

By constantly practicing these skills of reflection and inquiry, designers improve their practice and better understand and interpret the intentions and goals of their clients.

SHARED VISION

Building a shared vision means providing a common focus and impetus for the accumulation of new knowledge. Senge explains, “Shared vision is vital for the learning organization because it provides the focus and energy for learning. While adaptive learning is possible without vision, generative learning occurs only when people are striving to accomplish something that matters deeply to them. In fact, the whole idea of generative learning—‘expanding your ability to create’—will seem abstract and meaningless *until* people become excited about some vision of what they want to accomplish. . . . A shared vision is a vision that many people are truly committed to, because it reflects their own personal vision.”²

This notion of shared vision applies to projects, teams, firms, and professions. For teams, shared vision creates alignment and motivates team members to exceed expectations. (It also helps get people to *just stick around*—which is important nowadays, when attraction and retention are hot issues.) An employer, a team leader, or a client can create shared vision by making the time to develop this mutually held possibility with integrity and convincing his or her colleagues to buy in. Designers who approach their projects with the goal of first establishing shared vision find that it engenders commitment and creates alignment, facilitates decision making, and seems to bring out everyone’s best thinking and creativity. Developing a shared vision also provides the opportunity for the client to expand upon ideas and ambitions for the project and see the links between decisions and their outcomes.

So how is shared vision established? Some firms hold “vision” sessions with their clients and invite as broad a cross section of representation as can be persuaded to participate. They begin by bringing the client’s goals to the surface—not only for the project, but for themselves or their organization. They then get the group to imagine what needs to happen or what activities should occur for those goals to be realized. Then they discuss what qualities or

attributes of the environment would support those activities. A part of this session is also to have everyone either determine or articulate (in the case of business) what their corporate culture or brand is about, and what constraints or parameters must be respected. This understanding provides another level of context for the project.

Sessions like these also go a long way toward engaging the participants in the process and getting them to support the outcome—they now understand and agree with the context in which decisions or recommendations are made. Also, they more thoroughly understand what contribution the design firm made to ensuring a successful and relevant outcome.

Developing shared vision is particularly challenging in geographically dispersed businesses. One approach used by several of the “giants of the industry” gathers the senior management together on a regular basis to exchange successes and failures and otherwise reinforce the values and goals of the organization. Here, shared values begin with establishing a concise vision that permeates the entire organization and is then reinforced on a consistent and continuous basis.

One large, U.S.-based architectural and interior design firm describes itself this way:

As a means of bridging the diversity of interests in a profit-centered and highly entrepreneurial organization such as ours, it is our desire to build consensus and engender support for the way we see ourselves in the market and recognize the values under which we behave.

There are two components to the Vision:

- *The core purpose—we have a core purpose that defines our strategic goal. It is the “near sighted” portion of our vision. It is strategic in the sense that from time to time, our interpretation of the market will require redefining the core purpose to properly respond to market opportunity.*
- *The core values—the “far sighted” portion of our vision is represented by those standards of conviction and behavior that are so central to the beliefs of the company that they will not change even though the market may urge a redefinition.*