

VISION TO ACTION



Realizing our Aspirations

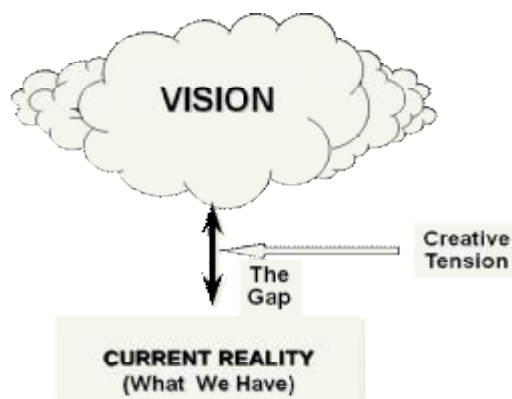
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Most organizations have Vision Statements (along with Mission, Values, etc.). Evolving the Mission, Vision and Values assume importance, since it is through these processes that people in the organization decide where they want to go / what they want to achieve, where they are currently and how to “bridge the gap”. That leads to strategy and action.

Various methodologies and models are available for evolving the Vision. I adopt Dr. Peter Senge’s “Creative Tension” model. The methodology provides the trigger for action from one’s aspirations or Vision. In this facilitator-led process, an individual or group is helped to “envision” or “see the picture of the desired future” – through a series of imageries. Thereafter the individual or group is helped to examine the Current Reality vis-a-vis Vision. While doing this exercise, the individual or group “experiences tension or a tremendous pull from” within – to “bridge” the “gap between Vision and Current Reality” – which leads to forming the strategy and action.

The model looks something like this:



I have been engaged in facilitating this process in many organizations using the model, beginning with creating the Vision. It was during one such session in an organization that a senior manager asked a question – “Since our Current Reality influences our intentions and actions, why don’t we start with looking at Current Reality and then develop our Vision with reference to it and build our strategy.” Before we address this question, let us first look at another model.

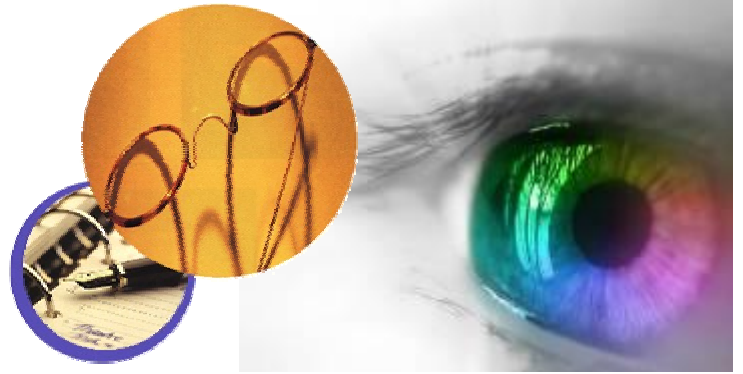
The Change Model of Beckhard and Harris is an equation given below:

$C = DVF$ Where:-
C – Change
D – Level of Dissatisfaction with Status Quo/Current Reality
V – Vision / Clear Desired State
F – Practical First Steps toward Desired State

If you notice, here the trigger lies in the Current Reality, the “Dissatisfaction” from it which leads to taking action for creating a Desired State or Vision and then bridging the gap between Vision and Current Reality with Action Steps. This has worked effectively for many people who have invented things or processes or for leaders who have led movements – where they were triggered by their dissatisfaction with what was happening – their current reality – and they wanted to make a difference.

Thus it is not about models and theories, it is about feeling so passionately about something that one has to act to realize it.

This article was published in Gray Matters Quarterly, Newsletter, Annual Issue, Volume 2, Issue 1, September 2008



There is only one problem, for most people, the current reality often seems over-powering – how do we overcome the situations we are in, with all the constraints, problems and seemingly “insurmountable odds”. As a result, we tend to either give up our Vision or tone it down – it leads to mediocrity.

I found the “Creative Tension” model more effective and energizing, to drive us in fulfilling our aspirations. It is not as if this is a new discovery. Many of us may be practising this approach in our lives! E.g. Let us look at the situation of planning our holidays – planning a trip to some place. We can adopt either of the 2 approaches:

- We first check our current reality – what about “disposable” money and budget! Next questions are possibly about easy accessibility / familiarity etc. Thereafter we decide the place. We often end up visiting the same or known places. After a few days of our return, a feeling creeps back – this was not what we wanted!
- We first imagine about the kind of place we would like to see / visit – pictures come in our mind — some names of places also pop up and energize us. We start feeling a strong urge or desire for that place. We then go about checking the costs for visiting the place, arranging the finance etc. When the finances are limiting, we plan cost-cutting in our daily lives, making some sacrifices to save money, or we may even take some loan. But we end up visiting place that we badly wanted to visit but never thought we had ability to visit.

So where lay the difference?


It is about examining possibilities as against limiting factors! It is about “being energized by the images of the desired future”. First dreaming about achieving or obtaining something very strongly and then feeling an intrinsic “pull” for action to fructify that “dream” (although in our terminology, the word “dream” is avoided since it might lead to “fantasizing”! Instead we use the word “vision”). Banks and other financial institutions have realized the power of helping people to “realize their dreams” and launched such a variety of loans and repayment options!

One only needs to help people to “learn to vision” and to not feel constrained by “current reality”. The rest they will do themselves. Individuals, groups or organizations have transformed as a result of going through process of experiencing this “Pull”.

Unfortunately, my experience has been that most of the organizations have focused on the product – i.e. creating attractive statements – but have not really utilized the power of the “envisioning process” – the process of evolving the Vision, Mission and Values and then “aligning” the employees to these, through structured processes. Thus these statements remain as just documents. Although often organizations resort to communication circulars etc. these are not effective enough. Employees often do not understand the meanings or ramifications and consequently do not feel any ownership or commitment to these aspects of an organization’s identity.

The real power of the Vision etc. can be experienced from the processes. I have seen this happen. I did this kind of a process in an organization in Madagascar, with employees across hierarchies, including opinion makers, where they had never heard of these terminologies and did not speak English, so explaining took real effort. But at the end of the process, there was a remarkable effect. These people were energized – the seeding for “change” happened.

It proved that humans are all alike – they all have aspirations and they want to fulfil them, they only need to be made aware of them. They will then have the drive to “live their vision” – organizations only need to create facilitative conditions.

Thus even if the Vision, Mission Statements are already created and exist, it would do well to have strategic and structured processes that help to revisit these from time to time, to validate its relevance and significance to the organization and have the people own them. 

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