Articulating a Compelling Vision
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Mission vs. Vision

Mission
• Focuses attention on the Present
• Broad goals to guide tasks
• Talks about HOW works will get to where it wants to go

Vision
• Looks to the Future
• Picture to frame current decisions that impact the future
• Talks about WHERE the organization wants to be

Approaches to Planning

• Reactive – coping with change as it occurs
  – Vision of heroic leadership
• Inactive – going with the flow, muddling thru
  – Vision of winning the lottery (given sufficient time)
• Preactive – preparing for the future
  – Vision of sufficient competence when needed
• Proactive – designing the desired future
  – Vision of shaping the future

Vision

• “Vision without action is merely a dream, that action without vision merely passes the time, but vision with action can change the world.”
  (Goodstein, Nolan, & Pfeiffer, 1992, p. 39)
• “Don’t settle for superficial vision statements written to motivate others. Focus on what really matters to members of the team, individually and collectively.”
  (Senge, et. al., 1999, pp. 408-409)

• A vision provides an organization a forward-looking, idealized image of itself
  – Moves outside the usual assumptions
• Concentrates on the end state, not the means to attain the objective
• A vision answers the question “What do we want to create?” (Senge, 1990)

• Visioning differentiates strategic planning from long-range planning
  – Arrive at a discontinuous future (not a boiled frog)
• The challenge is getting a compelling vision that is shared (and understood) across the organization
Possible Attitudes toward a Vision

- **Commitment**: wants it & willing to do whatever it takes to make it happen
- **Enrollment**: wants it & will align behavior
- **Genuine compliance**: sees the benefits & does what is expected plus a bit more
- **Formal compliance**: sees the benefits & does the minimum required
- **Grudging compliance**: does not see the benefits, but doesn't want to lose job
- **Apathy**: neither for nor against the vision
- **Passive-aggressive**: says the right things, but takes no action
- **Noncompliance**: does not see the benefits and will not do what is expected

Senge, 1990, pp. 219-220

Critical Success Factors for Vision

- Concepts in the statement are **simple & clear**
- **Uniquely relevant** to the organization
- Communicated and **accepted** across the organization
- **Top management** demonstrates total commitment to the vision
- **Consistent** linkages to decisions made across the organization (current decisions drive the future)

Core Requirements for a Vision

- Belief that every organization has a destiny
  - Connect to the overarching reason for existence
  - Choosing to listen for that sense of emerging purpose
- To be shared, the vision must be driven by widespread reflection on the organization’s purpose
  - Such purpose is often tacit, hidden by daily activity
  - Building shared meaning (where none may exist)
  - “Collective sense of what is important and why” (p. 299)
- The vision must create “creative tension”
  - Pull of the vision vs. our current reality

[Kotter, et. al., 1994]

Essential Requirements

- The vision must go beyond defining the future
- It must engage people toward involvement
  - There is no transformation without collective belief that is followed with individual action (Block, 2008)
- Purpose of a vision statement (DAC leadership)
  - Clarify the general direction for change (D)
  - Motivates people to move in that direction (C)
  - Coordinates actions across the organization (A)

[Kotter, 1996]

Characteristics of an Effective Vision

- **Imaginable**: paints a picture of the future
- **Desirable**: appeals to all key stakeholders
- **Feasible**: realistic & attainable
- Focused: clear guidance to decision-making
- Flexible: allows for creativity & adaptation
- Communicable: easily explained in < 5 min.

[Kotter, 1996, p. 72]

Characteristics of **Transformational** Vision

- Ambitious: moves people out of their comfort zone
- Appealing: connects to stakeholders at a fundamental level
- Trends: consistent with prevailing trends
- Moral: does not attempt to exploit anyone

[Kotter, 1996, p. 79]
Areas of Difficulty when Visioning

- Too many managers, not enough leaders
- Significant data must be understood and distilled down to its essence
- Requires introspection, who we are and what we really care about
- Requires teamwork and sacrifice
- Sense of urgency needed to maintain priority

Considerations for Telling & Selling

- Telling often leads to compliance, not commitment
  - Suitable in times of crisis
  - A "told" vision is still a vision that can move people
  - Must communicate directly, clearly, & consistently
  - Must articulate the truth about current reality
  - Sets boundaries on what is negotiable and what is not
  - Provides sufficient detail without limiting creativity
- Selling doesn't end until full commitment is attained
  - Requires frequent follow up meetings and communication
  - Requires support, not manipulation – must trust followers
  - Treat employees as a "customer"
  - Focus on personal benefits, not features
  - Problems: drop back to telling or ahead to testing & consulting

Considerations

- Resources
  - Ability to execute (people, capital, knowledge, and the time needed)
- Culture
  - When there is misalignment between vision and culture, either the vision or the culture needs to be modified
- Who is involved and how?
  - How does the organizational gain ownership?

Followers gain Ownership by

- Traditional view
  - Developing the means (action planning) after top management crafts the vision
    - Requires a learning process to gain commitment
- Newer, participatory approach (learning organization)
  - Participating in the organization dialogue
    - Commitment gained early through involvement

Where to Start?

- Where to start depends on organizational predisposition
  - Telling: the boss knows the vision and everyone has to follow it
  - Selling: the boss knows what the vision should be, but needs everyone to “buy in”
  - Testing: the boss has an idea of what the vision should be and wants feedback before proceeding
  - Consulting: the boss is putting together a vision and wants creative input before proceeding
  - Co-creating: the boss and others collaboratively build a shared vision together

Considerations for Testing & Consulting

- Testing – where is the passion?
  - Spell out the details, including difficulties
  - Offer viable choices & don’t bias the possible responses
  - Allow anonymous responses
  - Test degree of motivation required for adopting the vision
  - Consider a focus group to address the process (moves to consulting)
- Consulting – bringing together multiple, interdependent visions
  - Collect information through cascading down & up the organization
    - Consider facilitators to document critiques & prevent distortion of messages
  - Collect anonymous comments to ensure full voice be given to everyone
  - Drop back to testing to work through multiple suggestions
  - Try to move beyond suggesting options, to making a recommendation
  - Danger of adopting a compromise vision
**Considerations for Co-creating**

- Co-creating – align personal & collective visions
  1. Start with personal vision (people have to really care)
  2. Evolve into a shared sense of organization vision
     - Cascading process of dialogue at multiple levels (everyone of equal status)
     - Focus within the group & let cascade process handle outside interests
     - Have a straw man available from the higher level to bring clarity
     - Seek alignment, not agreement
     - Lack of alignment is a concern that will have to be addressed to investigate different mental models in use
     - Don’t sample – take the necessary time to permit a vision to emerge
     - Focus on the language (especially metaphors) used in these dialogues
  3. Gain a mutual understanding of current realities
  4. Establish creative tension to close the gap

[Sepge, et. al., 1994, pp. 314-324]

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**Group Exercises for Visioning**

1. Consider self-imposed constraints
2. Promote risk-taking
3. The Yanking Contest
4. Question driven dialogue
5. Managing the Horizon
6. Teamwork & communication development
   - Required to move the organization thru the process

**1 – Consider self-imposed constraints**

- Activity: Exploring creativity (think outside the box)
  - 9-dot problem to set stage
    - Connect all nine dots without lifting your pencil
      - 4 line solution
      - 3 line solution (big dots)
      - 1 line solution (cut & tape paper)
  - What were the self-imposed constraints?
    - What paradigm are you living?

2 – Promoting Risk-taking

- Activity: Experiencing Learning Anxiety
  - New situations are often like letting go of a trapeze in order to grab another
  - Consider the following questions:
    - When have you faced a new situation?
    - How did you feel? Why did you feel this way?
    - How did others respond to the situation?
  - Discuss:
    - How would you summarize the situation?
    - What did you do to cope?
    - Was the level of initial concern appropriate?
  - What is the real risk of trying something new?
    - What is the risk of not trying?

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**3 – The Yanking Contest**

1. Everyone stand in a circle facing inward.
2. As individuals, reflect on your vision of what you would like your organization to become
3. Form a clear mental image of the vision and then associate that image with some location in the room (quiet corner, window, artifact, etc.)
4. Everyone join hands – no talking (grunts & laughter are permitted)
5. The Contest (on the count of 3) push, pull, or roll others with body language toward your vision’s location. “Win” by getting others to your vision spot.
6. If you can’t get others to your spot, shift strategy and try to help someone else reach their vision spot.

Wolfenden (1994)

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**3 – The Yanking Contest (cont.)**

7. Debrief (drop hands)
   - What happened?
   - What emotions did you feel?
   - At what point did you abandon your vision and adopt another?
   - What was successful in moving others?

- Implication: too often visions are imposed
  - Those who “win” are often resented & blamed
4 – Question-driven Dialogue

• Questions about leading into the future
  – What are the most important trends emerging?
  – What is our unique contribution to the world?
  – How do we secure revenue (funding)?
  – How is this a great place to work?
  – What are our values? How do we treat people?
  – How secure is our future?

(Senge, et. al., 1994, pp. 337-338)

4 – Question-driven Dialogue (cont.)

• Questions about the current reality
  – What aspects of our organization empower people?
  – What disempowers people?
  – What challenges do we face?
    • Does everyone agree?
  – What do we know that we need to know?
  – What don’t we know that we need to know?

(Senge, et. al., 1994, p. 338)

5 – Managing the Horizon

• Prepare a wall chart as below
  • Individually place sticky notes with your vision on the chart
  • Collectively rearrange the notes to a correct timeline

  Vision 1 Vision 2 Vision 3 Vision 4

  Short-term Long-term

• Short-term people are cautious and may miss opportunities
• Long-term people may have difficulty managing problems and recourses
• CEOs are often Vision 4 people and have to hold back to avoid shutting down those lower in the organization.

Communicating Vision

Key Elements in Communicating Vision

• Simplicity: easily understood without jargon
• Metaphor & analogy: paint a verbal picture
• Multiple forums: meetings, memos, whatever!
  – Interspersed into other communication as well
• Repetition: repeat, repetition
• Leadership by example: walk the talk
• Explain inconsistencies: avoid undermining credibility of communications
• 2-way communication: up & down the organization
  – Listen and modify as feedback is received

(Kotter, 1996, p. 90)

Challenge in Communicating Vision

• Message requires both intellectual and emotional acceptance, which is difficult
  – Even multiple messages get drowned out in the information overload
References