

Three

Vision: Motivating Change

Prime Responsibility #3: Leaders must work with others in the organization to create a vision, a reasonable story about the organization's future in light of the constraints imposed by its environment and culture, and to articulate the goal agenda that follows from that vision. Then they must promote acceptance of the vision throughout the organization.

In Chapter 2, we saw that as an organization grows, the relationship between its activities and its culture becomes more complex. In addition to “what we do” and “what we believe in,” a sense of direction begins to develop: “what we want to become.” This sense of direction, the agenda the organization perceives itself to be pursuing, is its vision. Thus, activities, culture, and vision become an interrelated whole, each interacting with and shaping the other within the context of the organization’s external and internal environments. Culture embodies the organization’s fundamental beliefs and the imperatives that are dictated by these beliefs. Activities flow from these imperatives, but they also influence the imperatives and the beliefs that give rise to them. Vision defines the ideal future, perhaps implying retention of the current culture and the activities, or

perhaps implying change. That is, the vision may require no more than natural evolution of the present, or it may require radical changes in what the organization is doing and in its culture in light of trends, threats, and opportunities present in its external and internal environments.

What the Vision Isn't

The Vision Isn't the Mission

Many organizations confuse their organization's vision and its mission. Worse, they presume that a mission statement is the statement of their vision. They are wrong.

The vision is a narrative, a story that tells the organization who it is now and who it ideally will be at some time in the future. That is, the vision helps members understand what the organization is now and what it is striving to become. In contrast, the mission describes what the organization does—its activities—in pursuit of the goals dictated by the vision. The mission derives from the vision.

People often presume that because they have concocted a mission statement that they therefore have created a vision. I use the word *concocted* because mission statements that do not derive from a vision tend to be mere verbiage, a collection of jargon and catch phrases that neither inform nor inspire. Most organizations that start their search for a vision by writing a mission statement never develop a true vision because the brief mission statement promotes a narrow mind-set. It makes about as much sense to write a mission statement in the absence of vision as it would to write an executive summary before you write a document; in both cases the tail wags the dog by exerting a powerful and limiting influence on what is, after all, the main event.

The Vision Isn't a Plan

People often confuse vision with plans. True, the organization's vision is a story about a desirable future that implies an agenda of goals, which, in turn, implies plans for attaining them, but the implied plans usually are quite vague. Eventually, concrete plans will have to be made, and concrete actions will have to be taken, but the vision itself seldom outlines either of them very precisely.

Although the vision is not the same thing as a plan, it gives rise to and dictates the shape of plans. The vision sets the goals, and the plan maps the path to those goals in light of environmental constraints. Without planning (and implementation), the vision remains an abstract dream. Without the vision, planning (and implementation) tends to focus on solutions to short-term problems. The vision infuses the plan with energy because it gives it direction and defines long-term objectives. Even the most unassuming vision challenges the organization to become something stronger, better, different. It is a glimpse of the future's potential. As such, it is a mixture of reality and imagination.

The Vision Isn't Just for Threats

People often think that a vision (and planning and implementation) is solely to address threats. In fact, opportunities also require a vision in order to make the most of them. Opportunities are circumstances that, if properly utilized, can lead to outcomes that satisfy the organization's cultural values, just as threats are conditions that can lead to outcomes that violate those values. For example, a firm that is going along nicely may see a new product or a new market as an opportunity to do even better, thus satisfying its cultural imperative for growth and success. In contrast, a firm that is in danger may see leaving its current business and entering another one as an opportunity to save itself, also satisfying its cultural imperative for growth and success *and survival*. Recall the rather optimistic old saying, "There are no problems, just opportunities."

The Vision Isn't Necessarily Dramatic

History provides examples of dramatic visions that have inspired productive action and bettered the lot of those who were inspired by them. Visions offered by, among others, Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and the "I Have a Dream" speech by Martin Luther King Jr. at the March on Washington in 1963 are dramatic in their sweep and inspiring in their eloquence. They are more notable than most workaday visions because they are movingly stated and they address changes of magnificent proportions. But for all that, they are fundamentally the same as the vision that every organization needs to motivate necessary change and give direction to its actions. Every vision helps its intended audience recognize things they perhaps already know but have not put into words: who we are and who we want to become.

Elements of the Vision

By now I hope you are convinced that to avoid trouble or to seize opportunity, the organization needs a creative vision to guide it. The good news is that the process of building that vision is not particularly mysterious.

A vision has four elements: goals, priorities, requirements, and implications. Seldom does the vision contain very fine detail about each of these elements; that will be spelled out in the plans that derive from the vision.

Goals

Goals are the most important elements of vision. They are the stars, and the other elements are the supporting players. Goals have two attributes: thrust and scope. *Thrust* is the direction that vision prescribes for the organization. *Scope* is the breadth of the undertaking and the comprehensiveness of its impact on the organization's culture and activities, and it is dictated by the comprehensiveness and magnitude of the thrust. Together thrust and scope constitute the vision's goals, the future toward which the organization should strive.

Priorities

Priorities give differential weight to the goals and add a time dimension for their accomplishment. Some goals are more important than others; some must be attained first if the others are to be attained subsequently; and some are tangential to the real thrust but are necessitated by cultural considerations.

Requirements

Requirements for achieving the vision often center on anticipating the skills and tools that might be needed to reach its goals. One of the reasons for failed vision regularly cited by managers is that although the organization's members accept the new vision and work hard to achieve it, they lack the required skills. Sometimes this means that the vision must include retraining programs. Sometimes it means the vision must include ideas about recruitment of new people who possess the requisite skills. Sometimes it means the vision must include tasks being done by people outside the organization. All of these will cost money, so another requirement is that the vision must include a realistic idea about how things are going to be paid for.

Implications

Implications of failing and succeeding are the final element of vision. Failure can be disastrous, and although they may not be fleshed out, the vision should at least suggest fall-back positions. On the other hand, success that is followed by awful surprises can be just about as bad, and it too needs fallback positions. Risk is part of being alive, but risk can be reduced, if only a little, by attempting to anticipate what might happen if efforts fail and if they succeed. For example, without a fallback plan, the firm that dreams of independence and security by ridding itself of debt and amassing a large cash reserve may be setting itself up for a takeover. Vision that is heedless of the possible negative implications of both failure and success is asking for trouble.

Sources of the Vision

Vision is not the unique gift of a few special leaders who, because of their extraordinary foresight, are singularly adept at leading ailing organizations out of the darkness and into the light. There is no denying that some leaders do a better job than others of communicating their particular vision to the organization's members. There is no reason, however, to believe that their sense of vision is necessarily superior to anyone else's (recall that Adolph Hitler was a particularly gifted communicator).

The fact is that what often is cited as almost clairvoyant, nearly messianic vision is usually recognized as such only in retrospect. When a leader's vision proves spectacularly successful, both the leader and the successful vision become bigger than life and are accorded a special place in the organization's mythology. The myth attributes exceptional powers to the leader who, without that striking success, would probably be regarded as just an ordinary person. Notice that one seldom hears failure hailed as visionary, even when the fault was in planning or implementation and not the vision. The truth is that vision is less special and more mundane than many would like to think.

Leaders' Vision

Whatever our doubts about charisma, we must not summarily dismiss the vision that strong leaders present their organizations. Especially when the leader has a good track record, his or her vision often is very influential. In the 1980s, when stepping down after 14 years as a programming

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executive at NBC television, Brandon Tartikoff expressed fear that nobody at NBC had a vision of what they wanted the network to become. He contrasted this with the clear vision that Grant Tinker had brought to NBC when he took over as chairman 10 years earlier, bringing NBC's shows to the top of the ratings.

"The vision was, we're going to try to get the best producers, give them the greatest freedom, encourage them to bring us their projects of passion, and give them what no one else gives them, which is time to connect on the air with the audience and let the audience catch up with some of their shows" (quoted in Shales, 1991).

The result was that shows that were slow starters were allowed to stay on the air until they found their audiences. Although neither would comment, it was broadly believed throughout the industry that both Tinker and Tartikoff left NBC because this vision no longer prevailed. After General Electric bought it in 1981, NBC was subjected to stringent cost cutting, a shift in emphasis from quality to profit as the measure of success, and a marked decline in morale and in NBC's desirability as a place to work. As often happens when the control of an organization changes hands, the ensuing clash between the new and the old cultures and visions made some people quit rather than compromise their beliefs and dreams.

Members' Vision

Just as it is a mistake to think that vision arises from the special talent of gifted leaders, it also is a mistake to think that it *only* arises from leaders, gifted or otherwise. Like culture, vision belongs to everyone in the organization. That is, each member has his or her own vision for the organization, although any particular example may be rather idiosyncratic and heavily focused on its owner's own future in the organization. Usually, however, the members' private visions contain some sense of the larger organization's future, if only because a common culture underlies them. To the degree that each individual member's vision is congruent with the vision of the other members and with leadership's vision, we can speak of consensus about the organization's vision.

Consensus

Growth of consensus about a vision means that what were once unconventional ideas about the organization's future become conventional.

Although there are many different visions within an organization, most of them receive little attention, and only one or two emerge as the contenders for adoption. Sometimes the survivors are the visions of one or two people, but quite often they seem to arise from somewhere deep within the organization. Although it would be interesting to know their origins, the most pressing question is why some survive and others die.

It is not difficult to identify key characteristics of surviving visions. They must address identifiable problems, and they must not be markedly incompatible with the culture and activities. The question, however, goes beyond even these basics, for some visions that possess these qualifications still fail to survive. Clearly, there are political considerations that prevail over the mere quality of the vision.

Let us assume for a moment that we have three or four very acceptable, contending visions of an organization's future. They all address the problems that the organization faces, and they all are sufficiently compatible with the culture and current activities to permit them to be considered further. Which one will become the vision that is favored by the members of the organization?

This question, or at least a very similar question, has received close attention from political scientists who study how issues become part of the public agenda. As it turns out, much of what they have learned in the public realm is instructive about how an organization's agenda—its vision—arises from its leaders and from within the ranks of its membership.

Surviving. Milward and Laird (1992) examined the natural history of various issues that aroused public concern and that eventually were acted on by one or another legislative body. They discovered a pattern in the careers of these issues that involves relevance, sponsorship, and timing.

First, the issue must be relevant. It must address the problems that are important to people and contain the rudiments of a solution. It helps if some villainous source of the problems can be identified: a person or organization that is responsible, preferably if their motivation is questionable and what they are doing victimizes innocent people (and we all like to think we are innocent people). The counterpart in a business might be something like the loss of a big contract to a rival firm, which turns everyone's attention to the problem of competing with this obviously malevolent opponent and sets the scene for thinking about how the organization might be able to do better in the future.

Second, the issue must have sponsors. A highly credible person must champion it, and a group that is seen as knowledgeable must push it.

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Third, timing must be right. The issue that fits the mood of the moment will have the best chance of surviving to be considered further. The mood may change, but unless the change is large, the issue may remain viable. An issue that is raised before its time will fall on deaf ears; one that is raised after the mood has passed will sink into oblivion. Timing is everything.

Substituting the word *vision* for the word *issue* in the above implies that to have staying power, a candidate to become the organization's vision has to fit the problems that members perceive the organization to be facing, must receive support and endorsement from powerful people and factions within the organization, and must be proposed and discussed at the right time. The further lesson to be learned from political science, however, is that a vision that achieves this consensus still may not be the best vision, just as the vision that comes from leadership may not be the best one. Even if it were possible to identify and clearly label the best vision, it might not turn out to be the survivor.

As you might have gathered from all of this, the odds are slim that a truly good vision is going to spontaneously arise from within an organization, survive the political gauntlet, and achieve the consensus that is necessary for it to become the rallying point. That is why leaders are wise to keep their eye on the competing visions that are floating around within the organization and to help those that have the best chance of addressing the organization's long-term problems and of gaining consensus. Indeed, building on a vision that has its roots in the organization itself greatly improves the chances of attaining consensus.

Evolution and Revolution Revisited

As we saw earlier, there are two modes of cultural change: evolution and revolution. As one might expect, these two modes derive from very different underlying kinds of vision: evolutionary vision and revolutionary vision.

Evolutionary vision sees the future as a natural evolution of the present. This does not mean that things are static. It merely means that as the organization considers what it wants to become, it strives to keep the vision as compatible as possible with its existing culture, only making changes as required and even then focusing on slow and measured changes.

Revolutionary vision sees the future as a profound departure from the present, usually as a result of existing or looming crises. This kind of vision prescribes rapid and radical changes both in how things are done and in the culture that legitimizes those activities.

Each kind of vision, evolutionary or revolutionary, is appropriate in some circumstances and inappropriate in others.

Evolutionary Vision

Books about organizational change often start with the assumption that all organizations are constantly on the brink of disaster. As a result, leaders are exhorted to be a "fireball," to impose revolutionary changes, and to turn the organization around. Lack of change is equated with stagnation. It sometimes seems that proactive is equated with hyperactive.

The fact is, for most organizations most of the time, it is appropriate for the vision merely to be an informed and reasonable extension of the present. If there are no looming threats and participants (including, for example, shareholders, if it is a business, or voters, if it is a unit of government) are satisfied with what is happening, continuing with the present agenda may be in order; the vision may be merely to improve quality steadily, to work on reducing costs or whatever. Change exacts a price, and when change is not needed, an evolutionary vision requiring quiet progress may be best. Contrary to management lore, sometimes the best advice is, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Revolutionary Vision

On the other hand, if the organization is in trouble, or if serious threats or compelling opportunities loom on the horizon, maintaining the status quo may be either dangerous or foolish. If leadership is ever going to be a "fireball," this is the time. The trick, of course, is recognizing and understanding the threat or opportunity and having the creativity to build a vision that can deal with it adequately.

Adequacy of the Vision

The most obvious criterion for judging the adequacy of the vision is whether it addresses the opportunities and threats in the organization's

external environment. But that may not be enough. Unless there is a willingness on the part of both leaders and members to endure profound change, a vision that is in direct and irresolvable conflict with the culture and with current practices is not an adequate vision. Similarly, unless it includes a remedy, a vision that requires strength where the organization is weak is not an adequate vision. And, a vision that is implausible or has little chance of success is not adequate. In short, not just any dream will do: It must be grounded in reality, or it's a waste of time.

An adequate vision lies somewhere between mundane problem solving and idealistic dreaming. It sets an agenda that possibly might not be reached but that is so close to being attainable that it inspires the attempt to achieve it. It is this quality of being within the organization's grasp, but requiring serious effort, that allows the vision to inspire, motivate, and unify the organization's members. The most adequate vision is one that addresses the issues and is attainable, but is a challenge.

Two Examples of Vision Building

To see how real organizations build visions, let us examine two examples. The first is a newly founded fire department in a suburb of a medium-size city. The second is a well-established urban hospital located near the center of a very large city. Both found themselves faced with the need to build an effective vision that their various constituencies could support. The second example is particularly instructive because it describes how the vision guided planning and subsequent action, which provides a segue into Chapter 4 where we will discuss planning.

The First Example: A Suburban Fire Department

Southwest Fire Department (not its real name) was formed when the board of a fire district decided not to renew its contract with a private provider, a large emergency services corporation, and set up its own fire department. The district's five fire stations serve a rapidly growing population of about 70,000 residents and 1,000 businesses in an area of roughly 70 square miles. Many of the firefighters previously worked for the fire corporation, and they generally were pleased by the change in employment. As part of its development, the new fire department sought to build a vision that could give a sense of unity to its members and provide direction for its growth (Weatherly, 1995).

The first step. The process began with a series of focus group meetings and interviews with key members of the organization. A fundamental split quickly became apparent: The fire marshal remarked that, "There is no honor in putting out a fire that could have been prevented." Immediately, one of the firefighters replied, "Firefighting is always honorable." As the discussion progressed, it became clear that the group did not share a common view about the reason the organization existed. Some contended that the department's purpose was to prevent fires, and others contended that it was to fight fires, but they all agreed that they were in the "fire business." As it turned out, however, this was not strictly true. Observation of their activities revealed that fire prevention and firefighting were only part of what they did. They provided emergency medical services, collected toys for children, provided safe "haunted houses" for Halloween, helped senior citizens with plumbing emergencies and similar problems, removed wild animals from people's yards, and rescued domestic animals. In short, their real business appeared to be both emergency and nonemergency community service.

Other themes emerged, most of them defined by what the department was not rather than by what it was. Most notably, it was not like the former corporation that provided fire protection. When asked to define what the department was, most members responded by contrasting it with the corporation. Indeed, the culture was more of an anticulture, in that it had no substance other than being different from the corporation. As a result of trying to be different from the corporation (which perhaps had been overorganized and overcontrolling), the department's culture appeared to be fragmented with little integration across the five fire stations and not much better within each station. This led to the perception of fragmentation (the feeling that things were out of control and falling apart), which previously had resulted in moves toward unionization in an attempt to provide a sense of security and organization.

All of this was compounded by the fact that the corporation, for which many of the firefighters had previously worked, was aggressively seeking contracts with areas adjacent to the district's borders in an attempt to "land lock" the district and prevent its expansion, thus limiting its financial base. The result was a strong sense of threat and the feeling that the department was fighting for survival, although nobody had a coherent idea about what to do to remedy things. The discomfort level was high and the resulting bickering and turf battles were leading to valuable resources being squandered and long-time friendships being destroyed.

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Clearly a strong vision was needed to provide a common cause and a viable way of assuring the future of the department.

The second step. While the focus groups and interviews were being conducted, all of the firefighters in the five fire stations were administered the Organizational Culture Survey (Appendix B). The results showed the department's culture to be weak on *reward* and, as you might expect, on *communication, fairness, enjoyment, and innovation*. On the other hand, the culture was strong on *achievement, competitiveness, resourcefulness, judgment, and integrity*. This suggests that the culture was clear about doing a good job externally, but it was less clear about internal matters such as treating employees well or providing them support for doing their jobs.

A second finding of the survey was that the department had a more unified culture than it at first appeared. This meant that the culture was a better foundation for building a vision and formulating a strategic plan for the department than had been anticipated.

The third step. To augment the results of the focus groups, interviews, and the Organizational Culture Survey, various of the department's internal documents were reviewed, documents that had previously been prepared by outside consultants. For example, one was an assessment of opportunities and threats with suggestions for a strategic plan. Another was the results of an environmental scanning project with recommendations about the implications for the department's future.

The fourth step. A picture began to emerge from the documents, the focus group, the interview information, and the Organizational Culture Survey results. The firefighters were fiercely loyal, but they defined their department in terms of how it differed from the corporation for which they had previously worked. As a result, the department had no distinct identity of its own and was floundering because it had no sense of direction. In short, the department was strong in many ways, but there was no shared vision of where it was going and what it was striving to become.

The fifth step. Armed with all of this information, a task force was formed to create a vision for the department. Following the procedures outlined earlier in this chapter, the task force crafted a detailed document describing the values of the department and the implications for the department's future. By this point, the vision focused broadly on the department's community service rather than only on fire prevention and firefighting. Prevention and readiness to fight fires were retained, but they were not

seen as the only goals toward which the department should strive: The department also was envisioned as working toward greater integration into the community. Retention of the traditional elements of the firefighter professional ethos enabled more conservative members of the department to buy into the vision without feeling threatened. Together with the new elements, this made the vision broad enough to be encompassing but narrow enough to provide a basis for sensible planning and coordination of future activities.

The sixth step. A follow-up about a year later revealed that the vision was still in place, that it was in fact driving activities, and that there had been a marked decrease in internal conflict and discomfort with the department. In fact, the first steps had been taken toward formulation of a long-term plan to guide the department's future growth and development.

Some of the comments obtained during the follow-up are instructive enough to warrant inclusion, and they provide a nice ending to our little story:

We were doing all these programs, but we really didn't know why. It seemed like people were saying, "Hey, this is a great idea; we ought to do this Toys for Tots program." And our leader would say, "Sure. Do it." We didn't really see how it tied to anything. But going through this process showed us that we were doing things right. Focusing on our values allowed us to think a little bigger in terms of our vision. It helped us see how the things we do fit together and serve a larger purpose.

Or,

We are a caring organization, and we participate in an enormous amount of social service that has to do with the peace of mind of people in our community. When little Mrs. Johnson falls down, and she's not really hurt (and she knows she's not hurt) or she might not have even really fallen down, but she calls us because she's lonely, we've got to talk to her and try and find organizations that can find somebody for her to talk to. We're not saying we're going to be in the counseling business, but what we are saying is we try to be in the referral business.

And,

Our vision is more than putting out fires. We're really there for our customers' peace of mind in areas we can affect: fire, medical, and a variety of community services.

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As is clear in these quotations, the line between vision building and planning is not well defined. As the vision becomes clearer, the outlines of a plan for achieving it also become clearer, a fact that also is illustrated by our second example of vision building.

The Second Example: An Urban Hospital

Mercy Hospital (not its real name) is owned and run by an order of Catholic nuns who founded it in the early 1900s as a charity hospital. Located at the edge of the downtown core, Mercy plays a major role in the care of the city's poor. As was true for many hospitals, Mercy long had financed its charity care by charging its paying patients more than their care actually cost, charges that usually were paid by private or public health insurance. As a result of pressure from insurance companies and from programs like Medicare, however, the margin that paying patients contributed began to be reduced. Because charity cases were never turned away, the institution found itself underwriting their care, resulting in increasingly serious financial trouble.

Steps to solve its problems began in the usual way, with cutbacks in materials and maintenance. As things got worse, the hospital had to lay off almost 20% of its nonmedical work force, among whom were many loyal, long-term employees. The first results were a plunge in morale and the growth of an underground rumor mill that fueled a growing sense of disaster. Survivors of the "purge" believed that another layoff was imminent. Employee loyalty gave way to resentment that the organization had sold out to "mere" economic forces and had abandoned its moral responsibilities to its employees and patients.

The professional administrators who managed Mercy's business affairs argued for even more cutbacks, particularly in the volume of nonpaying charity care. The nuns, who constituted the hospital's board of directors, refused to turn any charity case away. The chief administrator, caught in the middle of these opposing forces, found that anything he did made someone angry, employees, administrators, or the nuns.

Different visions. Analysis of the situation revealed that part of the problem was that no one had a viable vision of the future. The employees saw the future as a downward path, with slipping standards and fewer people to do what must be done. The nuns saw the future as an extension of the past, taking care of the charity cases and waiting for God to take care of the finances. The administrators saw the future as short and bleak unless

something could be done quickly to stop financial losses. The chief administrator, who was not a particularly strong leader, could not mold these dire visions into anything that held promise, and he had no vision of his own to present. As a result, the organization had no sense of direction, except perhaps inextricably toward closing its doors. To an outsider, the organization looked like some large, wounded animal, waiting in stunned confusion for the fatal blow.

Turning point. As things turned out, the nuns may have had the right idea. Sometime earlier, the hospital, as a half-hearted experiment, had opened two satellite clinics in fairly middle-class neighborhoods. Patients from the surrounding neighborhoods used them because they were accessible and convenient. Although the clinics followed the central hospital's policy on charity care, not many charity cases came in, and the clinics quickly became profitable. Although Mercy had not really paid much attention, in other cities clinics like these were proving to be equally successful. They fit well with the industry's increasing emphasis on health maintenance and preventive care while using central hospitals as technical centers to which patients could be sent for more comprehensive care.

Vision building. On the advice of a management consultant, a "vision task force" was formed, composed of nuns, employees, and administrators. Building on the success of the clinics, the task force developed a vision for Mercy that borrowed heavily from successful examples throughout the health care industry.

The vision outlined the hospital's problems and described the desired future, which was survival of the hospital with the ability to continue serving the poor, as well as avoidance of further layoffs. The envisioned future emphasized decentralization, health maintenance, and preventive care. It stressed retention of Mercy's existing culture, insofar as the culture could accept decentralization and the decreased importance of the central hospital relative to the clinics. It retained charity care and high standards while stressing financial viability. When unveiled in a series of meetings with employees and the medical staff, the vision was quickly approved and widely accepted.

The task force members remarked that as the vision developed, it became clear what would have to be done to realize it. That is, the outlines of the plan were dictated by the vision, just as the shape of the vision was dictated by Mercy's environment and its culture. After the vision had

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been clearly articulated and broadly approved, the task force began formulating plans for achieving it. In this they turned to the clinics, the various units in the hospital, and to influential people throughout the organization. They all were asked to consider the vision and what their units could contribute to attaining it.

Planning process. The preliminary plan that emerged from this beginning stage was much too conservative. People were disinclined to change enough to make the vision attainable. After some intense lobbying by task force members, another attempt was made. Again, it was too conservative. Four iterations later, the plan began to look vaguely promising. At this point, the task force added its own ideas to produce a final plan that asked more of the units than they had volunteered, but not so much that they rebelled. The major changes were slated to take place over a 5-year period, thus reducing the immediate threat to those most affected. Not everyone applauded the final plan, but it was seen as fair and far better than any alternative that could be proposed.

The plan. Briefly, the plan called for the walk-in clinics at the central hospital to be closed and the neighborhood clinics to be expanded and increased in number, largely by moving personnel from the central hospital. One clinic that was expected to lose money was to be placed in the downtown area to serve the very poor. The other clinics were to be spread throughout the city, particularly in cash-producing middle-class areas. Hospital physicians were to be reassigned to the clinics as their primary workplaces, coming to the central hospital to see their more serious patients. Expensive high-tech equipment that duplicated equipment at other hospitals was to be sold, and the neighborhood clinics would be allowed to refer patients to other hospitals, a practice that had been discouraged in the past. In the same vein, narrow specialties were to be phased out and their resources used to strengthen basic medical care. Referral to other hospitals would be made when exotic illnesses were encountered.

The final version of Mercy's new vision was accepted because it accommodated the most important parts of everyone's unique vision: The employees got the potential for keeping their jobs and maintaining high standards of care; the nuns got the potential for continuing charity care; and the administrators got the potential for financial soundness.

Of course, the new emphasis on the clinics and the reduced emphasis on the central hospital were threatening to those people who had vested interests in the status quo. A concerted effort, however, by task force members

and others who recognized the new vision's potential for saving the organization was effective in converting enough holdouts that the plan finally was accepted and implementation begun. There have been successes and failures, progress and reversals, but the vision is still in place, and the plan is still unfolding. Some of the old wounds have healed, and the organization appears to be moving toward soundness. No more layoffs have been needed, and employees are again building loyalty to the organization. This is not to say that Mercy Hospital's future is safe and secure, but thus far the plan has worked to move the organization toward its vision.

As this example demonstrates, vision is not the same thing as a plan, nor is it mere fantasy. Mercy's vision was made of fairly commonplace stuff, built on its own good fortune in having opened clinics that worked and on copying successful examples in other cities. The vision was not spawned by some great insight on the part of the chief administrator. Indeed, the man was notable for his lack of imagination. Rather, the vision derived from the simple insight that the clinics were the one bright spot in an otherwise dark picture. Even then, the vision did not spring full-blown as a complete picture. It was crafted piece by piece through hard work and lots of discussion by the task force, and care was taken to make it compatible with what remained of the organization's culture and with the various visions of its members.

Steller Art Frames Revisited

We end this chapter by checking back in on our fictionalized company, Steller Art Frames. The foregoing examples of vision building make it unnecessary to elaborate on how Steller created its vision except to say that it followed the steps discussed above. The one unusual feature was that Steller's assessment committee undertook the vision building task itself while doing the external and internal assessments (usually different committees do the two jobs). They began by informing Steller's staff, and the board, about what they were finding in the course of their assessments, promoting discussion about the company's future. Slowly it became clear that people were agreed that the company had to find a way to transform itself into a global business if it were to survive. This agreement encouraged the committee to look for new markets abroad, to consider ways of expanding its product line—including licensing of its fastener system—while cutting production costs, and to consider how to transform the jobs of the company's existing employees to support the new business model

and how to restructure the organization to better support that new model. The vision was itself more complex than this, but this is the essence. The new manager, The Mighty Carson, undertook to build consensus for the new vision. She also used this as an opportunity to help employees understand just how much their work lives were going to change, in anticipation of getting buy-in when the new plan was unveiled.

Summary

To aid in mastery of this material, summarize it for yourself by filling in this topic outline:

Vision: Motivating Change

- I. What vision isn't
 - A. The vision isn't the mission
 - B. The vision isn't a plan
 - C. The vision isn't just for threats
 - D. The vision isn't necessarily dramatic
- II. Elements of vision
 - A. Goals
 - B. Priorities
 - C. Requirements
 - D. Implications
- III. Sources of vision
 - A. Leaders' vision
 - B. Member's vision
 - C. Consensus
 - D. Surviving
- IV. Evolution and revolution revisited
 - A. Evolutionary vision
 - B. Revolutionary vision
- V. Adequacy of the vision
- VI. Two examples of vision building
 - A. Suburban fire department
 - B. Urban hospital

Exercises

1. Return to the current or retired leader you interviewed previously. Try to come up with your own questions about vision, but you could, for example, ask if the organization even has a widely understood and accepted vision. If not, why not? If so, how did it come to exist? Is it evolutionary or revolutionary or a mix? Is it written down? Does it actually guide what people do? How is it conveyed to newcomers to the organization?
2. Pose the same questions to the other people you have interviewed.
3. Write a short essay on the nature and role of vision and add it to your notebook.

Sources and Further Reading

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