

# MAKE A STATEMENT

Here's how to turn vision into reality. BY JOYCE LI, Ph.D., PMP



**T**hink about all the projects you've managed. How many of them were considered "smooth sailing"—no scope creep, plenty of resources, flexible deadlines?

You may be wondering whether these amazing projects really exist.

On the other hand, we all know about the *other* kind of projects.

One differentiating factor may be the vision statement in your project charter. Vision is powerful. A shared project vision enables team members to focus their energy toward the future reality. Vision also provides context and meaning to their hard work. In the case of a troubled project, the vision statement can serve as a marker to steer the effort back on track when targets are missed and/or scope changes cloud the original mandate.

## So Many Ideas, So Little Time

Having a vision statement can also help rein in all those good ideas. I learned that lesson at a former job when I was working on a project to update the company website. The directive from senior management was to generate some quick wins in three to six months' time. The core project team had spent many hours defining the project scope without coming to an agreement. At one point or another, we had

contemplated a range of possibilities: rewriting and cleaning up page content, redesigning and rebranding the general look and feel, changing to a new content-management platform, restructuring the backend database, etc.

The three- to six-month project soon turned into a multiphase 12-month initiative with budget estimates that prohibited further consideration.

The project sponsor gracefully stepped in to paint a picture, in one sentence, of what success might look like: "This project is to review and revise the content of our company website such that information is accurate, straightforward, easy to find and relevant to the reader, using existing hardware and software infrastructure."

With that, the project was launched and completed successfully in six months.

## The Art of Vision

Crafting the project vision can be a fun team-building experience, but there are some pitfalls. Don't try to be all things to all people. Focus on the customer experience, for

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## Olivier Gourment, PMI, on Agile: The Great Debate:

*This debate is very clearly an important one, if not the most important debate in the IT PM world right now. An open dialogue is indeed key to have a constructive debate. Many conceptions need to be revisited. I would suggest looking at the distinction between projects and operations. Clearly, operations are not supposed to turn organizations upside down, "reboot" projects and boost morale; but this has been said of some Agile migrations... Maybe organization management doesn't really care if the teams are stable or not, they just want their projects to be temporary in the sense that they want their products completed at some point in time, and not linger forever. Maybe temporary teams are just a side effect, and not a desirable one. From the perspective of the organization, if it has invested time and resources to train and form teams during a project, it makes sense to try and reuse those teams for other, similar, projects.*

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example, or a gain in efficiency—not both. Also avoid using jargon or technical terms that lead readers to different interpretations. The vision should be straightforward, and elicit excitement from team members and stakeholders.

First and foremost, consult with your project sponsors about their project vision:

1. What are the business goals in implementing the project?
2. What improvement do you expect as a result of the project?
3. How many direct/indirect users will benefit from the project?
4. Would you be able to quantify the benefits?

Here are some other factors to consider when you create a project vision statement:

### 1. Make it tangible.

- Does the project vision convey a clear picture of the future?
- Is the project vision realistic and does it have concrete attributes?
- When the project is finished, will we be able to measure our success?

### 2. Make it interesting.

- Does the project vision appeal to employees, customers and other stakeholders?
- Can people answer the question, “What’s in it for me?”

### 3. Make it feasible.

- Is the project vision attainable?
- Do people believe in the project vision?

### 4. Make it focused.

- Does the project vision address fundamental challenges and not the peripheral symptoms?

- Is the project vision directly linked to the organization’s strategic goals?

### 5. Make it succinct.

- Can you explain the project vision in two minutes or less?
- Can the key project stakeholders recite our project vision?

### Test Time

Now that you know the rules, does the following vision statement pass the test? “The XYZ project will enable our call center staff to respond to our customers more quickly and efficiently via e-mail, online chat, instant messaging, phone or written correspondence.”

To some people, this vision statement is right on target because it implies an unambiguous, defined and achievable scope—it’s tangible, feasible and focused. It’s also interesting in the sense that call center staff will see it as a way to enhance their ability to quickly and efficiently provide service to their customers. And the statement is succinct.

However, there may still be room for improvement by including a more definitive and measurable description of how the project will help the team respond more quickly and efficiently.

It may take some work, but with a vision statement in hand, any team is ready for action. *PM*



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