

Analysis of Vision Statements

Joseph C. Thomas

Regent University Center for Leadership Studies

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Introduction

This paper examines the vision statements of two organizations. Based upon a preliminary assessment, the first organization was selected because its vision statement was viewed as relatively strong and comprehensive. The second organization was selected because of its familiarity and a desire to offer constructive criticism. This paper seeks to critically analyze the statements by identifying their strengths and weaknesses, and provide recommendations for improvement.

Vision Statement Analysis Framework

Various authors (Collins & Porras, 1991; Senge, 1998) have asserted that there is much confusion about the topic of organizational vision statements and associated components such as mission, purpose, and core values. Collins and Porras (1991, p. 31) quote one CEO as lamenting “I’ve come to believe that we need a vision to guide us, but I can’t seem to get my hands on what ‘vision’ is. I’ve heard lots of terms like ‘mission,’ ‘purpose,’ ‘values,’ ‘strategic intent,’ but no one has given me a satisfactory way of looking at vision that will help me to sort out this morass of words and set a coherent vision for my company. It’s really frustrating!” Collins and Porras (1991, p. 33) go on to note that “many of the words used to describe the process of providing direction to an organization have been under-defined and confused with each other. Many of the terms commonly considered synonymous are not and, most important, they represent distinct concepts related to each other in significant ways.”

To avoid this confusion, this paper uses the Collins and Porras (1991) vision framework as a basis to evaluate the two subject organizational vision statements. Collins and

Porras (1991, p. 32) describe vision as “an over-arching concept under which a variety of other concepts are subsumed.” The following outline summarizes the Collins and Porras framework and its component concepts.

1. **Guiding Philosophy.** “A system of fundamental motivating assumptions, principles, values, and tenets.” (Collins and Porras, 1991, p. 34)
 - 1.1. **Values and Beliefs.** The organization’s fundamental ideas about what is important in operating its business as well as life in general and its role in society. Organization leaders at all levels hold deep convictions about these ideas and act accordingly. (Collins and Porras ,1991, p. 35)
 - 1.2. **Purpose.** Based upon core values and beliefs, the essence of why the organization exists expressed succinctly and inspirationally in a few sentences. Easily understood with little or no explanation. Endures for an extended period of time. (Collins and Porras, 1991, p. 38)
2. **Tangible Image.** “Consists of a mission which clearly focuses the efforts of the organization and a vivid description through which the mission is made more alive and engaging.” (Collins and Porras, 1991, p. 42)
 - 2.1. **Mission.** Specific goals clearly expressed that provide focus for people throughout the organization. Extremely challenging to the point that success is not assured, yet is possible and feasible. Includes a specific timeframe that is of shorter duration than Purpose (Collins and Porras, 1991, p. 42)
 - 2.2. **Vivid Description.** An engaging and compelling portrait or word picture that describes what it will be like when the mission is achieved. Evokes passion and excitement. (Collins and Porras, 1991, p. 47)

The Collins and Porras vision framework provides lucid and comprehensive criteria with which to evaluate organizational vision statements. Each organizational vision statement is explicitly evaluated against these criteria.

First Organizational Vision Statement

The first organizational vision statement is from a Christian church that is part of a large international denomination.

Our Mission

As a people called by God, our purpose is to:

GLORIFY God and rejoice in Him (1 Chron. 16:10, 28, 29; 2 Thess. 1:11, 12; 1 Peter 2:9),

GROW more Christ-like in character and service (Col. 2:7; John 13:34, 35; Eph. 4:11-16; Acts 2:42-47), and

GO into the world, proclaiming the gospel and making disciples of Jesus Christ (Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).

We will accomplish this by equipping God's people for works of service, demonstrating His grace in the power of the Holy Spirit – as individuals, families and in cooperation with others of like faith.

Core Values

Because we are an assembly of individuals with diverse backgrounds, each of us has slightly different values that influence how we go about joining in the mission of Jesus Christ. However, if we are going to have an effective ministry as a unified church, we must identify and share certain common values. These values serve as the framework for developing and

implementing ministries within our church. They should also support us beyond our church environment into our public lives.

Communication of God's Word

The anointed communication of biblical truths is the catalyst for personal salvation and growth in Christ.

When spirit-led people teach the Word of God, the Holy Spirit directs us to repent of sin, to receive forgiveness and newness of life, to live a holy and obedient life, and to minister to others. (Psalm 119:9, 11, Isaiah 55:11, Hebrews 4:12, 2 Timothy 3:14-17, James 1:22-25)

Pentecostal Legacy

The work of the Holy Spirit, as experienced and modeled by the early church, is a cherished part of our church and individual lives.

This work includes Spirit baptism, spiritual gifts and in-fillings, and should be earnestly sought by all believers as a normal part of healthy church life. (Acts 1:8; 2:4, 1 Corinthians 14:1)

Service

The serving of others is the natural result of being a steward of God's gifts, abilities and resources in our lives.

Faithful service is a vital aspect of healthy spiritual life which produces lasting spiritual fruit, resulting in personal fulfillment and eternal benefit. (Matthew 25:21, 1 Corinthians 3:12-13; 12, 14; Romans 12:6-8)

Servant Leadership

Leaders are servants who continually develop co-laborers (including workers and potential leaders) by equipping, empowering and supporting them in their area of giftedness.

These leaders model Christ-like character, competence and commitment. (Exodus 3:1-8, Mark 10:45, Acts 6:2-5, Romans 12:8, Ephesians 4:11-13)

People-Relevant Ministry

Our ministries strive to meet people at their individual level of need and understanding, being culturally relevant while remaining scripturally sound.

This compels us to be sensitive to all the ways we relate to our community (e.g., programs, facilities, communications and use of the arts). (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

Relationship Center Ministry

People grow spiritually and needs are met most effectively through trusted relationships with other believers.

Experiences beyond corporate worship are essential in the building of trusted relationships. Participation in care communities, ministry teams and small groups foster mutual encouragement, personal mentoring, accountability, and discovery of spiritual gifts. (John 13:34-35, 1 Corinthians 13, Philippians 1:6, Hebrews 10:24-25, 1 John 1:7)

Evangelism and Missions

By faith, we demonstrate the grace of God, joining Christ in his mission to reconcile people to God.

This begins with our peers and communities, and extends to the farthest corners of the earth. We will go, send and provide resources to win our world for Christ. (Matthew 25:40; 28:19, Acts 1:8)

Evaluation of First Organizational Vision Statement

The first organizational vision statement consists of two components that correspond closely to the Guiding Philosophy portion of the vision framework. The organization in its literature and website refers to the first component as both a “mission” and a “purpose.” This first component clearly fits the Purpose component of the vision framework as it follows from the expressed core values, it is succinct in that it consists of three simple sentences, and it clearly conveys how the organization intends to fill basic human needs. It also is broad and enduring, easily lasting for many years over the life of the church. Because of these reasons, it is a strong statement of Purpose as defined by the vision framework.

The second component of the organizational vision statement also clearly fits the Values and Beliefs component of the vision framework. Its seven parts outlines the precepts the organization considers most important and is complete with biblical references. Because of its comprehensiveness and rich detail, this component is also a strong statement of Values and Beliefs as defined by the vision framework.

The organizational vision statement stops short of a complete vision statement as defined by the vision framework because it does not contain the Tangible Image component. Although the organization terms part of its vision statement as a mission, this part is really a statement of Purpose (as previously explained). Therefore, the Mission component that should serve as a unifying force to focus and guide an organization's efforts by being a compelling goal that is both challenging and achievable is omitted. Likewise, the Vivid Description is also omitted.

Although missing two out of four components of the vision framework, this organizational vision statement is still very good as its Guiding Philosophy statement is strong. Obviously, a great deal of discussion and work must have ensued to develop such strong Values and Beliefs and Purpose components, and the results of this work can serve the organization for many years to come. This organizational vision statement needs a statement of Mission as a means to assist in focusing the organization on short to mid term goals one to three years in the future. Once these goals are determined and clearly articulated, a Vivid Description can be developed.

As there are no clear and specific goals with a specific time for achievement, a statement is not present that meets the criteria for the vision framework definition of Mission (Collins and Porras, 1991, p. 42). However, one can surmise based upon the Purpose statement that the Mission would likely meet the criteria for the Targeting approach to setting a mission (Collins and Porras, 1991, p. 43). These criteria include establishing and pursuing a clear and definable target, either quantitative or qualitative (Collins and Porras, 1991, p. 43).

Second Organizational Vision Statement

The second organizational vision statement is from a crisis pregnancy ministry.

Mission Statement

Pregnancy Helpline (PH) acknowledges God the Father as our source, direction, and strength. In the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, through the Power of the Holy Spirit, we endeavor to support the mother in the continuation of her pregnancy and to assist her in providing for the young child through material and emotional support. In an attitude of love and empathy, we seek to help the mother sort out her feelings, look realistically at the options of parenting and adoption, and explore the physical and emotional effects of abortion. We hope our offers of help will provide the support and encouragement many women lack in their circle of friends and relatives.

PH believes the unborn child has a right to be born and will not assist a woman in obtaining an abortion. We will not abandon a client who does choose abortion, but will offer her a healing opportunity through our post-abortion counseling education program. We hope to lessen the likelihood of an unplanned pregnancy through abstinence education programs, point out the real benefits of choosing positive lifestyles.

Evaluation of Second Organizational Vision Statement

The second organizational vision statement, although entitled a “Mission Statement,” is primarily a statement of Purpose interspersed with elements of the Values and Beliefs

component of the vision framework. It stops short of meeting the criteria for the vision framework definition for Mission because there are no clear and specific goals with a specific time for achievement (Collins and Porras, 1991, p. 42). The individual elements of Purpose as well as those of Values and Beliefs are very good, but the statement of organizational vision can be strengthened by reorganizing the sentences into separate Purpose and Values and Beliefs sections, as the following revisions suggest:

Values and Beliefs

- We acknowledge God the Father as our source, direction, and strength in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, through the Power of the Holy Spirit.
- We believe the unborn child has a right to be born and will not assist a woman in obtaining an abortion.
- We will not abandon a client who does choose abortion, but will offer a healing opportunity.
- We minister to our clients in an attitude of love and empathy.

Statement of Purpose

We endeavor to support the mother in the continuation of her pregnancy by helping to sort out her feelings, look realistically at the options of parenting and adoption, and explore the physical and emotional effects of abortion. We assist mothers by providing material support for the young child. We provide the emotional support and encouragement many women lack in their circle of friends and relatives. For those clients who choose abortion, we offer healing opportunities through post-abortion counseling and education. We lessen the likelihood of an unplanned pregnancy

through abstinence education programs that point out the real benefits of choosing positive lifestyles.

Separating the components of Purpose from Values and Beliefs reveal additional opportunities to improve the vision statement. Values and Beliefs could be extended to become more comprehensive and the statement of Purpose could be simplified.

This organization has a three to five year strategic plan, from which a Mission statement could be drawn. Elements of the strategic plan that could be used for this purpose include stimulating a dramatic decline in the number of abortions in the county as reported by the state health department, reducing abortions in young women ages 15-19 by targeting youth ages 12-19 for chastity education, and expanding the post-abortion survival program to reach all women in the county who have aborted. Many of these goals are challenging, but achievable. Constructing a Mission statement from the strategic plan would serve to focus the staff and volunteers of the organization. From this Mission, a Vivid Description could be developed, and potentially provide great dividends by rallying all stakeholders around achieving the goals of the organization.

These elements of a Mission meet the criteria for the Targeting approach to setting a mission (Collins and Porras, 1991, p. 43). In practice, the organization also exhibits characteristics of the Common Enemy approach to setting a mission (Collins and Porras, 1991, p. 44) by focusing on establishing a community presence to thwart the goals of the local Planned Parenthood office.

Conclusion

A good vision statement helps an organization focus the energy of its people on a common objective and thus maximizes the likelihood of successful achievement. The Collins and Porras (1991) vision framework is valuable to help leaders and organizations dispel confusion around what a vision statement is, what it is comprised of, and its potential value. The vision framework is a useful tool to help evaluate organizational vision statements, and provide direction to leaders in adding value to existing vision statements. All leaders can benefit from the clarity this framework provides and from applying it in their vision casting endeavors.

References

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