



Developing a vision that can be seen

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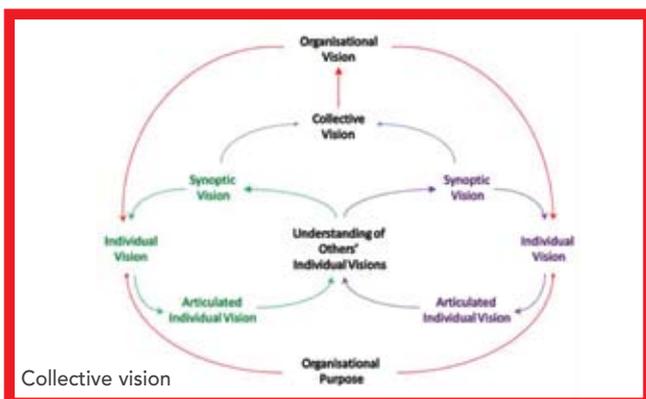
A common understanding of an organisations' purpose and the manner in which this is to be achieved is essential for those responsible for the effective realisation of that purpose. In many organisations this is addressed through an exercise which results in the publication of "Vision" and/or "Mission" statements, with a slew of supporting "Values", "Objectives", "Goals", etc (collectively referred to as a "vision" in this article).

These are vital concepts which contain marvellous potential for organisations. However, the similarity of content that can be seen in many of these statements across different companies in different industries makes me wonder how useful the traditional vision statement is, particularly in an environment where companies need to constantly renew themselves in order to remain relevant in the changing world, and obliged to differentiate themselves from their competitors to attract business. Although a vision may be periodically reviewed as part of the regular strategic planning and budgeting routine within a company, once carefully crafted and duly documented the effort to amend it may be considerable, and hence not seriously attempted.

Creating a "living vision"

The challenge is to find a mechanism to create a "living vision" for the organisation, one that goes beyond a neat current catch-phrase, but provides ongoing direction for its relevant stakeholders by reflecting the purpose of the organisation and the vision as to how this is to be achieved under current circumstances.

I believe that the prerequisite to establishing a meaningful organisational vision is the overlay of visions of the individuals employed within the organisation, which are driven by an understanding of the purpose of the business. A process to develop this is illustrated below.



It is submitted that just as individual performance for the benefit of the organisation is a primary objective of a meaningful vision, individual action is also the logical starting point for its development. This requires that the individual obtain an understanding of the organisation's purpose and, with this as input, develop a personal or individual vision, articulate it with the objective of enhancing it and attracting others to it, learning from sharing with others and working through to a synoptic level (ie establishing a comprehensive understanding incorporating different perspectives for each individual), resulting in a collective vision which is a synthesis of the individual views and from which the organisational vision may be established.

A meaningful organisational vision will attract individuals with different orientations to strive for the same objectives

Action by individuals is essential

The above implies that without individual action the required process will not flow. However, note that the circular nature of the process illustrated shows that individual vision can be stimulated and enhanced by consideration of any of the process points in the diagram. Interaction between individuals around any of these points may thus initiate the development of a vision with meaning, and ongoing discussion will maintain its relevance as the conditions within which the organisation operates evolve. Self-evidently individual participation in the process should create some sense of ownership of the vision, at least promote understanding and perhaps even generate useful input to its formulation. Where this is made a broad-based ongoing iterative process within an organisation the flowery language may be dispensed with and a living vision can take root and grow.

The effect of a meaningful vision

A meaningful organisational vision will attract individuals with different orientations to strive for the same objectives. This allows diverse attitudes and approaches to be accommodated within the organisation and it is not necessary to employ "like thinking" individuals, with the obvious benefits this diversity encompasses. ♦