

Vision-Driven Strategic Planning



*Creating
a Shared Future
of Choice*

THE VISION-DRIVEN STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

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Description

A vision-driven planning approach to create a shared organizational future of choice. It involves employees and external customers who collaboratively develop a vision-driven strategic plan encompassing shared values, goals, objectives and results. Activity-based budgets, projects, programs, performance contracts, information systems and organizational structure are linked to the plan.

Practical anticipated result (PAR)

The participative development of a 3- to 5-year vision-driven plan aligning subordinate departments with a shared organizational mission, vision, goals and objectives with linked performance, metrics, structures, actions, customer processes and overall team and individual accountability.

Target audience

Organizations, departments and Boards desiring a flexible vision-driven plan, collaboratively achieved, that aligns their organization to create a shared future of choice.

Discussion

There are three key characteristics of high-performance organizations and teams:

- They are clear about their basic purpose (mission).
- They have an equally clear picture of what they are trying to create together (vision).
- They share a common set of values that are reflected in both.

If it's this "simple" why do so many organizations fail in their planning process or fail to plan at all?

Based on our experience, this failure is typically caused by the lack of a commonly held vision for the future (either the future market needs or the future nature of the organization). The results of the planning don't match the leader's (or, as importantly, the employees' and customers') view of the

future, so it is either never implemented or stonewalled into ineffectiveness. If a vision of the future is not well known *and embedded* in the planning system of the organization, it is not automatically a part of all activities — including strategic planning, product/service or system design teams, and task force deliberations.

History is replete with examples of men and women with uncommon vision and the successes they have achieved. Those we now think of as "visionaries" were more than just dreamers; they were doers. They communicated their vision clearly, and their activities were always closely connected to the achievement of their visions.

Were these women and men able to foresee the future? No, they were able to design the future in the image of their vision rather than just reacting to the future as it arrives on a daily basis. How were they able to convert their views of the future into reality?

- They had, or created, a clear, shared view of what the future should be.
- They consistently and clearly communicated their visions to gain internal support.
- They planned participatively according to that view of the future (vision).
- They acted consistently with the vision and insisted others do as well.

The first step then, is the development of a compelling vision of the future. For the members of an organization, this vision, translated into a vision-driven plan, specifies in a concise, clear, and actionable form the direction and future for the organization. Good vision statements inspire and mobilize. Visioning is picturing excellence — what the person, team or organization wants to create in its best possible future. It is an evocative description of what is possible. A vision is not "something out there" that is impractical, but a way of setting a compelling scenario. Creating this image of the future requires the ability to expand one's sense of possibilities and then focus on what new initiatives can lead to success.

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The Vision-Driven Planning Process

The process begins with a shared perception of a desired future based on personal experiences, training, temperament, and other attributes that make up the organization. The inputs of others are added in a mix that determines how the organization will take ownership of the vision and, ultimately, of the methodology by which to achieve that vision.

The most striking difference between vision-driven planning and more traditional approaches is that vision-driven planning starts with a very high-level view of the future, rather than risking becoming attracted to — and stuck in — today's problems. The vision-driven planning approach initially encourages broad, imaginative thinking, and discourages tunnel vision and entrapment in details. Because the traditional approach most often burdens the planner with voluminous details regarding the historical perspective, current situation and problems, it is virtually impossible to focus on a plan for the future.

This sounds much like the conversation between Alice and the Cheshire cat in Lewis Carroll's book, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In her travels Alice is faced with a path that splits to go 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 and individuals find themselves; they're walking enough without knowing where "there" is.

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 can you decide on budget, by what means you're going to get there, what clothes or other items to take and, most importantly, which direction to travel. This single decision drives all the other important decisions that make certain you get to you're *chosen* destination.

Much has been said about the development of the vision statement. Many authors have noted the attributes of a good vision statement and a summary of their recommendations would include many of the attributes that we have already discussed:

- Clear, concise, easily understandable
- Exciting and inspiring
- Memorable
- Challenging
- Excellence-centered
- Stable, but flexible
- Implementable and tangible

Given these guidelines, and the previous discussion, we should have a comfortable feel for what makes a good vision — or at least how to recognize a good one when it is developed. So, then, how does one go about actually developing a vision-driven strategic plan once a clear view of a shared future has been established?

Developing a Vision-Driven Strategic Plan

Several authors have developed structured approaches to the development of a vision statement but not necessarily a plan. These procedures start with a very freewheeling, brainstorming session in which a vision statement is developed with successive meetings devoted to a refinement and restatement of the vision only to revert to the comfort of the traditional planning model.

THE VISION-DRIVEN STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

So what are the steps needed to reverse engineer a plan for today that, if implemented, will create a future of choice vs. happenstance for an organization?

It is a seven step process with the first six steps intended to provide an increasingly detailed set of activities which, when rolled from the bottom up will create the future.

1. *Determining Organizational Readiness.* This phase involves assessing how ready the organization is for vision-driven planning by asking the following kinds of questions: What do the leaders know about their organization? What processes have been used to learn about it? How effective have these processes been? What kinds of plans are in place and how current are they? How much are they used? What kind of organizational structure is in place? What do the employees want? What do the customers want?
2. *Performing an Organizational Assessment.* This step involves an honest assessment of the organization's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT). Most strategic planning involves this process but with vision-driven planning it is expanded to include mission, vision and values discussions. The assessment includes inventorying current assets, economic and demographic trends, and the understanding of larger environmental trends that could impact the strategy.
3. *Creating an Organizational Vision.* This step builds internal consensus regarding what the organization wants to be in three to five years, in non-financial terms. The vision places local strategies in the larger national/ state/regional context. It is a way to detach the organization from its present development path and to establish a new one.
4. *Identifying Strategic Issues, Goals (results) and Objectives (projects).* Strategic issues are broad-scope, large overarching strategic issues (i.e., HR, IT, finance, et al) that must be addressed to be successful. After the organization reaches a consensus on what strategic issues to undertake, it must

identify the tools for realizing these strategies. Goals (results) and objectives (projects) are the tools for accomplishing the strategic issues. These need to be real, achievable, measurable and couched in declarative, goal language. The goals (results) and objectives (projects) will become the measuring sticks for the plan's success or failure.

5. *Planning Action Steps.* After identifying promising strategies, cross-functional organizational teams are asked to further investigate the issues and tailor actions to fit these large, broad problems, opportunities and resources.
6. *Moving to Action.* This phase has four major goals:
 - To synthesize all earlier work into an overall action plan.
 - To set implementation priorities, accountabilities and a timeline.
 - To establish performance measures.
 - To craft a communications/ marketing plan. The plan needs to be both internal (for the team itself) as well as external to keep other agencies and the community informed of progress.
7. *Monitoring and Feedback Loops.* Staying on track requires assigning an institution or a group the responsibilities of monitoring progress and the taking of any needed corrective actions. This may be performed by the planning team or by an impartial outside group.

This seven-step process is duplicated by subordinate departments/divisions to create their own vision-driven strategic plans to align with the organization's overarching plan.

Plan Reverse Deployment

This rather strange sounding term is the real end-result of vision-driven planning process. It could be called migration plan development or high-level implementation planning, however the term "reverse deployment" is much more descriptive of the activity.

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This is the process of starting with the future vision and working backward in time to today's reality. In doing so, a road map — a high-level implementation plan — is prepared to guide later, more detailed implementation planning. It is at this stage that a list of direct guides for the detailed processes and action plans are developed. Reverse deployment starts from the vision of the future and provides a framework for developing those steps necessary to get to that future without the detours and dead-ends.

Reverse deployment is the reward of vision-driven planning because the goal of any planning activity must ultimately be to determine what actions should be taken today to reach tomorrow's goals. That is the focus in this stage. The genius of vision-driven planning is that it starts with a desired future, rather than merely projecting the present forward, as is the case with traditional strategic planning models. One is thus able to "create the future."

The approach to reverse deployment is to visualize the future desired state and to work backward in time in large increments, determining what each of the preceding major, logical steps (strategic issues) should be. This activity results in a high-level roadmap.

The real skill in this process is linking the roadmap to the present situation (e.g., the legacy systems and processes) in the most expedient manner. Accomplishing this linkage will require the assistance of those highly skilled in today's operations. It is here that a required transition design — the bridge between old and new processes — will be outlined. This transition design, along with the

roadmap, will provide an ongoing basis for measurement as the vision is pursued.

A primary purpose of reverse deployment (or reverse engineering if you will) is to develop solid guidelines and measurements for the following planning and implementation stages.

The roadmap and other outputs should be taken and directly applied in the next planning stage. It is important that each stage does not

"reinvent the wheel," but rather depends on and uses material previously developed. If this linkage is not enforced the final plan and actions may have no relation to the vision.

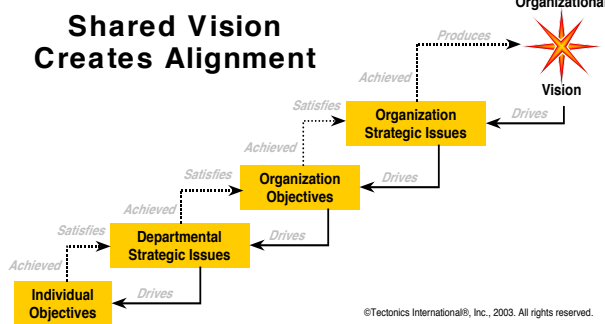
Summary

Vision-driven planning never ends. The activities outlined here should be repeated every year to assure that the vision remains valid and with goals

and projects adjusted to compensate for an ever-changing environment and technology.

Vision-driven planning is the process that allows an organization (or individual) to design its own future. Creating a shared vision of the future is the key to staying focused and on target so that the end-result will be a plan successfully implemented and a future of choice achieved.

The discrete steps of establishing a vision-driven strategic plan have been outlined above, and the importance of the contributions of technical forecasts and expertise has been emphasized. The choice of doing effective vision-driven planning is one of deciding either to be a designer of the future or to be a part of someone else's design. The vision-driven planning process will equip those who choose the path of leadership with the tools needed to successfully pursue that choice.



Linkages

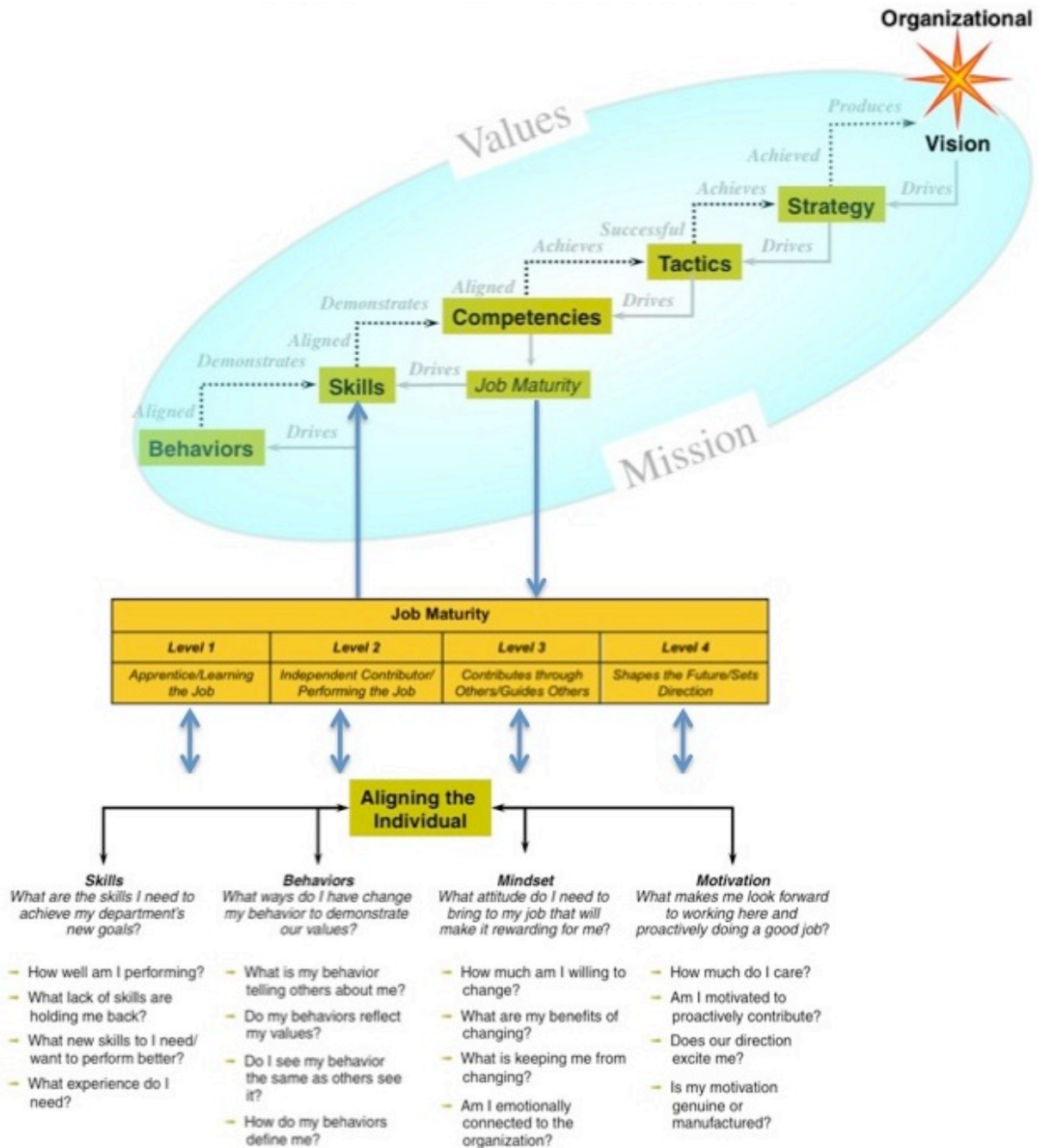
- Activity based budgeting
- Organizational structure
- Performance contracts
- Quality action teams
- Information systems
- Employee development

Benefits

- Organizational alignment
- Job meaning
- Value-added actions only
- Long range
- Tiered
- Living

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VISION-DRIVEN STRATEGIC PLANNING LINKAGES



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THE VISION-DRIVEN STRATEGIC PLANNING DEFINITIONS

Segment	Purpose	Description
<i>Vision Statement</i>	Illumination	A vision statement stretches the organizational horizon. It is a statement of “becoming.” It defines what the organization would like to evolve into, to become, within a specified timeframe. Visioning evokes creative solutions to organizational challenges sparking continual evolution and a learning organization. A vision is an articulation of what the desired future for the organization would look like. It is an organizational dream — it stretches the imagination and motivates people to rethink what is possible. As with the mission, the true value of a vision is as a guide for individual behavior and decision-making.
<i>Values Identification</i>	Defining	A clarification of the values, with associated personal behaviors, that the organization defines as driving the conduct of business and on which all policies, decisions, actions and personal behaviors are based.
<i>Mission Statement</i>	Grounding	Missions define what it is the organization wants to focus on when it comes to work each day. The mission is the purpose, the why the organization exists each day. It is the synthesis of what both customers and employees see as the organization's business, what its products and services should be, who its customers are and what value it brings to them. It is built upon the organization's core values and each member's behavior reflecting these values. It also includes what the larger environment sees as the organization's purpose and what work it actually does.
<i>Strategic Issue(s)</i>	Strategic	Broad areas of critical importance in which an organization desires to make significant progress and accomplish meaningful results (milestones) during the period covered by the planning process. These are the overarching strategic "stepping stones" that, when accomplished, will achieve the vision. They reflect the needs of the customer and are consistent with the mission and vision
<i>Result (Goal)</i>	Tactical	A series of linked, aligned, tactical result statements that, when accomplished, achieves or satisfies the broader strategic issue to which they are attached. Multiple results may need to be achieved to satisfy any single strategic issue.
<i>Project (Objective)</i>	Action	A series of linked projects (objectives) that when accomplished, will result in the achievement of the goal (result) to which it is attached. Multiple projects may need to be accomplished to achieve a single result.
<i>Action Plan</i>	Action	Composed of specific, well-defined actions or activities that the organization agrees to take to assure that the objectives are obtained. Should include costs, personnel, barriers and time frames.