. Moreover, effective MVSs may be used instrumentally, particularly by faith-based entities, in interviewing job applicants, as suggested by Devine (2024), to ascertain alignment

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with the mission of the organisation to forestall potential future employee disconnect.

In a sense, MVSs work like mnemonics that activate our memory by forging links and associations with behaviours. An Old Testament version of this is the practical counsel given to Israel: “Place these words on your hearts. Get them deep inside you. Tie them on your hand and foreheads as a reminder. Inscribe them on the doorposts and gates of your cities ...” (Deut.11:18, 20; The Message). The equivalence (in terms of possibilities and opportunities) for a present-day faith-based organisation is to communicate its mission and vision to a wide audience in clear, crisp and concise language, which is only limited by one’s creative imagination.

In conclusion, it is hoped that the findings of this study have raised an awareness that organisations of all kinds would do well in following Drucker’s dictum that a mission or vision statement should fit on a t-shirt – less being more – thus avoiding a plethora of words; a case of where one ‘cannot see the forest for the trees’. **TEACH**

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- Appendix A: SDA Church (or affiliated/associated with) Organisations/Institutions/Entities**
- ▼ **General Conference, Divisions, Unions & Conferences:** General Conference of SDAs; North American Division of SDAs; Northern Californian Conference of SDAs; South Pacific Division of SDAs; British Union Conference of SDAs; Central Philippine Union Conference of SDAs; East Central Africa Division.
- Hospitals & Health-related Organisations:** Sydney Adventist Hospital; Adventist Health – Roseville CA; Adventist Health Care – Hospitals in Washington DC area; Florida (Adventist) Hospital System.
- Health Food Companies:** Inter-American Health Food Company; Sanitarium Health Food Company (Australia).
- SDA School Systems:** Adventist Schools Australia; British Union Conference of SDAs Ed. Dept.; Nth. American Division of SDAs Education Department; Pacific Union Conference of SDAs Education: K-12 Office of Education, CA.
- **Tertiary Institutions:** Herbert Fletcher University, Inter American Division; Loma Linda University, CA; Pacific Union College, CA; Avondale College of Higher Education (now Avondale University, in Australia); Southern Adventist University, TN; La Sierra University, CA; Oakwood University, AL; Walla Walla University, WA; Baraton University, Kenya.
- SDA Media Centres:** Adventist Media Productions, Simi Valley, CA; Adventist Media Network, South Pacific.
- ♥ **Aged Care and Residential Care:** Adventist Residential Care Western Australia; Adventist Aged Care (Greater Sydney Conference of SDAs; Paradise Village, San Diego, CA; Feather Canyon, Paradise, CA (Part of Hawthorn Retirement Group); Cherry Wood Retirement Community, Portland, OR; Pisgah Valley: A SDA Retirement Community, NC.
- Publishing Houses:** Pacific Press, CA; Review & Herald, MD; Signs Publishing Australia; Stanborough Press, UK.
- Appendix B: Exemplar Organisations/Entities**
- Amazon, Apple, BBC (UK), Cadbury, Canon, Costco, Google, Harley Davidson, IKEA, Kellogs Foods, LinkedIn, Meta/ Facebook, Microsoft, NIKE, Pepsi Co, Pfizer, Target, TED, TESLA, Toyota (USA), Uber.
- Appendix C:**
- ▼ **non-SDA faith-based Church Organisations/Entities**
- Anglican Church of Southern Africa, Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide, Church of Scotland, Dutch Reformed Church in Africa, Hillsong (Australia), Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Salvation Army (Australia).
- ▼ **Secular/Humanitarian Service-oriented Organisations/Entities (non-Faith-based)**
- Alzheimers Association, Habitat for Humanity, Light in Action, Lions International, Rotary International, RSPCA (Australia), UNICEF.
- **non-SDA faith-based Church (or affiliated/associated with) Tertiary Education Institutions**
- Alphacrucis University College, Australian Catholic University, Christian Heritage College of Higher Education, Concordia University Texas, Excelsia College, Methodist University of Ghana, Morling College, Pentecost University of Ghana, Tabor College, University of Divinity.
- **Secular Tertiary Education Institutions (non-faith-based)**
- Cambridge University, Harvard University, University of British Columbia, University of Johannesburg, University of Otago, University of Pretoria, University of Toronto, University of Western Australia, Yale University.**
- ♥ **non-SDA faith-based Church (or affiliated/associated with) Aged Care and Residential Care Providers**
- Anglicare (Sydney Diocese), Baptcare (USA), Braemar Presbyterian Aged Care, Calvary Health Care, St. Vincent's, United Methodist Retirement Homes (USA).
- ♥ **Secular Aged Care and Residential Care Providers (non-faith-based, for-profit)**
- Bupa, Menarock Aged Care, Opal Aged Care, Regis Aged Care, Sunrise Senior Living (Canada).
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