

By Way of Summing Up Should the MVITEC Arrive at Consensus on Topics Related to the Profession and Take a Public Position?

At first glance, a response to the question raised by the program topic may appear to be rather simple and straightforward. Unfortunately, it is not. The topic raises two basic and fundamental questions: (a) Should the membership try to reach consensus? and (b) Should the position reached through the consensus process be communicated to the public? Obviously, either question may be answered with a “yes” or “no” response. This type of response, however, would at first seem unfair if made hastily and without conducting a more thorough analysis of relevant factors, for example, mission, membership criteria, traditions, etc.

The position taken in this paper is that the reason(s) for the existence of any organization may be found in an organization’s mission statement. The mission statement, therefore, becomes the vehicle to address why the organization exists. Once defined, there must be a critical mass of followers who believe in, support, and are willing to promulgate the organization through its mission. When there is a critical mass of support, then one may assume that reaching consensus and communicating to the public would be two natural outcomes of the human energy spent in addressing an organization’s mission.

The mission statements of three organizations that purport to be concerned with advancing the study about technology are examined. An attempt is made to identify the existence of commonalities in mission statements while raising questions as food for thought. It is also guided by the premise that if there is significant overlap in mission statements, then “other” reasons must be found to substantiate a rationale for the existence of an organization such as the Mississippi Valley Industrial Teacher Education Conference (MVITEC). When other reasons are identified, substantial in number and significant in substance, then the issues of consensus and public position can be addressed.

At the annual meetings of the MVITEC over the past several years, there have been discussions on what should be the mission of the conference. At the 1995 conference in Lisle, Illinois, for example, the following mission statement was developed by people in attendance.

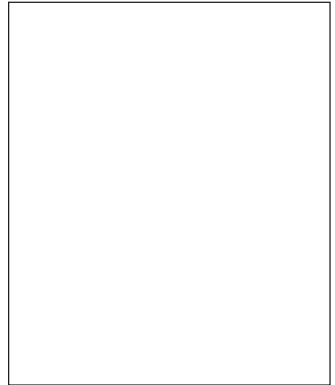
The mission of the Mississippi Valley Industrial Teacher Education Conference is to facilitate debate on the critical issues and problems of teaching and research about technology, to

develop solutions, and to communicate them to the field and public at large.

Several key words in the mission statement may help develop a response to the question posed in this paper. For example, the members have stated rather emphatically that they want the conference meetings to be a forum where “critical issues and problems of teaching and research about technology” are debated. No other topics are to be addressed—only critical issues and problems—and the type of address is the debate format. Critical issues and problems, therefore, become the benchmark to measure conference effectiveness. Is it fair to assume that there is no other forum in the United States where selected administrators and leaders interested in the study about technology come together on a regular basis to address critical issues and problems? Is no other organization already doing this whether such organization is within or outside our profession? Is there insecurity within the MVITEC membership about the ability of other organizations to address critical issues and problems?

Another key phrase in the mission statement is “to develop solutions.” The membership has stated by the use of these three words that it wants to become proactive and develop solutions to critical issues and problems. Developing solutions, therefore, becomes the second benchmark. Why would a group of 50+ administrators and leaders believe they have solutions to critical issues and problems that may be quite different or even unique from those developed by more formally organized and operated bodies? Are other organizations not already developing these solutions? If solutions are being developed by other organizations, does the membership not accept their solutions? Is the MVITEC membership simply serving as a check and balance system, whether it is being done in a formal or informal way, for these other organizations?

A final key phrase in the mission statement is that the membership wants “to communicate [its solutions] to the field and public at large.” Communication becomes the third benchmark. Communication implies that this organization wants to get proactive and provide leadership in communicating solutions. Are other organizations not communicating fully to the profession and public at large? It seems appropriate, therefore, that in order to



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investigate the topic further, one should examine the mission statements of some selected organizations that focus on technology.

The Constitution and Bylaws of the Council on Technology Teacher Education (CTTE) offers three stated purposes of the organization:

1. To support and further the professional ideals of technology education.
2. To define and strive to achieve the purposes and professional goals of technology teacher education, and to enlist the greatest possible number of people in this endeavor.
3. To stimulate research and the dissemination of information of professional interest.

Is the CTTE already doing what the MVITEC membership says is its mission? Does it make a difference that “regular” membership in the CTTE is “open to all persons interested in technology teacher education including graduate students” whereas membership in the MVITEC is not open to all? Within the CTTE’s third purpose, “to stimulate research and the dissemination of information of professional interest,” is it assumed that the CTTE is already addressing the critical issues and problems and communicating solutions to the profession and public or are the issues and problems limited to technology teacher education? If one concludes that the CTTE is not addressing the critical issues and problems (regardless of the level of education) and communicating them to the profession and public, then one could readily conclude that any perceived overlap in mission statements between the MVITEC and the CTTE simply does not exist or if it does exist, it exists only in writing. One quick check might be to examine the titles of the CTTE program sessions and the process by which program topics and presenters are chosen while at the same time examining the professional literature sponsored by the CTTE.

Another organization that deserves at least a cursory examination is the International Technology Education Association (ITEA). Membership in the ITEA is “open to individuals interested in technology education.” The ITEA has the following mission statement of its strategic plan: “The mission . . . is to support teachers who teach about technology and to promote and give direction to the profession.”

The ITEA’s strategic plan identifies 4 goals, 10 objectives, and 41 tasks in order that it may accomplish its mission. The ITEA also states that “the fundamental goal of the strategic plan is to ensure that citizens are prepared to function effectively in and contribute to a technological society and global community.” Can the ITEA really deliver on this goal without addressing critical issues and problems? The

four goals of the strategic plan are the following:

1. Promote the study of technology as a core subject.
2. Identify, promote, and support activities that lead to continuing improvement in program and professional development.
3. Gain recognition and support by the educational community and other constituents that the study of technology is essential.
4. Promote teaching of technology as an exciting and rewarding career choice.

The ITEA’s credo may provide further evidence of similarities or dissimilarities in missions between the ITEA and the MVITEC. The ITEA credo states the following:

The International Technology Education Association is concerned about improving the quality of life through constant improvement of teaching and dissemination of information about our technological world. Forums and an atmosphere that inspires people to dream of great things should be provided that will lead to helping students achieve success. The Association has a responsibility to its contributors to recognize their dignity as human beings and to assure that they share in the success which their work and contributions made possible.

Finally, the ITEA’s purposes are defined in its Bylaws. The stated purposes are the following:

- ITEA exists to provide leadership in the design and development of quality instruction, research, and service in technology education.
- ITEA exists to support excellence in marketing and assistance in the international integration, implementation, and acceptance of technology education. (*Note the use of the term **technology education** for the first time.*)

Is the mission of the MVITEC contained within the ITEA’s mission and four goals of its strategic plan, within its credo, and/or within its two purposes as found in its Bylaws? If the answer is yes, then is the ITEA addressing the critical issues and problems, developing solutions, and communicating them to the profession and public to the satisfaction of the MVITEC membership? If the MVITEC membership believes that the missions are similar but that the ITEA is not fulfilling its mission statement, then that may define the reason for the existence of the MVITEC.

Ultimately, however, the following question must be addressed by the membership: Is there a justifiable reason(s) why the MVITEC should exist if similar mission statements already exist in other organizations such as the CTTE and the ITEA? If a reason(s) can be identified, does that provide a basis for reaching consensus and taking a public position? In order to address these and other similar questions, the following should be considered by

the MVITEC membership.

1. First and foremost, align the title of this organization with membership qualifications. If the intent of this organization is to include only technology educators, then include this intent in the title of the organization. If the intent is to include all of industrial teacher education, then adjust membership qualifications to reflect the title. Consensus building and taking a public position will have little meaning unless there is at least some commonality between the qualifications for membership and the title of the organization.

2. The membership categories (regular, active-at-large, and associate) provide a uniqueness not necessarily found in other organizations. If the intent is to stay with the current membership categories, then move to capitalize on this uniqueness. Maybe this uniqueness provides the very justification for this organization's existence. Maybe this uniqueness will help the organization reach consensus and take a public position. Maybe the inherent elitism in the membership categories has made its uniqueness a strength and this strength should be promulgated within the profession. What other organizations limit their membership to leaders and administrators of industrial teacher education programs? If recognized administrators and leaders are not willing to take a public stand on critical issues and problems, then are we forfeiting that privilege to someone else?

3. The MVITEC membership is limited to 20 states while the CTTE and the ITEA are international in scope. The number of states and programs within each state will always limit this organization's size and influence. Its limited size, however, affords an opportunity not necessarily available through other organizations to focus on critical issues and then reach consensus on the issues that are specific to the 20 states. Is it possible that a smaller, more focused organization may be a more effective one? The answer to this question may rest with the level of leadership this organization is willing to exert and the influence it chooses to embrace. The answer may also provide a basis for reaching consensus and taking a public position.

4. The MVITEC membership is limited to key individuals who have administrative responsibilities for one or more areas of industrial teacher education. While the past several years have shown a decline in membership, the conference does address a very specific targeted audience. Currently there are only three state departments of education "active" members and no "active-at-large" and "associate" members from this population. In addition,

four states (Alabama, Louisiana, South Dakota, and Wisconsin) are not represented by "active" members, "active-at-large" members, and "associate" members (except for Wisconsin). If one of the purposes of the MVITEC is to attract into its membership key leaders and administrators within its geographical boundaries, then its potential sphere of influence will be limited until it is able to attract more eligible individuals. Consensus building within its targeted audience will have limited influence until a broader more representative audience is identified.

The preceding four points provide a basis to address the question raised by the program topic: Should the MVITEC arrive at consensus on topics related to the profession and take a public position? Now that the MVITEC has defined its mission and assuming that some of its basic traditions will not change, the answer is yes if it is able to turn perceived weaknesses into strengths. Clearly, the MVITEC has the following characteristics that can serve as assets when arriving at consensus and taking a public position:

- It wants to consider only critical issues and problems of teaching and research about technology at its conference meetings.
- It wants to develop solutions to these issues and problems.
- It wants to arrive at its solutions through the debate format.
- It wants to communicate its solutions to the field and public at large.
- It wants to have selective membership categories.
- It wants to limit its geographical sphere of influence by the exclusion of states outside of the Mississippi Valley (20 states).
- It wants to elect selected people to be members rather than allowing any and all to become members.

In order to take advantage of its assets, the MVITEC will need to better position itself within the community(s) it wishes to influence. This will require a new level of leadership. Organizations like the MVITEC are in dire need of people who want to lead, who know how to lead, and who are willing to lead. Fortunately, this organization contains many such people, and now its challenge is to bring these people together in greater numbers to reach common goals. A very significant way for the MVITEC to provide leadership is to address the critical issues and problems within its 20-state membership area through a consensus-building process, developing solutions, and then communicating the solutions to the field and public it serves. Isn't that what a professional organization is really all about?

The comments of each of the Three-Minute Philosophers add an interpretation of the present draft of the mission statement for the Mississippi Valley Industrial Teacher Education Conference (MVITEC). It is useful to realize what each speaker has garnered from the statement and to hear how that might affect the nature of the conference and its deliberations. It should not be discouraging to know that there are differences of opinion about the meaning of the mission statement, although additional effort for the resolution of those differences is required. This is time well spent since it should result in a more enduring mission statement that represents the intention of a larger portion of the membership and better communicates the purposes of the conference.

Credit G. Eugene Martin with developing an image of the conference as represented by the mission statement by providing a literal interpretation of the words therein. His presentation focused on what it would mean to have conference members arrive at a consensus on topics of concern to the profession and to take a public position on those concerns. As he gave form to the conference that he saw portrayed in the mission statement, it became apparent that the mission statement draft pointed toward a significant departure from the conference as it has been known. Each conference member was called upon by Martin's presentation to weigh the consequences of implementing the present mission statement draft for the body of the conference and for their behavior in their own individual teacher education role.

Inconsistencies between the mission statement and the statement of vision were identified by Charles Pinder and Jane Liedtke. Their point is that if both statements are to be used, they need to agree. David Pucel and Gerald Jennings highlighted the focus of the mission statement on teacher education, a common concern among members, and the need for this to be the center of conference proceedings. Lowell Anderson and John Dugger viewed the development of the vision and mission statements as part of the larger function of strategic planning. However, the vision statement does not recognize the extent to which present change is revolutionary and that the umbrella under which we operate has changed shape and location. Frederick Ruda expressed the importance of conference history and his respect for the ways in which the present

conference procedures have resulted in timely topics presented in a stimulating format. He also questioned the capability of the conference to communicate with two distinct audiences, teachers of technology and the public at large. In his comments, Paul Post reminded members of recent gains of which the conference has been a part and the need to preserve and continue advancement. Specifically, he mentioned support from teachers in other fields, the entry into a "golden age" of technology, the headlining of equity issues, the maintenance of linkages among technology educators, vocational educators, and industrial technologists, and open discussions of troublesome issues.

Any entrance by the conference into the politics of education (i.e., to develop solutions to critical problems and communicate them to the field and the public at large) must be done cautiously. The conference does not have a record for political astuteness—it has been more exclusive than inclusive in such things as membership and participation in its program presentations and debates. It has done better in being inclusive of such topics as research, curriculum, and access that pertain to technology, industrial technology, and vocational-industrial education. Many of the arguments made have influenced individual members and some have changed conference behavior. However, the sustained effort required to be politically persuasive on any of these topics has not been part of the conference. This has been a low maintenance organization with little or no business conducted by the total membership between annual conference sessions, and dramatic changes would be required if the conference were to initiate stands on issues and press its case with constituent groups. Certainly, individual members have opportunities to carry their convictions to more politically oriented organizations in which they are active, where they can express their convictions.

Early in its history, the conference was recognized as a place where members could come together and express their heresies without having to account for them before the field at large. The conference has been a testing place for ideas, even those that may have been "politically incorrect" or inconsistent with the mainstream of thinking about the teaching of technology. The existence of the conference has not been threatened by ideas that run against the grain or that, on the surface, seem

to be absurd. Over the years, members have praised the stimulation provided by this divergent thinking and the understanding of ideologies they have gained. By contrast, many of our professional organizations thrive by the converging of opinions and members are expected to help create a united political front. For the conference to succeed at what it does best, that is, engage in the exchange or commerce of ideas, it cannot be fettered with a purpose that requires it to produce consensus opinions with a commitment to propagate them.

The mission statement appropriately recognizes the relationship of the conference to all teachers of technology. To fulfill this intent, it becomes necessary to expand representation in the conference to include persons with wider responsibilities in technology teaching than presently included in the membership. This may extend to some who heretofore have been considered to be outside the field or even competitors and distracters.

In order to maintain a sufficient mass of

active members in the conference, it may be desirable to expand the geographic territory of the conference. The number of universities with programs for the preparation of teachers of technology has diminished, and efforts to bring into membership representatives of all institutions within the territory currently served have not always been successful. The result is that a full roster of active members has not been achieved in recent years. Expansion of the member-at-large category has successfully added members and has diversified the membership. Meaningful argumentation of ideas that are representative of the practitioners in the field is enhanced by the presence of a range of ideas from a variety of persons and institutions.

Charles Pinder presented an insightful alternative to the present mission statement draft. Members would be well served by carefully examining his statement which addresses the aspirations and focus for the conference as presented by our speakers.

The Past Instructs the Future

Thomas L. Erikson

The 83rd Mississippi Valley Conference was historic because, after four years of study and debate, the members approved a mission statement and a name change. The mission statement evolved from the strategic planning efforts at the 82nd Conference and the perspectives on the mission and direction of the conference presented at the 83rd Conference. Specifically, the approved mission statement is a modification of a proposal that Charles Pinder made at the 83rd Conference when he reacted to the draft mission statement. The approved mission statement is:

The mission of the Conference is to facilitate debate on critical issues and problems about the teaching of technology. (Erikson, 1996)

Thus, the Mississippi Valley Conference would continue, consider, discuss, and debate. The conference format, one that provides ample time for discussion and debate after the presentation of papers, was viewed as a unique strength and, in effect, has been institutionalized in the mission statement. Furthermore, there has been strong sentiment among the members that the conference should fulfill a professional development role. This, too, is consistent with a mission statement, but more reflective of the vision statement.

The members of the conference did not address the draft vision statement at the 83rd Conference. As chair, I intend to lead a discussion of the vision statement via the conference listserver. However, the concepts included in the draft vision statement suggest that the conference aspires to become the premier forum for developing leaders for our profession. This suggests a professional development orientation for the conference. Again, this is consistent with the history of the conference, where new leaders were developed "in the crucible of MVITEC participation" (Evans, 1996, p. 47).

CONFERENCE NAME

That there have only been three official names for the conference between 1909 and 1996 reflects the members' reluctance to change. However, during the 1980s several organizations in the profession changed names to reflect the transition to technology education (e.g., the American Industrial Arts Association became the International Technology Education Association; AVA's Industrial Arts Division became the Technology Education Division) and many of the members belong to and are leaders of the National Association for Industrial Technology. As a result, there has

been discussion of the outdated nature of the official name of the Mississippi Valley Conference at virtually every meeting in the past decade. In some cases, motions for name change were made at the conference business meeting, but all such motions were defeated.

The 83rd Conference was historic also because the members approved a name change that was consistent with the mission statement. A motion was made by Fred Ruda, Fort Hays State University, seconded by William Dugger, Jr., Virginia Tech, to change the name of the conference by replacing the word "Industrial" with the word "Technology" in the official name of the conference. After discussion and debate, the motion to change the name of the conference passed. The official name of the conference is Mississippi Valley Technology Teacher Education Conference.

Commenting on the name change to the conference members, I observed that the mission statement, which focuses on "critical issues and problems about the teaching of technology," should not be viewed as narrowing the scope of the conference. Since the "teaching of technology" takes place at all levels of education and in diverse settings, the name change is inclusive of a wide array of programs and personnel rather than an exclusive posture for the conference that would suggest a narrow array of programs and personnel (Erekson, 1996).

It is also interesting to note that the new name of the conference is the same name proposed by the committee on the mission of the conference (Lemons et al., 1994). However, the discussion of the committee's report and recommendations at the 81st Conference centered on concerns of similarity with other professional organizations for technology teacher education and the potential to narrow the focus of the conference.

THE FUTURE

David Bjorkquist (1996), immediate past life chair, noted at the 83rd Conference that the Mississippi Valley Conference is a place where the participants can be "politically incorrect" if they so desire. He further noted that while membership is by election, there is no philosophical "litmus test" for prospective members. Does our profession need a forum for debate where members can speak freely without concern for professional retaliation or ostracization? Does our profession need a forum that provides a crucible for developing new leaders and re-energizing old leaders? Does the conference format of presentation and extensive questioning (some might refer to the questioning sessions as "grilling") pre-

pare leaders with the intestinal fortitude to "stand up and be counted" on their respective campuses and in the profession at large?

I believe that the profession needs such a forum and that the Mississippi Valley Conference can fulfill these functions by fulfilling its mission statement. Change and flexibility will be required as the conference seeks to fulfill its mission. The conference will have to determine which of its unique traditions will be continued, be altered, or be eliminated as it seeks to become the "premier leadership forum" for "facilitating debate on critical issues and problems about the teaching of technology." The key, of course, will be to make selective changes that improve the conference without destroying its uniqueness among the array of professional organizations.

The following examples describe possible change scenarios that will allow the conference to fulfill its mission while maintaining important traditions.

- Membership is by election and Active members are limited to 65 program administrators or leaders responsible for technology teacher education at a university in the 20-state Mississippi Valley region. An additional 10 Active at Large Members can be elected with out regard for administrative duties or geographic region. If the conference increased the number of members for the Active at Large category several things would be accomplished. The tradition of a limited number of members would continue as would the criteria for the Active membership category. By increasing the Active at Large category, leaders and prospective leaders from other technology areas could be elected to membership and participation in the conference. This would expand the diversity of perspective for the membership and would build strength through that diversity. This change could also facilitate the development of new leaders who are not currently program administrators, in effect helping to develop new leaders. Furthermore, the conference could become a national or international organization because Active at Large members are not restricted to the 20-state Mississippi Valley area.
- The tradition of limiting participation on the conference program to members could also be modified to facilitate professional development functions and debate on critical issues. This change will allow the conference chair to invite experts to address critical issues regardless of membership status. The tradition of only having

members prepare and present papers has already been altered. At both the 81st and 83rd Conferences nonmembers were invited to present papers. In these instances the nonmembers had special expertise related to the issue being presented and debated. This modification will be continued; however, the majority of the presentations will continue to be made by members.

I believe that the Mississippi Valley Tech-

nology Teacher Education Conference fulfills a unique role in our profession and that it will continue to do so as it fulfills its mission. The Mississippi Valley Conference, through its members, has had significant impacts on the field since its first meeting in 1909. Based on the recently defined mission statement, I would anticipate that the members will continue to make significant impacts on the profession as we approach the 100th anniversary of the founding of the conference.

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