

organisation direction

creating awareness of the vision, values and strategy of an organisation

An inspiring vision and clear strategic direction help guide an organisation in day-to-day operations, particularly during times of change. When such direction is effectively communicated, employees are more likely to be engaged at work and empowered for aligned decision-making and action.

suggested actions

- **assess the internal and external environment** An organisation's direction is often guided by a range of internal and external factors. Before setting a direction for your organisation, scan the internal and external environment to gather necessary information. For example, you may use internal data from employee and customer surveys, finance reports, human resources system, and operational statistics. External data can be collected via industry reports, market research and networking.
- **consult your stakeholders** When developing or revising your organisation's direction, it is important to consult various stakeholder groups including employees, customers, board and volunteers. Consultation does not always have to happen in face-to-face meetings or focus groups, it can also be done via surveys, online forums and polls. Stakeholders who are involved at the development stage often have a better understanding of the organisation's direction and show greater commitment.
- **formulate the direction** Prioritise, integrate and analyse information from various sources using business frameworks (e.g. five forces, SWOT, stakeholder analysis, scenario analysis). Use outputs of these analyses to inform the direction of your organisation. Draft and refine the direction based on feedback of the management team or committee.
- **craft your message** Ensure that your organisation's vision and values are clearly articulated. Communicate your strategy in terms of specific objectives, for the organisation overall and for various departments, and desirable behaviours so that staff can relate to them. Tailor the message to suit your organisation's style and staff at different levels (avoid 'corporate speak'). Meaningful stories and experiences are more memorable than facts and figures. Greater staff buy-in is often achieved when well-regarded peers and leaders are involved in the communication process, either directly or indirectly via working closely with an internal communications team.
- **communicate via multiple channels** In order to engage your staff from different age groups and backgrounds, communicate your message using a mix of regular and unexpected channels such as online (e.g. mobile phone, social media, email), paper (e.g. poster, notice, payslip), and face-to-face (e.g. town hall meeting, team meeting). Choose ones that are most appropriate for your audience. Ensure your message is regularly and consistently communicated across different channels so that they become part of your organisation's language.
- **monitor and revise** Once the communication plan has been implemented, it is important to continue to monitor staff awareness and commitment to your organisation's direction. Refine your communication strategy and overall direction in response to staff feedback and changes in the internal and external environment.

case study

Vision Australia is a leading national provider of blindness and low vision services in Australia with a mission to “support people who are blind or have low vision to live the life they choose”. Vision Australia currently have over 800 staff, 33,000 clients and 4000 volunteers throughout Australia.

Due to the residual impacts of the GFC, the pending introduction of a new individualised funding model (NDIS) promoting client choice, and rapid technological advancements, Vision Australia faced significant challenges in their operation and lost focus on their mission and overall direction. Results of their Voice Engagement Survey revealed a low level of staff engagement and room for improvement in management practices across the board.

These survey results, together with the external changes, prompted Vision Australia to rethink their organisation direction and strategy. Work on creating their plan started with 28 senior staff spending a day exploring the challenges confronting Vision Australia. Before consulting with the board, multiple group sessions with more than 550 staff, volunteers, community partners and clients were held to better understand where they believed the organisation should be headed and what changes were required. Their input was carefully considered in the development of the strategic plan, and as the plan took shape, leaders went back to some of the forum participants, to check whether they’d got it right. Vision Australia’s values were similarly revised through consultation.

The resultant 8-page strategic plan states that client choice and control would become central to the organisation’s purpose, and is communicated in a clear, succinct manner to ensure that everyone including staff, clients and volunteers can understand it. The values are communicated in a way that establishes mutual obligations – staff are expected to behave in accordance with the values; and staff, volunteers and clients can also expect the same from the organisation. These values are now part of their everyday language, guiding daily decisions and giving staff permission to do their jobs.

To support leaders in implementing the new strategic plan, Vision Australia invested in a Business Transformation team, which was resourced primarily by existing staff within the organisation, and developed a Change Toolkit. They emphasised breaking down objectives into realistic deliverables to be achieved every quarter, and orderly implementation steps including design, testing, review and evaluation, and learning.

These changes were reflected in more favourable results in their repeat staff survey, with the biggest improvement in awareness of the organisation direction (up 33%). In open-ended responses, staff commented positively on the organisation’s direction: “strategy to achieve our vision”, and “a clear strategic approach with clear objectives and values”. Staff also reported strong personal alignment with the organisation’s vision and values (92% favourable). Ron Hooton, the CEO of Vision Australia, commented on the benefits of a focused approach: “by getting a few important things right we lifted our score in every category”. Significantly, these changes translated into a complete turnaround in financial position from deficit to surplus and reduced employee turnover within 2 years.

useful resources

- O’Brien, F. A. & Dyson, R. G. (2007). **Supporting Strategy: Frameworks, Methods and Models.**
- Decker, K., & Decker, B. (2015). **Communicating a corporate vision to your team.** Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2015/07/communicating-a-corporate-vision-to-your-team>
- Everse, G. (2011). **Eight ways to communicate your strategy more effectively.** Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2011/08/eight-ways-to-energize-your-te>
- Barrett, D. J. (2002). **Change communication: using strategic employee communication to facilitate major change.** Corporate Communications: An International Journal, Vol. 7 Iss: 4, pp.219 – 231.
- Kaplan, R. S., & Norton, D. P. (2000). **Having Trouble with Your Strategy? Then Map It.** Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2000/09/having-trouble-with-your-strategy-then-map-it>