



Organizational Vision and Momentum

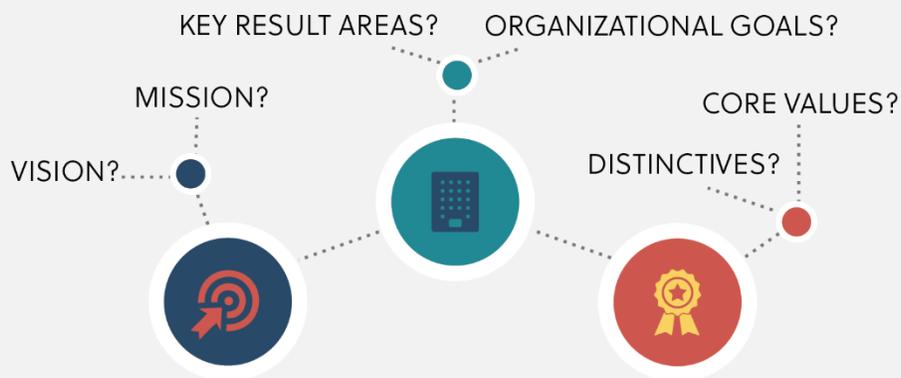
Jay Desko, Ph.D.

The Center is a non-profit Christian consulting group whose highly trained team is passionate about advancing leadership and organizational health. We believe this article on organizational vision and momentum will be a helpful resource for you and your team. As an extension of our vision of advancing organizational health, we are providing this resource without charge.

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Organizational Vision and Momentum



As consultants, we often work with clients who feel a bit confused and stuck. –Confused because what they read and hear is telling them they need some or all of the above pieces. This is often reflected in statements such as: “A seminar leader told me I need a vision statement and mission statement. Do I?” –And stuck because they aren’t sure what is really needed and what is missing. This is often reflected in statements such as: “I just want an organization that has momentum. How can I get there?” For example, let’s take a look at Jack. He, his leadership team, and his board had been working for over a year on vision and direction for their organization. They created a vision statement, a generic mission statement, a set of ten core values, and three organizational priorities. However, now they were



more confused than ever about what this really meant to their organization, and their effort resulted in little action or momentum for the organization. But, they did have a nice looking, thick notebook that was impressive but irrelevant!

From our experience, organizations are spending far too much time working on organizational statements and lengthy documents and far too little time on truly defining a vision and priorities that result in both action and momentum. We find a clear correlation between the complexity and length of the vision and related elements with the likelihood that it is not leading to any meaningful action. The time consuming work, talk, and planning meetings can sometimes mask deeper issues of confusion, fear, political dynamics, and incompetence. But it can give the illusion that meaningful work is being done.

3 Elements Needed for a High Momentum Organization

There are many factors that play into organizational momentum including God’s choosing to do something big or special in spite of the leaders or circumstances. However, that is more often the exception than the rule. From our consulting experience, there are three elements that are present in high momentum organizations.



When you have the convergence of credible leaders, compelling vision, and effective execution, a powerful and positive reaction takes place that results in attracting great talent, financial donations, and investing.

CREDIBLE LEADERS



Those who are viewed as trustworthy and proven.

CREDIBLE LEADERS. Credible leaders are those who are viewed as trustworthy and proven. These are leaders who employees, followers and donors believe can and will do the right things and do things right. While character is a vital part of this, there is much more. Credible leaders:

- Always act with integrity
- Do what they say they will do
- Admit mistakes quickly and try to correct them
- Solve problems and help others do the same
- Recognize (publicly and privately) others' contributions
- Listen to suggestions and feedback
- Share information openly and freely
- Are accessible and visible
- Have a track record of delivering results

COMPELLING VISION



A short, inspiring picture of your organization's future.

COMPELLING VISION. Often referred to as a preferred future, a compelling vision is a short descriptive picture of what your organization is aiming for. Some books will tell you that you need to have a mission statement and a vision statement. Don't believe it. While there can be a difference between the two (mission describes your reason for existence while vision describes your future) and there is nothing wrong with having both of these statements, there are plenty of successful organizations that work off of one unifying description of why they exist and where they are going. Many organizations have both a mission and vision statement, but there is minimal difference between them in actual function or feel.

For example, look at the following mission and vision statements of Make-A-Wish, an exceptional nonprofit that grants wishes to children who are facing life-threatening illnesses.



MAKE-A-WISH MISSION

We grant the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions to enrich the human experience with hope, strength and joy.

MAKE-A-WISH VISION

That people everywhere will share the power of a wish.

While there is a difference between the two statements, I am not convinced the difference is worth spending a hundred hours of planning, debate and discussion over just to create two different statements. Make-A-Wish has touched the lives of thousands of very sick children. Both statements are meaningful, yet it is hard to know if there would be any measurable loss by merging them into one.

Another example is the mission and vision of Jesus. How clearly can you differentiate between what the Bible describes as his mission and vision?

JESUS

“Jesus came to seek and save the lost.” (Luke 19:10)

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”
(John 10:10)

“On hearing this, Jesus said to them, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’” (Mark 2:17)

If Jesus didn’t get worked up about perfectly defined mission and vision statements, maybe we shouldn’t either.

Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia is the oldest and highest ranking children’s hospital in the United States. It has accomplished this with one unifying and concise statement that it calls its mission:



CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL OF PHILADELPHIA

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia strives to be the world leader in the advancement of healthcare for children by integrating excellent patient care, innovative research and quality professional education into all of its programs.

I know some will have strong feelings about this, and that is OK. In my opinion, whether you choose to call it mission, vision, or both, it is most important that you simply answer these questions:

1. Where are we going?
2. What are we doing?
3. Why are we doing it?
4. How are we going to get there?
5. Are we there yet?
6. How can I help?

The answers to these questions should fit on one sheet of paper with a lot of white space! The answers often result in **a clear and compelling direction with 3-5 priorities**. We often call this “the playbook.” If you get this far, your likelihood of experiencing progress will grow exponentially, regardless of how many cool and creative statements you have.

Leadership is not about statements; it's about purposeful action!

EFFECTIVE EXECUTION



Timely, well-planned implementation.

EFFECTIVE EXECUTION. One of the unfortunate and unnecessary ways a leader harms his credibility and the momentum of his organization is by not ensuring that a decision or plan, for which he is responsible, is carried out in a timely manner. In their book *Execution, The Discipline of Getting Things Done* (2002), Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan note that execution is the major job of a leader, and it must be a key element of the organization's culture.



So, if execution is so important, why does it sometimes not happen? The following are the top reasons:

1. There is no **buy-in** by some of the key power-brokers in the organization.
2. The culture and key leaders accept **excuses** and fail to hold people **accountable**.
3. Sometimes, people **coast** and **evade** the hard work that needs to be done.
4. The required **resources** are not being provided.
5. No one is assigned **ownership** for implementation.
6. There is **fear** of failure and consequence.

No matter how compelling the vision, it is irrelevant if action is not taken. Helen Keller is believed to have once said, “A vision without action is only a dream!”



*A vision without action
is only a dream!
-Helen Keller*

How Momentum Really Works

Whether you are a church, business or a nonprofit such as a school or social service agency, it is our belief that organizational momentum most often results from the convergence of these elements: the right people, compelling vision, and context and opportunity. It is important to remember that we, as fallen people, cannot fabricate momentum in our organization. At times, we are even confounded by the momentum that we see since, humanly-speaking, there would be no explanation for it.

One of the most important things we have learned about organizational momentum is just how fast it can change. Organizations were once much more resilient to large and rapid fluctuations of momentum than they are today. It is critically important for leaders to monitor the signs of positive and negative momentum markers which are depicted in the following graphic.





6 Ways to Kill Organizational Vision and Momentum

1. Too much talk, too little action

Leaders, staffs and boards sometimes have a tendency to talk, analyze and plan themselves to a slow, painful death. While conversation, analysis and planning is vital, it can sometimes become a detriment to producing momentum if it does not result in timely action.

“The best decision-makers are those who are willing to suffer the most over their decisions but still retain the ability to be decisive.” -Psychiatrist M. Scott Peck

2. Too many voices

While collaboration and seeking input from others is beneficial in a visioning process, you can reach a point of oversaturation. Like a plant, water is vital for growth, but too much and it drowns. There is a difference between how many voices are needed in creating a vision and related strategy versus testing the vision by seeking input and buy-in.

3. Too complex a planning process

Complexity is often the death blow to many visioning processes. When the process involves 30 people working through six phases spread out over 12 months, you likely have too complex a process. Remember, unless you are planning for an extraordinarily large undertaking such as



a once in a lifetime capital expansion, merger or acquisition, or building a four-star hotel on Mars, vision planning does not need to be as complex as it is often made out to be.

4. Too much confusion over roles

Whose job is it to cultivate the vision of the organization? Whoever has the gifts and passion worth following! While it is a senior leader or leadership team's job to ensure there is a compelling vision, that does not necessarily mean they are the only ones who possess those qualities. Quite often, the best vision is already resident in the DNA of the organization and its people. The leadership's primary job is to be listening and discerning what that vision is and how to feed it.

5. Too much fear of risk

In their book *Flight of the Buffalo* (2008), author's James Belasco and Ralph Stayer write,

“Change is hard because people overestimate the value of what they have—and underestimate the value of what they may gain by giving that up.”

We have seen this too often in churches and other organizations where the leaders fear losing the safety and stability of what already is and therefore, find dignified and legitimate sounding excuses to avoid any major risk or change. Leaders who are driven by anxiety create an anxious organization, one where political factions and conflict grow due to the indecisiveness of the leadership. In other words, the fear of conflict that leads to inaction will most likely result in the very conflict leaders are trying to avoid!

6. Too much confidence

In Jim Collins excellent book, *How the Mighty Fall* (2009), he describes the stages that lead to the demise of organizations. The first stage in the process is pride that grows out of previous success. Success is wonderful to experience, but the more you have of it, the greater the risk of a leader or organization beginning to believe they cannot fail. Such confidence usually tips over into an arrogant spirit, one that feels invincible, one that does not seek counsel, and one that over-extends itself.



9 Ways to Build and Sustain Vision and Momentum

1. Protect the organization from you!
The fears, insecurities, ego needs and arrogance of one or more leaders can be the single greatest harm to a high momentum organization.
2. Build a great leadership environment and team.
A blend of catalysts, experts, and testers working in a high trust environment can do amazing things!
3. Face your organization's reality; don't avoid it.
Every organization has ups and downs. However, it cannot improve until it honestly faces its weaknesses and opportunities.
4. Swing for singles, enjoy home runs.
Many organizations strive for home runs. However, most momentum comes from the convergence of small opportunities, small actions, and small successes over a long period.
5. Compare your organization to your vision, not to others.
Comparison can be deadly to momentum. Other organizations are not your measure – your vision is.
6. Experiment when you are strong, not when you are weak.
The best time to try new ideas for momentum is when the organization is healthy, having both energy and resources. Even when an organization is weak, however, it must still experiment. Not experimenting will likely lead to further decline.
7. If everyone is talking about it, think twice about doing it.
Often, organizations adopt programs and events because so many others do. Sustainable momentum is seldom built this way.
8. Guard momentum since it is hard to acquire and easy to lose.
It only takes a few hurtful events or bad decisions to lose it.



9. Remember that Success is often a greater enemy than being average.

When an organization is experiencing momentum, its leaders can become proud, resulting in arrogance and failure to continue learning.

Conclusion

As consultants, we have seen far too many organizations slow their own momentum down by getting stuck on the less important details. The most important steps you can take are to define your vision in a way that paints a clear and compelling picture of your future, while appointing leaders who are trustworthy and have a history of proven performance. Once you have those two factors in place, outlining the other aspects like values, goals and result areas will come much more easily.



Jay Desko is the Executive Director of The Center and serves on the Senior Leadership Team at Calvary Church in Souderton, Pennsylvania. Jay brings experience in the areas of ministry assessment, leadership coaching, decision-making, and strategic questioning. Jay's degrees include a B.S. in Bible, an M.Ed in Instructional Systems Design and a Ph.D. in Organizational Behavior and Leadership.

If you would ever like to contact Jay, he can be reached at jdesko@centerconsulting.org.

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