

Fact-File 21: Leading with Vision – managing your business future.



Extracts from **The Learning-Centred Leadership Series: Module 2**

What's a Shared Vision?

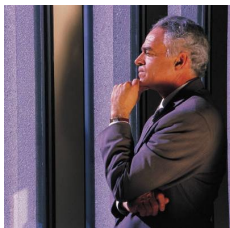
Behind everything we achieve in life, there's a *vision* - whether it's in sport, business, career or family life. Personal, social, community or organisational - visions help us innovate, guide, lead, direct and inspire ourself and others.

In a dynamic and deliberate business, everything they do is driven by the visions a manager shares with the team. Their visions and values are clearly spelt out, commonly understood and everyone works hard to ensure they're shared and followed.

Visioning means focussing on a powerful mental image of the future. A Vision is your preferred future state – where you'd like to be if your business is doing the best you can imagine.

Visions:

- ❑ Paint a picture of the long-term outcomes you want to achieve in your business



- ❑ Say where you want to take it and how you plan to get there
- ❑ Determine overall direction for the actions you take and the services you provide

When a team, group or a business as a whole collectively create a shared vision (along with guiding principles and practices to get them there), this provides common focus, a sense of commitment and mutual purpose.

What can we Create Together?

This *is* the key question behind shared vision. *Shared Vision* is your purpose - your business reason for being. Creating a shared vision together helps managers and their staff:

- ❑ Define what they're here for, where they're going and how to get there
- ❑ Identify what the business targets and performance challenges really are
- ❑ Make decisions, solve problems and set improvement priorities
- ❑ Guide how you'll work together and relate to each other
- ❑ Picture more vividly the bottom-line outcomes you need to achieve and the kind of working climate you want to create on the way.

Shaping a Shared Vision

The biggest struggle most managers face is getting the organisational vision '*off the wall and into the hearts and minds*' of people in ways that make sense to them.

Shared Visions are more than snappy slogans or nice-sounding phrases crafted in corporate plans or marketing purposes. The real challenge isn't drafting vision statements. It's:



- ❑ turning them into what we call '*real working visions*' in terms of accountability, passion and relevance
- ❑ translating them into agreed actions and make systems, structures, activities, operating principles, leadership styles and behaviours consistent with them.

Here's some ideas for shaping a shared business vision:

- ❑ Use consultative approaches that foster genuine, active commitment and positive enrolment, not resigned compliance. Everyone needs to understand, share and contribute for the vision to become reality.
- ❑ The process often starts with a management team sitting down and have a guided conversation about their aspirations, dreams or pictures of their business future
- ❑ Visioning means *walking the talk* - engaging in conversations and being open to the different viewpoints of others. Keep talking till you find the right way to picture it with staff
- ❑ Empower everyone to participate in the dialogue, planning and visioning processes that help shape an agreed shared vision
- ❑ Shared Vision is an ongoing conversation and leadership tool - *not* a once-off activity you do over one-weekend. Be persistent in talking up vision - visions take time, they don't magically fall into place

How do we Get Started?

Working visions are tools - and like tools, they wear out. As things change, new visions are needed. You need to know when the old vision isn't working and a new vision is called for.

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Simply stating your vision doesn't automatically deliver improvements. The walls of many organisations are littered with framed vision statements that mean little to the people who deliver the services and deal with customers there.

Think about how people in your business might respond to your vision? For example:

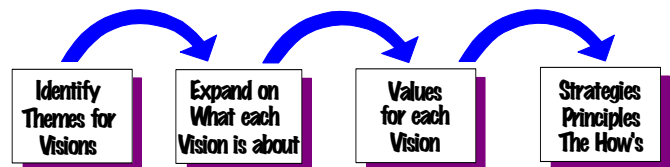
- ? Are people actively committed to making the vision a reality or are they cynical, questioning, and dismissive of the vision?
- ? Are people concerned about the inconsistency between the vision and the reality of what they contribute?
- ? Are people applying creative energy to further the vision or are they anxious and fearful about the negative impact the vision may have on them?
- ? Do people feel personally responsible for making the vision work or do they have little sense of accountability for achieving outcomes of the vision?
- ? Are people challenged by the vision but feel it's attainable and worthwhile with a bit of effort or do they keep saying the vision is impossible, out of touch and unachievable?
- ? Do people see how the vision helps them achieve outcomes and strive to raise performance or are they defensive about being tasked to get outcomes in line with the vision?
- ? Do people speak with high regard for the vision's intentions or do they speak of it with bitterness or disrespect?

The startpoint of most shared visioning processes is a workshop forum where key people (business owners, board members, senior managers or key operational staff) come together to exchange ideas and views on questions like:

- ? What are the really important things to us about this business?
- ? What are the critical challenges we face in delivering a quality service?
- ? What are the key themes we need to build our business vision around?

- ? What values, operating principles and strategies are needed to make this vision happen?
- ? What changes do we need to make to current systems and structures: The way we do things? How we relate to customers/staff?

This diagram maps a 4-step process...



Guided Conversations

For many reasons, developing shared visions can be much harder than it sounds. For a start, different people have different ideas and values, which are sometimes difficult to air or reconcile.

Most business teams do this better initially if they have the help of a neutral facilitator who help to guide them through a structured vision-setting process and have the conversations they need to have along the way.



The Change Forum has extensive, in-depth experience assisting management teams develop shared visions and turn them into strategic actions everyone is committed to. We conduct 1, 2 or 3 day vision-setting forums as well as training leaders in how to use visioning as part of their leadership toolkit through **Leading with Vision - Module 2** in our **Learning-Centred Leadership Series...**

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