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## **Got Vision?**

### **Why Organizations Need a Vision and 5 Types You Might Recognize**

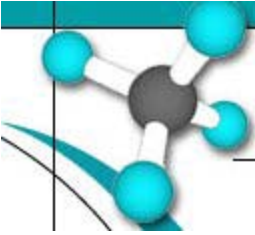
A vision is an organization's declared destination. If it doesn't have a clear vision, how can it know where it's going or know if it's arrived? Even when we leave our homes to drive somewhere, we know where we are going and, hopefully, we know how to get there. So why would we expect an organization to "arrive" without those two essentials in place?

An organization needs a vision because, ideally, a clearly stated vision serves two purposes. First, it articulates to employees, customers, and other stakeholders why the organization is in existence. Second, it functions as the guiding beacon, the central theme, towards and around which the organization works, develops, performs and succeeds. It should be seen as a somewhat fluid document that changes as the organization develops and internal and external landscapes change.

An organization's strategic goals are developed around its vision, as are the goals of different departments, facilities, and subsidiaries. Individual goals are then developed in support of the departmental goals. In this way, every person, project, system and process, every resource, can be geared towards achieving one thing – the organization's strategic goals. This is an efficient way of conducting business and maximizes available talent and resources.

As an alignment consultant working with troubled organizations, I've seen four main types of visions, but I have never seen one that has a clearly stated, meaningful and shared vision.

I've labeled the four types I've seen as: The Missing, The Lip Service, the Misleading, and the Lone Wolf visions. To varying degrees, each detracts from the clarity and effectiveness of the ideal vision – even at times causing the destruction of an organization. There is no common purpose towards which to devote the collective ownership and energy of employees. This energy, having to go somewhere, is diverted in many directions, like scattershot, depleting the power and ability to excel. The organization will never reach its potential.



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The Missing vision looks like this: if developed at all, it is a static document developed at the point in the life of an organization when leadership was crafting a business plan for bankers or other investors. Whether meaningful or not, beyond gaining the attention of investors, it often becomes a document stored away and forgotten, dismissed, unknown to anyone. Any power it may have once had is rendered useless.

The Lip Service vision is a promotional tool, emblazoned on advertising materials, presented on the website's home page, engraved on a plaque and hung prominently in the lobby for all to see. In this scenario, more people may be familiar with it, but it has little impact or meaning as it is dismissed as "marketing".

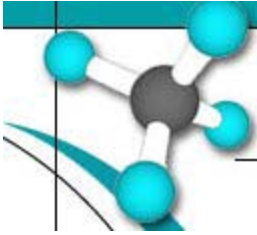
The Misleading vision is one that is clearly articulated, but is not the vision that actually guides the actions of the organization. The stated vision might say that the organization is in existence to produce the highest quality widgets, when the message from management (either overtly or covertly) may be to produce the largest widgets.

The Lone Wolf vision stands alone and is known only to the leaders or owners of the organization. It isn't shared either because a vision isn't deemed important, or because sharing important information isn't deemed necessary.

Developing a vision, or clarifying an existing one, is an exercise that is as simple as it is complex. Ask anybody who has tried. Outside facilitation may be necessary – but a truly shared vision will be the gift that keeps on giving.

This is best done with input from all members of leadership who then take the time to come to agreement on the final version. This step is most important because, once a vision has been developed, it must be shared with all decision makers and department heads. This is necessary to get their buy in and so that they can disseminate it throughout the organization. A cautionary note: because it's sometimes simpler for people to say nothing and go along with the majority vote, watch out for "pseudo buy in" - outward agreement but internal objection.

Managers who don't buy in can become saboteurs of progress. Their direct reports know that they don't support the vision or the activities that will support it, and, depending on how important it is for them to agree with their managers, will go along



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with the unspoken message. This spreads the virus throughout the group, and eventually beyond the confines of the group.

Devote some time to your organization's vision today.

Contact Paul Cattermole at 303.437.4374, [pcattermole@catt-alyt.com](mailto:pcattermole@catt-alyt.com)

Contact Fiona Cattermole at 303.807.1044, [fcattermole@catt-alyt.com](mailto:fcattermole@catt-alyt.com)