

THE ROLE OF VISION IN STRATEGY

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Whether they are in the private, public or non-profit sectors, there are three key characteristics of high-performance organizations and teams:

1. They are clear about their basic purpose, why they exist (mission).
2. They have an equally clear picture of what they are trying to create together (vision).
3. High employee commitment that is generated by a shared, collaboratively achieved, set of values that are reflected in both the organizational/team mission and vision.

Visioning is the process of clarifying an organization's or team's values, focusing on a mission and stretching the group's horizon with a vision. It defines what an organization or team would like to evolve into, to become, in a specified timeframe with stages to be accomplished over time. Visioning evokes creative solutions to business challenges and sparks continual organizational or team evolution and learning — it stretches the imagination and motivates people to rethink what is possible. As with the mission, the true value of a vision is to guide individual behavior, decision-making and to create shared commitment.

The essential key to creating, and managing, commitment is a shared direction (vision) and set of values. Opportunities abound for those managers who use this understanding to create *mutual* commitment; such a manager will achieve the workplace benefits of:

- Increased internal and external customer satisfaction.
- Improved teamwork, better work coordination.
- Improved alignment of work unit goals and efforts.
- Increased morale.

Working with organizations to develop 3- to 5-year vision-driven strategic plans, and the reluctance of many in these organizations to embrace the visioning process (they just want to get immediately to the "do list"), I'm

reminded of the conversation between Alice and the Cheshire cat in Lewis Carroll's book, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. At the base of a large tree the path that Alice is following branches off in several different directions. She sets off first one way and then another, only to come back each time to the crossroads. As she is considering which way to go she sees a Cheshire cat lying in the tree next to the path, prompting the following exchange:

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" Alice asks.

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

"I don't much care where----" said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

"---- so long as I get *somewhere*," Alice added as an explanation.

"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk enough."

And it is here that most organizations find themselves. They "walk enough" by replicating yesterday 260 work days a year.

Before starting a journey the first thing you do is not pack, buy tickets, or pull out the map. No, the first thing you do is to decide *where* you're going. Only then do you decide on budget, how you're going to get there, what clothes or other items to take and, most importantly, which direction to travel. That single decision drives all other important decisions that make certain you get to your *chosen* destination. To effectively allocate resources or plan for eventualities, you have to be clear about your destination and, thereby, your direction. If you were in Kansas headed for Alaska to take a direction toward Mexico would be counter-productive. Most of us can't imagine planning a trip any other way.



Unfortunately, most organizations seldom take the time to decide where "there" is, where they *chose* to go. They get up every morning and repeat, with minor variations, yesterday for months or years on end. Organizations then are often heard to lament, with some mix of anger and frustration, that they're "going nowhere". They are "going somewhere", as the Cheshire cat suggests, because they are "walking enough". It is that they are not satisfied because you can't get to a place you choose to go, a happier, more successful place, unless you know where "there" is and develop a plan to reach it. When, however, it's suggested that they *decide* where they want to go as an organization, they say they need to "make money" and that, in any case, they're "to busy".

The role of vision for an organization is to literally define the destination that provides the direction it *chooses* to take versus the one that circumstances, the economy, competition or other forces, would send them down. A vision *articulates* what the desired future for your organization would look like in non-financial terms. It is an organizational dream, a "perfect" future place — it stretches the imagination and motivates people to rethink what is possible. It is the first step in *creating* the future. But let's digress for a moment to address the "non-financial" admonition in the vision discussion.

Money is important but its organizational role needs to be reframed. Simply put, money is a reward, the measure if you will, for how well an organization's products/services satisfy their customer's wants, needs and desires as well as how the organization provides those same products or services. Profit or loss, up to a point, is the measure of how well we are satisfying those customer wants, needs and desires — if we are doing this well, customers

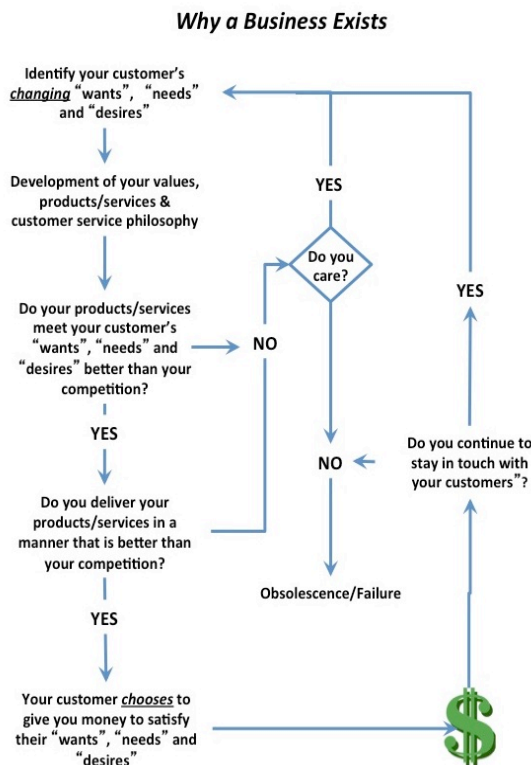
choose to give our organization money rather than to our competition. Focusing primarily on finances can cause an organization to lose focus on why they were successful in the first place. If customers are at the core of our vision, money becomes the measure of how well we are serving them.

Why are we emphasizing a non-financial view of the future, especially when virtually every

executive we have worked with starts their quality initiative with statements such as, "Times are tough and we need to earn..." or "We need to get the share value up for..." or "Sales are in the dumper, we need to..." or some other reactive statement.

It is useful to keep in mind that people will only give money to organizations in exchange for a product or service that either solves a problem or satisfies a need, not simply to insure the organization's prosperity/survival. When the organization's focus is exclusively on the financial results there is little impetus, support, or desire to

change the processes of service provision or product production to insure that the customer continues to "need" the product or service. Such changes are most often undertaken with the admonition to save money not, first and foremost, to improve the processes or products from the customer perspective. One of the most difficult elements of our work is getting senior management to understand the linkages between the concept called an envisioned future and the bottom line. We focus the discussion on the "if you don't know where you're going how can you get there" metaphor, that financial wellbeing is something that is not a given simply by practicing the technical skills of fiscal management.



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So back to vision – it is purposely *BIG* picture. A vision is new organizational terrain. It describes a time and place that is happy and successful and is consistent with your organization’s mission, strategy, core competencies and philosophy (values).

A vision statement needs to be:

- Exciting. If it doesn’t have emotional appeal and inspire it will have little meaning.
- Clear, concise, easily understandable – no platitudes or fuzzy phraseology.
- Memorable – no more than 15 words.
- Challenging – out-of-the-box thinking, no status quo.
- Excellence-centered – measure everything and insist on accountability
- Stable, but flexible – preserve tactical options.
- Implementable and tangible – connect to people’s dreams and do it.

To be effective, a vision must be continually reinforced through words, symbols, and actions. Respected individuals, wherever they reside in the organization, must personally embody the values (and model

their associated behaviors) explicitly linked to, and those inherent in, the vision; these are demonstrated by how they spend their time, with whom they surround themselves and, of course, what they do and say.

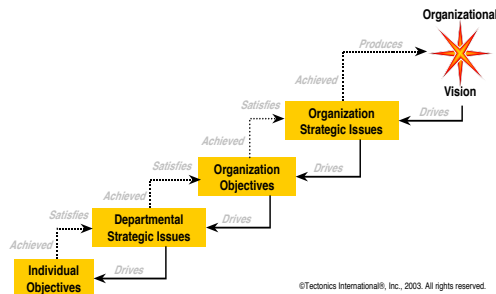
The true value of a vision statement is as a guide for decisions and behavior. It allows those in an organization to sort through the daily minutiae without losing direction. It is

our vision that allows us to determine what tasks to accomplish, what roles to play, which decisions to make. If what we're confronted with doesn't move us toward achieving our vision then, however noble the undertaking, it should be set aside in favor of other tasks, projects, or decisions that will help our vision become a reality. For

a few coaching questions to assist in clarifying a vision, see attachment 1.

Take to heart Alice's lesson, take control of your organization’s future. Remaining ambivalent or uncertain of your direction allows circumstances and the decisions of others to determine that future. By identifying your vision, core values and setting your own course, you take control of your organization's life to create a future of *choice*, not happenstance.

Shared Vision & Alignment



VISION PLANNING QUESTIONS

1. What opportunities exist for our organization?
 - Do we have core competencies that could be leveraged into an opportunity?
 - What unrecognized market needs exist that aren't being addressed?
 - Do we have excess capacity that could become a revenue stream?
 - Do we have a unique competency(ies)?
2. What threats exist for our organization?
 - External?
 - Internal?
 - Regulatory?
 - Technological?
3. What are the strengths of our organization?
 - People?
 - Processes, policies?
 - Systems, planning?
 - Products/services?
4. What are the weaknesses of our organization?
 - People?
 - Processes, policies?
 - Systems, planning?
 - Products/services?
5. What business is our organization in?
 - Seldom obvious. For example, Macdonald's sees themselves in the real estate business, not the business of selling hamburgers.
6. Why is our organization in business?
 - Not to make money. Money is the reward, the measure if you will, of how well you do what you do. Look back, if possible, to what your founder's had in mind when they started the organization.
7. Will we be in business in five years? If so, why?
 - What will be the key(s) to your success?
8. What is our organization's product/service?
 - Think past your specific offerings to why your customer's purchase them, this would be closer to your "real" product/service.
9. What is our organization's market?
 - Defined in the traditional marketing context – geography and segment.
10. Who are our organization's customers?
 - Fortune 500, SMB, individuals?
 - Demographics?
 - Psychographics?
 - Geographics?
11. What are our organization's values?
 - Look at how decisions are made and people are treated and assign values to the behaviors.
12. What will our organization look like in the future?
 - Bigger, smaller?
 - More stable, more nimble?
 - More customer-driven, more vision-driven?
 - More automated, more regulated?
13. What will our organization's environment look like in the future?
 - More regulation, less regulation?
 - Better economy, worse economy?
 - Declining market, increasing market?
 - More competitive, less competitive?
14. What should our organization accomplish?
 - BIG things, in relative terms.
 - Excellence focused.
 - Non-financial

Creating a vision is the first step in an organizational alignment process that uses as input the diverse (and often divergent) thinking, communication and larger perspectives of a group of individuals which is then collaboratively transformed into a shared mission, vision, values and, importantly, key strategies. These are discovered collaboratively so that all organization/team members can have, 1) input and gain understanding so that they can 2) create synergy (1+1=3 or 7 or 12) by working together holistically in order that 3) their combined efforts are focused, mutually supporting and, ultimately, successful. Because of alignment, business policy, rules and decisions become easier as they are based on common understanding and strategies/goals, then working through shared agreement to achieve those goals. Project assignments, budgeting, performance standards, benchmarks all become more easily established and managed because of the commonality and agreement achieved from the alignment process.



Introduction

The present is a time of upheaval and change in organizations. Companies are challenging the ways they do business. They need to innovate, adapt, shift and transform themselves. For an organization to succeed today, every employee needs to exhibit leadership, make decisions and act on opportunities. But with all this change, what are the keys that will help to keep a person and an organization on track?

The Process of Visioning

"The best way to predict the future is to invent it" - Alan Kay - Scientist, Inventor

Visioning is a journey from the known to the unknown, which helps create the future from a montage of facts, hopes, dreams, dangers and opportunities.

One of the key characteristics of high performance organizations and teams is that they have a clear picture of what they are trying to create together.

Visioning evokes creative solutions to business challenges and sparks continual evolution and learning in an organization.

Elements of the Visioning Process

Values - What is most important to an organization.

Scanning - Looking beyond the organization to its suppliers, customers, employees, etc.

Mission - The core purpose for which an organization is created.

Visioning - Picturing excellence.

Implementation - Includes the strategy, plans, procedures and key actions that will put all of the above into action.