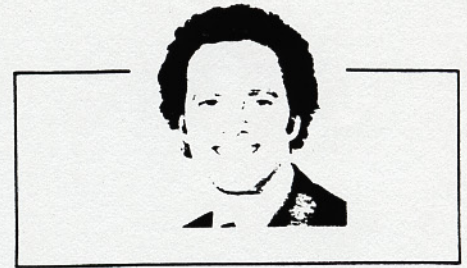


# Re-Vision

by Peter Stroh



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Vision has moved into our language and thinking with amazing rapidity. We are learning that the picture of a desired future is a powerful force in motivating and focusing an organization's efforts. The processes developed by numerous practitioners to clarify vision represent an exciting new technology. However, all these processes assume the goal of clarifying one vision, the vision, which we then hope will guide the organization from that moment on.

The attraction of one vision, one answer to the basic questions of who we are and where we're going, is understandable. In this world of change we want something that doesn't change. But answers, like solutions, tend to slip away, and people and organizations find themselves faced all too quickly with yet another question.

Perhaps a more powerful approach is to anchor the questions, and let the answers emerge and move us along. The image is more of designing an environment that enables an organization continually to ask a few important questions. Several powerful questions are: "What is our purpose?" or "What do we really want?" and "What is happening right now?"

The power of purpose to orient an organization is well known. At the same time, an organization's purpose or reason for being is hard to describe. We use vehicles such as mission, a statement of values, and vision to illuminate what this purpose really is.

If we consider vision as one of the tools for elucidating purpose, we can approach it in more open-ended ways. Complementary visions sometimes make it easier for people with seemingly different interests to identify a shared purpose. For example, one organization's collective vision included how people see themselves as human beings, technicians, marketers, managers, and a company in the larger world. By evoking and identifying with these images, a senior management team of 13

people was able to arrive at a consensus on their mission statement in two hours. Multiple visions can also provide the basis for an organization's strategic planning. For example, the vision for a growing urban region naturally divided into several critical areas: downtown development, city-region relations, citizen involvement, and housing. These areas became the focal points for action committees formed out of the visioning activity.

Another approach is to cultivate the process of visioning rather than the identification of a fixed vision. Building visioning into the ongoing processes of the organization, such as strategic planning, annual meetings, and goal-setting, provides a valuable way of asking the questions that really matter. For example, visioning can be used as an important element in a company's national business meetings. In addition to bringing employees up to date on key projects, managers share their visions for the business. They also express what the visions mean to them personally and encourage others to create their own visions. The purpose of these activities is not to reach closure on one vision. Instead, they 1) enable the managers to be clearer about their visions, 2) empower employees by helping them clarify their own, 3) provide opportunities for managers to expand their visions from the input they receive, and 4) provide opportunities for employees to commit to the managers as people rather than just as direction-setters.

In another company, visioning helped an interdepartmental task force to develop a long-term manufacturing plan. First, the task force members envisioned the plan being published and well-received. Second, they envisioned what manufacturing in the organization would actually look like in 15 years.

Another technique is to use the communications concept of the Johari Window to identify the many dimensions

of vision: the aspects that we both know, the elements that only one of us knows, and the part that neither understands. It is also important to have organizations clarify what the vision is not.

Sometimes one vision is important to mobilizing and harnessing an organization's energy. John F. Kennedy's vision to have a man on the moon by the end of the 1960s focused NASA's efforts during this period. Many people who worked for NASA at the time reported accomplishing extraordinary results unparalleled in any work project before or since.

The corporate information systems group in another company found that having a vision of serving their internal customers made the purpose of service more meaningful to them. Rather than view the decentralization of data processing as a turf issue, they chose to assume responsibility for the success of the entire company as one of their objectives, whether or not they had direct control over this outcome. Their commitment to service as a personal ideal instead of a managerial prescription is paying off in terms of more effective client relations.

In summary, while a single vision can powerfully communicate an organization's purpose in certain situations, we need not limit the use of visioning in this way. As long as we stimulate organizations to regularly confront their most important questions, complementary visions enriched over time may well help focus the meaningful and productive work we want organizations to achieve. □

NOTE: The use of visionings in business meetings is a technique employed by Sherry Immediato and Charles Kilfer. Use of the Johari Window concept as a visioning and is an idea of Joel Yanowitz and Charlotte Roberts.