
Excellence through Envisioning

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Abstract

*Envisioning helps in realizing dreams and aspirations. It creates paradigms of possibilities and supports in striving for excellence even in apparently difficult times. It is a continuous process of being sensitive to the changes, happenings in the external and internal environment and identifying or creating prospects through an optimistic navigation and synergistic convergence of challenging experimentation with innovative resources. Historically, those who took important initiatives to achieve exemplary success in long-term are called visionary leaders. This paper attempts to develop the concept of **envisioning** into a systematic approach and tries to evolve a process which can help everyone achieve excellence through looking beyond the obvious, charting a challenging agenda, gauging gaps between envisioned states/levels and existing states/levels of factors of performance and supportive process as well as consistently striving on an ever-improving action agenda to fill these gaps with innovative initiatives.*

Introduction

Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bangaluru is recognized world over for its immense contribution to scientific innovations and development. Its contribution in steering India to its present global status is very significant. Very few might be knowing that creation of this great institution is the realization of the Vision of two exceptionally brilliant Indians: Swami Vivekananda and Jamsetji Nusserrvanji Tata.

'The year was 1893. "The Empress of India" was sailing from Yokohama in Japan to Vancouver in Canada. Two great Indians were on the ship, Swami Vivekananda and Jamsetji Tata. Swami Vivekananda was traveling to Chicago to attend the Parliament of Religions and Jamshetji was on his way to visit the Chicago World Fair.

The two great souls struck up a conversation during the voyage. Jamshetji showed his interest in spiritualism and preferred to talk to the monk on the subject. Swami Vivekananda instead of deliberating on spirituality and religion, emphasized the fact that a nation cannot develop solely on the strength of religion and virtues of spiritualism. Development of India can take place only when the ascetic spirit inherent in the religion of India can be channelized in

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the right direction and used creatively for the development of scientific prowess and research abilities.

Inspired by the views of Swami Vivekanakda, Jamsetji Tata took the initiative to bring manufacturing technology for steel in India and laid the foundation for the development of Indian Institute of Science.

Infosys, a \$6 billion behemoth employing more than 1.30 lakh people and most importantly a beacon for corporate governance excellence and international best management practices is undoubtedly the pride of India and has strengthened India's leadership position in the global corporate world. N.R.Narayana Murthy who is one of the most inspiring organization builders, envisioned to create this world class software company during the worst 72 hours of his life spent in a dingy cell of Bulgaria where he was placed as a punishment for criticizing the communist regime of the country.

In 1974, while travelling in a train near a border town between Bulgaria and Serbia, NR Narayana Murthy was engaged in a conversation in French with a young woman and talk drifted to how tough it was to live in the communist world. Before too long, a few guards came along and pulled them out. Murthy was dragged through the platform into a little cell where he spent the next 72 hours without food or drink.

Murthy took one of the biggest decisions of his life while being in that dingy room. Having lost all sympathy for communism, he made up his mind to become an entrepreneur who would create thousands of jobs for the then struggling Indian middle class. He left the shores of being a confused leftist and joined the ranks of a passionate capitalist. Murthy is on record stating that this incident sowed in his mind the seeds of creating an Indian multinational software company.

The above two and many such real stories of achieving excellence originate from the process of envisioning the future. As we are experiencing, business paradigms are witnessing rapid shifts and the people's perspectives around the globe are taking different shapes thereby providing scope and reason for new explorations. The pace, proportions and directions of change appear to be unpredictable in the global

playing field which may also not be leveled for every player. The survival with sustained growth, therefore, hinges on being hard-nosed and fleet-footed. The borderless world that we are living in, poses immense complexity. And it has become a big challenge to ensure that one excels in various roles of life in times to come.

Leaders have dreams about future but the competition that is assuming fierce dimensions is forcing many to think that dreams have nothing to do with reality. But the fact is different. Our dreams will help create ambition which is the root of the action tree and the drive for achievement. To enable the dreams come true, we need to **envision**.

Why Envisioning ?

Envisioning is certainly not a new concept. Swami Vivekanand, Jamsetji N. Tata, Aditya Vikram Birla, Bill Gates, NR Narayan Murthy and many such foresighted leaders have created institutions and empires through Envisioning and several not so well recognized are already in this process.

Envisioning is the continuous process of creating a Vision out of individuals' (or the organizational leaders') dreams, ambitions and self-esteem and the spectrum of prospects and possibilities appearing to emerge from the scanning of environmental symptoms. Many people perceive Vision as a mere statement which it is not. Vision is a sensitive driver of change. It is a dynamic instrument that guides for long-term socio-economic relevance and enables the organizations succeed even in unpredictable future. In this era of globalization, diversity and knowledge, the instrument of Vision needs to be carefully developed and sharpened frequently in response to the metamorphosis in the external environment. Now, when change has become an unchangeable necessity for organizations, Vision has assumed greater importance since it:

- provides the systems of looking into future through emerging symptoms.
- enhances environmental scanning abilities.
- shows a frame of logical directions of change.
- facilitates and supports the process of change.

- helps formulate strategies to survive and grow in the crisis situation.
- helps in shaping the expectations of the people affected by the change.
- provides a wider spectrum of organizational plans, which are synergized to achieve ambitious targets.

Process

Envisioning is initiated through dreams and ambitions of leaders but internalization of Vision by organizational members is very essential. In fact, most organizations have not cared for this and consequently have not realized the importance and benefits of Vision. Internalization of Vision should be through active involvement of people during the entire envisioning process in such a way that they develop a strong sense of belongingness to the Vision and commit to it. This is a great responsibility of organizational leaders to create an envisioning team at all functional level. Functional Visions, when orchestrated well by the top managers are meant to contribute to the attainment of organizational Vision.

Vision is the bridge between the dreams and the action plan to make the dreams come true. It should, therefore be stimulating, challenging, credible, clear and as robust as possible. It should also enable all members to see a credible and feasible big picture wherein they are able to appreciate their individual roles.

How to Envision ?

Envisioning is founded in the belief about inexhaustible power of human intellect which sets the direction and pace of actions and interactions. It involves following processes:

- a) Microscopic observation and analysis with high precision of attributes of environmental factors and trying to predict the future needs of goods and services by the fast evolving human society.

- b) Creating a momentum of fastest innovation in technology, supply chain and all factors contributing to the consumers' and customers' delight.

- c) Being prepared to break the vicious circle of myopic thoughts by tougher decisions which may sometimes entail heavy short-term costs and sacrifices and switching over to virtuous circle of long-term optimism, courage and passionate endeavors.

- d) Seeing the purpose of being of an individual or organization in relation to wider interests and concerns of human community and its interdependence with nature.

- e) Transcendent questioning of all happenings and outcomes like burgeoning population, trends of ownerships of assets on the earth and behaviours of people etc.

- f) Treating the problem as potential resource of business learning.

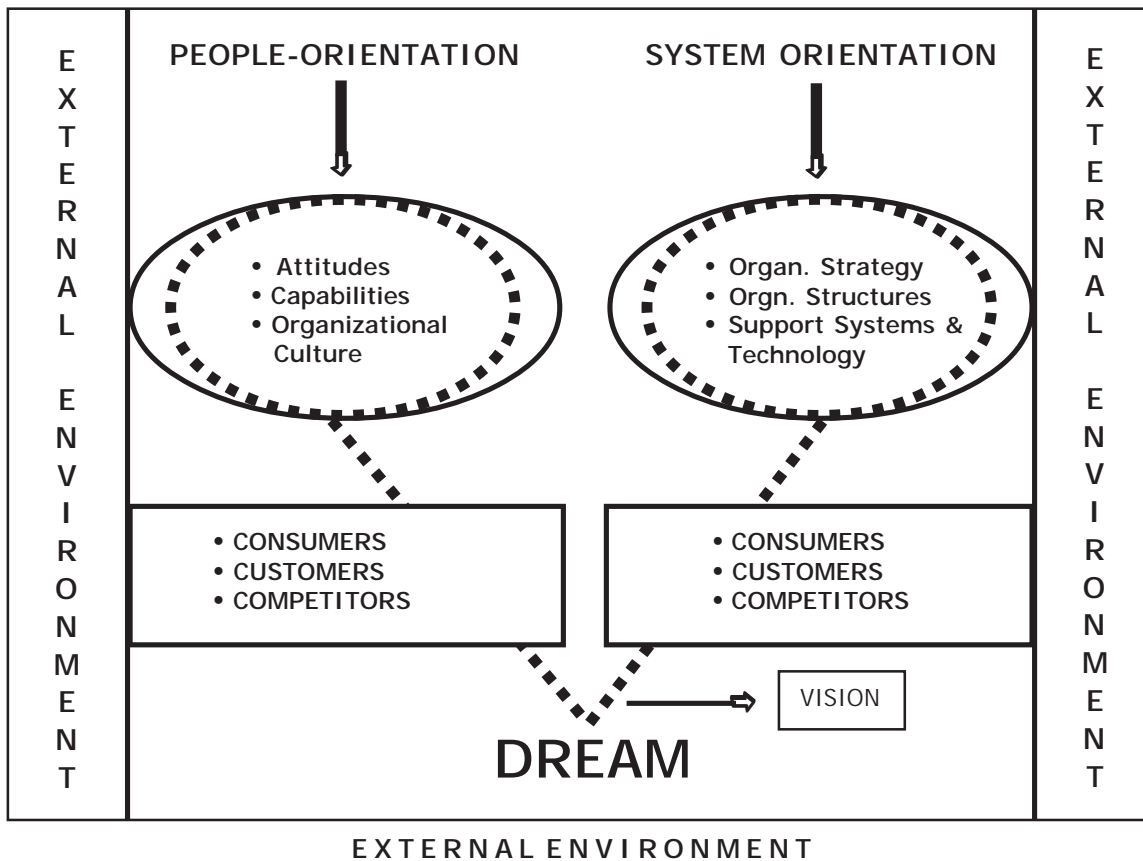
- g) Seeing beyond the obvious, not being carried away by established trends and trying to see the reasons of deviations. Probing of deviations may give clues to unique possibilities.

- h) First setting the highest targets of performance, then planning for exploitation of available resources, accession of unavailable ones through extended networking and creation of alternatives.

Empowering people with the best quality of work-life, enlightenment and excitement of a brighter future.

How Vision Works ?

Vision is the strongest force to facilitate transformation of organizational dreams into real success and clear identification of future prospects.



Visionary People Orientation

Visionary people orientation starts from a strong conviction about tremendous human potential and existence of an instinctive desire in every person to excel. The envisioned state as leaders have envisioned is actualized through development of following :

- (i) Attitudes: values, beliefs, aspirations etc.
- (ii) Capabilities: knowledge, wisdom, interpersonal skills, skills for environmental scanning, leadership skills, analytical skills etc.
- (iii) Culture: ways of expression, sources of excitement and joy,

The gap is gauged between the envisioned levels of these factors and the present levels as visible from current performance. For bridging these gaps, the organization has to have a flexible but very effective

action plan.

The success obviously depends on flawless and passionate execution of plans which happens only when the interest, zest, energy and promise keep flowing in from the envisioning leadership.

Visionary System Orientation

System aspect includes the plans, support systems, tools and basic infrastructure. Envisioning leader has to envisage the appropriate quality and quantum of the following factors which could facilitate the optimum performance of above mentioned human dimensions:

- (i) Organizational Strategy which includes;
 - Expression of long-term objectives, Functional Aims.

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- Organizational value system.
 - Creation of opportunities of experimentation and learning.
 - Dynamics of decision-making process.
 - Identification of key-drivers of desired change.
 - Unique features of a beaming organization.
- (ii) Organization Structures which include:
- Power hierarchy
 - Channels of communication
 - Points of feedback and reflection
 - Accountability levels and process
- (iii) Support systems & Technology which include:
- Availability of telecom systems, power, transportation.
 - Continuous upgradation of technology

And then he has to gauge the gap between the desired levels of these factors and the present levels as assessed from current performance. These gaps have to draw a pragmatic plan to bridge. This sets the direction of investment by envisioning organizations.

CONCLUSION

Envisioning, being a process of environmental sensitivity and vibrant strategic responses, can really make the dreams come true if there is perfect precision in monitoring, evaluation, pro-active and timely redressal of problems.

Envisioning is not about finding solutions of obvious questions but it's about looking beyond visible horizons and framing questions out of the exploration of distant possibilities.

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Financial Express June 13, 2011