



Visioning

Setting the Future for Your Organization

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Picture this – a smoothly-running organization with passion, shared values and a plan for the future. Does this describe all organizations? Certainly not. If not, what makes these organizations different?

Vision

The important role that vision plays within a successful organization cannot be underestimated. A vision transforms an organization; it offers a picture of what could be, and encourages the organization to move toward that goal. In addition, when a vision is developed through a process that engages both an organization’s members and leadership, it becomes a tool of empowerment. **Leaders take note** – this is not the time to delegate the process or assign homework to a committee. Everyone should be involved in developing the organization’s vision statement. But what specifically is a vision? And how does one develop it – especially a vision appropriate to the organization? Read on to find out.

What is a Vision Statement?

In essence, a **vision statement** can be defined as a statement outlining the desired future state of an organization. The question to ask when developing an organizational vision is - “What do we want our organization to be?”

What a vision does:

- A vision serves as a catalyst for change.
- A vision links people in activities that span across the organization.
- A vision facilitates planning and goal setting.
- A vision sets priorities.

The vision reflects the core values of an organization. For example:

The vision statement of the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service:

“The Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service is the educational resource for all Kentuckians that serves as a catalyst to build better communities and improve quality of life.”

(Kentucky Cooperative Extension, n.d.)

A **mission statement** describes the “business” the organization is in: the organization’s products and services, the market in which it operates and the public image of the organization. Essentially, the mission answers the question – “Why does this organization exist?” For example:

The mission statement of the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service:

“The Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service serves as a link between the counties of the Commonwealth and the State’s land grant universities to help people improve their lives through an educational process focusing on their issues and needs.”

(Kentucky Cooperative Extension, n.d.)

Each statement serves different purposes and both are essential to an organization; however the focus for this document is the organizational vision statement.

Five Easy Steps to Developing an Effective Vision Statement

As discussed above, developing an effective vision is important to move your organization into the future. But the



“It is a terrible thing to see and have no vision.”

– Helen Keller



A vision is only a daydream without set goals and action plans. Bring it alive to inspire members of your organization using images, metaphors and stories.

question remains – *How do I develop an effective vision that is appropriate for my organization?* Below are five easy steps that will assist you in developing a vision appropriate for your organization.

1. **Get the right people on board.** Determine the key stakeholders that need to be part of the visioning process. Beyond employees, volunteers or team members within the organization, anyone who might have good ideas to contribute or a part to play in the implementation process should be included.
2. **Plan for an effective visioning meeting.** Several factors should be considered when planning a visioning process:
 - a. Schedule at least one-half (½) to one full day for the meeting
 - b. Off-site location, if possible
 - c. For groups with several locations, a face-to-face meeting is **absolutely** necessary
 - d. Utilize a neutral facilitator (someone to lead the visioning process) – the organization’s leader should be an active participant in the visioning process (and not be facilitating the meeting). Involve the selected facilitator in ALL aspects of the planning process.
3. **Set the stage.** Send documents to participants to review ahead of time, encourage participants to come to the meeting prepared, consider bringing in a guest speaker or two to set the stage. All of these will provide the foundation for a successful result.
 - a. At the beginning of the visioning meeting, review the agenda, process and set ground rules. By setting the tone early, this sets the stage for how the rest of the day will flow.
4. **Develop and utilize a process that encourages full participation, openness and creativity.** Successful visions are developed using an effective and well-thought out visioning process. Below is a general example:
 - a. Explain or define a vision statement.
 - b. Either singly or in small groups have the participants brainstorm (*using the following questions*)

Imagine what this team or organization could look like 3-5 years from now

- What would success look like?
- What would they love to achieve?
- If they were to pick up a newspaper 3-5 years from now, what would the headline say about what this group has accomplished?

Allow 30 minutes.

- c. Have each person/group report to the larger group. Make sure the leader of the organization goes last (to keep the process unbiased).
 - d. Record key phrases on a flip chart. Make sure to **clarify, not evaluate**.
 - e. Have participants vote on their favorite phrases.
 - f. Begin reviewing phrases that received the most votes – check for agreement. Repeat with phrases that received no/few votes. Work your way to the middle.
 - g. If consensus (on an overall vision statement) can’t be made in a timely manner, the leader needs to offer alternatives such as a small committee working on a draft and circulating it electronically for feedback, repeating the process until group consensus is reached.
5. **Communicate the vision and make it a reality.** A vision is only a daydream without set goals and action plans. Bring it alive to inspire members of your organization using images, metaphors and stories.

Pitfalls when Developing an Organizational Vision

Organizational visioning is a very popular concept right now, and this can mean danger for a group or organization. Just because “everyone’s doing it” is not a good reason to take on this process. Lots of time and effort can be wasted if the process isn’t undertaken for the right reasons, or if the process isn’t well executed. Some pitfalls or issues to avoid when planning for an organizational visioning process:

- Avoid a “one size fits all” statement that has a lot of shallow, nice-sounding clichés.

- Develop a vision with the intent to use it for planning or decision-making purposes (not as an empty process).
- Too many leaders try to delegate visioning to a committee. It doesn't work. There needs to be involvement from as many individuals within the organization as reasonably possible. Your team or organization needs a shared vision, not something only a few people own.
- Don't be mediocre. Invoke pride, stretch everyone's thinking, and encourage individuals' competitive emotions. Inspire your group to become the best at something.

Summary

As the leader of your team or organization, one of your primary responsibilities is to assist in providing focus for the group. A great way to do this is to carry out a visioning process in cooperation with other group members. Understanding the difference between a vision and a mission statement, using the right step-by-step process, and being aware of the hazards when developing an organizational vision are all important aspects to take into consideration when working to achieve the best vision possible for your organization. At the end of the day, vision isn't about complex statements or pretty words. It's about the future.

References

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