

## visionary capacity framework



### characteristics

author:	de Jong, Rob-Jan
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### related models

five functions of management
ten managerial roles

### description:

In 2015, Rob-Jan de Jong, behavioral strategist and world-renown executive educator, published the visionary capacity framework based on an eight year investigation into leadership and vision formation.

Senior leaders are expected to anticipate the future and provide direction, meaning and inspiration to their organization's customers, employees, suppliers and other stakeholders. Compelling and powerful visions show the path forward, stretch the imagination, challenge the status quo, break through existing paradigms, mobilize and energize support. Buschnell (Atari), Kamprad (IKEA), and Immelt (GE) are examples of visionary business leaders who have built world-class firms.

The framework shows how leaders can grow their visionary capacity. It consists of two, independent, dimensions:

#### 1. ABILITY TO SEE THINGS EARLY

The first signs of change often manifest as random noise or faint warning signals, often at the periphery of one's attention and far less explicit in their game-changing nature than later in time. Essential to raising visionary capacity is growing the ability to notice these signals early, and to recognize their potential impact.

#### 2. ABILITY TO CONNECT THE DOTS

creating a coherent understanding of the future comes by constructively and intelligently working through the complexity of the multifaceted and multidimensional future. This understanding is turned into a sound story about the "bigger picture".

Thus, the first dimension is about an eye for detail, the second about a helicopter view. The two dimensions result in four different archetypes of visionary leaders:

#### FOLLOWER

is neither good at early noticing nor skilled in creating and communicating a coherent story from the various insights of future possibilities. Vision is either absent, poorly developed and unformulated, or lacking coherence. The Follower may be an excellent manager or able professional, but generally lacks inspiration as well as the ability to drive innovation, fuel fresh breakthrough ideas or help others overcome mental barriers to go beyond the current reality.

#### TREND HOPPER

has a well-developed ability to see things early, is in tune with emerging ideas, and willing to embrace changing realities. They are inspirational and a compelling raconteurs of cutting-edge business successes, but weak at turning early-stage insights into a coherent story that would justify an active strategic pursuit. Trend Hoppers have difficulty in finding appropriate balance between possible radical differences and the current reality, at least in the foreseeable future.

#### HISTORIAN

has a strong thinking preference for consistency and logic, and is therefore less interested in discontinuities or other sources that break a coherent picture (unlike a Trend Hopper). Their focus is on communicating the current reality by integrating past events into a logically consistent perspective. They are adept at connecting the dots and spinning a sensible story. This archetype likes to cite patterns, facts, and figures and marvel at the ways the current reality is coherent and intentional, but focuses on the factual past rather than the imaginative, uncertain future. The Historian is weak at spotting the origin of early signals and how these could become potential game changers.

#### THE VISIONARY

combines both abilities: seeing the first hints of change at the horizon, AND integrating those into the bigger perspective. The visionary would not overoptimistically jump on every passing fad as the Trend Hopper risks, nor become a naysayer and launch into the cynical Historian mode. The visionary takes a mindful, future-oriented perspective, balancing the need for a compelling future with the awareness of the inherent dangers of becoming dogmatic and overoptimistic.

#### CAPACITY BUILDING PATHWAYS

The two abilities of seeing things early and connecting the dots have a number of required leadership skills and attitudes in common: both dimensions are future-oriented, built around imagination, exploration, anticipation and positive engagement with uncertainty enhanced by curiosity, open-mindedness, and playfulness.

The two abilities differ in three ways:

##### 1: *Relevance vs. Implication*

The ability to see change early depends on judging weak signals according to their *relevance*. Specific effort is required to identify events that were early manifestations in retrospect of change. The ability to connect the dots, however, is focused on *implications* of changing realities. This ability takes the ideas generated from the ability to notice signals early, weighs these signals and integrates them with other important factors such as the constraints of the organization's key strengths, and makes the signals logically consistent.

##### 2: *Focus on Detail vs. Focus on Helicopter View*

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The ability to see things early requires acute attention to detail, the need to filter the signal from the noise, focus on one or perhaps several signals that generally go undetected. The ability to create a coherent story, however, requires a helicopter view. A generalist, hampered by attention to detail, can understand the implications of various developments and connect them in a logical, compelling story.

### 3: Risk Seeking vs. Risk Aversion

The ability to identify change requires a challenging, risk-seeking stance. It involves questioning the current reality and looking beyond the conventional. The ability to connect the dots is more conservative and risk-averse since a coherent, bigger picture is sought. Thus, mindfulness of the chosen stance needs to take precedence over the chance of "betting the house" over attractive, but highly speculative views identified from early changes. Balancing the two abilities is the real art of looking forward.

The ability as a leader to better anticipate the future, to be more insightful and inspirational in speaking about the future, and that grows through conscious and continuous work. Vision building is accessible and practical for those interested in leading and inspiring others with a gripping vision of the future.

#### assets:



##### visioning capacity framework

ProvenModels • de Jong, Rob-Jan • version 3 • 224 KB



##### visioning capacity self assessment

ProvenModels • de Jong, Rob-Jan • version 2.8 • 186 KB

#### pros:

- Vision building is a skill accessible to all. The developmental framework enables one to determine the areas where work is needed to construct and maintain ability and competence.
- The two abilities can be developed through specific techniques. The ability to see things early can be developed using the FuturePriming technique. The ability to connect the dots can evolve by engaging in multiple future techniques e.g. scenario planning.
- Many leadership thinkers have described vision formation as a necessary key skill for corporate leaders to have. They have left out how visions form and turned into reality. The visionary capacity framework provides practical guidance in developing this essential leadership competence.
- The visionary capacity model provides guidance for those who lead or aspire to lead through vision. This ability is independent from such personality qualities as charisma; charisma is different from a coherent and potent vision to drive change.
- The model aims to generate realistic outcomes rather than following hypes. It is important to remember that time is often available to compose and reflect on a vision. It is less important to be the first to pick up or initiate new trends rather than simply being in the early group of change agents who shape the future.
- Responsibly connecting the dots into a bigger picture is promoted through the use of multiple future techniques (e.g. scenario planning), decreasing the behavioral risks of overconfidence and frame blindness.

#### cons:

- Timing of initiating strategic moves in order to obtain a distinct strategic advantage remains very difficult to achieve: too early means no support; too late generally means that either the move has become conventional wisdom and, or worse, that the environment has so changed that only catch-up strategy remains.
- The framework does not provide assurance that classic decision making pitfalls such as groupthink, can be avoided. Responsible leaders include in their decision-making processes regular soundings with opposing views.
- The framework focuses on a leader's personal (business) vision, not on the generation and execution of a corporate vision.
- The framework is practice/development-oriented, not content-oriented.

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