

How A Company's Vision Impacts A Project Success

Approved: Wendy Brooke Date: June 8, 2009

HOW A COMPANY'S VISION IMPACTS PROJECT SUCCESS

A Seminar Paper

Presented to

the Graduate Faculty

University of Wisconsin-Platteville

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirement for the Degree

Master of Science

in

Project Management

by

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2009

ABSTRACT

A project management methodology is a systems approach to make sure a project is successful. Even though it is used , some projects fail. This article will use philosophical thinking to consider a company's vision. Vision is an effective tool used to increase a companies' cohesiveness.

Some case studies will be presented to show how vision influences a companies' project success. It is important to pay attention to how vision in different companies and countries' is applied to influence methods in application. The company's vision is a foundation for company and project success.

Keywords: vision; mission; philosophical

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INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

Vision is becoming a more and more important core concept for businesses. Companies are beginning to attach importance to integrity and indissolubility when faced with serious global competitive pressure. The competition found in the current market is also a challenge for development and future orientation.

Chinese companies' culture theory focuses on corporate philosophy, and includes vision, mission, inner axiology and philosophy theory. For purposes of this research, companies use vision to answer two questions:

What is our corporation?

What should we want to be?

American strategic theory usually describes vision and mission as an objective or a duty. As it is in the US, there are many statements for vision in a Chinese company. Some companies use the term vision, others use mission instead of vision; while others call it an operating objective. The final group of companies lack philosophical thinking about the reason and value of the company's purpose altogether.

Purpose of the Research

This paper will use "vision" as a point of projection, analyzing "vision" theory's application. It will also track "vision" theory to focus on that how it can affect both a project's and a company's success.

Significance of the Problem

This study relates to scope management in the PMBOK Guide. Scope management is a very important process in project management and has five steps: scope planning, scope definition, create WBS, scope verification and scope control. In scope planning, the project scope will be defined, verified and controlled; the work breakdown structure (WBS) will be created and defined. It is important to create a project scope plan upon which all the stockholders, project manager and employees can agree and easily understand. Vision theory can provide a powerful approach to help define the project, motivate the project team, and generate enthusiasm among stakeholders.

Delimitations of the Research

The research for this study was conducted in Karrmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. Most of the research was done online. Key search topics included “vision theory in project”, “vision and mission”, “role of vision in project success”, and “company’s vision and philosophy”

Definition of Terms

Vision The dictionary definition of vision is “the ability to think about or plan the future with imagination or wisdom.” (“Oxford Dictionary”, 2001) Kotter describes vision in terms of “something that helps clarify the direction in which to proceed.” (Kotter, 1995) Christenson and Walker state that “Vision becomes one of the tools or means to engender passion and meaning to a project or an organization to meet its goals and objectives.” (Christenson and Walker, 2004)

Mission is a specific task, often spiritual, which a person or group has been charged with or adopts as their main purpose. (Oxford. 2001)

Philosophy is the study of general problems concerning matters such as existence, knowledge, truth, beauty, justice, validity, mind, and language. (Oxford. 2001)

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Link of Vision, and Mission

Samer el Barakeh, who gained the Project Management Professional (PMP) credential from The Project Management Institute (PMI), describes vision, mission, and objectives.

Vision: A high-level description of the desired state is brief, concise, and realistic. This comes from the Board of Directors, Executives, Owners etc. (the top level). For vision to become reality many things need to be done, some are inter-related. It is necessary to know the roles and tasks of each sub-organization or division (the second level) to enable making this vision real, these roles and tasks become the mission. (2008)

Mission statements are developed by communication and discussions between the top and lower level management. Once agreed upon, each division will have its mission that is aligned with, and contributes to, achieving the organizational vision. Mission statements are broad high-level statements, therefore it is necessary to breakdown each mission statement into a 'specific set of objectives'. (2008)

Define Your Company's Vision

Products or services are the basis of a company. One technique used to guide this exercise is the old journalism advice of asking. The five “Ws”: Who? What? When? Where? Why?

Freedman uses this guide to analyze vision. (Freedman. 2009) This approach challenges the vision statement to ensure it communicates needed information:

- Who? This vision guides the entire project team to clarify the target customer, and also ensure that the language used in the vision is suitable for customers and employees.
- What? In this section, companies describe what their vision is, and what its character is.
- When? In this question, the focus is on a very important process in project – scheduling. It helps to clarify the stockholder’s expectations, and the time if applicable of new product to market, or project timelines.
- Where? This question helps the team to clarify the scope of the project. It defines if the product or project will be departmental or companywide.
- Why? This is the most critical question to answer. Freedman states it as “Why would the users and stakeholders make the painful effort to change their existing habits and migrate to this new product? This question is also expanded to explain why the company is developing this particular product as opposed to

another one that some stakeholders may champion, or that might be bought off the shelf in, well, a package. “(Freedman, 2009)

Christenson and Walker present that “besides the obvious benefit of helping the group define their vision of the ultimate product and express their expectations in non-technical language, the ensuing vision is a powerful force for motivating the project team that will develop the new solution. “(Christenson and Walker, 2004)

Key points about creating an effective project vision are described by Christenson and Walker. (Christenson and Walker, 2004) They state the four basic factors for creating an effective project vision are:

- Communication skills
- Intensive understanding of both organizational culture and the history
- Trigger mechanisms that creates potential assumptions of individuals
- Groups, which consist of project teams

Project vision can be considered an artifact that determines the project's soul. It should tie into the project participants' core values. If someone wants to create a vision, he or she should recognize that assumptions play an important part in values and call for creating accepted and internalized goals.

A concept that can be used to develop a vision is called the Vision Box. The Vision Box exercise is typically used at the beginning of a new project and is implemented to help the members of the executive team make the project easier. The basic concept is clear: If a business's new product is promoted to the market in a box, what product characteristics, benefits, and attributes would you emphasize on the box that can help you attract the customers to buy your product? (2009)

Freedman supports that the Vision Box can help developers and stakeholders keep their eyes on the prize, avoid product bloat and scope creep. Doing the Vision Box exercise creates stockholders' passion, "inspire your project teams to creative heights, and keep the project effort focused on the elements that generate the most business value." (Freedman 2009)

In addition, the goal of the Vision Box exercise is to create a convincing story that emphasizes the project's unique benefits. It uses headlines in order to avoid long, technical descriptions. Moreover, the exercise can produce a product name, and graphics that help the project team find the wonderful features of the new product, including some catchy phrases that conclude the benefits about the project. (2009)

The Role of “Vision” in Project Success

Dale Christenson and Derek H T Walker devoted themselves to interpreting the influence of project vision on the results of anticipated projects. Significant attention was given to the determinable factors of a project. One of the most outstanding contributions they found was creating and communicating a shared vision clearly. Any leader can make these contributions to an organization or project. Their paper discusses that “project vision” is a tremendous devotion which determines the success of the project. The result of the project will be influenced by the interaction and maintenance of a project perception.

According to the research by Briner, Hastings, & Geddes et al, they state, “The most significant success factor for project teams is that they have a common and shared idea of what difference they are trying to make as a result of the project.” (Briner, Hastings, & Geddes et al. 1996, p. 89)

They continue, “Such a vision can be built up by exploring questions with stakeholders and project team members, such as:

1. How will this project make a difference to the organization?
2. How would we know that this project has been highly successful?
3. What in our wildest dreams would you like this project to achieve?”

(Briner, Hastings, & Geddes et al. 1996, p. 89)

DISCUSSION

Through a review of the literature, there is some evidence to support how important “vision” is in project success. The following discussion will explore a variety of cases showing the impact of the vision statement within companies.

The first case, presented by Nigel Holden, shows a company vision for global knowledge sharing and the use of common methods and operating procedures used to create the concept of a corporate facilitator. “The “Novo Nordisk Way of Management” was spread across its global operations” (Holden, 2002, P.110). According to Holden (2002), the “Vision 21 purpose” is cited as “Our business is to discover and market products which satisfy real needs-improving the way people live and work. We find better ways to fight the burdens of disease and to provide sustainable biological solutions to industrial problems.” The company’s way includes how they approach implementing procedures for accountability, excellence, openness and honesty, customer focus, readiness for change, and social responsibility.

In this example, Vision 21 was implemented throughout Novo Nordisk’s management. It uses 14 specially selected senior level personnel called facilitators. These selected facilitators help the business unit (BU) adopt standard approaches and share knowledge about best practices that are developed within other BUs, They improve communication and transfer values across the organization when they visit each BU. By developing its vision and implementing it with credible, strong leadership models, through its delivery model of facilitation, Novo Nordisk

“walked-the-talk” motivates BU commitment and support. “It should be noted that this organization experimented with the facilitator concept to activate its vision in late 1996 and that as of 1999, the concept was judged a success and it was continued and improved.”(Holden, 2002, p. 129). This change program could be regarded as an initial three-year project that was successfully completed and could be considered the most important component of this company’s vision and project. From this example, it is understood that inspired motivation can be credible and challenging.

Another analysis has been quoted by Holden in 2002. It concerns Konoske Matsushita (KM). It studied the foundation of the Japanese global company. Matsushita has also explained his organization’s reason for being concretely in “the basic management target” and “intention for the company”. These are quoted respectively as “If we want to realize our responsibility as industrialists, we will contribute to the progress and development of society and the welfare of people through our business activities in order to enhance the quality of life all over the world.” Holden has also cited that “Each employee of our company will realize the progress and development (of the project) only through the combined efforts and cooperation. The group members have enthusiasm for the whole company. They can ensure to perform their common duties with contribution, hardworking and honesty” (Holden, 2002, P. 141) It shows that the company’s culture has related vision and action.

These are two examples of successful vision deployment. Successful

deployment of vision is not always guaranteed. To provide a well-cited example of how lack of vision can significantly contribute to a project failure, the following case is presented (Drummond, 1998):

Drummond's project took place over an 18-month period for design, development, and deployment. The project, called Taurus, was designed to handle online processing of share trading for the UK Stock Exchange. This £ 500 million project was very complex and time limited. The Taurus project was proposed for the UK Stock Exchange to provide online processing of share trading and other ancillary activities. The project was abandoned in 1993. They had wanted to update their software. However, the input and output were unclear and uncertain. It was hard to work with the project when there was no focus on the project's objective.

A major finding of the study according to Christenson and Walker, was that this case strongly indicates that the role of project leadership is pivotal. However, while the project management literature appears to be dominated by the importance of techniques used to manage projects, there is a noticeable gap in the literature relating to the impact of project leadership and the development of a project vision. This project vision should unite the project team and is a critical success factor for projects. (Christenson and Walker, 2004)

The following table is from Christenson and Walker's successful vision characteristics research. They use this table to analyze the three case studies listed

above. The table shows that the three cases meet or do not meet these vision characteristics.

Vision Characteristics	Case 1 Novo Nordisk	Case 2 Matsushita	Case 3 Taurus
Easily understood	Yes- by all	Yes- by Japanese employees, But no – by “foreign employees.	No – by all participants, different understanding of the core purpose by different stakeholder
Motivational and inspirational	Yes – at first, many saw the process as intrusive and greeted it with skepticism and suspicion; later the Knowledge Management advantages were appreciated and it was highly supported.	Yes – by Japanese employees the Japanese identity, history, and cultural legacy was very strong, but No – for “foreign” employees.	No – it appeared that, in general, the lack of focus, the massive scope creep, and difficulties in ever seeing the light at the end of the tunnel was a very large negative.
Credible	Yes – it made sense to employees as sound way forward	Yes – for older and more senior Japanese. No – for younger Japanese and foreign employees due to not “walking-the-talk”	No – It appeared that the general confusion resulted in unrealistic expectations and ideas of what could be achieved.
Working smarter, stretch goals	Yes – best practices identified and welcomed for widespread uptake	Yes – best practices within Japan No – for outside Japan, due to the corporate dogma that best practice can only come out of HQ in Japan.	No – the chaos and confusion accompanying an ever-widening scope did stretch people, but not to do things smarter – there was a lot of re-work and abandoned work.
Overall Rating	Best practice vision	A good vision for Japanese but not for outside Japan	A weak and enfeebled vision that failed to focus the project.

Table1. Vision characteristics from example cited in the discussion. (Christenson and Walker, 2004)

In this table, Christenson and Walker have shown a definite model to identify four key points of successful vision. The vision needs to be easily understood by employees and stockholders. If they don't know what they are

working for, how can they become motivated and inspired? In other words, the vision needs to be credible. The company or project's vision must let employees believe that they are walking the right path, and then can keep moving. Just like people who are lost in the desert, if they do not have a compass they will be struggling and spend more effort than someone who does have a compass. The vision must promote working smarter and provide stretch goals. In this part, it is necessary to consider regional differences. Some concepts that can be successful in some countries are not suitable for others.

Using the same concepts that Christenson and Walker have used in their evaluation of Vision, it is possible to look at other companies or types of organizations.

Memorial Blood Center is a nationally known, locally operated, nonprofit community blood center that serves more than 30 hospitals in the Twin Cities metro area, northern Minnesota and northwestern Wisconsin in the United States. They collect, test and distribute more than 100,000 units of blood each year.

Their vision is: "to provide blood products and biomedical services to benefit our community. Memorial Blood Center is a member of America's Blood Centers. Since our inception, we've collected, tested and distributed more than 3 million units of blood. That blood has helped as many as 6 million people through surgery, illness and life-threatening medical emergencies." (Memorial Blood Centers, 2009)

Memorial Blood Center's vision can be analyzed using the two structures outlined in this paper. Evaluating the same vision statement using both methods will point out the differences in each in approach. Using Christenson and Walker's vision characteristics to analyze this case:

Easily understood: Yes - by all

Motivational: Yes - It has helped as many as 6 million people through surgery, illness and life-threatening medical emergencies.

Credible, it is a member of America's Blood Centers, and has more than fifty years history since World War II.

Working smarter, stretch goals: Yes – best practices

The results of this analyze for this case shows that it fits all four vision characteristics for a successful project. It should be noted that this method is difficult to execute. The four vision characteristics are individual and subjective. The person who create the vision, therefore needs to understand everyone's viewpoint and synthesize them.

Now, using Freedman's "five Ws" method to analyze Memorial Blood Centers' vision:

Who: People who live in northern Minnesota and northwestern Wisconsin.

What: Their vision is to provide blood products and biomedical services to benefit our community

When: When people have surgery, illness, or life-threatening medical emergencies.

Where: 30 hospitals in the Twin Cities metro area, northern Minnesota and northwestern Wisconsin

Why: During World War II, the need for a coordinated system to receive, store and distribute blood became obvious. To fill that need, several sponsoring organizations founded the Minneapolis War Memorial Blood Bank in 1948.

The five "W" method is much easier, because all of the information that is needed is based on facts. One can find the specific answers.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has shown how a company's vision impacts project success. The vision is a compass to direct a project or company's way. It lets team members know what is being looked for and how it can be obtained. It is a critical success factor for project outcomes. Since everyone is an individual, they may have different ideas about the direction a project should take. The vision is a tool to combine ideas to create a single one which everyone agrees upon. It is important that all people working in a project or a company believe that the organization's vision will lead them to success. This will increase the chance for a successful project or company.

A vision is important for a project or company's success. It is also necessary to identify a vision which can fit the specific project or company. This paper has provided some concepts about vision, mission and objective. It has defined vision,

as it occurs in the dictionary and business literature. A company's vision needs to be easily understood, motivational, credible, encourage working smarter, and provide stretch goals. Additionally, one can use the "five Ws" guide to identify company's vision.

Table 1 provides four vision characteristics which can help to understand how vision impacts project success. Not all characteristics are needed to complete every project.

As the research shows, there is a strong link between development of an effective project vision and scope management. When risk is increasing, it's very important to let stockholders, project managers and employees understand the company or project's goal. Vision is an excellent tool to help people realize it. Good project scope management plans will match the company's vision.

According for the case study, there are two methods to identify company's vision, Christenson and Walker's four Vision Characteristics and Freedman's "five Ws" guide. Both have been used to analyze the same case - Memorial Blood Centers. It was found that the Vision Characteristics is hard to use, because there are some characteristics are difficult to identify. Further, it's more powerful because it can explore vision deeply. But Freedman's "five Ws" guide is easy to use. The project manager must be cognizant and let the project's vision follow the company's vision. Visioning can help guide the project along its path through changes that occur, without sidetracking or derailing the project.

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