

Corporate success: create a vision, live the values

Philip Atkinson

Communicating focus and direction should be every manager's *raison d'être*.

Talking with a senior manager at a recent workshop, I asked her what one simple objective she would like to achieve. Without hesitation, she replied: 'Engage with our people to achieve our purpose and create a can do attitude to achieve our business objectives and our vision.'

A major challenge any organisation faces is winning the hearts and minds of its people to focus on achieving corporate objectives. The experience of many organisations in achieving this is sub-optimal: it works in some areas, but invariably is not shared across the whole of the organisation.

A major step forward is to develop strategies that engage people in creating the future of the business. Realistically, anything that detracts from this process is not advancing security for the organisation or its staff. The resources of the organisation should be directed to focus, persuade, win the support and motivate all to strive for and commit to the vision of the enterprise. This is not always easy. Many organisations lack clarity of direction and thus unintentionally communicate ambiguous goals.



The purpose of any senior team should be to communicate the intent of the organisation and the strategies to achieve its goals, and to create the culture in which behaviours that result in goals being achieved are practised.

Culture: focus, energy, alignment

It is a good idea to assess the health of any organisation by measuring the effectiveness of three basic concepts in organisational development: focus, energy and alignment.

Every business needs a strong focus and direction. This should be communicated to all staff and is probably the *raison d'être* of any manager's or leader's role, essential to winning and motivating others to commit and engage, while contributing positively to the corporate vision. A company without focus will waste resources and experience a state of confusion and ambiguity. As well as focus, an enterprise requires energy – from a high calibre of leaders or managers who are willing to develop innovative strategies to engage

with staff at all levels. Finally, the organisation needs processes to ensure that the alignment of directed energies impacts directly on the speedy achievement of results for business.

Assess, on a scale of 1 to 10, how your organisation is doing. How well is the focus and direction shared across the organisation? How well is it shared in regions and small functional entities, in different geographies, and in sharply contrasting functions such as IT and marketing, finance and logistics, HR and R&D?

If companies want to improve the interplay of these three major components of success, they have to commit to a rigorous process, starting with vision, and then working on clarifying values and behaviours – the drivers that establish the desired results.

Key learning points

- ◆ The importance of clear vision and values.
- ◆ The positive role of business culture in performance improvement.
- ◆ Communicating vision and values.

'clarifying vision, values and behaviours will add focus and direction to the business'

This is very like how we interpret values in our workplace. Corporate values are somewhat similar. Some values will attract us to behave in certain ways, and others will not. If people and teams understand how to create a strong positive culture, they will know that focusing upon the importance of displaying certain corporate values will help guide behaviour and actions. The real key is to create values that people can identify with personally, and that will at the same time enable the organisation to meet its objectives. Values which reflect equity, fairness, team spirit, learning, integrity and advancement will certainly support the achievement of an organisation's objectives.

The value of these exercises is obvious to those who want to become the architects of the business culture. By blending together and integrating common-sense personal values with ethical business practices, most organisations can galvanise the energy and focus of their people, uniting them in a common desire to advance the business and preserve – and at the same time develop – the culture. Values that have been articulated through the organisation depict certain ways of acting, behaving, relating and working with others. When organisations undertake a vision and values clarification exercise, people at all levels have a much clearer idea and understanding of how they can contribute to the overall organisation, and how they

can best use their skills to improve their own performance and satisfaction as well.

By what criteria are vision and values to be judged?

Vision and values should appeal to the heart as well as to the head, and should focus attention on a future desired state. Vision and values should engender a genuine commitment to achieve this and the associated behaviours. Well-articulated vision and values help to focus people on the desired actions and behaviours.

These criteria are important:

- Strong customer focus.
- Challenging and stretching.
- Inspirational and enthusing.
- Encouraging passionate commitment.
- Emotionally bonding at a team level.
- Easy to understand and to communicate to others.
- Simple and straightforward to articulate.
- Shared – going beyond one person's dream.
- Evolving, rather than being frozen in time.
- Providing a rationale or motivation for change and improvement.

Overall, after the completion of the vision and values exercise, the purpose is to win the support of all, and to commit to action to sharpen, intensify and deepen the vision and values through communication.

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Communication of vision and values

Every time a business communicates – either internally with its own departments, functions and people; or externally with the customer, shareholders, consumers or other constituents – it demonstrates commitment to its future through its vision and values.

Through a communication process, everyone has a part to play in understanding the meaning behind vision and values and the rationale behind the key drivers in shaping these. The link here is to demonstrate how values can convey desired behaviours, which later can be related to specific technical and team competencies. There are opportunities everywhere to ensure that shaping the vision and living values becomes business as usual for everyone in the organisation.

A final word

Clarifying what a business stands for adds drive and direction. Working through carefully designed vision and value exercises and workshops enables emotion to be attached to direction, and is critical in shaping the behaviours and actions of everyone in the organisation. What is even more important is that clarification of values helps people understand better how their personal skills can contribute to the greater community of the organisation, and to the consumers of its services and products.



On a scale of 1 to 10,
how well is your business doing?

What are the benefits of clarifying vision and values?

- Create a powerful **vision** for your business – ensuring that it is practical and simple to understand and, at the same time, imaginative and visionary.
- Focus on what the organisation will become, and relate this to current business plans to achieve it.
- Concentrate upon the future of the business and the strategies that will enable its achievement.
- Use the process of **vision and values** to fine tune strategic and tactical objectives.
- Translate wider global and strategic objectives into more local and tactical objectives.
- Ensure that the **vision** is the best that can be created in order to articulate in simple terms what the organisation is about, in pursuit of its strategic direction.
- Generate a **vision statement**, if required, that communicates clearly to others the direction for the business.
- Develop a clear understanding of how the vision of an organisation or business unit can shape the **values** which will be the tenets behind transacting good business practice.
- Assess and create the core values that will drive the desired **behaviours**.
- Ensure that core values drive consistent behaviours, particularly for those in team leadership positions.
- Establish the causal link between vision-values and behaviours.
- Articulate behaviours that will drive improved morale and performance, and identify the individual and team behaviours that will take you towards your vision, differentiating them from those that will not.

Who will benefit from clarifying vision and values?

Too few organisations and business units within larger organisations have a strong and positive vision of what they want to **become, do and have** as a business entity. Time invested in clarifying vision, values and behaviours will add focus and direction to the business, yielding significant, tangible returns in terms of consumer satisfaction, customer acquisition and retention, return on investment, profitability, and enhanced stakeholder or shareholder value. This process is equally

successful within large organisations and when applied to smaller local entities – such as sales and marketing groups, customer focus teams, regional business units, manufacturing sites, supply depots, distribution and logistics centres, and other specialist units geared to adding value to the bigger picture. It is also equally applicable to organisations in the private and the not-for-profit sector.

Strategic focus

Organisations that commit to a rigorous vision and values clarification process will in the short and long term create a tangible business plan for themselves. They will have a firm understanding of where resources are best invested, and will differentiate strategies that work from those that do not. When organisations are able to predict direct cause-effect relationships between the vision of the business and specific behaviours, then they have the secret to achieving improved performance for all stakeholders.

everyone has a part to play in understanding the meaning behind vision and values

Strong business cultures causing performance improvement

In too few organisations, **culture** is not viewed positively, as a force that can reshape business performance – yet it is central and critical to achievement. There is a magical connection and causal link between a positive culture and the achievement of corporate objectives. The culture of any business can either revitalise or ruin it. The foundation of a high-vitality business is creating a strong positive culture with a vision that unites all in a common purpose.

Knowing the vision for a business can rapidly create a strong momentum for achieving long-term objectives, and can utilise resources most effectively, with that aim in mind. The result of such efforts is the formation of a strong vision to which people can relate emotionally and which they can work towards.

Knowing when and why an organisation is pursuing a specific direction can have immediate and positive effects on team morale and the achievement of business goals. With motivation, we can galvanise the commitment of the people in the organisation through vision and values workshops. Instant results and sustained improvement in team performance, morale and bottom-line results can be the consequence of people pursuing exercises in a positive manner. Commitment to training people to articulate a strong vision can shape the organisation to pursue the achievement of goals in a climate of constant

change. The core issue is that culture causes results to happen. Staff at all levels must devote time to creating a culture to achieve improved performance.

Key issues in the vision and values debate

Vision and values are seldom explicitly stated in most organisations. When they are, they will give intellectual clarity to the purpose and operational thrust of the organisation. Intellectual clarity is the starting point for debate with others on what the direction of the business can become. Many organisations never achieve this degree of rapport with their members of staff, who merely attend work rather than contributing to shaping the business of the future. Focusing upon including staff in shaping the vision concentrates the mind of each and every person on how they

can contribute to the greater good of the whole community in which they work.

Vision and values are equally important

Values usually indicate how we will behave or how we will execute a particular action. Values tell us what will guide our actions. They tell us what is important to us. In other words, we value what we do and we do what we value. Values indicate how we direct our energies and guide our personal behaviour. If we are forced to do things that do not fit into our value system, we either fail to commit to them or do so only under duress or through reward. Values are the intrinsic barometer of what is important to us, what is right and wrong, good and bad. When we value something, we will tend to be drawn to pursuing or achieving it in a particular manner. If we don't value something, we will tend to avoid it. We know and feel when we are doing things that fit or do not fit our personal value system.

A strong business culture drives performance

Vision. Where is the organisation going? What is important? What does the organisation want to become, do and have as an entity?

Values and leadership style. Which values, if displayed in leadership style, will optimise the successful achievement of performance improvement? What values do we need to adopt to create and sustain a strong and positive culture?

Strategies and goals. How can we be confident that our strategies and goals are encapsulated in our strategic vision, and in how we transact business through our values?

Behaviours. What behaviours are consistent with the values relating to how we transact and lead the business? What specific behaviours, if practised consistently, will project us forward to achieve our vision, strategies and goals?

Structure and roles. How can we best organise ourselves to achieve our strategies and goals?

Key performance measures. To what actions, processes and metrics should we commit, in order to indicate powerfully our achievement of our strategies and goals?