

Emphasize the  
importance of vision



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## **1. Introduction**

This critique report explores the article ‘ Understanding the role of vision in project success’ by Dale Christenson and Derek H. T. Walker. The sole purpose of this article was to emphasize the importance of ‘ vision’ in project success as it states “ this paper focuses on an examination of the impact of the leadership construct of project vision on expected project outcomes”. This article is interesting as it focuses on project vision being the key to creating successful project outcomes by understanding that development, communication and maintenance are important when considering stakeholder management. This article contained the four characteristics of vision and a total of four case studies, comparing and contrasting with one another, however only two have been looked at in this report. The article had gathered information from past project experiences which helped its argument that vision is in fact critical in project success. The main points discussed in this report will be the definition and role of vision in project management, analysis of the case studies and strengths and weaknesses of vision.

## **2. Terms of Reference**

Requested was a critique report on a chosen article. This report will be exploring the article “ Understanding the role of vision in project success” and investigating its strengths and weaknesses.

This report is due on Monday 22 March 2010.

### **3. Findings**

#### **3.1 Definition of Vision**

Having read this article, I have concluded that vision is a strong means of clarification and communication that surround a team within a project by an appointed central project manager whom inspires a vision of the projects requirements and how they will positively influence the project. The definition described in the article however was as Bennis and Nanus (1987, p. 82) explain, "...The concept of vision becomes one of a tool or means to engender passion and meaning to a project to meet the envisioned end manifestation." A project vision can also be an object that defines the projects foundation.

#### **3.2 Analytical summary**

##### **3.2.1 The Importance of Vision**

There are many factors that, when put together guarantee project success. However, this article focuses on the role of vision as a critical achievement factor in project success. "The type of project influences the way that a project vision may develop, no matter the situation regarding goal definition, vision has an impact on the possibilities for developing a project vision." A vision is linked to the end benefits and should be understood at the beginning of the project, but with "foreknowledge that both the vision and end benefits are likely to change and evolve throughout the project lifecycle".

"It is important to discuss the basis of change management because projects are about instigating a process or product change." "Vision clearly seeks to convince its audience that change is worthwhile and bestows

benefits. A project vision concept, summarized within a vision statement, often seeks to motivate and inspire team members and other stakeholders to positively participate and shed negative behaviors.” Stretch goals are encouraged within this article such as BHAG which stands for big hairy audacious goal. Stretch goals are needed to “ provide a framework for progressing towards the envisioned future” and to improve the overall system. A successful project must have both an appropriate relationship structure and the individual leaders must have the leadership skills and abilities and personal motivation to make it work.

### **3. 2. 2 Communication in Vision**

In project management the “ projects require a strong cohesive team focus on the desired project outcomes” and “ it is important for project teams to have a common and shared idea of what difference they are trying to make as a result of the project” I agree with these two statements as for a project to succeed, you need to both co-operate and except others viewpoints, so that if there are contrasting ideas you may look from each other’s perspective and come to a resolution without interfering with the project. This article stated that communication is a key factor in project success and coheres with vision as it states that “ Creating an effective project vision requires excellent communication skills and a deep understanding of both organizational culture and the history and trigger mechanisms that create underlying assumptions of individuals and groups comprising project teams.” It is also suggested that team building exercises help create vision for the team, as it indicates that those who are team orientated people will stick around and cohere with the group and the “ problematic” people will often

walk away. Leaders use vision-making and vision-communicating as their tools to achieve strategic goals. A vision statement may become an artifact, a document describing project goals and aspiration.

### **3. 2. 3 Stakeholders in Vision**

Attention is focused on stakeholder analysis and project leader behavior in the promotion and adoption of project vision.” Identifying the need to conduct a stakeholder analysis, alert the central project manager as to the motivation of some project participants and create a better opportunity to better manage the risks that these stakeholders presented to the project.” This vision can be built by exploring questions and ideas with both stakeholders and project team members. “ A clear understanding is needed of stakeholder goals and their aspirations for the project.” Identification of three stakeholders, internal, external and customers, meeting stakeholder requirements, is of key importance. “ Vision must be continually ingrained in the minds of project teams and active stakeholders; often the focus is on the business requirements and technical specifications of the system.”

### **3. 2. 4 The four characteristics of Vision**

The four characteristics of vision are seen as a ‘ must’ to ensure that vision operates to its full effectiveness, all strongly advise clear and positive communication, emphasis on goals, objectives and the importance of stakeholder input within a project.

- It must be understood: it must capture the core purpose, preferred future state and essence of project objectives

- It must be motivational: it must make a convincing case for following the project vision concept that can be internalized by project stakeholders and that provides a compelling value proposition.
- It must be credible: It must be consistent with stakeholder cultures to appeal at the assumptions and values level so that the vision statement artifact resonates with them
- It must be demanding and challenging: It should be proactive to facilitate teams to work smarter and more effectively, perhaps identifying stretch goals.

### **3. 3 Analysis of the JIMS and Global Knowledge case studies**

Four case studies were described in this article, however I will only be exploring the downfalls of one and the positive aspects of the other as I found the JIMS case study contained many weaknesses and the Matsushita consisted of strengths.

#### **3. 3. 1 A brief overview of the JIMS project**

The JIMS project which stands for Joint information management system had a life of ten years, however, evolved from a loose group of individuals into a project management structure with a good sense of vision. The stakeholders required separate meetings to discuss business requirements and were assigned someone each without formal training “ Their authority was uncertain within their respective agencies and dubious within the context of the project management structure” there was an assumption that this would help them gain experience and learn, however resulted in greater stress. The article states that “ a successful project must have both an appropriate

leadership structure and the individual leaders must have the leadership skills, abilities and the motivation to make it work”

Although the vision was apparently understood, business requirements were identified and signed, design specifications approved and proof of concept modules displayed, front end core agencies participating in the system still had the opinion to walk away from the project if they didn't like it. “ Thus at the point of inflection, both motivational and inspirational characteristics were revived and the vision became credible once again.” the project vision with this change came greater decision making, problem solving and a better positioning of stakeholders through understanding the role of vision in project success.

### **3.3.2 Weaknesses within the project**

- Leadership structure did not stay consistent as it evolved from being structured to a maintaining a more flexible approach.
- The contract was not binding to both the team members and stakeholders giving them the option to abort at any chosen time with no mechanism to preserve their continued participation.
- Stakeholders were allowed too much input into the project with contrasting ideas and personal reflections of “ their individual agency or department interests” getting in the way.
- There was lack of executive sponsorship, due to costs. Lack of sponsorship is seen as a number one way to set projects out to fail.
- Leadership of the central project manager was driven by technology and resource concerns.

### **3.3.3 A brief scenario of the global knowledge project**

The Global knowledge project, known as 'Vision 21' had senior level personals from a successful project team The Novo Nordisk visited their business units and discussed standard approaches, the importance of communication and their best practices. 'The Novo Nordisk' personals acted as models for the Vision 21 team, thus producing vision and positivity for the business unit to successfully complete their project.

### **3.3.4 Strengths within the project**

- Emphasis on the importance of vision and bringing past successful personal to encourage and motivate the business unit.
- Teamwork is shown and stakeholders are questioned, but not have the power to influence the project.

### **3.3.5 Case study analysis**

Extreme problems had to be encountered first for the JIMS team to get together and come up with a strategy to better their project so it did not fail completely. The project lacked in management experience and knowledge, thus proved to be a big learning curve for the development team. However, I believe from this case study, sometimes in order to learn, mistakes need to be made, to better further them for the next project. The JIMS team would have benefited if vision was used better within their project, they would have worked better as a team, reduced risks and would have experienced less problems with stakeholders both internally and externally.

The Global knowledge project proved successful through bringing in experienced personal to give insight on how they achieved sanction and motivating the Vision 21 team to follow their footsteps and create a vision for



their project. I believe this was a good idea as it gives knowledge and insight into the ways of creating a successful project, this would have benefited the JIMS team as they lacked in experience and knowledge.

#### **4. Conclusion**

To conclude, project vision is viewed as a critical success factor in projects, it determines the final outcome of the projects and gives the project team some motivation and structure which leads to efficiency, better team co-operation and project accomplishment. Explored have been the four characteristics, which convey vision as a whole, they need to be considered for vision to produce its full capability. I have analyzed two case studies, one of a successful outcome and another that experiences problems but solved them in the end.

I believe that vision is an important aspect of project success through reading this article, not only have the case studies proved it, but it also makes sense to consult your stakeholders on a regular basis, rather than just focusing on the business requirements. It is important that both the team itself and the stakeholders are informed of any changes to the requirements and are kept up to date with all that is happening. I feel that it is also important for good team communication and goal setting when doing a project, it creates an optimistic vision of what the project has to achieve and how it can make an important impact. All the information in this article was useful and displayed clearly and helped me gain a better understanding of factors that underlie project success.

## **5. Reference**

Christenson, D., & Walker, D. (n. d). Understanding the role of vision in project success. Project management Journal, 39-52. Retrieved March 1 2010.