

MANAGEMENT

You've mastered vision, so what's next?

Text by RENATE ROONEY

It isn't enough for leaders to define the vision of an organization. Today's leaders need to participate actively to make their vision a reality. Before implementation can begin, it's important, as a leader, to understand your role.

Communicate

Leaders who can break down corporate strategy across the organization so it is directly relevant at each level – corporate, department, team and individual – help everyone to focus on the organization's key activities.

The key to success is to communicate the vision through multiple means, which may include:

- Disseminating the vision in written, hard copy form;
- Using the company's intranet to communicate electronically; and
- Delivering the message in speeches, interviews or press releases by the organization's leaders.

It's important to remember that leaders don't communicate with words alone. Their actions speak volumes.

One high tech company took some powerful action to showcase its vision. Quarterly, the CEO and the senior leadership team visited each location within the organization to conduct town meetings. They met with employees to share the vision, solicit ideas and celebrate successes.

Additionally, the CEO and team spent time assuming different roles within the organization – from working the helpdesk to taking customer calls to going on sales calls – to understand the challenges and opportunities employees faced on a day-to-day basis.



In this case, upper management strengthened their connections with employees at all levels, fostered a sense of camaraderie and accessibility, and enhanced the company's ability to make its vision a reality.

Embrace change

Business strategies and processes have lifecycles. When change occurs, success can quickly turn to failure. The need for change can come from many different avenues – from a competitor, a new market requirement or a significant environmental shift outside of the business model.

Even the best leaders can't predict every change, but the best organizations are able to adapt rapidly.

Consider a manufacturing company that assigns each manager a group of customers they are responsible for. Each customer is visited at least twice a

year. During these visits, managers take the time to understand their customers' satisfaction levels, challenges and future needs. They solicit as much information as possible so they can understand how they might better support their customer.

Plan for implementation

Implementing the organization's strategies cannot happen without a detailed, prioritized action plan. Change takes time – you can't do it all at once. For a change implementation to be effective, you need to do the following:

- Establish priorities. You've established the organization's objectives, now prioritize them. Trying to do everything at once sets you up for failure.
- Conduct a stakeholder analysis. Proactively seek the opinions of those affected by the change. Failing to recognize those who influence or are influenced by the change can have dire consequences to its successful implementation.

• Develop detailed action plans with accountabilities for each objective. Translate your strategy into operational terms through specific action plans, programs, budgets and procedures. People will be more successful if they understand the objective and their accountabilities, deliverables and timeframes.

• Identify risks and develop contingency plans. Every change has risk associated with it. As soon as you can identify risk, develop contingency plans. Don't be afraid to execute the contingencies.

MANAGEMENT

- Measure, monitor and control. Establish appropriate metrics. Whether the news is good or bad, measure the performance and results and act accordingly. Weigh the project priorities, evaluate the risks regularly and implement contingency plans when necessary.

Develop an operating model

An operating model is a tool used to define how the organization will implement its strategic or tactical plan into its operating environment. It encompasses all core work, competencies, tools and technologies, organizational structure and processes needed to execute the organization's strategies.

An effective operating model:

- Helps build capabilities and commitments to new ways of managing both change and operations work;
- Helps align business objectives;
- Helps an organization manage change that is vital to the enterprise,

division or department;

- Creates a well-defined, structured organization that achieves its objectives by aligning human capital and business needs to stated goals;
- Allows the organization to be proactive and adapt to changes in technologies, etc.;
- Creates a framework that serves as an enabler of process-centric, customer-focused and information-driven business models.

As an example, a management team recognized the need for a strong account management practice to support the growth strategies the business had embarked on.

They recognized that they didn't have sufficient talent within the organization to meet their needs. Before they retrained or hired anyone, they identified the core work, competencies, tools and technology, and optimal organizational structure to meet the organization's long-term strategies.

With a consistent operating model, they were able to clearly define roles and responsibilities – allowing them to retrain and hire the right people for the account management group. As their business continues to grow, they are able to hire the right people, thus eliminating employee turnover and inconsistent customer service delivery.

The operating model allowed them to align the company's tactics and strategies to meet its objectives, thus delivering value.

By communicating successfully, embracing change, developing implementation plans and creating operating models that make sense, your organization can take the loftiest of visions and transform them into a profitable, fulfilling reality.

Renate Rooney is the president and CEO of Renate Chisholm Rooney Associates, Harvard.