

FINDING FUTURES THAT MATTER: LEADING CHANGE THROUGH SHARED VISION

Drawn from the book,
**“Creating Futures that Matter Today:
Facilitating Change Through Shared Vision®”**
by Marjorie Parker and Anna Pool



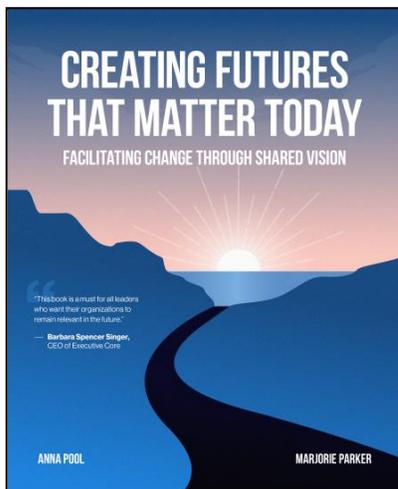
What is Visionary Leadership?

If you ask a group of fifty leaders, *how many of you consider yourselves visionary leaders*, how many hands would go up? In our experience, not many.

Most leaders don't consider "being visionary" part of their skill set. While many recognize the need to be visionary, most lack an understanding of what that means. This has resulted in a focus on formulating vision statements, rather than experiencing the visioning process. It is not enough to recognize the need to be visionary. Leaders need to better understand the nature of visions and what enhances and sustains them. They need to learn how to engage their own visionary capacity, as well as those of their teams.

The typical "vision statement," used by many organizations, is very different from a process of creating shared vision.

In the first, the goal is the creation of a vision statement that can be used to represent an organization's desired future. Typically, engagement and alignment around the vision statement is low.



In our book, "Creating Futures That Matter Today: Facilitating Change Through Shared Vision,[®]" we guide leaders toward a deeper understanding of how to more fully engage a team of leaders or stakeholders in a powerful visioning process.

Please visit our [website](#) for more information on our book, or [buy now](#) on Amazon.

To effectively use visionary thinking,

we need to move beyond purely analytical and rational thinking capabilities and activate insight, imagination, intuition, empathy, emotions and other whole brain capacities that can help us envision a desired future state in a more integrated and holistic way.



This process includes moving together into the desired future state in order to imagine and explore pictures and scenes of the desired future, inquiring into what is most important in that future and sharing and aligning around the elements that are experienced as most valuable.

Inevitably, the group's shared vision is experienced as compelling, authentic and attractive, creating an implicit drive for implementation. The vision statement itself is a by-product, not an end in and of itself.

During our many years of supporting leaders in creating authentic visioning processes, people have often asked us:

What is the difference between setting goals and creating a vision?

There are some fundamental differences that effect how we think and feel, as well as the underlying assumptions that guide each approach and the actual results of each approach. These differences have huge implications on many levels. We have explored each dimension in order clearly delineate the differences.

Differences in How We Think



Thinking in a goal-oriented manner stimulates one's analytical and logical brain functions. Typically, goal setting leans into a more convergent thinking style at the expense of divergent thinking— thus limiting the exploration of options, innovation and creativity. Convergent thinking is most useful in a problem solving or planning process when creative options have already been fully explored and it's time to narrow the solutions to a few of the best.

Working in a vision-oriented manner is best supported by a divergent approach to thinking as it allows the group to discover and explore more possible futures.

Visioning stimulates the full functioning of the brain, allowing access to mental imagery and intuitive knowledge. The group can more easily grasp the “whole picture” and how all the pieces are inter-connected.

Most of the “visioning” processes we have seen employ only convergent thinking, or at best, a superficial “brainstorming” approach to divergent thinking. Helping teams fully access their whole brain capacities like intuition, imagery, and imagination are not typically used. Using divergent and convergent thinking at the right points in a planning and visioning process stimulate creativity and allow for the design of breakthrough futures.

Differences in How We Feel

When we work in a **goal-oriented framework**, we tend to ask questions like:

What do we have to do in the next two years?

or

What do we have be better at?



We often come in contact with a sense of insufficiency or lack of resources. For example, think about a time when you set a personal goal for yourself, maybe to exercise more or lose weight. Were you excited and inspired or dutiful and determined? For many people, personal goal setting is not very enjoyable and can even be intimidating or stress provoking. Follow-through and success rates are typically quite low. How we feel when setting organizational goals is not much different. Often, the goals seem to have little personal relevance. Achieving them may or may not be motivating. Or, while we may be committed to achieving results, our teams find it hard to feel any real excitement, passion or commitment to making them happen. This usually makes implementation very challenging.

When we work in a **vision-oriented framework**, the visions that emerge are immediately inspiring because they are a result of responding to questions like:

What do we want to create?

or

What's possible?

When we are invited to envision what we want or what we believe is most meaningful, we come in contact with that which we care most about. We express values that are intrinsically inspiring to us at an emotional level. Our imagination is automatically stimulated and we come into contact with our own and the teams' creativity. The experience is refreshing, rejuvenating and energizing.

Differences in Underlying Assumptions



Assumptions are the beliefs that influence our emotional reactions, our choices and our behaviors. They are the hidden software that drive our experience of life. Often, they are unexamined and unknown to us. We have worked with many leaders who assume that if they give a team a goal or if their team identifies a goal, it will happen. For example, if an organization's sales and operational leaders meet together and set a goal of achieving a certain amount of revenue through a new cross-selling initiative, the assumption is that setting the goal will be sufficient to drive results.

Experience shows this is not so. When groups need to learn how to adapt to a lot of change in the organization, such as learning how to work in a cross-boundary manner, setting goals is rarely sufficient. In order to embed the new ways of thinking that will be necessary to activate new behaviors, more engagement is needed. Specifically,

leaders must create a shared change vision of what the desired future state should look like. Change expert John Kotter says,

“Every successful large-scale change that I have seen has, as a part of it, a change vision. And what that means is a picture of after we have made the changes on whatever dimensions, this is what we’re going to look like.”

When working in the visioning mode, the assumption is that the group needs to create something new. They need to explore, learn, listen and co-create a change vision that they share together. As Harvard Business Review author Rosabeth Moss-Kanter says,

“Change efforts have to mobilize people around what is not yet know, not yet experienced. They require a leap of imagination and a leap of faith.”

As a group, mental images and pictures of a desired future state must be discovered, explored and shared. The change vision must be illuminated, explored and owned by all.

Differences in Results



Because the starting point for goal setting is an analysis of today’s situation and our reaction to it, goal setting is often a more reactive way to relate to the future. Goals are constructed from what we know and are usually guided by what we believe we are able to do today. As such, they limit new thinking and constrain possibilities. This approach works for situations that don’t require any innovation or learning but usually the team needs to evolve how they are thinking about the problem, defining the problem, or being in relationship to others around the

problem. Most disruptive change requires that the team undergo a transformation in mindsets and discover something that is completely new. Goal setting cannot provide this.

Let's look at how a goal-oriented framework differentiates with a vision-oriented framework:

GOAL SETTING	CREATING SHARED VISION
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> HOW WE THINK  </div>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stimulates analytical and logical brain functions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stimulates mental images and intuitive brain functions
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> HOW WE FEEL  </div>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dutiful ▪ Determined ▪ Disengaged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inspired ▪ Energized ▪ Passionate
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS  </div>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Less focus on exploring and sharing underlying assumptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Must actively explore and share underlying assumptions about the challenge
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> ACHIEVING RESULTS  </div>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Goal is typically a re-hash of past solutions ▪ Low levels of alignment and commitment to implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Heightened possibility for breakthrough futures ▪ High alignment and commitment to implementation

After a goal is formulated, the attention goes immediately to dividing it up into action steps. It's easy to shift the focus from the substance of the goal to focusing on how to reach it. Leaders are often overwhelmed by all the isolated action steps and lose sight of what the goal was and why it mattered. Additionally, the process of dividing the goal up into steps can further isolate and polarize team members. Each one has his or her piece of the goal to implement. Without a powerful and engaging shared vision of the change, new siloes can be created or existing siloes are reinforced. "Us Vs. Them" continues and the new goal does not provide much help in addressing the problem.

A visioning approach is not constrained by current reality, but proactively seeks out what is possible.

It encourages learning about one's own attitudes, assumptions and behaviors and it automatically expands the capacities of each leader's ability to contribute to the future. Visioning stimulates the full functioning of the whole brain, including intuition and the subconscious, while looking for what's optimal. It works beyond the rational, the linear and the logical and offers a bigger opportunity for the team to ideate around. It stimulates passion, engagement and the desire for action.

In this way, visioning opens up the possibility for results that are far beyond what a standard goal setting process can provide, and yet, are finely-tuned to serve the needs of the organization and its future.

Key Takeaways



- Leaders need to actively pursue skill development in visionary thinking both at an individual level and in facilitating shared visions in their organizations.
- Shared vision can be a powerful way to engage leadership and teams around solving organizational challenges or re-invigorating an organizational future, including a revitalization of organization's mission, vision statement and values.
- Many organizations need to create more **engagement and alignment around their vision** than the typical approach to crafting a vision statement can provide.
- Both convergent and divergent thinking are needed in the vision process but without an approach to utilize divergent thinking, the vision usually remains a re-hash of the present and will not engage others in a compelling way.

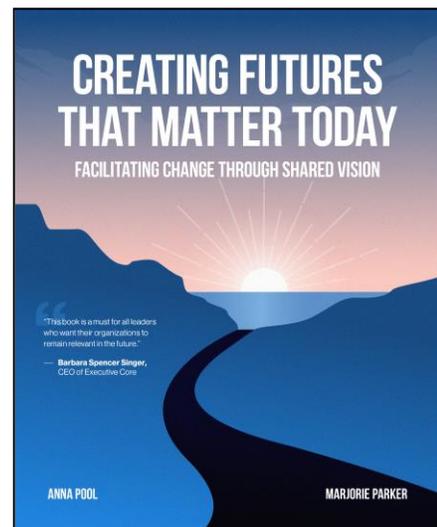
Next Steps

For more information or a complimentary discussion on how to use a shared visioning approach to leading change in your organization, please [email the author](#).

Get the Book

To order the book,
“Creating Futures that Matter Today:
Leading Change through Shared Vision”
by Marjorie Parker and Anna Pool,
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[Contact us](#) directly for bulk order inquiries.



About the Author



Anna Pool offers more than 20 years of talent management consulting, executive coaching, executive education, and facilitation of leadership and organizational development. As a long-time trusted advisor to top leadership, she provides strategic insight, tough feedback, and actionable guidance that helps leaders to build innovative and collaborative environments where the desired future state can be powerfully envisioned and systematically enabled. She is a Master-level certified coach with the Association of Corporate Executive Coaches, and holds certifications in broad range of best practice assessment tools.

Anna coaches at all levels in organizations. A seasoned business professional, Anna has experience across a broad range of industries, including Michelin, Shell, Fluor, Verizon, Citi, Bechtel, Bayer, Bertelsman, Sandia National Labs, Cargill, Lucent, Cisco, Nike, Raytheon, Bank of Canada, Ford Motor Company, Infosys, Accenture, Publicis, and Sapient.Razorfish, as well as various advertising agencies. Her experience in both private and public organizations allows her to quickly understand and clarify her clients' "must win" business imperatives. From CEO-level and out to the broader organization, Anna is often relied upon to be an instrumental partner during times of transformation, volatility or rapid growth as well as in difficult economic or industry downturns.

As President of Executive Savvy, she consistently serves as a thought partner and facilitator of strategic planning, leadership development and alignment, and organizational culture development. Her expertise in designing and facilitating top team development and in the coaching of senior leadership allows her to be a long-term partner with dynamic leaders and organizations. She was honored to have been selected to serve as an organizational learning consultant to Ford's New Business Leader program, an innovative, action-learning program that was benchmarked by the International Consortium on Executive Development as among the best in the world. Anna is also on the Board of Directors for The Shanta Foundation, a non-profit focused on providing sustainable solutions to extreme rural poverty in Myanmar.

With Marjorie Parker, Anna is the co-author of the book, *Creating Futures that Matter Today: Leading Change through Shared Vision* and the author of the Bronze Telly Award winning video series, *Effective People Skills*, and the co-author of Lore's 360 Assessment of Collaborative Tendencies. She holds a Masters degree in Organizational Development from the Fielding Institute in Santa Barbara CA.

About Marjorie Parker and the Shared Vision Approach



Marjorie Parker is an organizational consultant who has been recognized as among the first who applied visionary thinking to concrete organizational challenges and opportunities for optimizing the future. Her approach to creating shared vision was influenced by her life long interest in guided imagery and creativity. For over 25 years, she consulted with senior management in organizations and companies interested in building more innovative work environments by applying creative thinking, imagery, visionary thinking and dialogue in connection with complex strategic issues and long-term organizational development programs. She has designed and conducted creative strategy workshops for management and project teams in many of Norway's leading corporations, health care institutions and government agencies. In addition, she has developed and led training programs for internal and external consultants in applying creative approaches to strategy development and organizational change.

Marjorie is a former board member of the European Association for Creativity and Innovation. She's been a frequent presenter at Norwegian and international conferences in Europe, India and USA including The Center for Creative Leadership, The Conference on the Learning Organization, The Creative Problem-Solving Institute, The International Conference on Creativity and Innovation, The Indian Institute of Management and The Systems Thinking in Action conference. Marjorie was awarded a two-year national scholarship from the Norwegian Council for Leadership Development and was a recipient of a stipend from the Norwegian Council for Scientific and Industrial Research to document work with using innovative approaches to leadership and organizational development.

Marjorie is the author of the book: *Creating Shared Vision – The Story of A Pioneering Approach to Organizational Revitalization*, with a foreword by Peter Senge who called it “the first of its kind” among books on vision. The book was published in Norwegian, English, Polish and Arabic. The story of *Creating Shared Vision* was a feature of a BBC/Open University production. She is also the co-author of the book: *Dialogue – A Practical Guide* published in Norwegian. She holds a M.Sc. from the International Center for Studies in Creativity, Buffalo, NY.

Today she focuses on mentoring organizational consultants who are searching for new ways to develop a more creative mind-set within their own client organizations as well as writing about her approach to visionary thinking through accessing the resources of the whole brain. Marjorie lives in Oslo, Norway.