

Vision and Leadership

"Substituting one vague concept for another leaves you with a vague concept."

– Robert Fritz

Portions adapted from **Corporate Tides**, Chapters 13-14, Robert Fritz (© Berrett-Kohler publisher)

Vision & Structural Tension

What is your company, department or unit's vision? What is the *specific goal* you are striving to achieve every day?

Even if you don't know its exact wording, a vision statement should be constructed clearly enough that if it were to become manifest everyone would be able to immediately recognize it and know the goal was achieved. With a **clear vision** and an accurate assessment of the **current reality**, any discrepancy between the two will reveal what Robert Fritz calls **structural tension**. This tension is the primary motivator which drives companies from where they are to where they want to be.

Vision must be shared (not necessarily created together)

A shared vision is the prime motivating force that powers a successful organization. Who creates the vision isn't important. What's important is that everybody participates in implementing the vision. It's their level of investment that counts. If everyone in your company is on board with a clear, elevating goal, they will demonstrate their support through active participation.

Leadership elements:

- Clarity
- Total responsibility
- Substance

Clarity

Effective leadership produces clarity. When people know not only what to do but why it is important to do it, a clear

Vision and Leadership

strategy (e.g. a business strategy) will expand viability. A **good decision making method** can be used to determine how best to move from here (objective reality) to there (specific vision.)

Total Responsibility

While a leader encourages participation, involvement, and commitment, a true leader will take total responsibility for the organization and regard organizational failure ultimately as leadership failure.

Substance

The essence of leadership is **not style but substance**. While people may love a leader's style, ultimately, they might not fully participate because they feel that leader's substance is lacking. But if a leader possesses good judgment, strong character, clarity of purpose, and acts on principle rather than popularity, almost anybody will get on board with their program, even if they hate their style! Concern with leader style should be dealt with only after issues concerning substance are addressed.

A Leader Sets the Priorities

The leader must make it clear what is most important and what is less important. The organization's purpose takes the highest place followed by viability. The leader must master the business strategy to accomplish the purpose while remaining viable.

Wealth generation is paramount, NOT cost cutting.

A leader's focus should not be on how the company accumulates wealth but rather on how the company generates wealth. The business strategy defines how the company will get money to come in the door. How the money is spent after it comes in the door is important, but secondary. Equating wealth accumulation with wealth generation can lead to a dangerously random pattern of cost cutting that causes permanent damage to the organization's ability to generate future wealth.

Vision and Leadership

Imagine that your organization implements an across-the-board 20% downsizing of all departments. While this may seem like a very neat and workable solution, the reality is that not all areas of your company can withstand a 20% cut. Would you authorize a surgeon to reduce your body size by 20%, no matter what part of you had to go? An arbitrary percentage cut does not consider and reconcile the true difference between your company's business strategy and its vision. In critical thinking terms the decision statement should be changed to reflect the real purpose behind downsizing (e.g. How to make revenues exceed expenditures) for the long-term benefit of the enterprise.

In sum, all great leaders utilize structural tension to create a full awareness of the discrepancy between what is and what should be. Great leaders have a clear understanding of where they are, where they want to go, and how best to encourage others to join them.

What do great leaders do?

Ask yourself. "Would I follow a leader who...

- did not have a vision of a desirable future?
- was out of touch with reality?
- did not know how to guide our collective efforts?"

BPI Fosters Great Leaders

Leaders can use **BPI's** Critical Thinking processes to both clarify reality and harness the collective efforts of everyone in pursuit of a shared vision. In short, turning a vision into reality is a job for critical thinking collaboration.

In **BPI** terms, the gap between the company's vision and the current reality is defined as an issue. Our Problem-Solving process would quickly reveal and verify this issue's root cause, which will improve our Decision-Making ability to select a corrective action that offers us the most overall benefits at an acceptable level of risk.

Vision and Leadership

Our immensely popular Critical Thinking for Leaders workshop improves three areas of leader leverage: personal thinking competence, coaching the thinking of subordinates, and using the critical thinking process to improve human and technical systems as a natural part of thinking more clearly.

Conclusion

In a very real sense, your organization is an experiment to determine what works! Capture the lessons structural tension is offering. Use **BPI's** simple but powerful processes to improve both your understanding of reality and your design of a clear vision of the future! [Contact](#) us to learn more about [Critical Thinking for Leaders](#) and [Systematic Project Management](#) skills and tools.