

## **Clarity on Vision & Values - the first step in the Journey of Organizational Excellence**

J.M. Sampath

Managing Director – Arpitha Associates Pvt Ltd, India

Excellence is the ability to enable right things to happen at the right time at the right place and at the right level. Many a time this becomes difficult because of a variety of reasons. It also becomes difficult because of lack of clarity on the vision, values and the context. In business context, for any organization or individual to be excelling in whatever they do they need to work on finding meaningful response to at least the following four questions:

1. Where one wants to go?
2. How one wants to go?
3. Why one wants to go to where one wants to go?
4. What one wants to do?

If you look at these questions deeply you will find each of the question gives birth to the most important component of organizational existence and its direction. Let us see what is the clarity one would get while attempting to respond to the above questions.

When one attempts to find the answer to the question where one wants to go? The response would give clarity on the goal or vision which is the end objective of the organization or the individual.

The response to next question will give an insight on the kind of values that would guide the actions of the individual and the organization which would enable them to move in the set direction. This would determine the means of achieving the end.

The response to the third question - why one wants to go? Where one wants to go? Will give deeper understanding on the goal and the appropriate means to be adopted to achieve the goal. The lack of clarity at this level definitely leads to a lot of value conflicts as one is not clear on why the organization or the individual wants to achieve what they have set to achieve.

For instance, if there are two individuals who have set a very materialistic goal of wanting to earn a million dollar in a period of one year and they set out working on accomplishing their objective. They are also clear on their values, that are the way they would accomplish the set objective. But somewhere both of them have not spent enough time on consciously stating why they want to earn a million. In such a situation, what is bound to happen is, on the day both of them accomplish their goal of earning a million dollar, there is going to be confusion with respect to how this money is going to be used. In all possibility, there is going to be a lot of indecisiveness or wrong decisions taken. Lack of clarity on the purpose is bound to lead to distractions and thus result in taking decisions which may not be in line with the long term vision of the organization or individual.

The fourth question - What one wants to do - will give an insight into understanding the context and being context sensitive. But one can be sensitive to a given context only when one has clarity on the responses to the above three questions.

The four key words that emerge in the process of responding to these questions are - Vision, Values, Clarity and Context. In personal or organizational growth each of these words are powerfully interconnected with each other and an imbalance in them leads to certain consequences. The figure-1 below gives an insight into the various combinations possible.

From the above figure one can see that there are four distinctive combinations that emerge. Each of these combinations has their own profile. It would be worthwhile to look at each of these combinations and understand what are the predominant qualities of any one of them.

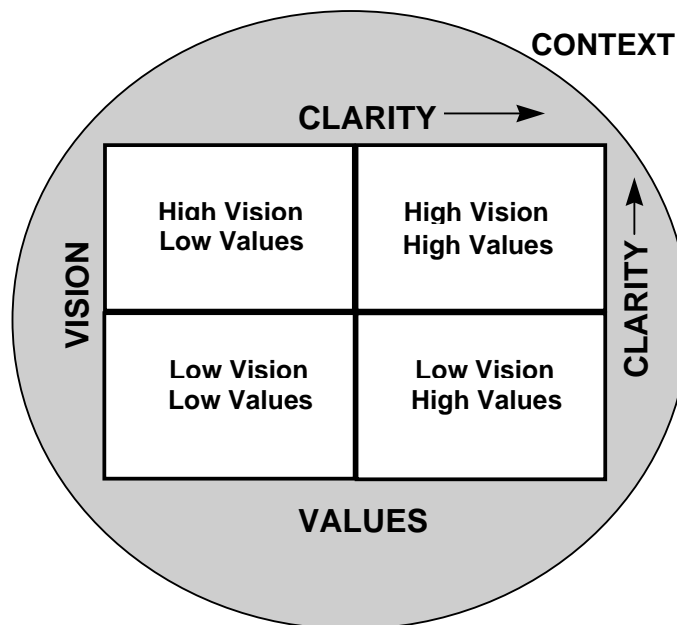


Figure 1 : Vision - Value - Clarity

### **LOW VISION - LOW VALUES**

The organizations or individuals while in this combination exhibit certain distinctive qualities which can be easily identified. Some of these qualities are:

These are organizations or individuals who are flexible out of ignorance than out of awareness. They have no strong convictions or values and often they live by the principle "While in Rome be a Roman". This is also popularly referred to as the herd mentality. They are also very short sighted and have no clear principles laid down on how to lead the organization or one's own life. Eventually they become good followers of already established paths and find it difficult to venture out creating new paths. These organizations and individuals can also be easily influenced by the majority. They take very little initiative in exploring anything new and are very low risk takers. They would want absolute certainty on anything they do and would look for precedence before making a decision. These organizations and individuals are reactive in the sense they find a solution only after the problem turns into a crisis. They are often are governed by the options chosen by others and hardly use their own intellectual capability to look at a new option. They neither conscious of the task on hand or the people behind the task. There is a kind of standardization that exists in such organizations which makes it numb to the context.

A great number of organizations and individuals fall into this category and they exist more like a cog in the wheel.

### **HIGH VALUE - LOW VISION**

These are organizations or individuals who are quite rigid on the way they deal with their business or their life and many a time find themselves out of context. They also end up imposing their ways on others. They strongly believe that their way of life is the way of life and hence every sensible organization or individual should follow the same. There is very little freedom experienced in such organizations and this environment limits the creative processes in an organizational context. These organizations and individuals quite often are form centered than principle centered meaning they are caught up with the ways of doing things than the purpose of doing things. They start many process with the right intention but over a period of time the process becomes a ritual. The following story illustrates this process quite well: *"Each time the Guru sat for worship with his disciples; the ashram cat would come and distract them. So he ordered them to tie her when the ashram was at prayer. After the Guru died, the cat continued to be tied at worship time. And when the cat expired, another cat was brought into the ashram to make sure that the Guru's orders were observed faithfully at worship time"*.

*Centuries passed, and learned treatises were written by the Guru's scholarly disciples on the ritualistic significance of tying up a cat while worship is performed.*

One can see these organizations or individuals highly egoistic and very traditional in their approach to any issue on hand. These organizations and individuals project a kind of arrogance out of being right. The major issue is success blinds these organizations and individuals and they get frozen with the way they succeeded than paying attention to the context, this doesn't allow change to occur easily. They are often reactive and wake up only when the problem becomes serious. These organizations and individuals are driven externally in the sense that only when the context reacts vehemently they think of change. In the process they end up paying a heavy price. These organizations and individuals restrict themselves with few alternatives to deal with any situation. They are very task focused and hardly find any time for exploration and meaningful interaction. In the sense they get caught with ways of doing the job. They also find it extremely difficult to deal with any kind of ambiguity and feel comfortable solving problems in their own old ways.

These organizations and individuals hold very strong convictions which many a time goes to the extent of sacrificing the very purpose to retain the values. These organizations and individuals get caught with the ways that helped them succeed and find it difficult to come out of that frame in which process they turn context insensitive. Thus over a period of time they become extinct.

### **LOW VALUE - HIGH VISION**

These are organizations and individuals who are rigid with their purpose and in the process care least about the process. They are insensitive to any context and are highly self-centered. They have no standards or values by which their actions are governed. They strongly believe that it is always the fittest who survives. In the process they degenerate the larger system. They also constantly live under threat as many of their means are not aligned with the social norms. These individuals and organizations are more power driven than principle driven. They also are master game players. They are least bothered about ambiguities and believe that they can deal with any problem as they slow up without much of a difficulty. They are so much driven by the end goal that they forget the long term consequences of their immediate actions. They often live in the future.

These are organizations and individuals who strongly believe that "end justifies means". They sacrifice long term gains for short term rewards. They are very shortsighted and the life of such organizations is not too long.

### **HIGH VALUE - HIGH VISION**

These are organizations and individuals which are flexible but out of awareness. They are constantly sensing what is happening within and outside and keep themselves aligned to the context. They are very open and sensitive to each other and the context. They are more principle driven than form driven and hence have least difficulty in changing the ways they do things as long as it doesn't affect the underlined principles. These organizations and individuals constantly keep exploring possibilities and learn from everything they do. They are very introspective and self focused. They constantly look at higher order purposes and eventually end up setting new trends which others follow. They are very proactive and far sighted. They are highly context sensitive and progressive in their way of seeing things. These organizations and individuals are driven internally with a strong desire to add value. They become their own critique in the journey towards excellence. Every ambiguity is received by these organizations and individuals as an opportunity for a break-through. They have a number of options in finding solution to any problem. They also have least boundaries which restrict them in reaching the best possible solution.

These individuals and organizations strongly believe that change is a way of life. They continuously keep moving towards the never ending destiny of excellence. They compete with themselves in creating higher standards. They become the models from whom the larger system benefits. They operate on a win mode like the farmer in the story given below.

*"A farmer, whose corn always took the first prize at the State Fair, had the habit of sharing his best corn seeds with all the farmers in the neighborhood. When asked why, he said, "It is really a matter of self interest. The wind picks up the pollen and carries it from field to field, so if my neighbors grow inferior corn, the cross pollination brings down the quality of my own corn. So I am concerned they plant only the very best."*

The key elements of each of these categories or organization and people can be summarized in the following manner.

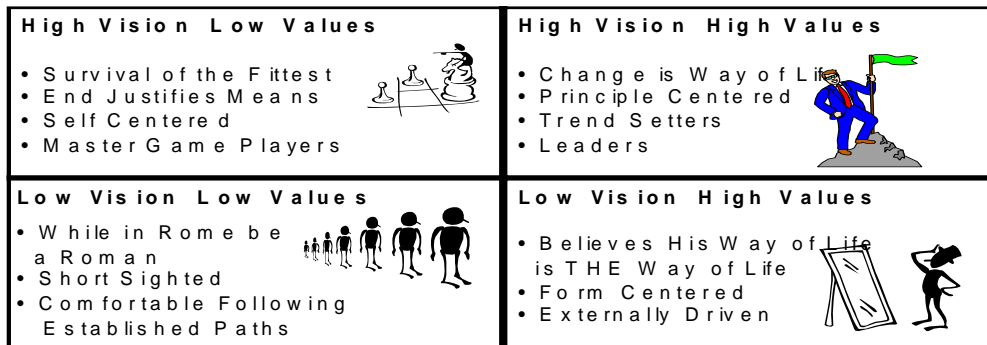


FIGURE 2

If we really see the four categories the Low Vision [Error! Not a valid link.](#) Clarity-Ignorance - High Values and High Vision

- Low Values are states of illusion - meaning though they exist in the long run they are bound to vanish. This is due to the fact that both ends and means are equally important; focus on one of them alone will not take the organization or the individual a long way.

If one is ignorant of one's existence in a particular category more often than in the others the eventual result would be that one would end up in Low Vision - Low Values. On the contrary if one is aware of one's own self and the consequences of being in a particular category it is possible with this awareness to move into High Vision - High values in the long run. However the current reality is that one finds among the numerous interactions that take place in an organization, could fall into all the four categories. As stated earlier, it is important to find out where the organizations find themselves often and consciously work towards moving into where they would like to see themselves.

It is also interesting to note that quite often in an organization most of the conflicts arise between the individuals who belong to Low Vision - High Values and High Vision - Low Values. This conflict if not handled well, it is likely to lead the conflicting groups to Low Vision - Low Values over a period of time. The groups move into Low Vision Low Values primarily because they get tired of fighting for their cause and there

comes a day when they give up. On the contrary if the conflicts are resolved there is a greater possibility of the groups moving into High Vision - High Values, thereby taking the organization into High Vision - High Values which is where excellence pervades the entire organization and the organization

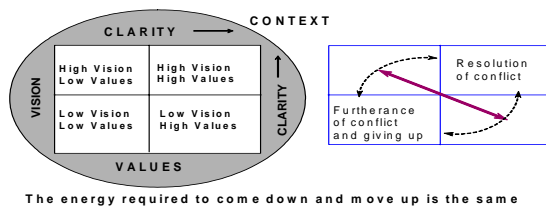


Figure 4

becomes a model for the rest of the world to follow.

The movement from any category to High Vision - High Values will be lasting if the change is out of realization than sheer knowledge. The change has to happen at the cause level than at the effect level. As Robert Pirsig in his book "Zen an the art of motorcycle maintenance" states the need for change to occur at the cause level. "To tear down a factory or to revolt against a system, is to attack effects rather than causes and as

long as the attack is up on the effects only, no change is possible... and if a factory is torn down but if the rationality which produced it is left standing, then that rationality which produced it is left standing, then that rationality will produce another factory. If a revolution destroys a systematic government, but the systematic patterns of thought that produced that government is left intact, then those patterns will repeat themselves in the succeeding government". Thus it becomes essential to deal with the factors that lead to value conflicts than the effect".

All that has been discussed above is not something new that one did not know earlier. But what is more important is inspite of knowing why one is not able to be what one knows. There is a visible gap between knowing and being and if an individual or an organization has to get into the High Vision - High Values - High Clarity - High Context Sensitivity then the organization and the individual will have to work on integrating the knowing and being.

If you look at what really creates the gap between knowing and being it is the lack of clarity on one's own values. This gap can be bridged only through willful personal growth. Any process aiming at organizational development will necessarily have to work at the individual level first and build from there to integrate the organization.

### **Conclusion:**

While the reality is that each one find oneself in different categories at any given point of time the most important challenge is how to consciously move towards High Vision - High Values. While the arrogance of often succeeding and the fear of continuously failing stagnates the organization or the individual wherever they are, the clarity on one's own values and the purpose of their existence as individuals and organizations facilitates moving in the right direction. While the journey is apparently tough but if one takes one step at a time and be mindful of each step one takes then there is a lot more joy as one travels through. I would like to conclude with a poem I wrote when I was confused and felt was in at cross roads not knowing which direction to take:

*There is a beginning and end  
In every step I take.  
There is a continuous movement in all my steps.  
The beginning and ends are  
A part of larger beginning and end.  
I have just started,  
I am sure one day I will reach.*