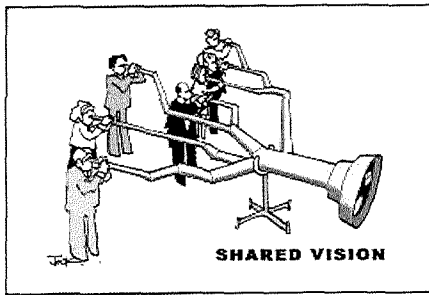


Module 6: Discussion 6: Shared Visions

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In this module, you have read about how to develop shared visions, the differences between vision and mission statements, and the importance of involving more than just one individual in crafting a shared vision statement. For this discussion, you will need to read and review the article that was written by the Southwest Education Development Laboratory (1993). Although it was written more than 25 years ago, the insights it provides on leadership, vision, and change have withstood the test of time.

Purpose

The purpose of this discussion is to analyze and apply the required tenets of a shared vision statement as demonstrated in the publication (Southwest Education Development Laboratory, 1993) to inspire followers.

Directions

1. **Find** your organization's Vision Statement and present it in this post.
2. **Analyze** the Statement against the 5 distinct precepts presented in the article (See Below). These tenets also are denoted in brief below for easy views.
 - *Attracts commitment and energizes people.*
 - *Creates meaning in workers' lives.*
 - *Establishes a standard of excellence.*
 - *Bridges the present to the future.*
 - *Transcends the status quo.*
3. **Explain** why you either are or are not inspired by your organization's Vision Statement.
4. **Explain** what you would change to improve the vision statement and present a **rewrite** of such in this space.
5. **Read** the Vision statements presented by at least 2 of your classmates and respond to them whether you feel inspired or not inspired by the vision statement they endorsed or modified for improvement.

Vision, Leadership, and Change

Introduction

In the previous *Issues*, . . . about *Change* the important topic of creating a context for change was discussed. That essay provided information concerning the various aspects of school context and the leader's role in shaping a school context that is conducive to change. One element of such a context identified by Boyd (1992a) is a "widely shared sense of purpose or vision." An organization's vision is an important component in the change process.

Whether a teacher is implementing a new instructional method, a leadership team is spearheading a school improvement campaign, or a superintendent is undertaking the restructuring of a district, the starting point for any change is a clear vision. This paper focuses on vision, its definition, and how it is demonstrated in educators. Further, it provides a process for the collaborative development of a shared vision resulting in a vision statement.

Vision

In the literature concerning leadership, vision has a variety of definitions, all of which include a mental image or picture, a future orientation, and aspects of direction or goal. Vision provides guidance to an organization by articulating what it wishes to attain. It serves as "a signpost pointing the way for all who need to understand what the organization is and where it intends to go" (Nanus, 1992). By providing a picture, vision not only describes an organization's direction or goal, but also the means of accomplishing it. It guides the work of the organization. Seeley (1992) describes vision as a "goal-oriented mental construct that guides people's behavior." Vision is a picture of the future for which people are willing to work.

However, vision is more than an image of the future. It has a compelling aspect that serves to inspire, motivate, and engage people. Vision has been described by Manasse (1986) as "the force which molds meaning for the people of an organization." It is a force that provides meaning and purpose to the work of an organization. Vision is a compelling picture of the future that inspires commitment. It answers the questions: Who is involved? What do they plan to accomplish? Why are they doing this? Vision therefore does more than provide a picture of a desired future; it encourages people to work, to strive for its attainment. For educational leaders who implement change in their school or district, vision is "a hunger to see improvement" (Pejza, 1985).

As important as it is to know what vision is, it is also important to know what vision is not. Nanus (1992) states that vision is not "a prophecy, a mission, factual, true or false, static, [or] a constraint on actions." Fullan (1992) warns against visions that blind and states that there is a tendency for "overattachment to particular philosophies or innovations."

To assist leaders in developing an appropriate vision, Nanus (1992) maintains that the "right vision" has five characteristics:

- attracts commitment and energizes people,
- creates meaning in workers' lives,
- establishes a standard of excellence,
- bridges the present to the future, and
- transcends the status quo.

Other descriptions of vision provide more explicit information especially pertinent to educational leaders. Seeley (1992) defines two types of vision, both related to Cuban's (1988) concepts of first and second order changes. Using the construct of first order changes, those that deal with improvements, Seeley asserts that these changes are connected to first order vision or program vision. An example of a change requiring program vision is a school's adoption of a new reading program.

Second order changes are those that require restructuring or a reconceptualization of an organization's roles, rules, relationships, and responsibilities. Seeley (1992) asserts that such second order changes require system vision. "The leader has to visualize not just how a new program or practice would work, but how whole new sets of expectations, relationships, accountability structures, etc., would fit together into a coherent whole" (Seeley, 1992).

An example of a change requiring system vision is the restructuring of a secondary school's schedule to include two-hour class periods. Some of the major changes related to this vision are rethinking the types and number of courses offered, considering teachers' needs for instructional planning, and accommodating extra-curricular activities. The distinction between program and system vision provided by Seeley extends our understanding of vision and its role in changing schools because the vision reflects the type of school or district change that is being implemented.

Shared Vision

In addition to providing a picture of the future, a vision inspires people to work to make it come true. It motivates people to join the campaign to realize the desired vision. A leader's efforts to develop a shared vision have been described as "bonding" by Sergiovanni (1990): leader and followers with a shared set of values and commitment "that bond them together in a common cause" in order to meet a common goal. In

Chrispeels's (1990) report of effective schools, she states "if a school staff has a shared vision, there is a commitment to change." The concerted efforts of members of an organization increase the possibilities of the vision's accomplishment. "A vision is little more than an empty dream until it is widely shared and accepted" (Nanus, 1992).

Many leaders begin with a personal vision realizing that it ultimately will be implemented by others in the organization. Johnson's (1992) study of vision and superintendents reported that they found both advantages and disadvantages to superintendents' personal vision as well as to the collaborative development of a shared vision. The advantages of a superintendent entering a district with a personal or a "ready made" (Johnson, 1992) vision were its clarity, coherence, and potential for rapid implementation. Disadvantages of these 'ready made' visions were that it was expected of the superintendent to attain the vision alone and resistance to a superintendent's 'ready made' vision existed from the onset. Superintendents who developed shared visions stated that the time invested to collaborate and develop such visions fostered mutual responsibility and more readily fit the context of their districts. However, the collaborative process required to develop shared vision did not help in meeting urgent needs for change or demands for quick action.

Whether the vision begins with a leader's personal concept or a group's consensual image of a school or district picture of the future, it is important that there be a sense of ownership of the vision. "Studies indicate that it is the presence of this personal vision on the part of a leader, shared with members of the organization, that may differentiate true leaders from mere managers" (Manasse, 1986, *italics added*). A leader's vision needs to be shared by those who will be involved in its realization. The shared vision becomes a "shared covenant that bonds together leader and follower in a moral commitment" (Sergiovanni, 1990). Murphy (1988) applied the concept of shared vision to studies of policy implementation. He found that those studies identified gaps between policy development and implementation, and concluded that this gap also applies to current discussions of vision. Murphy (1988) stressed the need for the development of a shared vision. "It is rare to see a clearly defined vision articulated by a leader at the top of the hierarchy and then installed by followers." The vision of a school or district, developed collaboratively or initiated by the leader and agreed to by the followers, becomes the common ground, the shared vision that compels all involved to realize the vision. "Vision comes alive only when it is shared" (Westley & Mintzberg, 1989).

Administrators and Vision

"All leaders have the capacity to create a compelling vision, one that takes people to a new place, and the ability to translate that vision into reality" (Bennis, 1990). Current leadership literature frequently characterizes the leader as the vision holder, the keeper of the dream, or the person who has a vision of the organization's purpose. Bennis (1990) writes that leaders "manage the dream." This aspect of leadership has been frequently called visionary leadership. According to Westley and Mintzberg (1989), visionary leadership is dynamic and involves a three stage continuum:

- an image of the desired future for the organization (vision) is
- communicated (shared), which serves to
- "empower those followers so that they can enact the vision."

The important role of vision is also evident in the literature concerning instructional leadership (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1984; Manasse, 1986; Mazzarella & Grundy, 1989; Pejza, 1985). Visionary educational leaders have a clear picture of what they want to accomplish. The vision of their school or district provides purpose, meaning, and significance to the work of the school and enables them to motivate and empower the staff to contribute to the realization of the vision.

Outstanding superintendents studied by Mahoney (1990) were described as individuals who "knew where their school system ought to be headed and why." He stated that "top school leaders create a vision for their school systems and develop a plan for the future." In Crowson and Morris's (1990) study of superintendents, vision included "deciding what's the correct thing to do." Vision guides the work of superintendents and influences the work of others. "School leaders are creative visionaries willing to take risks in pursuit of cherished values and able to cling to a vision with a tenacity that is contagious to nearly everyone" (Papalewis, 1988).

The importance of principals' visions also appears in the literature concerning instructional leadership (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980; Lightfoot, 1983; Méndez-Morse, 1991; Niece, 1989; Pejza, 1985). Principals have a vision or a picture of what they want their schools to be and their students to achieve. Pejza (1985) stated that "leadership requires a vision. Without a vision to challenge followers with, there's no possibility of a principal being a leader." The vision provides guidance and direction for the school staff, students, and administration. Niece (1989) reported that several authorities included "providing vision and direction for the school" as a component of instructional leadership.

Teachers and Vision

While administrators' visions tend to focus on district- or school-wide instructional issues, teachers' visions are more likely to address teacher roles and student outcomes (Bellon & Beaudry, 1992; Boles & Troen, 1992; Murphy, Everston, & Radnofsky, 1991; Wasley, 1991). Murphy, Everston, and Radnofsky (1991) found that teachers emphasized changes in student and instructional issues such as interdisciplinary curricula, varied student grouping patterns, and instruction that included basic literacy as well as "critical thinking, creativity, inquisitiveness, and independence of thought" (Murphy, Everston, & Radnofsky, 1991).

Teachers' vision also included school changes that would result in more participatory and decision-making roles for teachers. Two teachers, Boles and Troen (1992), reported from their personal experience with restructuring that their vision for improved student achievement necessitated changes in instructional approaches and teacher leadership roles. Similarly, other researchers found that teachers participating in school

improvement programs included the need to change the school's structures and instructional methods in order to better address students' needs (Bellon & Beaudry, 1992; Murphy, Everston, & Radnofsky, 1991; Wasley, 1991).

The relationship between teachers' and administrators' visions is important. Administrators' visions tend to encompass the whole system; their vision is an organizational vision. Teachers' visions appear to focus primarily on the individual or personal actions for school change. However, closer examination of the two may reveal that both groups of educators are attending to different aspects of the same vision. It is because of the differences in teachers' and administrators' perspectives that makes the development of a shared vision important.

School administrators who have developed a shared vision with their faculty have created common ground that serves to facilitate or promote action toward the realization of their vision. Although, they may begin with a personal vision to forge a shared vision with their staff, the leader's communication of the vision is such that it attracts others to join in the endeavor to attain it. School leaders not only must have a vision of their school or district but also the skills to communicate that vision to others, in developing a shared one. They invite and encourage others to participate in determining and developing this shared vision. The process promotes collegial and collaborative relationships. Although the process needed for developing a shared vision may be time consuming, the resulting shared commitment to the realization of the vision is the reward for the time and energy invested in such a collaborative process. The steps for such a process is discussed in the following section.

Developing A Shared Vision

There are various approaches that have been suggested for the actual development of a shared vision that then is expressed in a vision statement (Blokker, 1989; Nanus, 1992; Rogus, 1990). Educators will undoubtedly adjust the steps listed below to their unique situation since there is a different focus when applying the steps at the district or school level. Four steps facilitate the conceptualization of vision and lead to its becoming a vision statement.

1. Know your organization.

During the initial phase of formulating a vision, it is important to learn everything about the organization as it currently exists. This corresponds to Manasse's concept of organizational vision, "a comprehensive picture of the existing system within its environment." She suggests that organizational vision involves a systems perspective to determine the components of a school or district and how they are interrelated. Boyd (1992b) provides a comprehensive list of contextual factors that influence the change process which can serve as a guide to knowing a school or district. It is important that a school leader understand the important role of a school's ecology - the physical and material aspects such as school size - and a school's culture - the attitudes and beliefs, norms, and relationships. Nanus (1992) suggests that "the basic nature" of an organization can be defined by determining its present purpose and its value to society. Knowing what a school or district is about and the reason for its existence is the first step in developing a vision statement. Knowing the collective understanding of an organization is the second step and includes the participation of constituencies.

2. Involve critical individuals.

The individuals or groups identified as constituencies include those that are the most critical, both inside and outside, to a school or district. These 'critical' individuals can be those who are essential, such as a representative of a major business in the community and those people who tend to judge severely, such as the consistently vocal parent. Consider the major expectations or interests of these critical constituents as well as any threats or opportunities that may originate from these groups or individuals. Educators should involve individuals such as students, parents, business leaders, and other community members. They should also ensure the participation of children advocacy groups that work with their students and major employers of their students, as well as representatives of post-secondary institutions that serve their students.

The involvement of critical individuals often presents challenges to the development of a shared vision. Rogus (1990) suggests having the participants write their ideas before a meeting; identify consensus statements first and then grapple with non-consensus statements at the meeting. Remember that consensus is the absence of serious disagreement, not total agreement with everything. Aside from describing the organization and discussing its purpose, the group participates in discussing the factors that could impact the school or district.

3. Explore the possibilities.

In her definition of future vision Manasse (1986) advocates considering future developments and trends that may influence a school or district. Possible major changes in the economical, social, political, and technological arenas that will impact a school or district should be explored. Specific questions that educators should consider are:

- What are possible future trends of students' needs?
- What are possible future trends in parents' needs or requirements that will impact our students?
- What are possible future expectations or requirements of our students from employers or post-secondary institutions?
- What possible changes in social, economic, political, or technical areas will impact our organization?

The exploration of possible futures can be encouraged with the provision of literature concerning future trends. Another strategy that can assist participants to speculate about the future is to view and discuss videotapes that have been produced by futurists.

4. Put it in writing.

The final step is writing a clear and concise vision statement. This step uses all the information gathered and discussed, the descriptions of the school or district, as well as the predictions of future developments and trends that will impact a school or district. It flows from the discussion of the most probable future of the school or district. Rogus (1990) suggests using the consensus statements to begin writing the vision statement, getting one "last set of reactions," and having the total faculty determine its final form. This final step is the result of much discussion by the people involved and aside from 'distilling' the issues discussed, it focuses the group's attention to what they agreed upon and their united vision for their school or district. This vision then is committed to paper.

Summary

These four steps facilitate a collaborative development of a shared vision and written vision statement. Briefly these steps are:

1. Know your organization -
Clarify the nature and purpose
2. Involve critical individuals -
Include those affected
3. Explore the possibilities -
Consider possible futures
4. Put it in writing -
Vision is committed to paper.

The process of developing a vision and writing a vision statement can be a time-consuming but rewarding experience. All changes began with a mental picture, a vision, of that change - whether that of one person or the collective image of the future. "Vision is not a luxury but a necessity; without it, workers drift in confusion or, worse, act at cross-purposes" (Nanus, 1992).

Educators are being challenged to meet the present needs of students as well as prepare students for the 21st century. They must meet this challenge first with a vision, a picture of the future for which students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members are willing to work. They ensure its attainment by continuously collaborating with others to develop a shared vision. When educators invest time and energy in developing a vision and preparing a written statement reflecting it, they provide an inspiring image of the future for themselves, their colleagues, constituents, and most importantly, their students.

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