

Article

Content of Corporate Vision Statements in Maritime Logistics: A Case Study of the Largest Companies

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Abstract: The importance of maritime logistics for the world's economy necessitates urgent investigations of the corporate strategies in this industry. The present case study aims to examine the vision statements of the largest (by cargo capacity) companies of maritime logistics. Methodologically, it follows the previous research focused on the elements of corporate strategic communication: the principal components of the vision statements are distinguished, and their frequencies are calculated. Additionally, the similarity between all pairs of statements is measured. A total of twelve components are established, namely, service, customers, quality, business, geography, image, staff, history, innovation, sustainability, society, and environment. The most common from them are service and business, and the least common are history and staff. The contents of the vision statements differ to a certain degree between West European and East Asian companies. It is established that the average similarity of the vision statements is low. This case study provides an example for judgments about industry-level corporate strategic communication with vision statements. It contributes to the existing literature revealing the diversity of these statements. From the practical point of view, the study provides the information for designing vision statements by managers, who may choose from a wide set of components and should not forget about such important issues as the staff or environment.

Keywords: corporate communication; geographical differences; international logistics; strategic statement; vision content



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1. Introduction

Covering more than 70% of the planet's surface, the oceans and seas constitute a unique space for the effective transportation of goods. Currently, maritime logistics forms a highly developed network that contributes to international business integration (Palmieri et al. 2019), determines the existence of sectoral supply chains (Hua et al. 2018), and creates new mechanisms facilitating knowledge management (Song and Lee 2012). The rapid growth of this industry, its vital importance to the globalized economy, as well as its complexity and specifics have made its studies a separate direction of research, with its own agenda and approaches (Gülmez et al. 2023; Panayides and Song 2013; Talley 2013).

The biggest companies in maritime logistics are true corporations, which need appropriate strategies for succeeding in the contemporary turbulent economic environment (Parola et al. 2015; Yeo 2012). Although the developed strategies are often hidden and/or inaccessible, being fixed in internal corporate documentation, and the implemented strategies can be registered only post factum, strategic statements made on corporate web-pages shed light on some key managerial thoughts (Alegre et al. 2018; Cormier et al. 2009; Djajadikerta and Trieksani 2012; Fitzsimmons et al. 2022; Kim and Rader 2010; Larose 1997; Liu et al. 1997; Pearce and David 1987; Tsao and Chang 2002; Vantrappen and de Jong 2018). In ideal cases, these statements directly reflect the strategic priorities established by the companies.

In other cases (for instance, when statements are made without the significant involvement of top managers or when they are designed for a better image), these statements are related in any way to strategies reflecting their communication; moreover, the very disclosure of some strategic information influences performance and development, and, thus, it is related to the implemented strategy.

The present case study addresses the major problem of corporate strategic communication. Although the latter is generally well-developed in the literature (Ajayi and Mmutle 2020; Dolphin and Fan 2000; Steyn and Niemann 2010), attention has been paid to its particular aspects unequally. For instance, vision statements remain in the “shadow” of other strategic statements, and the principles of their composition are yet to be understood comprehensively. Moreover, the contemporary shifts to social and environmental responsibility stimulate the search for new “palettes” for analyzing and designing vision statements. Another aspect of the noted problem is whether corporate strategic communication has specific features in different industries (this may also be related to the development of industrial policies). The above-said aspect dictates the need for case studies exploring corporate vision statements as individual strategic communication tools in particular sectors of the economy. Various examples are necessary as a further contribution to the noted aspects of the major problem. In other words, it appears to be reasonable to work to provide such examples.

The objective of the present work is to systematize the knowledge of vision statements of maritime logistics companies on their official web-pages. Generally, visions reflect strategic thoughts on how a given company wishes to look in the future. Stating them seems to be very important in the considered industry because the latter depends on long-term development in the permanently changing network on maritime connections. This work pays attention to the leaders of maritime logistics because of three reasons: such companies dominate the industry on the world’s scale, their activity forms templates for smaller companies, and they have well-developed web-pages where enough information for various analyses is available. Taking into account the narrow industrial focus of this paper and its too-empirical manner and elementary analysis (essential for finding the main “bricks” of the related information), this paper seems to be a case study, which only raises the need for further, more comprehensive investigations, while providing a notable example.

The novelty of this paper is related to the fact that it is the first attempt to systematize the state of vision statements in an important sector of the economy and, more generally, the development of a new “palette” for the analysis of these statements. These main results will permit judgments of the strategic vision in international maritime logistics and, particularly, its focus and diversity. As an example from the given industry, this information will be beneficial to researchers for further conceptual developments related to corporate strategic communication and its specifics on the level of industries and managers for the improvement of existing vision statements and formulating new vision statements. The remainder of this paper offers a literature review, explains the materials (including the principles of their collection) and methodology, specifies the results, discusses the interpretations, and presents the general conclusions and implications.

2. Literature Review

Three principal themes related to the present case study include corporate strategic statements in international maritime logistics, vision statements as a specific element of corporate strategic communication, and industrial (sectoral) specifics of corporate strategic statements. The basic literature is considered for each for them below, with an indication of the research gaps related to this study.

The corporate strategic statements in maritime logistics are yet to be studied systematically. Andrikopoulos et al. (2013) noted the importance of corporate disclosure for the performance of international shipping companies. Di Vaio et al. (2021), Godet et al. (2021), and Drobetz et al. (2014) examined the patterns of social and environmental responsibility

disclosure in the maritime logistics industry, and Okumus et al. (2023) stressed the importance of strategic developments for making this industry really “green”. Additionally, it is necessary to note the studies by B y k zkan and G lery z (2016), Ruban and Yashalova (2022), and Wu et al. (2014) devoted to corporate documentation and web-pages in some related sectors of the economy. Generally, the understanding of the strategic statements of international shipping companies seems to be very incomplete. Particularly, the research gap corresponds to the lack of information about the content of vision statements. It is unclear how diverse this content is and which components it includes. Filling this gap is necessary for understanding how managers in this industry follow the contemporary business agenda in posing strategic tasks.

Vision statements are important elements of corporate strategic communication. Their essence was explained by Abdullah et al. (2013, 2022), Alshameri and Green (2020), Burmeister (2003), Carroll (1995), Elias and Philippi (2015), Fitzsimmons et al. (2022), Ingenhoff and Fuhrer (2010), Khandelwal and Mohendra (2010), Mansi et al. (2017), Poongavanam et al. (2019), Slintak and Dvorsky (2019), and Spear (2017). Principally, these demonstrate a certain coherence of the understanding of vision statements, which can be summarized as follows. Vision statements are short (sentence- or paragraph-long), sometimes slogan-like text passages explaining the desirable future of a given company. They are linked to long-term strategic intentions, company identity and image, and responsibility disclosure. They are placed on corporate web-pages where they often co-occur with the other elements of strategic communication such as statements of missions, values, and purposes (importantly, some companies may prefer stating visions instead of missions, or vice versa, although these are essentially different elements that are reasonable to state simultaneously). Importantly, vision statements influence a company’s performance and image, and, thus, they are related to strategy implementation. The research gaps correspond to biases in the understanding of the real content of vision statements and their industry-specific features. The existing literature indicates the general way this gap can be filled: the analysis of vision statements can be performed similarly to that of the other corporate strategic statements (Alegre et al. 2018; Hieu and Vu 2021; Pearce and David 1987; Seo 2020; Yadav and Sehgal 2019). It should be stressed that the objects of such an analysis are statements (short text passages), not the entire corporate web-pages where they are placed.

Industrial (sectoral) specifics of corporate strategic statements seem to be an expected, but incompletely known, theme. Hill and Snell (1988) demonstrated how the essence of a given industry and its managerial teams influence strategic developments. Kemp and Dwyer (2003) offered an example of a detailed study of mission statements of the companies in a particular industry, namely, international airlines. Nouri and Soltani (2017) found that the use of the tools and techniques of strategic management, including mission and vision statements, differ between industries. These results imply that studying such industry-level specifics is reasonable, but it should not be oversimplified via a consideration of the already-reported examples from a limited number of industries. From some (if not many) of the industries, the lines of evidence are missing, and this research gap can be filled step-by-step via a sequence of case studies addressing particular sectors of the economy.

3. Materials and Methods

The material for the present analysis is collected from the official web-pages of the world’s leading companies in maritime logistics. In addition to the above-stated reasons explaining why only such companies are chosen, it is necessary to note that considering smaller companies would be challenging methodologically. First, not all of them state and even develop strategic visions, whereas this seems to be essential for larger corporations. Second, not all smaller companies have well-maintained corporate web-pages, or the latter are available in languages other than English (this is significant because linguistic peculiarities matter when contents of statements are interpreted). Third, the information on smaller companies is scattered throughout different sources, and biases (for instance, geographical) are very expected. Therefore, consideration of smaller companies would

make the analyzed sample heterogeneous and biased to significant degree, and, thus, it is avoided.

One ranking indicates the 30 largest shipping companies by their cargo capacity (Top 30), and it is used to find the proper company names. Then, the official web-page (English version is preferred) of each company from this ranking is accessed to find vision statement. Some companies do not disclose (or even do not have) such a statement, or there are problems with accessing their web-pages. Vision statements are found for 19 companies (in one case, a typical vision statement is labeled as mission statement). This number appears to be limited, but it is appropriate for the purposes of the present analysis because of three reasons. First, the considered industry is a tiny little portion of the world's economy, and it is dominated by a small number of too-large companies. Second, only the leading companies are in the focus of the present study. Third, the number of the considered companies seems to be appropriate for the pioneering, tentative analysis of vision statements, as suggested by the previous research (see references above). The companies differ by their cargo capacity, headquarters location, and year of foundation (Table 1). They are treated anonymously to avoid any occasional challenge to their reputation or interests. By the same reason, the excerpts from vision statements are not provided. Nonetheless, this anonymity does not affect the quality of the analysis, which is repeatable because the vision statements can be re-gathered easily from the web-pages, and the companies are named in the open-access ranking ([Top 30 International Shipping Companies 2022](#)).

Table 1. Summarized profile of the companies considered in the present study.

Parameters	Characteristics	
Names	A–S (anonymized)	
Cargo capacity	42–4176.5 * 10 ³ TEU (the majority below 1000 * 10 ³ TEU)	Source: (Top 30 International Shipping Companies 2022)
Headquarters location	China, Denmark, France, Germany, Indonesia, Israel, Singapore, South Korea, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, USA	
Year of foundation	1816–2016 (1960–1970s are most common)	

Note: TEU (twenty-foot equivalent unit) is a commonly used unit of cargo capacity corresponding to the volume of standard intermodal containers.

The analysis includes two basic procedures, which are rather common in this research direction ([Alegre et al. 2018](#); [Hieu and Vu 2021](#); [Pearce and David 1987](#); [Seo 2020](#); [Yadav and Sehgal 2019](#)). First, the entirety of the collected vision statements is checked to identify the presence of some general topics reflecting key foci of the corporate strategic intentions in maritime logistics. This procedure is fully analytical because it requires qualitative content interpretation, and it is not too subjective because statements are short and well-shaped; i.e., they exhibit such topics. Finding topics which are more or less common and distinctive to the entirety of the analyzed vision statements allows us to distinguish the principal components of the latter. They have much in common with components of mission statements ([Pearce and David 1987](#)), but are not equivalent to the latter, being established for an essentially different element of corporate strategic communication and specifically for the companies of the maritime logistics industry. The importance of these components can be brought in correspondence with what has been established by the previous research in international shipping, which is a supplementary procedure. This analysis is not simplistic and requires state-of-the-art content interpretations, often repeated several times for consistency. It should be stressed that these interpretations are not mechanistic search of common key words. In fact, the same ideas can be expressed in different statements with different words, whereas the same words and notions can be related to different ideas. Moreover, focusing on only key words would mean that parts of

statements are not considered. In contrast, this study offers interpretations of entire vision statements, and common ideas are found irrespectively of the words with which these are formulated.

Second, the presence of the components in all considered vision statements is established (this requires a second round of interpretations of the content of each statement to attribute all its constituents to particular ideas, which is also analytical procedure). This allows us to calculate the frequency of occurrence of each component. This frequency can be measured for the entirety of the considered companies, as well as for their categories taken separately. The latter can be distinguished on the basis of their geographical affinity (depending on the location of headquarters) and age (depending on the year of foundation). This permits us to discuss the factors of space and time, which can potentially influence the content of the vision statements.

A supplementary, but important, procedure is aimed at understanding the similarity between the vision statements, which, if proven, can indicate the coherence of strategic intentions on the level of the particular industry. The similarity of each pair of vision statements can be established with the so-called Jaccard's index (Jaccard 1901), which is used widely in natural sciences for comparable purposes (e.g., for establishing similarity between animal assemblages of two areas). It is measured as

$$J = C / [(V1 + V2) - C] \quad (1)$$

where V1 is the number of components in one vision statement, V2 is the number of components in the other vision statement, and C is the number of components common for both compared vision statements. J values range from 0 (total dissimilarity) to 1 (full similarity), and they can be subdivided into three grades, namely, low similarity (<0.3), medium similarity (0.3–0.7), and high similarity (>0.7). It is also possible to establish mean and median J values for all possible pairs of vision statements to judge the above-mentioned coherence of strategic intentions. This procedure is rather simple, although it marks a transdisciplinary use of the approach for revealing novel patterns.

4. Results

A total of twelve components are established in the vision statements of the considered companies specializing in maritime logistics; these components refer to important themes outlined by the previous publications (Table 2). The number of these components reflects the apparent diversity of corporate strategic intentions in the analyzed industry. Importantly, the companies imagine them in the future with regard to not only business achievements and high performance, but also relatively to their staff, quality, and several higher purposes, which is evidence of the “maturity” of the strategic vision in the industry.

The established components can be gathered into two major groups, namely, basic activities and additional attributes. The first group includes such components as service, customers, quality, business, geography, image, and staff, which characterize various aspects of the companies' activity. It seems to be natural to describe the future of the latter referring to these aspects. It should also be noted that the available literature stresses the specifics of the services of maritime logistics and pays significant attention to the global versus regional scale of their provision (see citations in Table 2). The second group consists of five components, namely, history, innovation, sustainability, society, and environment. Indeed, outlining them in vision statements is voluntary, but it is also dictated by the imperatives of contemporary society. Significant research is performed to stress the importance of the related aspects to maritime logistics (see citations in Table 2). The only unusual component is history because vision statements focus on the future by definition. Nonetheless, mentioning history can underline a company's stability and, thus, ability for successful long-term development. It should also be noted that sustainability is often mentioned too generally, i.e., irrespectively of whether it is linked to organizational, social, and/or environmental sustainability. In one case, the company dedicates its vision statement to the contribution of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2022).

Table 2. Components established in the vision statements of the considered companies.

Component	Indications (Meanings) in Vision Statements	Related Literature *
Service (SE)	Specific service(s) provided by company	(Gülmez et al. 2023; Kadir 2009; Lee et al. 2016; Panayides and Song 2013; Talley 2013)
Customers (CU)	Specified and non-specified customers	(Palmieri et al. 2019; Zhao 2020)
Quality (QU)	Focus on quality and high standards	(Jang et al. 2013; Lobo 2010; Thai 2008)
Business (BU)	Business activities of company and industry-level issues	(Hendriksen 2022; Merika et al. 2015; Parola et al. 2015)
Geography (GE)	Scale of ambitions and markets	(Amin et al. 2021; Antonopoulos 2016; Li 2008; Panayides 2006; Wagener et al. 2020)
Image (IM)	Desirable and achieved image and reputation	(Bennett and Gabriel 2001)
Staff (ST)	Employees and work place	(Davis and Kovats 2003; Ding et al. 2019)
History (HI)	Company's background	(Harlaftis 2020)
Innovation (IN)	Focus on innovations	(Raza et al. 2023; Yang and Xie 2019)
Sustainability (SU)	General sustainability relevance	(Lee et al. 2019)
Society (SO)	Social higher purposes	(Ko et al. 2021)
Environment (EN)	Environmental higher purposes	(Christodoulou and Cullinane 2021; Grant and Elliott 2018; Lai et al. 2011; Okumus et al. 2023; Psaraftis 2016; Zhu et al. 2014)

Note: * The components are distinguished intuitively for the purposes of this study (they do not depend on any pre-existing conceptual frames), and the literature confirming the urgency of these components is indicated.

The distribution of the components in the vision statements reveals their different frequencies (Table 3). Strategic intentions associate most often with service and business. The other components occur in less than a third of the cases, and the least common are history, staff, and environment (Table 3). On average, the vision statements consist of four components; there are two statements consisting of one component; and none of them includes more than six components (Table 3). Taking into account the noted frequencies, it appears that the maritime logistics companies restrict their vision to a few priorities, and the sets of these priorities differ between the companies.

Table 3. Distribution of the components in the vision statements of the considered companies.

Companies (Anonymized)	Components (See Table 1 for Abbreviations)												Number of Components
	SE	CU	QU	BU	GE	IM	ST	HI	IN	SU	SO	EN	
A				+	+					+	+		4
B	+	+		+						+			4
C	+		+	+	+								4
D	+		+										2
E	+	+	+	+		+							5
F										+			1
G	+					+							2
H	+		+	+									3
I	+			+						+	+	+	6
J	+	+							+				3
K	+			+	+		+	+					5
L	+	+			+	+					+	+	6
M	+			+	+	+							4
N											+		1
O	+		+		+	+			+	+			6
P	+					+					+		3
Q	+			+	+								3
R		+		+			+			+	+	+	6
S	+	+		+					+				4
Number of visions	15	6	5	11	7	6	2	1	4	6	6	3	Mean—3.8 Median—4.0
Relative presence among all considered visions (in %)	79	32	26	58	37	32	11	5	21	32	32	16	

The distribution of the components in the vision statements differs geographically (Table 4). Although the companies of West Europe and East Asia, which are the most numerous, tend to focus on services and business, the vision statements of the East Asian companies are significantly more diverse. None of the West European companies pays attention to the staff, innovations, and the environment in their vision statements, whereas the East Asian companies are less concerned with customers and quality. One can also note that the West European companies prefer to deal with sustainability in general, whereas the East Asian companies specify society and environment in their statements more frequently. Moreover, the West European companies are two times less concerned with image. The differences of the vision statements depending on the age of the companies are less evident (Table 4). Nonetheless, one should note that the younger companies pay more attention to staff, society, and environment.

Table 4. Frequency of the components (in %) in the vision statements of the considered companies depending on their geography and age.

Category	Number of Companies	Components (See Table 1 for Abbreviations)											
		SE	CU	QU	BU	GE	IM	ST	HI	IN	SU	SO	EN
Geography (location of headquarters)													
West Europe	5	80	40	40	80	40	20	0	0	0	40	20	0
East Asia	12	83	17	25	50	42	42	8	8	25	25	33	17
Middle East	1	100	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	0	0
North America	1	0	100	0	100	0	0	100	0	0	100	100	100
Age (since the year of foundation)													
<25 years	4	50	50	0	50	50	50	25	0	0	25	75	50
25–50 years	5	100	0	40	40	40	40	0	0	40	40	20	20
50–75 years	7	86	29	43	71	29	29	14	14	0	29	14	0
>75 years	3	67	67	0	67	33	0	0	0	67	33	33	0

The similarity of the vision statements differs: J values range from 0.00 to 0.75 (Table 5). The mean J value is 0.26, and the median J value is 0.25. They both indicate the prevalence of the low similarity. Any similarity is absent for 17.5% of the pairs of the vision statements. A high similarity ($J > 0.7$) is registered for 2% of the pairs. Moreover, the visions statements do not form long “chains” of the pairs with $J > 0.5$. Taken together, these findings imply a kind of significant incoherence of the contents of the analyzed vision statements. As the latter reflect some strategic intentions, the latter seem to be highly heterogeneous within the industry. In the other words, the companies imagine themselves in the future with significant differences.

It is interesting to pay attention to the pairs of vision statements which demonstrate a high similarity of their contents. These belong to the companies C and H, C and Q, M and Q, and J and S (Table 5). The three first pairs form a kind of group consisting of the companies C, H, M, and Q because the similarity between the other pairs within this group are also relatively high (Table 5). These companies differ significantly by their cargo capacity, the location of the headquarters, and the age. The similarity of their vision statements is determined by the inclusion of only the components of the first group (basic activities) (Table 3). Provisionally, these companies can be labeled as self-concerned. The presence of this group is expected because it is natural when several companies from the same industry imagine themselves in the future with regard to only their direct activities. The companies J and S, the isolated pair which demonstrates a high similarity, also differ by their profiles. The similarity of their vision statements is determined by the unique focus on both customers and innovations (Table 3). The presence of this isolated pair can be only occasional.

Table 5. Similarity of the vision statements of the considered companies (J values are indicated for all possible pairs of vision statements; see text for explanations).

Companies (Anonymized)																			
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S
A	-	0.33	0.33	0.00	0.13	0.25	0.00	0.17	0.43	0.00	0.29	0.25	0.33	0.25	0.25	0.17	0.40	0.43	0.14
B		-	0.33	0.20	0.50	0.25	0.20	0.40	0.43	0.40	0.29	0.25	0.33	0.00	0.25	0.17	0.40	0.43	0.60
C			-	0.50	0.50	0.00	0.20	0.75	0.25	0.17	0.50	0.25	0.60	0.00	0.43	0.17	0.75	0.11	0.33
D				-	0.40	0.00	0.33	0.67	0.14	0.25	0.17	0.14	0.20	0.00	0.33	0.25	0.25	0.00	0.20
E					-	0.00	0.40	0.60	0.22	0.33	0.25	0.38	0.50	0.00	0.38	0.33	0.33	0.22	0.50
F						-	0.00	0.00	0.17	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.17	0.00	0.00	0.17	0.00
G							-	0.25	0.14	0.25	0.17	0.33	0.50	0.00	0.33	0.67	0.25	0.00	0.20
H								-	0.29	0.20	0.33	0.13	0.40	0.00	0.29	0.20	0.50	0.13	0.40
I									-	0.29	0.22	0.33	0.25	0.17	0.33	0.29	0.29	0.50	0.43
J										-	0.14	0.29	0.17	0.00	0.29	0.20	0.20	0.13	0.75
K											-	0.22	0.50	0.00	0.22	0.14	0.60	0.22	0.29
L												-	0.43	0.17	0.33	0.50	0.29	0.33	0.25
M													-	0.00	0.43	0.40	0.75	0.11	0.33
N														-	0.00	0.33	0.00	0.17	0.00
O															-	0.29	0.29	0.09	0.25
P																-	0.20	0.13	0.17
Q																	-	0.13	0.40
R																		-	0.25
S																			-

5. Discussion

The results of the present analysis imply that the considered companies formulate their vision statements with a broad range of information, and that they do so differently. Generally, this indicates the existence of multiple approaches to describe their desirable future. On the one hand, this suggests that, despite the significant specifics of maritime logistics, managers realize numerous aspects of their business. This is in agreement with how this industry looks like, in fact (Gülmez et al. 2023; Panayides and Song 2013; Talley 2013). On the other hand, there is not any agreement of what can be considered typical (“ideal”) strategic intentions in this industry. Hypothetically, this can be related to the various uncertainties faced by international shipping, linked to new challenges, new technological opportunities, and new factors (Calatayud et al. 2017; Ghaderi 2020; Garrido Salsas et al. 2022; Shahbakhsh et al. 2022; Teweldebrhan et al. 2022). Additionally, competition exists in this industry (Belyaev et al. 2020; Lee and Song 2015; Raza et al. 2023), but this seems to be specific in somewhat taking into account the strong disproportion of the considered companies by their cargo capacity (Top 30 International Shipping Companies 2022).

Although the contents of the analyzed vision statements seem to be rather diverse (Table 2), one should note the low frequencies of three components, namely, history, the staff, and environment (Table 3). From them, the restricted distribution of the staff component is especially notable, because history is “unnatural” to visions by definition and the environment is considered sometimes under the label of general sustainability. Human resources are extremely important in maritime logistics. Davis and Kovats (2003) argued the necessity of special co-operative management in this industry. Ding et al. (2019) stressed its dependence on the proper choice of middle managers. Additionally, specialists noted the requirement of being professional and having a really modern education, as well as the development of new competences for the sustainable development of maritime logistics (Bartusevičienė and Valionienė 2021; Belev et al. 2021; de Águas et al. 2020; Kilpi et al. 2021; Lau et al. 2018), which, thus, depend on intellectual capital and the mechanisms of its accumulation. The same resources are required to struggle with the various, often highly specific, environmental effects of maritime transportation (Lenzen et al. 2023; Mueller et al. 2023). Seafarer health influenced by many factors and conditions (Cui et al. 2022; Li et al. 2022), possible unfair treatment (Manuel 2011), and gender issues (Ahmad et al. 2020; Bao and Wang 2020; Dragomir and Popa 2018; Forsell et al. 2017; Kormykh 2020) also matter. If so, the correct positioning of the companies of this industry in the future seems to be impossible without paying attention to the staff. Therefore, the low frequency

of the related component (Table 3) reveals a kind of failure in the managerial strategic thoughts documented on the level of the industry. One should add that the situation may differ between the industry's leaders considered in the present study and the smaller companies. It cannot be excluded that the latter are more suitable for developing voluntary environmental initiatives (Christodoulou and Cullinane 2021).

An interesting finding of the present study is the rather significant attention of the considered shipping companies to sustainability in general, and society and the environment in particular (Table 3). These issues are very urgent for this industry (Table 2). Particular, Okumus et al. (2023) stressed the need in circularity. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2022) form the agenda for the contemporary economy, and it is notable to find that maritime logistics companies are ready to share this agenda (see above). One can also note that ocean governance requires the active development and implementation of pro-sustainability policies (Murphy 2022; Polejack 2021; Sardá et al. 2023). If we are to assume that the analyzed vision statements reflect the true intentions of the companies, this means that the industrial policy in this industry matches the general needs. However, a wider consideration of sustainability issues in vision statements is possible, and this may also form a new source of pro-sustainable stimuli to the entire marine economy.

An important inference from this study is the breadth of the strategic intentions of the maritime logistics companies. For example, the standardized components of mission statements established by Pearce and David (1987) include the only component, namely, philosophy, which is beyond direct business activities. As explained above, the components distinguished in the present analysis constitute two groups, and as much as five components (additional attributes) are beyond basic business activities (Table 2). One should also note the rather frequent notions of sustainability and society (Table 3). Therefore, maritime logistics appears to be viewed by the largest companies of this industry as something more than business. Moreover, focusing on four (on average) themes in each statement proves the advanced state of the vision of the considered companies.

6. Conclusions

An examination of the vision statements of the selected largest companies of the international maritime logistics industry permits us to form three general conclusions: First, the contents of these statements are diverse, and twelve components can be found outlined. Second, service specifics and business-related activities are considered most often, but attention is also paid to such issues as markets, customers, and sustainability; importantly, the majority of the vision statements differ by the set of the components. Third, although the strategic intentions of the considered companies seem to be rather diverse and advanced (they often go beyond only business making), insufficient attention is paid to the company staff. Principally, this case study offers a kind of "palette" for analyzing (this can be done by researchers) and designing (this can be done by managers) vision statements. Although it is developed for this particular industry, it appears that it may also have merit in other sectors of the economy, because the proposed components seem to be universal. This palette is distinguished by a better focus on such topics as innovations and sustainability, which are the true imperatives of contemporary corporations.

The theoretical importance of this study and its contribution to the literature is determined by the necessity to develop the idea of corporate strategic communication with regard to its particular elements (vision statements, in this case) and particular industries (maritime logistics, in this case). The findings contribute to the understanding of the content diversity of vision statements and the presence of multiple approaches to formulating them. From the methodological point of view, one should note the established diversity of the principal components, including those not related directly to basic business activities. Their presence is dictated by the need for technological innovations and the importance of social and environmental concerns. If so, it may be reasonable to reconsider the existing schemes for the classification of the content of the elements of corporate strategic communication

in light of the new realities. Indeed, this work is a case study, which pays attention to international maritime logistics. Nonetheless, it provides a notable example of how vision statements look like in a particular industry, which is important for further developments and comparisons with other industries. Importantly, international maritime logistics deals with a vast, but specific geographical domain, namely, the world ocean. If so, the conclusions made in this contribution contribute to the understanding of the managerial thoughts linked to the exploitation of this domain.

Practically, the findings of this case study draw attention to the insufficient consideration of the company staff, which is a kind of strategic myopia. Indeed, the related improvement of the vision statements is desirable. It can be beneficial to businesses of this industry to expend more effort in bringing their vision statements to order. This may be important for better marketing and imaging, as well as for the improvement of managerial processes and organizational culture. More generally, the recognition of the various components of vision statements seems to be important to indicate to managers what can be included into these statements, principally. The established components seem to be “bricks”, from which vision statements can be created or re-created. Indeed, the selected components, their word expression, and their order in the statement depend on a given company, its needs, and managerial thought. Nonetheless, the present development allows managers to solve the problem in a reversal mode, i.e., looking at the set of possible components followed by designing the structure of a future statement, and, finally, the formulation of the latter. This reversal mode allows the realization of the diversity of the components and their different demand in the industry, which can improve the practice of vision-statement formulation, making it less dependent on the managerial intuition.

Indeed, such a pioneering study cannot omit the limitations. First, only the largest companies are considered. This is appropriate for the preliminary description of the situation in the industry. However, further studies should also consider smaller companies. The main challenges may be the absence of a vision statement on their web-pages (or even the absence of the latter) and the necessity to take into account the national cultural and linguistic frames. Second, only the stated information is addressed in this study. Although this is enough to analyze the patterns of strategy communication, further investigations should also address the managers’ opinions, which are important for tracing the true strategic visions of the companies. In addition to the noted research perspectives, three other directions for further investigations can be outlined. First, this is a comparison for finding the fundamental differences between the components of vision and other strategic statements of corporations. The difference between vision and mission statements is evident, but it remains intriguing whether they offer a different treatment of the same ideas or explore different fields. Second, the present study distinguishes between common ideas and the related components in vision statements by qualitative interpretations of the latter. However, it cannot be excluded that an algorithmic procedure can be developed, and a solution of this methodological task can be facilitated by artificial intelligence. Third, tracing the links between the vision statements of the leaders of the international maritime logistics industry and the global ocean governance mechanisms and initiatives seems to be a promising task.

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