

MODULE 2 – Vision and Mission Statements

This module describes why it is important to have a clear and concise vision and mission statement, as well as suggested approaches to developing these statements. The module concludes with characteristics of an effective vision statement.

The vision statement describes the organization's desired future state. In contrast, the mission statement describes the purpose of the organization and how it does business. Both of these statements should be clear and concise for the following reasons:

1. To ensure unanimity of purpose within the organization;
2. To provide a basis, or standard, for allocating organizational resources;
3. To establish a general tone or organizational culture;
4. To serve as a focal point for individuals to identify with the organization's purpose and direction;
5. To facilitate the translation of objectives into a work structure involving the assignment of tasks;
6. To identify responsible elements within the organization; and,
7. To specify organizational purposes and the translation of the purposes into objectives in such a way that cost, time, and performance parameters can be assessed and controlled.¹

An organization that cannot translate its vision into terms that can be understood and acted upon may encounter fundamental disagreement about how to translate the vision and mission statements into actions. The consequence of this disagreement is fragmentation of efforts. This is because when the vision statement lacks consensus and clarity, different groups may pursue different agendas, according to their own interpretations of vision.²

The Process of Developing a Vision and Mission Statement

The process of developing a vision and mission statement for a Crown agency should begin with the enabling legislation and mandate, as these strongly influence the current business and future direction of the organization. Development of a vision and/or mission statement should remain within the scope of this legislation, as well as the organization's potential capabilities.

Development of a good vision statement may be challenging, as it should reflect an organization's present actions while representing the desired future. The vision statement

¹ King, W. R. and D. I. Cleland. (1979). Strategy Planning and Policy. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

² Kaplan, R. S., and Norton, D. P. (1996). The Balanced Scorecard: Translating Strategy into Action. Harvard Business School Press.

should also factor in existing competencies while identifying what's missing and how to overcome any limitations.³ A vision is not something overly specific in nature. The vision is a short thoughtful statement about what one would like to accomplish in the upcoming year without it becoming a goal itself.⁴ The vision statement may be accompanied by an explanatory paragraph.

One approach to develop a vision statement is to seek answers to the following questions:

- 1) What kind of organization do you want to become?
- 2) What reputation would you have?
- 3) What contribution would you make?
- 4) Would your products and services expand?
- 5) Would your customer/ client base change?
- 6) How would your people work together?
- 7) What values would you embody?⁵

Another approach to develop either a vision or a mission statement is to provide senior management with articles about mission statements and ask them to personally prepare a vision and/or mission statement for the organization. A facilitator may then merge the drafted statements into a revised draft, which may be used as the starting point of further discussion. It is useful to seek the views of a range of stakeholders when defining how success will be recognized. Their views may differ from those developing a program and this variation may highlight important issues or unanticipated outcomes. The greater the participation in the process of developing a vision and/or mission, the greater the implementation of future changes based on the vision and/or mission. This participation includes employees, management and senior administration.⁶

Characteristics of an Effective Vision Statement

Once the vision statement has been identified, it should incorporate one or more of the following characteristics of an effective vision:

1. **Imaginable:** Conveys a picture of what the future will look like.
2. **Desirable:** Appeals to the long-term interests of employees, customers/clients, stakeholders, and others who have a stake in the organization.
3. **Feasible:** Comprises realistic, attainable goals.
4. **Focused:** Is clear enough to provide guidance in decision making.
5. **Flexible:** Is general enough to allow individual initiative and alternative responses in light of changing conditions.

³ Manning, M. (March 2000). Creating a Vision. Semiconductor Magazine. 1 (3).

⁴ Skipsky, H. (August 2002). Fail to plan, plan to fail: A look at a yearly operating business plan. Journal of Leisure Property. London. 2 (3).

⁵ Manning, M. (March 2000). Creating a Vision. Semiconductor Magazine. 1 (3).

⁶ David, F R. (1993). Concepts of Strategic Management. 4th Ed., New York: MacMillan Publishing Company.

6. Communicable: Is easy to communicate, can be successfully explained within five minutes".⁷

⁷ Kotter, J. (1996). Leading Change. Harvard Business School Press: USA.