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# Special Briefing

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## The Holographic Team

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Hungarian inventor Dennis Gabor won the Nobel Prize in physics in 1971 for his invention of holography. Today holograms are familiar to most Americans. From usage by Disney at its amusement parks to imprints on credit cards to framed wall hangings, this three dimensional photography is increasingly familiar to most Americans today. What is less familiar to most are the implications holography has for organizations in the twentieth century and beyond.

Stan Davis suggested the concept of a holographic organization in his book "Future Perfect." The basis of this idea comes from a unique property of holograms: any fragment of the hologram can regenerate the entire image. Davis puts it this way: "For our purposes, the hologram has a very unique property. *If the image is broken, any part of it will reconstruct the whole!*" Later he adds "Can it also be said with equal possibility that the entire corporation resides in each of its products, and in each of its services?"

My work has focused on how holography can be a useful metaphor for creating teamwork, both at the organizational and departmental level. For a team to be maximally effective, *the code of the entire team must reside within each team member*. Shared understanding of what is expected-- of both team member and the team itself-- and a commitment to provide it, forms the basis of holographic teamwork. In short, every team member must know, understand and be committed to the code of the team's success.

While holographic teamwork is a lofty and seemingly nebulous goal, team leaders become perplexed about how to go about accomplishing it. The beginning point is defining the code--the shared understanding-- that must reside within each team member. My work has identified five basic components: the vision, mission, values, goals and expectations.

Each of these five components is distinct yet interrelated. Because different people might use different definitions (I have heard "vision" and "mission" interchangeably), I'll define each term and explain its importance.

Vision answers the question "Where are we going?" Proverbs 29:18 says "Without a vision, the people will perish." For team members to be motivated to change and progress, they must know what they are changing and progressing



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to. The team's vision is their view of the future and addresses questions like:

- What will our role within the organization be?*
- Will the team likely be larger or smaller and why?*
- Who will our customer be?*
- What will our products and services be?*
- What will it be like to be a member of this team?*

The last question is critical. One reason why organizational vision statements fail is because they only define a future where *management* wants to do business, rather than where *employees* want to do business. Team members want a sense of not only what their work will be, but what the long-term rewards will be also.

**Implementation:** The vision can--and should--be clarified at an individual team level as well as for the organization as a whole. While upper management is typically responsible for developing organizational vision with input from others, team leaders need to articulate a vision for their team. A practical exercise for team leaders at the end of each year is to develop a one-page vision statement for the next 12 months as well as the next five years. The 12 month vision statement will help guide the efforts of the team in the short run while the five year vision statement will remind them of the importance of taking a longer view of the future. The two views balance the controllable against the less known. Neither corporate nor team vision statements will be useful if they do not incorporate the interests and desires of team members.

Since vision provides a destination for team members, the mission answers the question "Why are we going there?" It is one thing to know what I do but something significantly different to understand why I do it. Mission statements, if they are useful, give point and purpose to what team members presently do and what they will be doing in the future.

**Example:** Subtle differences in mission can make dramatic differences in results. I have noticed that the majority of mission statements reflect what an organization does more than why they do it. A bookstore might have a mission to provide a diversity of books and periodicals with a high level of service. But consider the impact a higher-purpose mission might have: To stimulate intellectual curiosity and learning in the community through the medium of the published word and assist in fostering the constitutional right of freedom of



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speech. While both explain a mission, the latter enlarges the purpose of the organization in such a way that captures team members' imagination and passion.

Values address the question "How will we get there?" Values define team integrity and behavior.

Federal Express has held a mission statement that incorporates their primary values: "People, Service, Profits." This is a concise approach to emphasizing both mission and values simultaneously.

Rules, policies and procedures alleviate decision-making at the lowest and often most important level. Because of workplace complexities, no enlightened leader or manager today is capable of writing enough rules and procedures necessary to deal with every contingency team members encounter. And even if they could, nobody would have time to look up the appropriate rule or procedure. There is ample proof of this convoluted approach to doing business in corporate and government bureaucracies.

If we really expect team members to think about what they do, we need to provide useful guidelines rather than rigid policies. The value expressed by a true commitment to customers in a food service environment creates a different outcome than a rule that says "If the customer gets a cup, charge him or her for the cup, regardless of what was in it."

Almost all successful teams learn to BOFOGA rules: bend or flex or go around them. However, this doesn't create chaos, because the team never tolerates the violation of the values. Results are important, but values--how we conduct ourselves as we achieve them--are sacred.

Goals tell the team if they're getting closer to realizing their vision. As blasphemous as it sounds, I don't believe goals effectively motivate most team members. As a case in point, I could set a goal for you, but it would be worthless unless you had a reason to achieve it. (That's why the team's mission is a critical component of the holographic code.)

So why goals? Because they create accountability. They serve as a kind of signpost along the way that lets the team know if they're moving closer to their vision.



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The popularly used phrase “self-directed team” is a misnomer in most instances because it suggests a team that determines not only how it does things but what it will do. These truly autonomous units are a rare exception.

A more accurate descriptor is “self-managed team.” This takes into account that a department or group within a larger organization is going to need to be accountable to goals determined for the good of the whole; they will be required to pursue some goals that they themselves did not set. This doesn’t preclude, however, some specific goals of their own.

Every organization operates with a fiscal calendar year. To do otherwise would be financially irresponsible. Does your organization also have a results calendar year? Not to have one is equally irresponsible. Team members need to have several major goals each year that are linked toward long-term success. Knowing that they are responsible not just for maintaining the status quo but making real progress, they will have tangible feedback on their progress or regress.

**Implementation:** Once organizational (or what could be called directed goals) are clarified for the team, management can then ask, “What additional goals that you deem significant to the success of the team are you willing to commit to?” The team can realistically identify additional goals based on their expected workload, as well as available resources. Typically, the team should identify 3-5 goals and then structure their results calendar year around them, assigning responsibility, allocating resources and monitoring progress.

Finally, expectations answer the question “What is expected of me and what can I expect of my teammates?” Most employees carry around an image in their minds of what a good team player is like. They use that image to determine what is probably expected of them and what they can therefore expect of others. Their expectations have been developed through past experiences with other groups. Rarely do we compare images and clarify what is expected by this team if success is to be achieved. Different teams, depending on their vision and mission, will require different expectations for success.

**Example:** The specifics most usually associated with job descriptions aren’t sufficient. They tend to be task specific. Expectations are team specific. A group dental practice I am familiar with has gone so far as to agree on a list of 10 expectations they feel are necessary to be a successful member of their team.



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This list is posted in the break room as a reminder to team members of what they have committed to.

The holographic team benefits dramatically from this shared understanding. But the purpose of clarifying and communicating vision, mission, values, goals and expectations isn't to provide *information*, but *transformation*. Countless pages in annual reports and employee handbooks have been devoted to mission statement and other corporate rhetoric in the past without any real impact.

Edwin Louis Cole, speaker and founder of Christian Men's Network, explains that knowledge is the accumulation of information, understanding is the interpretation of it and wisdom is the application. By these definitions, the team needs more than information. Only when the team understands the holographic code and commits to it can any real transformation take place.

Transformation occurs when structure changes, when a group makes the shift from a loosely knit group of people sharing similar responsibilities to an integrated team sharing common commitments. It is this commitment to what they team stands for that makes the difference.

Webster's Dictionary lists *convert* as a synonym for transform. If management hopes to convert employee into team members, it must think beyond the words to meaning. To become an organizational evangelist, the beginning point is to clarify the most important messages and the meaning behind them: vision, mission, values, goals and expectations. The next step is a visible commitment to those things management hopes employees to embrace. Everyone must eventually "walk the talk," but management must walk first. Only when everyone, from part-time employee to CEO, knows, understands and is committed to those meanings that determine organizational success does holographic teamwork become a reality.

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