

Changing Your Organization for the Better

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Part 2: The Vision of the Future or How Do We Know Where We Are Going So We Will Know When We Have Arrived

In Part 1, we discussed the concept of organizational change, and introduced the eight key elements of the change equation. The overriding component however is the concept of vision. It is fine to have a general level of dissatisfaction with the current or “as-is” state, but it is not enough. You need a vision of what the new or “to-be” state will look like so that the organization will know what they are trying to achieve and what it will look like when they do.

Many organizations have created a vision for themselves. If you have one then you are on the right track. If you do not have one, how can you ask your organization to change when you can not describe to them what their future will look like if they do.

It is the vision, that when clearly understood creates alignment and group focus. What, then, is a vision? You can define it as follows:

Vision is an idealized picture of a future state, one that is integrated into the organization’s culture. It provides a stretch, yet it is achievable over an extended time period with a great deal of work and collective focus by the entire organization. Because it continually evolves, it is never fully achieved.

Let’s look more closely at this definition by examining each of the parts.

An Idealized Picture of a Future State

Vision should be something that people can see. When pieces of it are completed, people in the company can say “what we set out to create for ourselves is what we have achieved.” A picture is something that people can hold up and use to measure their progress.

Integrated into the Organization’s Culture

The vision must be difficult, if not impossible, to alter so that personnel changes can not easily destroy what the collective members have created. Too often the vision is not sufficiently integrated into the company culture. In these cases, change in management can easily alter or destroy what everyone has worked to achieve.

A Stretch, Yet Achievable

The vision needs to be something that the firm can achieve, but not easily. If it is too difficult people will become frustrated and give up. If it is not a stretch, then it will be easily accomplished and will not have significant value for the group.

Extended Time and a Great Deal of Work

A vision is not something that can be accomplished in a short period of time. It represents a major shift in how a firm does business. If a vision can be achieved overnight, then it is not sufficiently a stretch for the firm. However, a worthwhile vision that takes a lot of time and requires a major shift in the culture will take a great deal of work.

Collective Focus by the Entire Organization

It is not enough if just one person, or even a few people, understand and are working to achieve the vision. Instead, the vision must be a collective effort for the entire organization. Only then can it not only succeed, but also be long lasting and beneficial.

Continually Evolving, Never Accomplished

The process is continually evolving, not according to a set plan, but instead through a learning process. Although the vision is set at the beginning, the organization continually evolves and the end-state is never accomplished. In fact, by the time that the initially described end state is reached, a new and evolved end state will have replaced the original.

Even in the best of circumstances, achieving a vision is not a simple task. It is vulnerable to many pitfalls. Any strategy used to create the vision must translate into a strategy used to implement it. Thus the following aspects need to be considered at both stages for a chance at success:

- A strategy must be in place to take the vision from a picture of a desired future state to something that is real. This is what I was describing in Part 1 when I discussed next steps. It will be addressed further in Part 3.
- The organization must be ready to change by agreeing that they collectively have a high degree of dissatisfaction with their current situation.
- The organization must be aligned for change. This is very important. Alignment means that all those in the organization see the same picture of their future and work together to achieve it.
- The vision must be extremely clear and understood by all. This is extremely important to ultimate success. You should be able to ask anyone in the organization about the vision and have them describe it identically.
- The managers, those who set strategic direction, must “walk the talk”. The old adage of “don’t do what I do, do what I say” is a ticket to failure.
- All levels of the organization must make an ongoing commitment. The change effort will not succeed if everyone is not committed. Simply being involved is

- not enough. It is like a breakfast of ham and eggs. The chicken is involved, the pig was committed.
- Sufficient and realistic time must be allowed for the effort to be a success.

This concludes part 2 of 5 of “Changing Your Organization for the Better”. Part 3 will address concept of the Goal Achievement Model—a process to turn the mission into reality.

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