STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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VISION – THE STRATEGIC LEADER IMPERATIVE

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL BARRY B. GALLAGHER
United States Army Reserve

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

VISION - THE STRATEGIC LEADER IMPERATIVE

by

Lieutenant Colonel Barry B. Gallagher
United States Army Reserve

Professor Herbert F. Barber
Project Advisor

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U.S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013

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ABSTRACT

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The success or failure of the United States Army has always rested in the hands of senior leaders who provide the vision and direction that all large organizations require. Vision, the ability to imagine and create a sense of the future, is a critical conceptual skill that strategic leaders must possess to successfully lead large organizations. Strategic leaders are tasked with the responsibility of shaping the vision, values, and direction of large organizations. Their world is full of complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity, but they must be able to develop a clear picture of the future in order to lead their organization in the proper direction. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the importance of vision and the strategic leader's responsibility to develop organizational vision. It will define vision and explain why it is important. The characteristics of an effective vision will be explained and examples will be given. It will examine the abilities and knowledge that strategic leaders must possess to effectively demonstrate this skill. Two basic methods for developing organizational vision will be explained along with the advantages and disadvantages of each method. Finally, steps that strategic leaders can take to increase their visionary skills will be examined.

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VISION - THE STRATEGIC LEADER IMPERATIVE

"There is no more powerful engine driving an organization toward excellence and long-range success than an attractive, worthwhile, and achievable vision of the future, widely shared."

-Burt Nanus. Visionary Leadership.

The success or failure of large organizations has always rested in the hands of leaders who provide the vision and focus that is required to achieve success in the uncertain future. This paper is about vision, but it is about much more than having a vision. It is also about making visions become reality. The Bible tells us that "where there is no vision, the people perish." This is equally true for organizations. Where there is no vision, organizations can perish.

Authors General Gordon Sullivan and Michael Harper advise strategic leaders that "you will have to think a lot about the future and make others do the same."[1] Strategic leaders must be able to create a vision and then transform that vision into reality. Change is the only constant in the world of the strategic leader. Sullivan and Harper expressed the challenge of change perfectly when they observed that "leading change means doing two jobs at once - getting the organization through today and getting the organization into tomorrow."[2] Vision is job one for strategic leaders - it's the strategic leader imperative.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the importance of vision and the strategic leader's responsibility to develop organizational vision. In the course of this paper we will examine the following questions: What is vision? Why is vision important? What are the characteristics of a good strategic vision? How do strategic leaders increase their visionary skills? How do strategic leaders develop an organizational vision? What is a vision statement? Finally, how will I know if a vision is the right one for my organization?

WHAT IS VISION?

The concept of vision is a popular topic in business and academic literature today. It is a widely used term that is not well understood. It is often used interchangeably with words like, mission, purpose, and strategic intent. There are hundreds of books and articles that address "vision" and "strategic vision." Webster's New World Dictionary states that vision is "the ability to perceive something not actually visible as through mental acuteness or keen foresight."[3] Burt Nanus, an expert in the field of visionary leadership, says that vision is "a realistic, credible, attractive future for your organization."[4] Authors James Kouzes and Barry Posner define vision as "an ideal and unique image of the future for the common good." [5] Finally, General Gordon Sullivan, former Chief of Staff of the Army, says that:

> Vision is a sense of the future. It is an imagined possibility, stretching beyond today's capability, providing an intellectual bridge from today to tomorrow, and forming a basis for looking ahead, not for affirming the past or the status quo.[6]

While all of the above definitions are different they share a common theme. Vision is about the future, it is about imagination, and it is about an ideal state that will improve an organization and take it forward. Vision is not a mission statement and it is not a slogan. Mission, in the context of this paper, has to do with the present and what the organization does everyday. Mission is about doing practical, day to day business. In contrast, vision is more idealistic and definitely more futuristic. Mission has more to do with what the organization "is" while vision concerns itself with what the organization can "become."

WHY IS VISION IMPORTANT?

The importance of vision and forward thinking has been documented in two different leadership studies. First of all, James Kouzes and Barry Posner surveyed nearly 300 senior executives in 1986 who rated "developing a strategic planning and forecasting capability as their most critical concern."[7]

The findings of Kouzes and Posner were confirmed in 1989 by a joint Korn/Ferry-Columbia University study. Seventy-five percent of those surveyed ranked "conveys a strong vision of the future as a very important quality for CEOs today."[8]

Kouzes and Posner report that fully seventy-five percent of over 20,000 survey participants selected the "ability to look ahead as one of their most sought-after leadership traits."[9] They concluded that people "expect...leaders to have a sense of direction and a concern for the future of the organization."[10]

Vision is important to strategic leaders because it enables them to accomplish three important leadership tasks. First of all, vision clarifies the direction that the organization will take. Second, an articulate vision helps to motivate people to take action in support of the organizational direction. Finally, vision helps to unify the actions and efforts of different people in a powerful way. Now, we will examine each concept in more detail.

Every organization needs direction and vision helps establish direction. This is a leader's most important job. If a leader is in charge of an organization without direction, he is failing in his first and most important responsibility. The leader must not only establish direction for the organization, but he must also ensure that it is the right direction. This is a great responsibility and it is a critically important concept.

Author Stephen R. Covey clearly illustrates the leader's responsibility for directing the organization in his best selling book The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. Covey describes the disillusionment that many people experience when they spend their life climbing the "ladder of success" only to find that the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall. Leaders

are hired to ensure that the organization's "ladder of success" is leaning against the right wall. Strategic leaders cannot afford to take organizations up the wrong ladder or on climbing expeditions up the wrong mountain. The stakes are too high in today's competitive world. Vision is the tool that enables leaders to create the direction that is appropriate for the organization.

Vision is also important because it helps create energy and motivation within the organization. This energy and motivation is critical to the achievement of the vision. No leader can achieve an organizational vision by himself. He must have the effort and cooperation of everyone on the team to achieve the desired end state. Authors Michael Hammer and James Champy concluded in their book Reenginering the Corporation that the only companies that seem to successfully negotiate the arduous process of change are those that have created and communicated a very clear vision of the future. Vision is essential to the long-term success of any organization.

Finally, vision is critical to organizational success because of its impact on unity and cohesiveness. Organizations that lack vision will also lack the focus and teamwork that effective group effort requires. Successful organizations are created by leaders who have vision and the ability to enlist others to share that vision. A shared vision can enable an organization to create a group focus that gives purpose and direction to the work of hundreds and thousands of people. The power of a shared vision is difficult

to explain, but it is one of the keys to creating a winning organization. Authors Sullivan and Harper point out that "you cannot build a winning organization by simply trying to accommodate what is going on around you. To win, you have to get out front."[11] Vision enables leaders and organizations to get out front and to get into the future.

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE VISION?

Burt Nanus, author of numerous books and articles on vision and visionary leadership says that a vision is a mental model that "... offers a view of the future that is clearly and demonstrably better for the organization, for the people in the organization, and for the society within which the organization operates."[12]

He lists seven characteristics of powerful and transforming visions. First, they are appropriate for the organization and for the times. Second, they set standards of excellence and reflect high ideals. Third, they clarify purpose and direction. Fourth, they inspire enthusiasm and encourage commitment. Fifth, they are well articulated and easily understood. Sixth, they reflect the uniqueness of the organization. Finally, they are ambitious.[13]

General Gordon Sullivan and Michael Harper provide additional insight into the characteristics of a "shared vision." In their book Hope Is Not a Method, they discuss six traits of effective visions. First, an effective vision provides a

corporate sense of being. Second, it provides a sense of enduring purpose. Third, it incorporates a measure of success. Fourth, it transcends day-to-day issues. Fifth, it has legitimate meaning in both the present and the future. Finally, it empowers both leaders and followers to act.[14]

Finally, Professor John Kotter of Harvard University believes there are six characteristics of an effective vision. In his book, Leading Change, he states that a vision must be imaginable, desirable, feasible, focused, flexible, and communicable.[15]

Although each of these lists are different they do have some common elements that can be summarized. The best visions share many of the following characteristics:

1) Ambitious - Truly inspiring visions cause the organization and its people to stretch in order to achieve the future state. People will be required to be and do their best to create the vision of the future.

2) Appropriate - Powerful organizational visions are appropriate for the organization and the times. They allow the corporation, or group, to move forward while still retaining the values and traditions that contributed to all previous success. The best visions are the ones that fit the organization and the people who work to make it successful.

3) Articulate - Exceptional visions are vivid, yet easy to understand. They should be easy to communicate and easy to explain. Rarely, should a vision exceed one page of paper. Many of the best ones are no longer than one succicently written paragraph.

4) Desirable - An effective vision should appeal to the long term interests of the leaders, workers, customers, and stockholders who have a stake in the success of the organization. A motivating vision should be capable of inspiring everyone from the CEO to the janitor.

5) Focused - Visions should aim the efforts of the organization towards high ideals. The most successful visions seek to create a level of excellence such as "best company in our market" or "world leader in product technology." A vision that fails to incorporate a sense of excellence will fall short of one of its most important purposes.

6) Futuristic - This is a must for visions. They must be able to shift the organizational focus from the day to day routine to the future state. The time frame of the vision is not as important as the fact that it transcends day to day operations and directs the organization toward the future.

7) Idealistic - Vision statements that include the ideals and values of an organization create a powerful tool for reinforcing the best of the past and while striving to create a better future.

8) Measurable - The best visions include some descriptors that can be used to measure the arrival at the future state. A vision of achieving a large financial goal, or the reputation as the industry best can be a powerful and motivating force in an organizational vision.

9) Unique - Every organization is unique and each vision should reflect every organization's own special identity. A unique vision helps create pride that builds on the diversity of the entire work force.

A good strategic vision should include most of the characteristics listed above. Some will contain more and some will contain less, but a good strategic vision needs to contain these types of traits to be effective.

WHAT IS A VISION STATEMENT?

A vision statement is an articulation of a future state of the organization. It is not a slogan or a mission statement, but a description of what the organization will look like at some point down the road. Author Laurie Jones describes it as "the end result of what you will have done. It is a picture of how

the landscape will look after you've been through it. It is your ideal."[16] Another description is provided by James and Dana Robinson in their book Performance Consulting. They define a vision statement as something that "clarifies how you will operate in the future. It is the destination to which you are headed."[17]

The importance of a vision statement cannot be overemphasized. It is the articulation of organization's future so it must be thorough, but at the same time it must be concise. It should be unique and it should inspire members to contribute their best efforts towards the achievement of the vision. As you can see, a vision statement is a powerful tool that leaders must use to shape the future of their organization. A vision statement is not an easy thing to write, but it is worth the effort because of the value it can add to organization. A powerful vision statement has the potential to focus energy and generate enthusiasm that cannot be duplicated in any other way.

WHAT DOES A VISION STATEMENT LOOK LIKE?

Every vision statement is unique and the best ones reveal a great deal about the organizations they represent. Sullivan and Harper emphasize that "there are no hard-and-fast rules for what your organization's vision should look like."[18] They can be short and succinct or they can be long and voluminous. Ultimately, the vision must fit the organization and it must energize everyone from top to bottom. Now we will look at some

sample visions to develop a feel for the variety and uniqueness of organizational visions.

The Army vision developed during General Sullivan's tenure as Army Chief of Staff was an expressed in these words:

America's Army

Trained and Ready to Fight,
Serving the Nation at Home and Abroad,
A Strategic Force, Capable of Decisive Victory -
into the 21st Century.[19]

That vision evolved into the current Army vision which is similar, yet different in content:

> The World's best Army, a full spectrum force -- and Ready for Victory. A Total Force of quality soldiers and civilians:
>
> - A Values-based organization
> - An integral part of the Joint Team
> - Equipped with the most modern weapons and equipment the country can provide
> - Able to respond to our Nation's needs
> - Changing to meet challenges of today... tomorrow...and the 21st century.[20]

Both of these visions fit the Army, yet they reflect the current thinking at the time and the changing times that the Army has experienced and is currently experiencing.

Another example from another industry is one of the shortest yet most effective vision statements I read. The successful recovery of British Airways was sparked by this simple vision: "British Airways - The World's Favourite Airline."[21]
One corporate employee benefits department also has a short, succinct vision statement that says:

> Benefits are about people. It's not whether you have the forms filled in or whether the checks are written. It's whether individual people are cared for when they're sick, helped when they're in trouble.[22]

Finally, the vision of U.S. Space Command is stated in the following way:

> US Space Command -- dominating the space dimension of military operations to protect U.S. interests and investment. Integrating Space Forces into warfighting capabilities across the full spectrum of conflict.[23]

The purpose of this section is not to judge or evaluate the merits of any of the vision statements. Vision statements cannot be measured in this manner. The format and the wording of the vision statement is important. But, what is important is the impact that the vision and the vision statement have on the organization. Sullivan and Harper came to this conclusion about vision statements: "the critical test is not length or grammatical construction. The critical test is fit."[24] Strategic leaders need to concern themselves less with the developing the perfect vision and more with creating one that fits the organization and its people.

HOW DO STRATEGIC LEADERS DEVELOP AN ORGANIZATIONAL VISION?

Author Laurie Jones wrote that "all significant changes and inventions began with a vision first."[25] The question that strategic leaders would ask her is "where do visions begin?" Strategic leaders must be able to answer this question and they

must be able to develop an organizational vision or redefine an old one if they are to effectively fulfill their senior leadership responsibilities. Fortunately, there are a number of models for developing effective visions and lots of advice from people who have done it successfully or studied those who have. We will examine two of these approaches.

The first model for developing an organizational vision is provided by the work of Dr. Burt Nanus. His method for developing an organizational vision is a formal ten step process that looks like this:

1) Define the basic nature of your organization.
2) Define how your organization operates.
3) Conduct a vision audit.
4) Define the scope of the new vision.
5) Target the new vision and consider boundaries/limits.
6) Consider alternative futures.
7) Assess the significance and probabilities of future developments.
8) Build scenarios.
9) Draw tentative conclusions.
10) Choose the most promising vision.[26]

The Nanus Method is a comprehensive approach that can take one to two years to complete. It uses organizational knowledge to provide a solid foundation for the future vision. It achieves maximum involvement by bringing all major constituencies into the vision development process. This "bottom-up" approach is probably the greatest strength of this method. This system takes much longer to complete and complicates the vision development process, but it results in a more widely shared vision. This process allows organizations to survey a variety of future possibilities and critically weight the advantages and

disadvantages of each scenario. In the final analysis, it provides an organizational vision that fits the character of the organization, its people, and gives it a powerful destination to pursue.

The second model for developing an organizational vision is the one used by General Sullivan and Michael Harper in their book, Hope Is Not A Method. Their approach was used for a very large organization where it was extremely difficult to get input from all of the organization's constituencies. This method is described as the "top down" method.

1. Look back from the future and ask the following questions:
   a. What is your organization's purpose; what business are you in?
   b. What will your purpose be tomorrow?
   c. What will the characteristics of your strategic environment be?
   d. What will it take to win decisively in tomorrow's markets?
   e. What will the "after next" organization look like?
2. Look hard at the lessons of history
3. Try to interpret change that is taking place today.
4. Ensure that your assessment involves all the major systems of your organization.
5. Write the vision and get senior leadership ownership.[27]

The Sullivan-Harper Model proved very successful in developing a new vision for the U.S. Army during a period of great organizational turbulence. It took several years to achieve the final product. Much of the work was done by a study group of about two dozen people. As Sullivan and Harper point out "it had top-down sponsorship but was junior enough and broad enough to have a healthy overall perspective."[28] Most experts

criticize the "top-down" method because it lacks input from throughout the entire organization. This makes "buy-in" difficult and is the main reason that many organizational visions fail. Sullivan and Harper defend their method by stating that "...authorship is not important; what is important is buy-in, and that does begin with the leadership at the very top."[29]

There are many variations of the two approaches described here, but the "Bottom-Up Method" and the "Top-Down Method" represent both ends of the vision development spectrum. There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches. The size of the organization, the current state of the organization, time available, and many other factors will ultimately determine which approach should be used. The important thing to know is that the vision development process is not something to be taken lightly. It requires a large investment of energy and time to be done properly. However, it is an investment that organizations must make if they are to position themselves for future success.

HOW WILL I KNOW IF MY ORGANIZATION HAS THE RIGHT VISION?

Strategic leaders should not spend time debating or losing sleep over the question "is our vision the right vision?" In their book, Built to Last, authors James Collins and Jerry Porras stated, "It makes no sense to analyze whether an envisioned future is the right one."[30] The job of the strategic leader is to help create the future for his organization, not to predict it or perfect it. Instead of worrying about the right vision,

strategic leaders should ask themselves if the vision fits the organization. Collins and Porras suggest that senior leaders ask the following questions about their vision: "Does it get our juices flowing? Do we find it stimulating? Does it stimulate forward momentum? Does it get people going?"[31]

If you answer "Yes" to these questions, your vision probably fits your organization. And "fit" is all that is required, not perfection. My research indicates that there are no perfect visions. The only vision that matters is the one that works for the organization and its people. Sullivan and Harper point out that "a somewhat weak vision that is well articulated and reinforced is better than constantly changing gobbledygook emanating from the executive suite."[32] A vision that fits, that is articulated and shared throughout an organization, can become a powerful force that can literally pull the organization into the future.

HOW DO STRATEGIC LEADERS INCREASE THEIR VISIONARY SKILLS?

So far, we have learned about the importance of vision and the vital role that strategic leaders play in this critical process. Very few leaders doubt the importance of vision, but what they are unsure about is how to acquire it. The critical questions for many senior leaders are "How do I increase my vision?" How do I acquire the ability to envision the future?" and "What can I do to become a more visionary leader?"

Vision is not something that is issued to strategic leaders when they assume positions of great responsibility in large

organizations. Fortunately, vision, like many leadership skills can be developed and improved over time. Here are some actions strategic leaders can take to improve their vision:

1) Look at the past.
2) Describe what you want for your organization.
3) Tap into your experience and intuition.
4) Create a guiding coalition.
5) Tap into the experience of your organization.
6) Conduct site visits and tap into experience of other organizations.
7) Spend more time in the future.

Now, we will examine these seven strategies in greater depth and discover how they can help strategic leaders develop vision and increase their visionary leadership skills.

1. Look at the past. Kouzes and Posner believe that leaders should look into the past and think about it before looking too far into the future. Looking at the past allows leaders to learn about their organization's history, heritage, values, and ideals. This knowledge helps to broaden the leader's perspective and helps him discover the weaknesses of the past as well as the strengths. Also, this exercise provides leaders with the opportunity to reflect on the purpose and values of the organization.

General Gordon Sullivan emphasized the value of this process when he was trying to institute major changes in the U.S. Army. He believed "...that going back to our values, our essence, gave us the strength and direction we needed."[33] He went on to say "values give an organization a self-ordering quality, a kind of

organizational ballast, which provides direction and stability in periods of turmoil, stress, and change."[34]

2. Describe what you want for your organization. Another valuable method to increase vision is for the strategic leader to determine what he or she wants personally and for the organization. Kouzes and Posner recommend that leaders take time to list the things they want to accomplish in a certain job. Once the leader has developed such a list he should ask himself, "why do I want this?" Kouzes and Posner suggest that leaders should "keep on asking why until you run out of reasons."[35] They believe that this exercise helps leaders discover the few critical values that define the organization and help to shape its unique culture.

Kouzes and Posner propose some additional questions that strategic leaders can ask themselves as they attempt to clarify their vision:

a) How would I like to change the world for myself and my organization?

b) If I could invent the future, what future would I invent for myself and my organization?

c) What's the distinctive role or skill of my organization?

d) What does my ideal organization look like?

e) What's my personal agenda? What do I want to prove?[36]

3. Tap into your experience. Strategic leaders should spend time tapping into their experience. A lifetime of experience in many different circumstances and situations can be

one of the most valuable resources that strategic leaders have at their disposal. They must learn to rely on their experience and judgement to sort out the past, identify patterns, and link concepts that will help create desired conditions and future success. The concept of a leader's "gut feeling" or intuition is usually a choice guided by wisdom and experience.

4. Create a guiding coalition. John Kotter, author of Leading Change, advises visionary leaders to "create a guiding coalition."[37] Kotter argues that strategic leaders, despite popular opinion, cannot create and guide new visions on their own and neither can weak, low-credibility committees. The speed of today's market and technological changes require a new process of decision making. Kotter states that "only teams with the right composition and sufficient trust among members can be highly effective under these new circumstances."[38] He points out that a guiding coalition that "...operates as an effective team can process more information, more quickly. It can also speed the implementation of new approaches because powerful people are truly informed and committed to key decisions."[39]

The key to putting together an effective guiding coalition is finding the right membership. Kotter proposes four essential characteristics:

a) Position Power: Are enough key players on board, especially main line managers, so that those left out cannot easily block progress?

b) Expertise: Are the various points of view - in terms of discipline, work experience, nationality, etc. - relevant to the task at hand adequately represented so that informed, intelligent decisions will be made?

c) Credibility: Does the group have enough people with good reputations in the firm so that its pronouncements will be taken seriously by other employees?

d) Leadership: Does the group include enough proven leaders to be able to drive the change process?[40]

5. Tap into the experience of your organization. The next suggestion is to tap into the experience of your organization and brainstorm new visions with focus groups, team meetings, and the guiding coalition. These sessions, when properly conducted, can provide a valuable source of creative ideas and energy that is difficult to duplicate in any other way. Involving people early in the process helps to create a broader based vision and can prevent costly problems later on. Kotter points out that some organizations "...didn't get the vision exactly right and some employees figured this out or could have solved the problems had they been well informed."[41] When feedback is not solicited early on, the price for changes can become very high. This approach is unnecessary and can be prevented by seeking input often and from a wide variety of sources within the organization.

6. Conduct site visits and tap into the experience of other organizations. Another valuable way for leaders to expand their vision and increase their conceptual skill is to conduct site visits to other successful organizations. In their book, The Performance Imperative, authors Howard Risher and Charles Fay, state that "the most effective way to create a vision of what is possible is to send executives on site visits to other companies that are successfully implementing..." what you want to do.[42] In

order to avoid ethical dilemmas they suggest that visits should not be made to organizations in the same industry. This will allow the visitors to focus on principles and processes that make other enterprises successful instead of competitive issues.

Risher and Fay believe that site visits are important because they broaden perspectives and demonstrate what can be done. Finally, they offer the following suggestions for conducting an effective site visit:

a) Send executives in groups of three or four. Multiple sets of eyes will take in more.

b) Send each team in with specific learning objectives. The purpose of the trip should be clear.

c) Have the team write a report on its findings. The report should answer these questions: What do these companies do that makes them successful? What are the principles behind what they do? What can we take from this that will be useful for us?

d) At a meeting convened solely for this purpose, have each team report its findings to the rest of the executives. Follow with a discussion.

e) Communicate your findings to the rest of the organization.[43]

7. Spend more time in the future. Strategy scholars Gary Hamel and C.K. Prahalad observe that "less than three percent of senior management's energy is typically devoted to building a collective perspective on the future...."[44] Sullivan and Harper reinforced the importance of this concept by stating, "...the leader knows that some of the resources - time, energy, the best people - must be directed toward the future and that he or she must find a balance between today and tomorrow."[45]

Kouzes and Posner suggest that strategic leaders should spend nearly two-thirds of their time focused on the future and only one-third of their time with day to day operations.[46] This is a lot easier to talk about than to actually do. Former Army Chief of Staff General Sullivan wrestled with this dilemma and concluded "it was hard to focus on the future. To handle that tension, I had to find ways to act in today's world while at the same time focusing on the future."[47] Every leader must learn to handle the conflict between day to day operations and future planning in their own way.

Kouzes and Posner believe that leaders should develop their ability to envision the future at least three to five years ahead. Strategic leaders can learn a great deal about the future by staying current in their field or industry and attending futures conferences. Leaders who want to expand their visionary capabilities must read some of the classic futurist writers and examine articles in the futurist magazines. Kouzes and Posner advise visionary leaders to set up a working group or committee in their organization to study emerging issues and potential changes in core business areas. Committee members simply collect articles from a wide variety of sources and meet monthly or quarterly to discuss them and the impact that they may have on the organization. This simple approach is a powerful technique that strategic leaders can use to develop the ability to think long-term and spot important trends.

CONCLUSION:

The purpose of this paper was to examine the concept of vision and discuss how strategic leaders create organizational vision. Now that they have explored this process in some depth there are some conclusions that we can make about vision. First of all, vision is more than a buzzword that strategic leaders throw out at meetings. It is a vital process in defining the purpose and direction of successful organizations. Second, vision can serve as a powerful force that helps leaders direct, unify, and motivate an organization to successful achievement and outstanding performance. Third, there are certain common characteristics of effective visions that leaders can use to create a unique organizational vision. Fourth, there are definite steps and actions that strategic leaders can take to develop vision and improve their visionary skills. Fifth, leaders can use successful models and processes for developing organizational vision. Sixth, strategic leaders can learn how to orchestrate the process of developing visions and vision statements that fit their organization and offer the best chance of future success. Finally, strategic leaders don't create organizational vision as much as they orchestrate the process. The most effective visions come about as a result of a process that looks into the head and the heart of the organization. When done properly, this process reveals the vision of the organization and its people. The effective strategic leader must then communicate this vision, nurture it, and ensure that it

provides the inspiration that leads the organization into the future.

Strategic leaders must ensure that their organizations have vision and that the vision fits the organization. Vision is the strategic leader imperative, but vision is not enough. Once a leader has created an organizational vision it must be communicated, shared, planned, resourced and acted on - everyday. As former General Colin Powell says, "with vision only, you get no follow-through." [48] Yes, follow through is important, but follow through will only occur when the vision is a true reflection of the organization's values, culture, and people. This vision must be clearly articulated by the strategic leader and shared throughout the organization if it is to become the driving force that takes everyone into the future.

The title of this paper is "Vision - The Strategic Leader Imperative." Why this title? Is vision really that important? I believe it is and General Gordon Sullivan and Michael Harper agree. They remind all of us that "if you are a leader, your people expect you to create their future. They look into your eyes, and they expect to see strength and vision."[49] Strategic leaders must ensure that they provide the vision and leadership that their people and their organizations are looking for. Finally, Sullivan and Harper remind leaders "that today always competes with tomorrow."[50] The most effective strategic leaders will be the ones who can create visions that ensure that tomorrow always wins!

Word Count = 6,234

ENDNOTES

[1] Gordon R. Sullivan and Michael V. Harper, Hope Is Not A Method (New York: Times Business, 1996), 53.
[2] Ibid.
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[7] Kouzes and Posner, 23.
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