

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF THEORY AND RESEARCH TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF LIBRARIES

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### ON THE FULL-FLEDGED MISSION STATEMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY SCIENTIFIC LIBRARY

The mission statement of an organization compiled in accordance with the definition of the term “mission” of the dictionary of the ISO 9000 quality management systems standard cannot be recognized as an effective management tool, since the ISO requirements for this document are too generic and vague. The **objectives** of this work were to clarify the functions of the mission statement of the university library as a management document, to develop a definition of the mission statement, consisting mainly of a list of its functions, and to develop a full-fledged mission statement of the Scientific Library of the Belarusian National Technical University based on the developed functional definition. Accordingly, the **methods** of work were the retrieval and interpretation of relevant scientific literature and the synthesis of data obtained from it for the development of new documents, viz. the definition of the mission statement and the mission statement of our library based on it. As a **result**, the intended functional definition of a university library mission statement as a full-fledged effective management document has been given and the mission statement of the Scientific Library of the Belarusian National Technical University has been crafted. The aspects of improving the efficiency of the library after the adoption of the new mission statement **are briefly discussed**.

*Keywords:* mission statement; functions; definition; efficiency; university library

#### Introduction

The mission statements that are compiled guided only by the definition of the term “mission” of the dictionary of the ISO 9000 quality management systems standard cannot be recognized as an effective management tool since the ISO requirements for this document are too generic and vague. For example, the dictionary definition of a mission does not require distinguishing an organization from a number of single-profile ones, does not aim at forming interest in an organization among its customers, does not assume that the mission statement would stimulate and consolidate employees. Meanwhile, all these signs are characteristic for some mission statements of the US and UK organizations. At the same time, following the definition of the mission in accordance with ISO only, it is possible to draw up a formally correct statement, which, however, will say actually very little about the organization.

If a librarian, being in search of fresh ideas about effective wordings of library mission statements, consult some of the Russian-language library literature, he (she) will be in a need, first of all, for a strict distinction between two fundamentally different meanings in which the term “mission” is used in it. Thus, the Librarian’s Handbook (*Spravochnik bibliotekarya*, 2010) describes the library mission as an important management document (p. 349–351), but at the same time states that “there is a broad and narrow understanding of the mission” (p. 429). At the same time, “in a broad sense, the mission is the purpose, the meaning of the library’s existence, the expression of its values, beliefs and principles” (Stolyarov, 2010, p. 10), while “in a narrow sense, the mission manifests itself as a sufficiently substantial and detailed statement about what each particular library exists for. This wording reflects both the belonging of the library to the category

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of library institutions, and its uniqueness, difference from all others” (*Spravochnik bibliotekarya*, 2010, p. 429). It is clear that we are interested in the mission (mission statement) as in an effective management document “that directs the organization” and is able to “inspire employee”, that inspires “an image of the organization’s character”, thereby setting “a tone, through which actions are guided” (Kadhium, Betteg, Sharma, & Nalliah, 2021, p. 1)... in other words, we are interested in the “library mission” in the narrow meaning of this term.

It is clear that in order to develop a full-fledged mission statement, it is necessary to use both empirically accumulated corresponding world experience (to a certain extent presented in the mission statements collection compiled by J. M. Graham & W. C. Havlik), and the results of theoretical studies of the functions of this document. At the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, one of the co-authors was already dealing with the issue of highlighting the functions of mission statements. Based mainly on the mentioned book by J. M. Graham & W. C. Havlik (1994), on the few examples of mission statements of organizations in the USA and UK known to him, and on the first library mission statement in Belarus, developed in 1994 by the late V.A. Golubev (State Institution "I. S. Lupinovich Belarus Agricultural Library" of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, 2021), he twice tried to present his idea of the functions of this document (Lazarev, 2000, 2001). When combining the lists of functions given in these two papers, the following functional definition is obtained:

“Mission statement <1> *distinguishes* the organization from other organizations of its type; <2> indicates the *principal product or service area*; <3> describes *geographic parameters* of organization (e.g., Marseilles, France, European Union, Europe, etc.); <4> embodies the *strategic decision-making philosophy* (in particular: <4.1> by featuring the statement of *purpose*; <4.2> by describing the *strategic objectives, intent and business direction* for the organization; <4.3> by describing the organization’s *work in the context of achieving these goals*; <5> reveals the *image of the organization that its managers seek to project*, reflects the *expectations of the public*; <6> reflects the organization’s *self-concept*, understanding of its influence on the external environment and the influence of the environment on the organization; <7> embodies the primary *client needs* that the organization will attempt to satisfy; <8> demonstrates that the organization’s *top priority is the client* and reflects the *concern for quality* of the organization’s activity; <9> *stimulates the effective and creative work of the staff*, consolidates the efforts of the staff members (in particular: <9.1> by indicating the organization’s *ability to satisfy the principal desires of employees and stockholders over the long term*; <9.2> by *featuring a most important role of the staff*; <9.3> by the use of such wording and/or style that *make the staff proud* of the organization, that inspires the wish to work more effectively for the sake of its strategic aims; <10> reflects the other *values, priorities and fundamental beliefs* of the organization; <11> describes the *technology* that is used in the organization’s work; <12> idealizes the organization just as much as idealization helps to avoid disappointment (and not vice versa); at the same time, it does not intersect the border of truthfulness”.

### Methods

It is clear that one of the methods of this work was the analysis of relevant publications (not limited to the problems of exactly the university library, or any library, or the university as a whole), with special attention to the functions of the mission statement and ways of their implementation. Based on the analysis performed, we supplemented and clarified the functions of the full-fledged mission statement of the university library and crafted on their basis the “Mission of the Scientific Library of the Belarusian National Technical University”.

## Results and Discussion

1. Due to the limitations on the volume of the article it is just not possible to present and discuss here all the significant results of the analysis of literature and materials (mainly concerning the wordings of the mission statement functions and examples of their implementation). Therefore, we will touch on only some most important points.

- I. Efe & O. Ozer (2015) note that in the process of forming the university's mission statement, it is important to include data on cultural traditions, historical context, and economic conditions in it. This recommendation is presumably true for university libraries (and scientific libraries in general). N. V. Zbarovskaya (2003, p. 134) also points out the need to take into account the history of the library when developing its mission statement. The corresponding data are helpful for distinguishing the organization from other organizations of its type.

- R. N. Shamgunov (2011) proposes that the question "What are we *not* doing and will not do?" ought to be one of the key questions to be answered by the developer of the mission statement. The answer to it is extremely useful, because it makes it possible to make the wording of the above-mentioned functions 4.2, 4.3 and 6 (and, possibly, not only these functions) clearer.

- The wording "The mission is based on such characteristics of the company that are its strengths and can make the company be successful in the market" (Powerbranding, n.d.) is close, as it seems to us, to the formulations of functions 5 and 12 mentioned in the Introduction. The fact is that fulfilling the cited requirement helps to better reveal the image that the library managers seek to project (function 5); and, as for function 12, its wording can be clarified taking into account the cited requirement as follows: "idealizes the organization exactly as much as idealization helps to avoid disappointment (and not vice versa); at the same time, the border of truthfulness is not intersected and no exaggerations take place, but there is just a strong emphasis on the strengths of those activity and product, that favorably distinguish the organization from the activities and product of competitors".

- From other wordings given in the anonymous article "*Sovremennyi podkhod...*" (Powerbranding, n.d.), we note the following: "The mission <...> is a platform for setting strategic goals; it sets the general vector of business development and makes it possible to set priorities correctly". These wordings are close to the wordings of functions 4.1, 4.2 and 7 as presented in the Introduction.

- An indication that the mission statement "promotes unity within the library or library community", that it promotes "the creation of corporate spirit" (Zbarovskaya, 2003, p. 133) is close to function 9 of the working functional definition presented in the Introduction; moreover, this wording is so good (at least in relation to such an institution as a library) that it seems appropriate to include it verbatim in our new definition (see subparagraph 9.4 presented in subchapter 2 of the Results and Discussion).

- In the book by G. Y. Kudryashova (2004), a number of functions of the library mission are given, of which we consider the following to be noteworthy: "the mission guarantees that contradictory goals will not be pursued, instills confidence that the university library's activities are based on clear joint goals" (Kudryashova, 2004, p. 91). We believe that the indication of the clarity of goals and their consistency with the goals of the university is part of the disclosure of the philosophy of the organization—less straightforward than by "formulating the goals of the organization" (Lazarev, 2000, p. 10). In our opinion, excessively straightforward wording of goals can cause not optimism, but skepticism; balance *is* important here... At the same time, in relation to the university library, it may be very important to indicate that the goals of the library and the university itself are to a certain extent joint... By the way, in this context, even the most general

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declarations about the role of the mission may be important when developing the mission statement of the university library. Thus, when looking at such an imaginative and inspiring formulation as “Mission is the lens to which the organization views the relationship between students, educators, other stakeholders, and academia as well as the local and global communities” (Keefe, 2020, p. 1), from the perspective of a librarian, it shows an incentive to identify the role of the university library in the development of mutually beneficial relations between these “parties” and “communities” to improve the research and educational activities of the university.

- Also, in order to develop the mission statement of our library, we found it useful to take into account such a function of the library mission statement as being the basis for setting library goals, ensuring consistency of the set of goals, helping to develop a library development strategy, “setting the direction and permissible limits of the library's functioning” (Zbarovskaya, 2003, p. 133).

- The idea of the orientation of the organization's mission statement to the future seemed also very important to us (Parshukova, 2002). At the same time, the cited author points out, in particular, that when creating a mission statement, “a reference to the future is necessary, but the main attention should be paid to the present”. It would seem that in good mission statements this demand is immanently met even without its formulation. Especially, in such organizations as a university or a scientific library. Nevertheless, we really believe that perhaps the wording of the library mission statement would have aroused more confidence among readers when indicating in it the library's readiness for the challenges of the future. The main thing is not to fall into populism, not to slip into the formulation of primitive or obviously impossible slogans, excessively general attitudes... but soberly formulate a *feasible* direction for future activities.

- Going far beyond the analysis of the functions of mission statements, we note that the performance of at least the first two functions of the mission statement (according to the Introduction) requires an *accurate selection of words*. An interesting and rather curious example that illustrates this idea is the paper by M. F. Firmin & K. M. Gilson (2009) which analyzed the mission statements of 107 organizations of the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities<sup>1</sup>, but only 68% of them used the word “Christian” in the mission statements, 43% of the organizations mentioned Christ, 31% used the word “faith”, 27% used church-related concepts such as *kingdom*, only 26% – “God”, 23% – “Bible”... However, the word “education” – the most frequent component of the analyzed mission statements – was used only by 70% of them; and in general, it is quite difficult for us to understand how can mission statements devoid of these words at all somehow identify these organizations and describe their activities.

Also, a good illustration of how much accurate word selection means for the successful crafting a mission statement is the work by J. D. Cortés-Sánchez (2017), in which, as a result of analyses of mission statements of 149 European, 88 North American, 73 Asian, 9 South American, 4 African universities and 26 universities of Oceania, it was found, in particular, that the mission statements clearly do not use enough terms related to education; moreover, the word “education” is adequately represented only in the formulations of Asian universities (Cortés-Sánchez, 2017, p. 32); “collaboration” is usually only briefly mentioned in mission statements, despite its effective role in research and training (*Ibid*).

2. Taking into account the literature data, we come to the following updated and reconsidered working definition of the “ideal” mission (in relation to the university library), consisting, with the exception of the last phrase, from the set of its functions:

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<sup>1</sup> About this coalition it can be read at <https://www.cccu.org/membership/#heading-membership-categories-2>

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“Mission statement <1> *distinguishes* the library from other libraries of its type; <2> indicates its *principal product or service area with a delimiting indication of what the library does not and will not do* (Shamgunov, 2011); <3> describes *geographic parameters* of the library (e.g., Marseilles, France, European Union, Europe, etc.); <4> embodies the *strategic decision-making philosophy* (in particular: <4.1> by featuring the *transparently clear and consistent* statement of *purpose in the context of the university's goals* (Kudryashova, 2004; Zbarovskaya, 2003); <4.2> by *clear and consistent* (Kudryashova, 2004) describing the *strategic objectives, intent and business direction* for the library; <4.3> by describing the organization’s *work in the context of achieving these goals*; <5> *briefly highlights the cultural traditions and historical context of the library and the university* (Efe & Ozer, 2015), *provided that these data increase its attractiveness—as well as the attractive characteristics of the university as the “habitat” of the library (if any)* (Zbarovskaya, 2003); <6> reveals the *image of the library that its managers seek to project*, reflects the *expectations of the public*; <7> reflects the library’s *self-concept*, understanding of its influence on the external environment and the influence of the environment on it; <8> embodies the *primary user needs* that the library will attempt to satisfy, *showing how the library will make user’s life better* (Powerbranding, n.d.) *and how it can prepare him (her) for the challenges of the future* (Parshukova, 2002); <9> demonstrates that the organization’s *top priority is the client* and reflects the *concern for quality* of the organization’s activity; <10> *stimulates the effective and creative work of the staff*, consolidates the efforts of the staff members (in particular: <10.1> by indicating the organization’s *ability to satisfy the principal desires of employees* and stockholders over the long term; <10.2> by *featuring a most important role of the staff*; <10.3> by the use of such wording and/or style that *make the staff proud* of the organization, that inspires the wish to work more effectively for the sake of its strategic aims, <10.4> *by dictating the norms of behavior for employees and the formation of corporate culture* (Zbarovskaya, 2003; Powerbranding, n.d.); <11> reflects the other *values, priorities and fundamental beliefs* of the organization; <12> describes the *technology* that is used in the organization’s work; <13> idealizes the organization just as much as idealization helps to avoid disappointment (and not vice versa); at the same time, it does not intersect the border of truthfulness, *and idealization is achieved just by a strong emphasis on the strengths of the activity and product which favorably distinguish the library from the activities and product of competitors* (Modern approach..., s.a.), *but not by actual exaggerations*.

*When crafting the mission statement, it is critical to accurately select the necessary vocabulary* (Firmin & Gilson, 2009; Cortés-Sánchez, 2017) *that reflects the specifics of the organization's professional activities and products, regional aspects of its activities, and consumer needs”*.

New wordings in this definition (in comparison with the formulations given in the Introduction) are highlighted in bold italics indicating the source of their borrowing cited in this article or the source that inspired the formulation of the idea.

We believe that this definition, if adjusted in an appropriate way, can be applied to the wording of the mission of almost any organization. We would also like to note that, like the definitions given in the papers by V. S. Lazarev (2000, 2001), this definition is proposed not as a “Procrustean bed”, but rather as an ideal to strive for.

3. Based on the above working functional definition, a fundamentally new wording of the mission of the Scientific Library of the Belarusian National Technical University has been crafted. Not all the requirements of this definition were included in it, and some of them had to be deliberately avoided, because, e.g., due the absence of financial independence of the library, it cannot guarantee the fulfillment of a number of the corresponding obligations and aspirations.

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According to the new wording of the mission of the Scientific Library of the Belarusian National Technical University (BNTU), our library, “is a Belarusian university library, which is characterized by its breadth, expressed in the diversity of the stock’s coverage of engineering and technical disciplines (*but not only these ones*); in providing transnational access to information on these disciplines (*but not only these ones*); in servicing BNTU employees and students of all specialties (*but not only those working and studying at BNTU*); in presenting a variety of library and information services. Assistance and training services are provided not only to readers, but also to authors. The daring and qualified staff of the library valued by the library management strives to improve the qualifications of users directly or indirectly, to promote the papers of researchers in such scholarly publications that are visible to the whole world, and also, on the basis of the principles of open science to popularize the published papers and books by authors from BNTU and the results obtained by them. We also contribute to arousing students’ interest in scientific work, helping them “to open the door to science”. The promotion of the book and culture in general, the education of the user is also the subject of our concern, our essential value.

At the same time, the Library welcomes the cooperation of both specialists and groups within the library itself (maintaining faith in the value and uniqueness of each individual employee), and interlibrary, interinstitutional cooperation.

We strive to ensure high-quality and effective access of users to information that will contribute to educational, research, professional activities, cultural and ideological education of students and university staff. We strive to be ready for the challenges of the future and to foster such readiness among our users”<sup>2</sup>.

Considering this text, it can be noted that not all the above-formulated requirements are met literally, that individual elements of the mission statements often correspond not to one highlighted function, but to several ones at once. All this should not be surprising: it is known that classifications are always poorer than the systems they reflect, that “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor., 3:6) or, if you like, that “*grau <...> ist alle Theorie*”, as formulated by Goethe...<sup>3</sup>

Can we talk about the beneficial effects of the new mission statement? Within the three years after the approval of the new mission, the library made a great progress in the development of the repository, the promotion of scientific papers of the University employees in journals indexed by scientometric databases, in the development of profiles of researchers facilitating promoting transparency of their work, etc. Apparently, a certain incentive for this progress was the new “Mission of the BNTU Scientific Library”, which, “meeting” the reader at the entrance to the library, simultaneously” could have led him (her) to an idea to seek “help and training services”. Who knows... of course, it is impossible to single out the exact share of the mission statement’s contribution to this library progress. Or maybe we just don’t need to single it out? After all, success factors are complex.

In any case, we believe that the “adventures” of the full-fledged mission statement of the BNTU Scientific Library have only just begun

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<sup>2</sup> Since our University has such strong non-purely engineering faculties as the Faculty of Marketing, Management and Entrepreneurship and the Faculty of Management and Humanitarization Technologies, our library has the corresponding strong thematic fragments of its stock and the services provided to specialists and students of these faculties. Also, in addition to library and information services, the BNTU Scientific Library provides educational, advertising, etc. services. These and similar circumstances give rise to the formulation “*but not only*”, indicating that, in addition to the specified activity, another one is being performed—not the main one, but meaningfully closely related to the main one. In order to preserve the harmony of the reflection of the key characteristics of the library, the description of such activities is intentionally not specified.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.gutzitert.de/zitat\\_autor\\_johann\\_wolfgang\\_von\\_goethe\\_thema\\_denken\\_zitat\\_6033.html](https://www.gutzitert.de/zitat_autor_johann_wolfgang_von_goethe_thema_denken_zitat_6033.html)

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At the end of the article, the authors would like to quote a phrase that greatly inspired us both to write the paper and to write the principally new mission of our library: "...mission provides the basis for a culture that will guide future executive action" (Pearce II, 1982, p. 15).

### Conclusions

So, since we cannot recognize the mission statement of an organization crafted in accordance with the definition of the term "mission" of the dictionary of the ISO 9000 quality management systems standard as an effective management tool, we have clarified the list of functions that, as their analysis of the literature shows, are performed by a full-fledged mission statement of the university scientific library. With the use of the updated list of functions, a working functional definition of the mission statement of such a library has been developed. Guided by the latter, we have crafted a new wording of the mission of the Scientific Library of the Belarusian National Technical University that forms the attractive image of the library in the eyes of its users, encourages them to apply for services in editing their profiles, choosing journals for submitting papers and others aimed at increasing the visibility of their work, promotes consolidation of the library staff... etc. We believe that the contribution to the progress of our library in recent years has also been made by the existence of its new mission statement, by the fact that *it is being read*.

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## ПРО ПОВНОЦІННУ МІСІЮ НАУКОВОЇ БІБЛІОТЕКИ УНІВЕРСИТЕТУ

Формулювання місії (mission statement) організації, складені лише відповідно до визначення терміну «місія» у словнику стандарту систем менеджменту якості ISO 9000, не можуть бути визнані ефективним інструментом управління, оскільки вимоги ISO до цього документа є загальними. **Завдання** цієї роботи: уточнення функцій формулювання місії (mission statement) університетської бібліотеки як управлінського документа; розробка визначення формулювання місії, що складається переважно з переліку її функцій; та розробка повноцінного формулювання місії (mission statement) Наукової бібліотеки Білоруського національного технічного університету на основі розробленого функціонального визначення mission statement. Відповідно, **методами** роботи були пошук та інтерпретація відповідної наукової літератури та синтез отриманих з неї даних для розробки нових документів (визначення mission statement, самої mission statement) на їх основі. В **результаті** створено визначення mission statement як повноцінного ефективного управлінського документа та розроблено mission statement нашої університетської бібліотеки. Коротко **обговорюються** аспекти підвищення ефективності роботи бібліотеки після ухвалення нової mission statement.

*Ключові слова:* mission statement; функції; визначення; ефективність; університетська бібліотека

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