



## Putting the Vision Back Into Your Project's Mission

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Abstract: How many of us start a project thinking that we understood the reason behind doing the project in the first place? I'd say the majority of us! And then, there's about half of us who never aligned the project's mission with the overall department or company vision resulting in poorly-made decisions and possibly a breakdown in team morale and confidence. Providing a project focus that supports a "larger purpose" is particularly important for fast-paced, adjusting agile projects.

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## Are Company Goals Really Necessary?

If you're like me who has participated in dozens of mission/vision statement planning meetings, they feel like an incredible waste of time. According to Ernst and Young, "With a clear goal in mind for the team as a whole, individual members are able to establish a clear line of sight between their specific day-to-day responsibilities and the broader, long-term objectives of the business." The Harvard Business School has some rather disheartening statistics that only 7 percent of employees fully understand their company's business strategies and what's expected of them in order to help achieve company goals. A survey by Bersin and Associates adds fuel to the fire with the results of their corporate survey stating that only 29 percent of organizations create employee goals that are even aligned to the organization. Finally, according to a 2011 McKinsey report, 52 percent of executives across the globe spend their time largely matching team and individual goals to the organization's strategic priorities. [1]

## Mission Versus Vision

Mission statements and vision statements should be the inspiring words that clearly and concisely convey the company's direction. By reinforcing these overall goals your organization and your customers paints a common future. A mission statement is certainly different than a vision statement.

A mission statement is usually an internal communications vehicle that defines the organization's purpose and key objectives. A mission may also include some form of metrics to measure if these objectives are being met. Its audience is usually the leadership team, stockholders, and staff. [2]

The mission concentrates on the present. A great mission should satisfy the following tests: [3]

- Easy to recite.

- Agreed upon by key constituents.
- Long-lasting to hopefully hold up even with changing technology and customer needs.
- Can give the customer and employees a sense of comfort.
- Motivator to employees.

Take a moment and write down what you think your department's mission is. (Hint, if you don't know what it is I'd say there's brewing trouble. If you aren't sure, your team probably can't recite your mission either.)

As an example, Wal-Mart's mission has been based on three basic beliefs for some time:

1. Respect for the individual.
2. Service to our customers.
3. Strive for excellence.

You may not agree that this mission is what Wal-Mart practices, but does this mission pass the test?

- Easy to recite? Yes.
- Agreed upon by key constituents? Sure. Who wouldn't disagree?
- Long-lasting? These company philosophies have been in existence since the company was founded in 1962.
- Gives a sense of comfort? Notice that making a profit isn't on the list? Apparently, customers like the store—they keep on going back.
- Motivator to employees? Years back I visited the Wal-Mart headquarters in Arkansas. Wow, what a motivated group!

A vision statement, on the other hand, takes what you created with the mission and identifies the *value* that you wish to associate to the market and to your customers. A vision statement focuses on the future. In many respects the vision indicates *what* you want and the mission summarizes *how* you want to do it.

## How Does a Project Charter Fit in?

A project charter is a document that should summarize *what* your project is set to accomplish and *why* you're being ask to do it. (You can use other documents to specify *how* you and your team will accomplish it.)

There can be a serious disconnect between what the staff is doing with what the executive team has stated in the organization's mission and vision statements.

As project teams have to make tough decisions during a project lifecycle, it helps to have a simple yet well-constructed project charter that the team buys into. A project charter should be very simple in scope outlining the direction that the project needs to take. It should be easy to read and be very short (two pages or five to six slides). In the Scrum planning phase, for example, the most important role a ScrumMaster can have is to plan. Whenever a project charter is not specifically aligned to the company's mission (and vision) can result in using erroneous decision criteria (like "force of will") to influence outcomes.

If, for example, your software development project is chartered to add ten new features in a short amount of time, what happens if there isn't enough time to properly validate it before release? I've been told on more than one occasion that, "it is more important to get a product to market before everyone else does. If there's quality problems we'll show how customer-centric we are by how fast we fix them."

Using your customers as an extension to your quality assurance department? No way.

And yet, what could be your overall organization's vision? "To deliver the best quality clinical analytical analysis to our customers." Yet, your project charter doesn't support the vision. Avoid this situation at all costs.

## **A Final Word**

Without a project charter that supports your company's mission and vision, you're adding unnecessary risk to keeping your team in line for a successful project outcome.

The times I've skipped preparing the project charter, I've always regretted it. With agile projects requiring collaboration, validation-based development, and frequent transparency, incorporating purpose should be another necessary ingredient for success. Finally, PMI has a clear statement regarding the use of project charter in support of the overall company mission. Simply put, you don't have a project unless your project has a project charter. [4]

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## Bio



Ken Whitaker of Leading Software Maniacs® has more than twenty-five years of software development and project management executive leadership and training experience in a variety of technology roles and industries. He has created productivity apps and led commercial software teams at Software Publishing (remember Harvard Graphics?), Data General, embedded systems software companies, and enterprise software suppliers. Ken is a PMP® and ScrumMaster and has authored several leadership books, is the editor of *Better Software* magazine and the creator of PM Chalkboard®, <http://www.pmchalkboard.com>—the fastest and easiest way to learn project management with eLearning courses and videos shorts. His newest venture is the creation of a suite of Spresso® productivity apps. In addition, he uses a variety of digital tools to create original woodcut fine art.