

Visions to Guide Performance: A Typology of Multiple Future Organizational Images

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ABSTRACT

Organizational performance is highly influenced by how employees envision the future. To date, many scholars have emphasized the importance of an overarching future vision that unites all stakeholders, while acknowledging the presence of divergent perspectives among members. This variety in perspectives may be further complicated in organizations undergoing great stress and where the leadership has not defined and promoted a future vision to guide the content of the images of its members. Little study has explored the various types

of future organizational images that exist or the nature of those images. We explore these concerns via a case study of an airline in the midst of a dramatic fight for survival. The findings both confirm the existence of multiple views for the company's future and delineate their general characteristics through a typology of imagery. We conclude with a language to use to differentiate those images for future research and offer practical implications for managing multiple future organizational images to mobilize energy and enhance performance in a more unified direction.

Introduction

The interpretation of strategic issues is affected by how employees envision the future (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). Visions can symbolically act as a powerful catalyst to guide organizational performance and influence individual action. Much has been written about the need to have a shared vision among members of an organization to achieve unity in spirit and a cohesive effort toward a common goal (Lippitt, 1998; Nanus, 1992). Yet, scholars suggest the presence of multiple organizational views due to the unrealistic expectation of achieving an integrated organization-wide

consensus (Martin, 1992). In addition, volatile conditions may create a climate of ambiguity that produces a divergence of perspectives that can diffuse synergetic performance. It is incumbent on leadership to understand the presence of multiple future organizational images but to do that requires an understanding of the potential for variation. The literature has presented the concept of future organizational images as desired or ideal images of the future (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Reger, Gustafson, DeMarie, & Mullane, 1994). But what if the presence of multiple future organizational images in-

cludes a variety of images held by members that are both positive and negative? And what if these images are influenced by personal translations of others' perspectives?

Previous research indicates that individuals typically possess multiple images of an organization (Gioia et al., 2000). Our research seeks to expand this premise by focusing on images associated with the future. In particular, we explore the types of future organizational images that members hold in an environment that lacks a clearly defined vision as expressed by leadership. Our study was guided by this overarching question: What are the types of future organizational images that members possess? We investigated this question in the context of a case study of a small, low-cost airline in the midst of dramatic change. As the company restructured and merged with another carrier, we sought to understand how employees viewed the future of their organization. The data permitted us to create a typology of those images and offer a language to be used when studying future organizational images. In addition, as we analyzed the findings, possible implications for managing those images also emerged that may guide management in their efforts to enhance productivity and performance.

Theoretical Framework

This section is designed to give the reader an overview of the literature in this area. In particular, we have focused on the following three areas that have greatly shaped the research in this article: (1) the importance of a shared vision, (2) the presence of multiple perspectives, and (3) future image terminology.

Importance of a Shared Vision

The concept of future images or visioning is treated frequently from a descriptive and practitioner perspective (Allen, 1995; Nanus, 1992; Wilson, 1992), yet has received less attention as the focus in systematic research. There is research that targets visionary leadership (Awamleh & Gardner, 1997), the importance of vision salience (Oswald, Mossholder, & Harris, 1994), antecedents of visioning skill and effects of visioning training (Thoms & Greenberger, 1995), the visioning process (Thoms & Govekar, 1997), and the content and context of visions (Larwood, Falbe, Kriger, & Miesing, 1995). According to Thoms and Govekar (1997), empirical evidence has yet to show benefits of positive future images to organizational performance. However, in spite of the lack of data confirming benefits, many organizations seek to create a shared vision in their efforts to build community or enhance competitiveness. Some of these visioning activities include future search (Weisbord & Janoff, 1995; Weisbord & 35 co-authors, 1992), search conferences (Emery & Purser, 1996), other large group interventions (Axelrod, 1992; Danne-miller & Jacobs, 1992), and learning organization practices (Senge, 1990), just to name a few.

The importance of a shared vision has been expressed in the merger literature (Isabella, 1993; Marks & Mirvis, 1997; McEntire & Bentley, 1996; Salk, 1995) as well as in the demands for strategic unity as organizations move forward in turbulent times (Ulrich & Wiersema, 1989). Gioia and Thomas (1996) conducted research that revealed the power of a desired future image as a means

for change. They studied strategic change in higher education and how members made sense of important issues related to change. The researchers found that a compelling future image was a catalyst for change, and "a plausible, attractive, even idealistic future image would seem to help organization members envision and prepare for the dynamic environment implied by strategic change" (Gioia & Thomas, 1996, p. 398). Beer (1987) described the need to transform internal perspectives and processes in order to meet the demands imposed by the external environment. He identified the importance of a comprehensive model of a future vision as a necessary condition to guide organizational transformations.

Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) portrayed the power of an overarching, symbolic vision. The vision of change offered by the university CEO served as the guide from which to gauge all actions. The CEO's effective use of this symbol was described this way: "a captivating vision is perhaps a key feature in the initiation of strategic change because it provides a symbolic foundation for stakeholders to develop an alternative interpretive scheme" (p. 446).

Collins and Porras (1997) described a visionary company as one that creates an environment that consistently supports and nourishes the company's core ideology and stimulates performance toward an envisioned future. With this internal compass, organizational members are guided in a unified direction, bound by common values and purpose and a shared future image. When all elements work together within this framework, Collins and Porras labeled such a visionary organization as being built to last.

The Presence of Multiple Perspectives

The concept of multiple future images for an organization is analogous to the concept of possible selves for the individual (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The possible selves of an individual include not only one's past self and present self but also perceptions of one's potential and future. This includes a variety of other possible selves: the ideal of what one would like to become, what one ever considered, what one will probably be, and what one is afraid of becoming. Individuals, through the construction of these possible selves, are able to affect their own development. These possible selves have power because they are both an incentive for future behavior and a tool for evaluating the current view of oneself. This research by Markus and Nurius sheds light on the complexity of individuals, but does not apply this complexity to the organizational unit.

Some identity scholars propose the presence of multiple organizational identities (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). Pratt and Foreman suggest the importance of understanding the complexity of multiple identities as well as the potential avenues, costs, and benefits of this variety. While acknowledging these multiple conceptualizations of the identity of the organization, these researchers make no reference to multiple conceptualizations about the future of the organization by its members. We suggest the need for research with this future organizational image focus. Pratt and Foreman also propose that organizational leaders manage the multiple organizational identities. Similarly, we propose the need to understand the management

of future conceptualizations of an organization. This task may be quite complex if the range in future images is varied as is the range of perspectives on the organization's identity, as suggested by Pratt and Foreman.

Culture research supports a multiplicity of perspectives due to the existence of multiple subcultures. Sackmann (1992) presents a complex view of organizational culture by revealing the simultaneous existence of both subculture differences as well as organization-wide views. The array of subcultures can be based on cognitive traits, visible differences, geography, as well as other factors (Phillips & Sackmann, 2002). Subcultures may be internally strong and unified but differ significantly with other parts of the organization yielding a sense of fragmentation and lack of alignment. Creating synergies requires a multiple cultures view with the skills to manage this mosaic of diversity in a way that builds on similarities and manages differences. Meyerson and Martin (1987) present three cultural paradigms in organizations: integration and homogeneity, differentiation and diversity, and ambiguity. Using the lens of the multiple perspectives ranging from organization-wide consensus, to subcultural consensus, to no consensus, as discussed by Joanne Martin (1992), a broader insight can be gained to enrich understanding. In environments of inconsistency and complexity, diverse perspectives can contribute to the presence of multiple organizational perspectives. Although organizational culture research acknowledges this variety, this research has not been applied to future organizational images.

Future Image Terminology

A language for organizational images is initiated in the organizational identity and image research. Organizational identity refers to insiders' perspectives of the essential character of the organization (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). In contrast, organizational images are pictures "about an object in the absence of frequent interaction with, a deep relation with, good knowledge and overview of, or close contact with the object" (Alverson, 1990, p. 377). Although the concept of organizational image has been used to refer to insiders' beliefs about outsiders' impressions (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991), the image concept has also been applied to the desired or ideal view of the future of the organization from an internal perspective (Gioia et al., 2000; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Reger et al., 1994). Presented as a positive image, the label "desired future image" (Gioia & Thomas, 1996) describes a "visionary perception the organization would like external other and internal members to have of the organization sometime in the future" (Gioia et al., 2000, p. 67). This desired future image has a strategic interpretation. Other researchers have labeled this positive future image as an ideal picture of a desirable future state (Reger et al., 1994).

Many scholars use the term "vision" to describe an energizing image of a more desirable future (Nanus, 1992), a positive, motivating cognitive image of the future (Thoms & Greenberger, 1995), and a picture of the future that defines what will be created (Senge, 1990). Visions are organizational anchors (Ancona, Goodman, Lawrence, & Tushman, 2001) that provide direction, captured in a variety of forms ranging from slogans

(Ulrich & Wiersema, 1989), to stories (Levin, 2000), to simple and practical single-sentence statements that are neither risky nor conservative descriptions of the future (Larwood et al., 1995). There is little agreement on definition or content (Larwood et al., 1995; Nathan, 1996).

According to Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994, p. 258), "Future research should consider the array of organizational images that may affect members' attachments to an organization." They suggest that future-based images shape members' behaviors and therefore warrant future investigation. According to Morgan (1997, p. 149), "The beliefs and ideas that organizations hold about...what they are trying to do...have a much greater tendency to realize themselves than is usually believed." Therefore, it behooves an organization to understand the future organizational images that members possess.

Given these theoretical frames, we felt that there was a gap in understanding the variety of future organizational images that might exist within an organization as well as a need to better label and define those images to enhance future research, discussion, and the management of those images. This study targets the perspectives of individual members about the future of their organization, but does not attempt to study the similarities or differences that exist relative to the variety of subcultures within that organization. A merger offered a useful setting for this investigation.

Methods

The Setting

Using an inductive and emergent process, this qualitative case study

provided an opportunity to uncover insiders' perceptions of future organizational images within the context of an organization experiencing a merger. The setting for this research was a young company, that we labeled Company A, that had been in existence for fewer than five years. Company A was a public company in the business of commercial air transportation, which offered low-fare, passenger air service. Company A was extremely profitable and growing until its accident. The crash not only resulted in the loss of all lives on board, but also led to extensive negative media coverage. The company's efforts to survive prompted a massive reduction in service and then a 15-week shutdown and furlough of employees. After scheduled service resumed, losses continued to accumulate in spite of efforts to attract customers back to the company. Just 14 months after the accident and with a continuing decline in profits, the company announced a merger. This holding company merger with the parent of another small airline was specifically targeted as the best vehicle for keeping the company alive and improving the company's reputation that had been damaged because of the intense and unrelenting negative media exposure since the accident. It was an opportunity to bring life back into the company and allow it to have a future.

Sampling and Data Analysis

A semi-structured interview process (Spradley, 1979) was employed to conduct 52 interviews with company employees. The study's focus on how members saw the future of their organization framed the interview guide. Examples of questions asked

include the following: (1) What do you picture as the future for Company A two years from now? (2) Is this what you expect for Company A's future? If not, how do you expect to see this organization two years from now? (3) Is this the ideal future for Company A? If not, if you were describing the ideal Company A, two years in the future, what would it look like? (4) Do you think others in the organization see the future of the organization as you see it? (5) Do you think others outside the organization see the future of the organization as you see it?

In the tradition of purposive sampling (Bernard, 1995), various functional groups in the organization—pilots, in-flight, maintenance, and reservations—were fairly equally represented. The largest group sampled was customer service because that category consisted of several subgroups: ticketing, gate, baggage, ramp, transfer, and operations employees. Managers in in-flight, reservations, customer service, as well as at the hub were included in the sample.

Data were transcribed and verified for accuracy with the person interviewed. With this confirmation, we then began to code and link the data to our research question. This permitted us to develop a classification system for the analysis and examination of emergent themes (Spradley, 1979). Member checks confirmed categorical development, and the data were continually compared and analyzed in accordance with grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The technique of constant comparison upon which grounded theory is founded permitted us to refine and confirm the stability of our patterns.

Clusters of data emerged during the coding process. Future image data initially grouped into five subcategories: members' expected future organizational images, members' ideal future organizational images, members' feared future organizational images, future organizational images of others inside the organization, and future organizational images of others outside the organization. The five subcategories were clustered under two main categories: (1) members' future organizational images and (2) what members believed were others' future organizational images. The main category of members' future organizational images included three subcategories: members' expected future organizational images, members' ideal future organizational images, and members' feared future organizational images. The second main category—what members believed were others' future organizational images—included two subcategories: others inside the organization and others outside the organization.

Findings

Our data analysis first confirmed that individual members did possess multiple future organizational images. These data emerged into two core categories: (a) the types of images that members perceived about the future of their organization, and (b) the types of images that members held about the future of the organization that they construed others thought. The labels of these categories—"perceived" and "construed"—reflect earlier language presented by Dutton et al. (1994), grounded in the prior work by Dutton and Dukerich (1991), using the concepts of *perceived orga-*

nizational identity to label that which a member believes is central, distinctive, and enduring about the organization and *construed external image* as what a member believes outsiders think about the organization. Perceived images reflect a member's own view whereas construed images reflect what a member believes others think.

Perceived Future Organizational Image Types

The data revealed three different types of future images that employees held about their organization. Members described their expectations for the future of the organization, their dreams and desires for the ideal future, and images that they feared for the future.

Expected Future Organizational Images

Interviewees were asked what they expected to see for their company two years from now. Expected future images were typically a positive projection from their current state with a preservation of the purpose and distinctive philosophy of the organization. Members predicted some value changes, but not a loss of the family philosophy that they described as integral to their organization.

Most employees responded with an optimistic description of controlled growth for the company—a bigger airline with more and newer planes, increased destinations, and more employees—resulting from the upcoming merger and rumored future mergers. Most expected profits to be modest compared to their early days, but growth was still expected by many to move the company to a

higher level—to be number one in the delivery of low-cost air transportation in the region or to become a moderate-size national carrier.

Members expected a preservation of the core purpose of the company. They mentioned some changes in features but none that would alter their niche in providing affordable air transportation. Some anticipated an erosion of their present friendly image to a stuffier, more conservative one in their efforts to appear more professional to the public. But they did not believe that this change would affect how employees act with each other. Some anticipated that these changes might even add poise and more polish to their product.

Although some were cautious about the future of the organization, most expressed feelings of hope and opportunity. People offered expectations that the company would be in a position to start giving back to the employees through increased pay and benefits and improved work rules. Growth would also provide new opportunities for individual advancement and security.

Members who had some difficulty discussing a future image were those whose jobs were uncertain. For those employees, the future was like a void, and this was not easy to manage. It appeared that members needed some picture that they could feel personally connected to in order to have direction and purpose in their lives.

Ideal Future Organizational Images

When interviewees described their ideal future image of Company A, they depicted it using three differing scenarios: (1) to be like they were prior to the accident; (2) to be number one, defeating their primary competitor

(whom we have labeled Company Z); and (3) to achieve the excellence of another low-cost carrier (whom we have labeled Company W).

To many, the ideal was to be like they had been in the past—keeping their name and logo, continuing their growth, and being incredibly successful. It was as if they had experienced the ideal and then it was abruptly taken away. Frequently, Company A members expressed the ideal future in competitive terms against their key rival, Company Z. They desperately wanted to be number one and beat Company Z who they viewed as the source of their difficulties. Others described their ideal future as being like Company W, another low-cost air carrier, which had achieved respect and excellence despite a difficult start. These images were not abstract dreams, but images that they could picture and understand. These vivid images disclosed the way they saw the world and how they hoped to see Company A in the future.

Feared Future Organizational Images

Employees also had images of their organization that could be described as feared future images. Although this was not directly asked for in any of the questions, comments about a feared future often emerged in the conversation. These comments related to either the survival of the company or the preservation of the essential attributes of it that were so important to the members.

Members worried about the ability of the organization to survive. With passenger loads down, members were concerned as to whether the company could continue to compete. Some compared this feeling to the reality they

had experienced at a previous employer who had gone out of business after once being one of the biggest airlines in the world. They knew that the future was in question and that it would not be easy for the company to stay alive.

Several members commented on their fear of losing the unique family philosophy of Company A that they had cherished. They feared losing the closeness and the friendly, family-oriented togetherness that they felt. These were important values to the members that had been fundamental to this organization.

Construed Future Organizational Image Types

Members' images of the future do not occur in isolation of their environment. We found that factors in the form of others both inside and outside the organization emerged as additional types of images that members held. These images also impacted the formation of their expected, ideal, and feared future organizational images. Inside the organization, the actions and perspectives of colleagues including the organization's leadership clearly impacted members' images of the future. Additionally, people outside of the organization, especially the media and the flying public, impacted members' future organizational images.

Others in the Organization: Employees

Interviewees were asked about their perceptions of what others in the organization think about the future of the organization. Members typically felt that their images of the future were consistent with others within the organization.

They explained that many of their conversations both at work and after work focused on the changes taking place in the company, the stock, and the future of the company. Most described other employees as being excited about the future and having a general positive outlook.

Many also indicated that what others in the organization thought about the future did affect their own thoughts. One person explained that if some employees thought the future was not going to be good, they might start looking for another job. If enough qualified people did this, it could have a damaging outcome for the company. Some interviewees explained that when fellow employees decided to leave the company, it increased their own concern about the future of the company and its ability to survive.

*Others in the Organization:
Leadership*

Members had no idea what the leadership was planning for the future of the organization. There appeared to be a lack of and need for this information. Members believed that it was important to understand the company's short-term and long-term goals. Without this information, they felt like they were working day-by-day with no clear future picture. For many, this caused great frustration.

Others Outside the Organization

Interviewees were also asked about their perceptions of what others outside the organization thought about the future of the company. Interviewees typically seemed more perplexed about what the public thought about the future of their company. A key part of the public was their customers. Maintaining

that customer support was viewed as critical to the future of the company.

Several members felt that the media had tarnished many outsiders' future images of Company A. For some, there was confusion as to why the media would work so hard at trying to destroy them. This was upsetting and perplexing and considered a unique obstacle for their company. Many talked about the damaging effects of recent negative publicity that continued to make them feel insecure about their future. Members felt that negative publicity increased passenger fears and had a negative effect on the company stock. According to many, the media had a tremendous impact on members' thoughts about the future.

While the dominant pattern indicated that outsider perspectives influenced members' images, there were a very small number of negative instances where members indicated that they were not going to let the negative publicity affect them.

Conclusions and Implications

This research confirms the significance of future organizational images as being "key to the sensemaking process" (Gioia & Thomas, 1996, p. 370). Likewise, the findings reveal added complexity and insight to the vision construct. A new level of intricacy is indicated with the presence of multiple types of future organizational images held by an individual—images both positive and negative—and the influence of others on the formation of these images. This added complexity underscores an even greater need than previously described in the literature to understand members' future organizational images and effective-

ly manage those images to enhance organizational performance.

The Presence and Characteristics of Multiple Future Organizational Images
Perceived and Construed Future Organizational Images

The multiple future organizational images held by a member fall into two categories: perceived future organizational images and construed future organizational images. The perceived future organizational images are a member's own views about the future of the organization. Construed future organizational images are what a member believes others think about the future of the organization. Members gauge their future images by what they have experienced as well as what others in the industry have accomplished.

The presence of multiple future organizational images is consistent with research on the concept of multiple possible selves for the individual (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The variety of possible selves for individuals can be applied to members' multiple views of the future of their organization. Therefore, we suggest the following proposition related to perceived future organizational images:

A new level of intricacy is indicated with the presence of multiple types of future organizational images held by an individual—images both positive and negative—and the influence of others on the formation of these images.

Proposition 1: Members of an organization can possess multiple perceived future organizational images: their expected images of the future, their ideal images of the future, and their feared images of the future.

Our data suggests that the perceived ideal and expected future images are typically more closely associated with a positive future. This is consistent with the literature, which

highlights the desired aspects of the vision construct. But, as revealed in this study, future images can also be negative images. The multiplicity and variety of perceived future organizational images produces a complex environment of future images due to the potential for differentiation not only within an individual but also among individuals within the organization.

In addition, we suggest that the variety of types of future organizational images that a member holds can also include construed future organizational images. Thus, we suggest the following proposition:

Proposition 2: Members of an organization can possess multiple construed future organizational images: their images of what they believe others inside the organization see as the future of the

organization, their images of what they believe leadership sees as the future of the organization, and their images of what they believe others outside the organization see as the future of the organization.

These construed images are personal interpretations of what a member believes individuals of the organization, which we will refer to as "insiders," as well as individuals who are not members of the organization, who we will refer to as "outsiders," think about the future of the organization. Members of an organization often share views about the future of their organization. And in many organizations, a key insider—the leader—actively shares the leader's view for the future of the organization with all in the organization. Members also interact with and get feedback on perceptions of outsiders in the form of both individuals and groups. From these experiences, members acquire perceptions of what they believe outsiders view as the future of their organization.

The Influence of Vision Types on Each Other

Additionally, the construed images that members had of what others inside and outside the organization thought about the future of the organization influenced members' own perceptions of the future. It mattered what others thought because without consistent positive expectations, members' own pictures were dampened. Therefore, we suggest the following proposition that indicates a relationship between perceived and construed future organizational images:

Proposition 3: A member's construed future organizational im-

ages can influence that member's perceived future organizational images.

Within an organization, coworkers' attitudes can influence a member's perspective. When other employees that members know and value have negative views about the future of the organization, those negative views can impact members' own views about the future.

One critical insider vision for the future that can influence members' perceptions is the future image expressed by the leader of the organization. The leader often actively seeks to influence members' future images by sharing the leader's view, which is often presented as a company vision. It is this one future image that members seek to know and understand in order to assess whether the company's future direction is one that they share. Because the future image of the leader tends to be the future direction for the organization, the leader's expressed future image can powerfully influence members' own expected, ideal, or feared images. In this case study, members believed that the leader had the obligation to share the leader future image with all in the organization, but that image was missing. Lacking a clear understanding of the leader's perspective created a climate that precipitated the presence of multiple inconsistent future images and thus a lack of clarity about future direction.

Finally, outsiders clearly can influence a member's future images. What others outside of the organization think about one's organization and its future can influence a member's perceptions. There are critical outsiders such as customers who greatly

impact members' views. And in this study, others, such as the media who are in the business of disseminating information, had a powerful influence on members' perceptions about the future.

Characteristics of Future Organizational Images

We found that certain characteristics were common to virtually all images regardless of their classification. Therefore, we suggest the following proposition:

Proposition #4: Most members tend to think in terms of future organizational images that are experientially meaningful and simplistic.

Both perceived and construed future images had two traits that permitted members to visualize the future: (1) they were a reflection of the individual's experience or what others in the industry had accomplished and (2) they were simply stated. For most, members' future images did not constitute thinking outside the box; future images were typically neither complex, nor highly creative or imaginative. Truly original scenarios may often be absent because individuals typically associate with ideas that they consider to be believable. Believability is linked to their frame of reference which, in turn, is based on their past knowledge or experience. Additionally, people can easily grasp and comprehend images that are presented in a simple fashion. The simplicity of the vision statement, in terms of its brevity and crispness, facilitates easy communication. The trait of simplicity is consistent with the research of Larwood et al. (1995) who determined that simplicity, characterized by being single-sen-

tence in length, and practicality are attributes of executive visions. In this case study, we found that future organizational images, in particular ideal images, were often *benchmarked images* defining performance goals expressed like a headline—to be number one in the industry, to repeat or surpass past success, to have similar achievements as another company, or to beat a competitor.

We surmise, in tandem with Larwood et al. (1995), that organizational members typically do not perceive the ideal or the expected future images as being acceptable visions. Ideal images are often viewed as too grandiose and consequently not credible. Meanwhile, expected future images are not always seen as motivating because they may not offer a sufficient stretch in employee behavior. Therefore, we believe that creating a shared vision requires formulating an image that is experientially meaningful to members, simple to grasp, and that constitutes a believable yet motivating goal lying somewhere between the expected and the ideal.

Implications for Leadership

The likelihood of a shared vision is enhanced when leadership plays a strong role in defining and communicating a clear future organizational image. That image is best created through a process where all members participate. This study suggests a more complex process for developing a shared vision than we have previously seen in the literature. The process requires first understanding the range of future images that members possess and then having all members take part in a process to determine the future organizational image that

members choose to share. This future image becomes the vision for the organization.

It is the responsibility of the leader to take a key role in this vision creation process so that the chosen image becomes a reflection of the leader's perspective filtered through an understanding of the perspectives of all members. This requires a fine line between directing and managing the selection of the vision. Although it is the leader who typically has the broadest perspective, member participation must be integral to the vision creation process.

We conclude that the chosen vision must be one that is not only experientially meaningful and simplistic but also measurable. It is essential that the vision not be an abstract goal. Whether the vision focuses on, for example, achieving increased revenue, a higher ranking, increased profit margin, or increased growth, the chosen vision must be a measurable target that everyone understands. And it is the responsibility of the leader to continuously communicate progress in accomplishing it. Vague images that lack clear definition do not constitute effective visions. Visions must be able to be operationalized; desired results cannot be fuzzy. Providing clear criterion, the vision serves as the future image that people have defined as their success. If the vision cannot be measured, members will not have a barometer to gauge whether or not they have achieved that success.

Leading the effort to create a shared vision is only the beginning of the process. Then, leadership must take on the role of promoting that vision to all both internally and externally so that the strength of the vision can influence both members' images

as well as outsiders' images of the organization that have the potential for impacting members' perceptions. Leadership must understand this complex process of image management externally as well as vision management internally. The careful management of these images may be the key to driving performance in a preferred direction.

Implications for the Human Performance Technology (HPT) Professional

Future Images and Performance

In high-performing organizations, a shared vision defines the prime goal for all in the organization. That vision guides day-to-day activities: members engage in tasks and are evaluated based on whether or not those tasks either directly or indirectly support the organization in achieving that vision. By performing vision-directed tasks, individual performance is goal directed and therefore contributes to organizational performance. Members consciously participate in activities that make the vision become a reality. Without a defined direction that most members understand and support, individual performance may not contribute to organizational success. When members pursue their own future images, there is greater potential for incompatible goals. Alderson and Kakabadse (1993) drew upon research conducted at Cranfield School of Management to conclude that there are numerous negative effects of "a split vision" that can lead to poor performance. Some of these include: poorly defined and communicated objectives, little organizational pride, poor response to new initiatives, poor cross functional collaboration,

and low job satisfaction. Even high performance behavior not directed at the right tasks may not lead to improved organizational performance. High performing organizations have members who do those behaviors that contribute to the success of the organization in achieving its goals. When most members share a common view of the future and choose to work for it, performance becomes goal-directed toward a singular target.

Role of HPT Professionals

With a focus on organizational performance that contributes to business goals, HPT professionals have a keen interest in having a clearly defined vision that is shared by the members of the organization. With this target, they are able to design, develop, deliver, and evaluate performance improvement interventions that contribute

to moving the organization toward achieving the vision. With a systematic approach for analyzing and eliminating performance problems, the HPT professional can take the lead in positioning the organization for success. By guiding the organization to be vision driven, the HPT professional takes on a strategic function that requires an organization wide, systemic perspective.

The HPT professional has a key role in looking at the organization sys-

tem wide to determine if all aspects of it support the accomplishment of the chosen vision. The performance improvement practitioner must assess the organization in its current state to determine what changes are needed to accomplish specified end results. Root causes are identified and problems are eliminated so that the organization is more vision positioned. The structure of the organization, the tasks of its members, and all organizational

practices must be aligned to support the vision. HPT professionals must ensure that systems, such as performance management systems, are designed to support the vision and members are positively reinforced and rewarded for doing their part to achieve it.

In order to build a performance-based workforce with responsibilities linked to business goals, a focus on competencies is

required. Understanding the desired performance requirements and the current performance capabilities, the HPT professional diagnoses what changes and interventions are needed to close the gap so that members have the competencies and the systems needed to perform at a level required to achieve the vision. This process is akin to the diagnostic analysis used to identify interventions designed to enhance organizational performance (Hannum & Hansen,

The vision serves as the future image that people have defined as their success. If the vision cannot be measured, members will not have a barometer to gauge whether or not they have achieved that success.

1989; Robinson & Robinson, 1998). By understanding the activities that fit into an organizational change plan that enhances vision-directed performance, the HPT professional can guide the organization as a whole to more effectively use time and prioritize work.

After putting systems and processes in place, the HPT professional measures performance to evaluate progress toward achieving the vision. Organizational goals that align to the vision require monitoring and attention. With a data driven perspective, measurement can be strategic and actions can be quantified in their efforts to promote the vision. There is value in the process because outcomes are linked to the stated vision that all seek. The vision provides the measurable target for all in the organization. Members must be informed on organization wide progress toward reaching the vision so that momentum and energy can be sustained. Interventions must be evaluated relative to both performance improvement and vision-directed results. The work of the performance technologist is both business driven and value added as actual performance is linked to performance goals that are tied to the vision.

With the vision as an organizational tool and guide for performance, members will have a means to gauge their efforts. Promoting performance that is aligned to the vision encourages meaningful action toward organizational goals. The vision must be a real target that is nourished by constant attention and focus. With a clear understanding of what constitutes business success, the HPT professional, with a systems perspective and a systematic focus,

is better able to diagnose and solve performance problems and improve organizational performance.

Implications for Future Research

To facilitate future organizational identity and image research, we suggest an extension of the labels and definitions begun by Dutton et al. (1994). This research suggests an expansion in the organizational identity and image language (i.e. perceived organizational identity and construed external image) to include future organizational images. The current future image language refers to desired or ideal future images. Instead, we expand the language by suggesting the following definitions presented in a format that is consistent with Dutton et al. (1994).

Perceived future organizational images are the expected, ideal, and/or feared images that a member has of the future of the organization.

A *perceived expected future organizational image* is what a member expects as the future of the organization.

A *perceived ideal future organizational image* is what a member desires as the ideal future of the organization.

A *perceived feared future organizational image* is what a member fears will be the future of the organization.

Members also have perceptions of what others think about the future of their organization. Thus, we suggest the following additions to the language of organizational identity and image.

Construed future organizational images are the multiple future images that a member has of what

others inside and outside the organization think will be the future of the organization.

A *construed internal future organizational image* is what a member believes others in the organization think will be the future of the organization.

A *construed external future organizational image* is what a member believes others outside the organization think will be the future of the organization.

Therefore, members of an organization can possess expected future images of the organization (perceived expected future organizational images), ideal future images of the organization (perceived ideal future organizational images), feared future images of the organization (perceived feared future organizational images), images of what others in the organization see as the future of the organization, including a key insider—the leader (construed internal future organizational images), and images of what others outside the organization see as the future of the organization (construed external future organizational images).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand the variety of future

organizational images that members held. While in the absence of a leader vision and in the midst of significant change, members of this organization possessed fragmented, multiple future organizational images. This paper contributes to the literature by labeling a typology of future organizational images and reveals the potential for a negative perspective in future images. It also provides a language to be used in future studies in

order to build a vocabulary of images that contributes to organizational identity and image research.

We remind the reader that this is an exploratory study. Based on our emergent theory and the applied value of our implications to practitioners and researchers, we see the need for more study in this area. Our theoretical assumptions might be studied in other environments such as other industries and under different environmental

and organizational conditions. For example, would a mature company be different from a start-up company? If the conditions were less catastrophic or if the organization was not in a survival mode would the findings look different? And would the theoretical outcome have emerged differently had the leader communicated a clear, future organizational image to guide

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perceptions and performance? As a final note, further research might investigate the relationship between the types and content of future organizational images and the various subcultures within the organization.

Developing a shared vision is a component of many strategic planning activities. The development of a shared vision is often viewed as vital to channeling energy toward a unified goal. A vision can be a catalyst for understanding as well as an inspiration for action. In any organization and even more so at times of change such as mergers and leadership change, the presence of multiple future organizational images may be common, contributing to an environment of confusion and a lack of clear direction. HPT professionals must understand the potential for multiple future organizational images and ensure that the organization has identified a future image that most members share. In their effort to enhance performance, the HPT professional must diagnose the present state and create systems to achieve the desired future state. This is an inside and outside process because vision management requires not only understanding members' perspectives, but also understanding outsiders' perspectives which influence members' views. With a systemic perspective, the HPT professional can take the lead in creating a performance-focused, vision-directed organization. Understanding the variety of future organizational images within an organization is the first step in producing outcomes that generate business success.

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