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Develop and implement a business vision

How do you build a vision?

Few motivating forces are more potent than working together with your staff to express your collective aspirations for the business through a shared vision.

Some practices for building a shared business vision are:

1. Firstly, you have to believe in the power of a shared vision yourself - and what it can do.
2. The process starts with YOU sitting down to shape your own personal vision... then encouraging other people to do the same.
3. Use consultative approaches that foster genuine, active commitment and positive enrolment, not resigned compliance. Empower everyone to participate, understand, share and contribute for the vision to become reality, and be open to different viewpoints of others.
4. Shared vision is an ongoing conversation and leadership tool - not a once-off activity you do over one weekend.
5. A vision only works if it hits the right nerve - that makes sense, appeals and galvanises people into getting behind it and turning it into action. Keep talking until you find the right way to 'picture it' to people.
6. 'Emotionally intelligent' managers shape a vision to match the mood of the workplace - the 'triggers' that most resonate with your staff and situation.
7. Be persistent - visions take time, they don't magically fall into place.

Potential problems with visions

Many managers impose a vision - with little (or token) consultation or involvement from the staff who actually have to try to achieve it. Think about how people in your business might respond to your vision, for example:

1. Cynicism: Are people cynical, questioning, or dismissive of your vision and its value?
2. Inconsistency: Are people troubled by the misfit between your vision and their reality?
3. Compliance: So people feel coerced to grudgingly conform to your vision?
4. Anxiety: Are people anxious about the negative impact your vision has on them?
5. Ownership: Do people disown your vision and take little interest in achieving it?
6. Unrealistic: Do people say your vision is impossible, out of touch or unachievable?
7. Resentful: Do people resent your vision - avoid it or find ways to let it not affect them?



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Vision focus

Many visioning efforts fail to achieve their potential, often due to a vision developed but not well thought-through. Some key issues of focus include:

1. Focus on learning together

Breakthrough business visions are not the result of rushing into a day of brainstorming, nor based on what you already know. An effective vision will be developed through deep dialogue, reflection and questioning current mental models and assumptions. Current knowledge should be expanded to enable the business to move towards its desired future direction by listening to your customers, researching your competitors and immersing yourself in technology trends and possibilities.

2. Focus yourself in the future

Don't focus on current processes, systems and culture – focus on the desired future state. The following three processes can assist:

1. Positive visioning: imagine an ideal future as you want it to be and describe what you see, how you got there and obstacles you had to overcome.
2. Future-search: identify future challenges or change factors your vision needs to take account of - and their likely impacts.
3. Scenario planning: create three different future scenarios for your business/environment and the sorts of things you need to do in each.

3. Focus on Guiding Principles

Guiding principles are mental models or beliefs about your business and why it's run the way it is. It is useful to review current guiding principles to see whether they will support your new vision or would remain as unseen blockages.

Develop new guiding principles that will act like a compass for your vision, and ultimately assist the decision of new operating guidelines, business strategies and decision making.

Steps to build and implement a vision

1. **Identify vision themes:** Visions are best built around 'key themes'. A theme is anything you need to have a vision about - leadership, customer service, relationships, product reliability, business growth etc. A useful start-point is to identify what the most important themes are for you to build business visions around.
2. **Expand each vision theme:** You and your staff need to know exactly what the vision for each of these key themes means for the business in terms of goals, how we behave, how we treat customers, our business principles etc.
3. **Refine vision themes:** Develop draft vision statements everyone agrees with. This might be 50 or even 500 words - it doesn't matter. Don't compress all the ideas into one highly word-smithed statement that loses the meaning.



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4. Identify actions and strategies: A brilliant vision has little impact if it doesn't also contain an equally sound strategy for getting there. This final step involves making sure everyone agrees what the vision is (purpose), how to achieve it (goals) and then developing action plans (strategies) to move towards the vision.

For many reasons, developing shared visions can be much harder than it sounds. You may find it useful, initially, to engage the help of a neutral facilitator or consultant who can help guide you through a structured vision-setting process and the sorts of conversations you and your staff need to have along the way.

Checklist

- Does it describe your beliefs and the future you really want?
- Is it forward thinking - not just a variation on what you have now?
- Is it specific, realistic and achievable given the right effort and commitment?
- Is it energising, compelling or inspirational?
- Does it have clear themes people can relate to and regard as relevant?
- Does it have a specific action focus - say what and how?
- Does it meet customer expectations?
- Is it clear on how people will act and relate to customers and each other?

Further information

The following fact sheets provide further information on these issues:

- Business planning
- Business vision – introduction
- Maintain a business vision