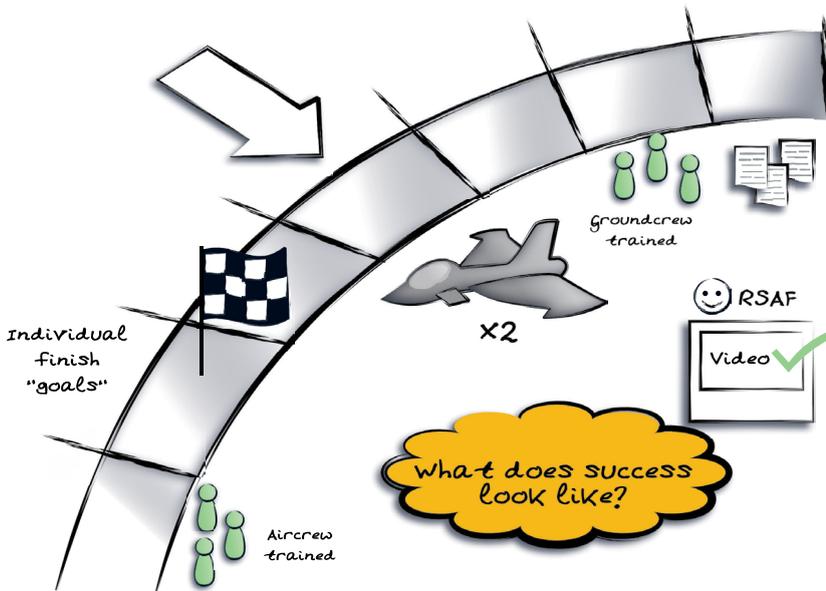


## CHAPTER THREE

# WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?



***A clear, focused vision actually allows us to experience ahead of time the emotions associated with our anticipated vision.*** Andy Stanley, *Visioneering*<sup>18</sup>

‘What Does Success Look Like?’ is always the first question to ask in any situation where some form of outcome is required. In this section, we explore the importance of this first question; how this can be established within the leader’s mind and then converted into an outwardly articulated vision. The last step is to communicate this vision, as described in Chapter 5, ‘Planting the Vision in their Hearts.’

As Stephen Covey states in *Seven Habits*<sup>19</sup>, ‘Begin with the end in mind.’ In other words, start at the end and work backwards. I have a slightly different take on this. Instead, I ask the team to cast their minds forward and ask themselves the question ‘what does success look like?’

By focusing on the word *success* we are automatically making a positive and uplifting statement about the outcome of that particular situation. This technique can be applied to anything from a meeting, a negotiation, a technical problem or a project.

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<sup>18</sup> See Andy Stanley’s Book referenced in the bibliography

<sup>19</sup> See Stephen Covey’ book ‘The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People’ in the Bibliography session

## **THE QUESTION, THE QUESTION, THE QUESTION....**

Those of you who have experience of small children will know the joy (and frustration) of the ‘*Why*’<sup>20</sup> phase of their lives when they just want to know why something is the way it is. As we grow older, we gain inhibitions around asking so many questions, because of embarrassment and many other social norming factors.

If you understand with absolute clarity the outcome of the project, then you are in a good starting position to help guide the team there. Understanding is the keyword here because you are going to be the ‘vision-caster’, therefore you need to be able to articulate the vision to other people (see Chapter 5).

As Albert Einstein said: “If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough.” It is quite easy (and many people do this in the high-tech world of aerospace) for someone to say ‘it’s really complicated, you won’t understand this.’ To me, this is like a red rag to a bull!<sup>21</sup>

Countless times I have sat in senior meetings where I’ve asked a simple question of clarification only to get a look of disgust from the presenter as if I’m mad or stupid. A good chairman would also ask if there is anyone else who doesn’t understand – in which case the show of hands would be quite shocking! So, are some people prepared to sit through a meeting and not understand

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<sup>20</sup> According to research work by Dr Sam Wass in 2017, children’s peak age for ‘Why?’ questions is four years of age when they ask on average 73 such questions a day.

<sup>21</sup> The phrase means to do something guaranteed to get an angry response. See appendix C for background on the phrase.

something? The answer is yes, and it's usually to avoid looking stupid – and how stupid is that!

The following are prime examples of situations in which I insisted on more information to be entirely sure that I fully understood:

- **Budget Approval forms** – get a copy and write out precisely who signs the form; how are we going to get them to sign, when are we going to get them to sign, what information do they need to make a decision, and do they need any specific information or others tasks completing before they will approve.
- **Contract Clauses** – again, get an original copy, not a summary. Read through it slowly and share so that everyone can read it at the same time, avoiding the interpretation effect that often causes issues later on. When you hear the 'I thought it meant...' you are doomed.
- **Process steps** – get the person who owns the process to draw it up on the whiteboard; if they are intimately familiar with the process there are likely to be steps that they 'jump over' sub-consciously because they combine these steps without thinking.

If in doubt, fall back on the, '*Show me, don't tell me...*' approach (Chapter 2). I would rather sit for five minutes in awkward silence in a meeting while someone goes out to fetch a copy of something that they have promised is 'on my desk'. After a few incidents like

this, people will bring what they know they need to the meeting and understand that you will not take things at face value.

The quote attributed to W Edwards Deming, '*In God, we trust, everyone else brings data*'<sup>22</sup>, is one that resonates with me. Like the former US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, I too have this framed on the wall behind my desk. When I get into a debate about the integrity of a view/opinion/data, I merely point at the sign.

Don't be afraid to ask questions to check understanding and remember that 'the only stupid question is the one you didn't ask'. Over the past decade I have developed a very thick skin for asking direct questions until I have an absolute understanding in my mind. This process can take between five and six delving questions with plenty of reflection to *check understanding*. Active listening is also extremely important. For example, I am not afraid to say 'Can I just pause for a moment while I make a note of that'. If you want to make a more positive statement, try 'That's a great point, just let me capture that'.

Be that four-year old you once were and unreservedly keep asking penetrating questions!

When considering how to approach questions, remember there is a time to listen and a time to ask. People may shape their thinking

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<sup>22</sup> Edward Deming (1900-1993) is generally seen as the father of modern quality thinking.

around your questions, but remember the primary focus is to gain knowledge. Sometimes, by asking a too direct question early on, you may shut a person down or cause them to recalibrate their answers. Draw them in with broad agreement of views and be clear that you are not criticising previous decisions, just seeking to understand. Above all else, remember the ration of ears to mouth – 2:1. Apply that thinking into how much you talk and how much you listen!

## **INJECTING THE ‘WHY’ INTO THE PICTURE**

I am a visual person; I naturally draw a picture when discussing a situation or problem. I do this principally to remember the discussion but, more importantly, to understand the interrelation of the various elements.

If you can draw<sup>23</sup> a concept then you can demonstrate a deeper understanding of what it is. More importantly, you can get a shared understanding with the person from whom you are getting the information.

This picture is the precursor to creating your vision; very often these smaller ‘understanding pictures’ blend into the overall vision or at least become a point of reference for you. I often do a quick sketch that I throw away once I have understood something, although I find more often than not, people ask to take a copy of

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<sup>23</sup>You don’t need to be an artist, just the ability to draw boxes and lines that connect.



my sketch as it helps them with their understanding.

During my first experience of running a large programme worth around USD200m, it took me some time to understand how the price, cost and budget were all linked together within our reporting tool. Subsequently spending a little time with the various disciplines (commercial, finance, HR, engineering etc) over a few weeks allowed me to build a single picture that explained how it all worked. When using this diagram in a briefing session with senior management, from the back of the room came a quip: “Isn’t it embarrassing how we get an engineer to run a programme and he puts together a simple picture that enables everyone to understand how all the money links together.”

## HOW TO SHOW WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

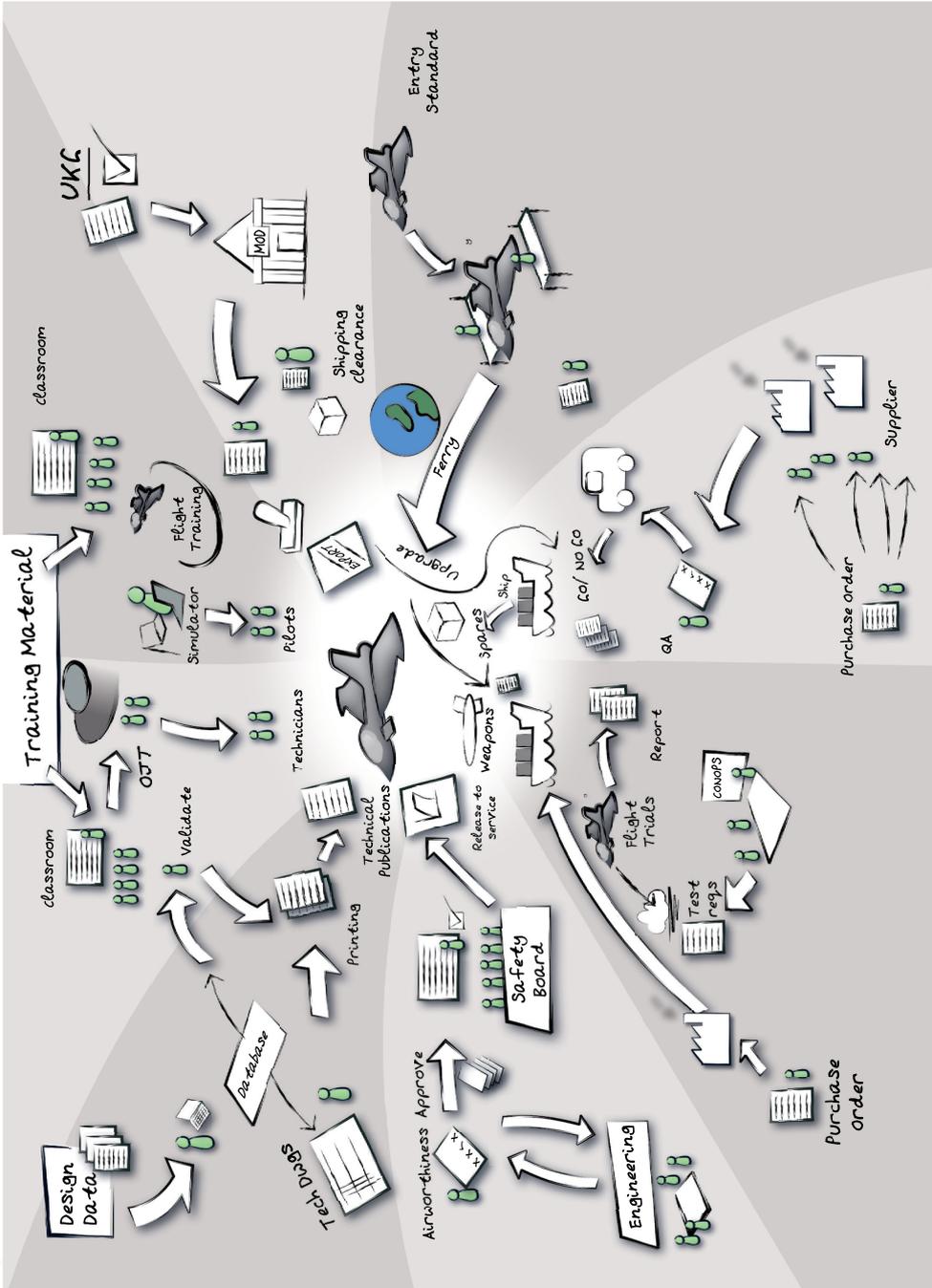
At this point, it is important to remember that the vision is not the plan. That will come later. You are focusing on that endpoint with absolute clarity in your mind so that you can capture it on paper.<sup>24</sup>

It is vital to ask yourself this question early in the process; but it does depend on various factors:

- Which forms of media work best for you? (eg PowerPoint,

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<sup>24</sup> In this context, I mean an artefact that you can pass across to someone else. It needs to be in a solid, tangible form, whether electronically or physical - for the sake of simplicity I will use the ‘get something down on paper’ to cover all forms of media.



rich picture etc)

- Is there a 'corporate expectation' of media?
- Does the specific group/team you are targeting have a media style which they prefer?

The approach can change as you develop your vision of the endpoint. It's okay to start with a whiteboard sketch or post-it notes on a wall. In Programme X, for example, I sketched a simple endpoint visualisation with activity lanes on a flip chart; this image stayed on the wall through the entire project. Indeed, one senior director remarked that it showed a raw and original approach without relying on slick computer-generated graphics.

In the deployment of a military capability to an export customer shown in Figure 1, I merely considered what I would need to be effective if I were standing next to aircraft 'Y' in country 'X'.

- An aircraft with the right upgrade
- Trained pilots
- Technicians who know how to fit and operate aircraft Y
- Documentation allowing us to fly
- Export approvals to get the equipment into country X
- The equipment to be fitted into the aircraft.

	Flag
	People
	Meetings
	Documents
	Email
	Telephone
	Presentation

## USE OF ICONS

Using a standard set of icons/images provides consistency across your graphics/pictures. The key is to make them simple enough so that you and others can then replicate easily. Yes, a beautiful 3D sketch of an aircraft is great, but if no-one else can do the same then it doesn't really work for sharing the vision!

- **The chequered flag:** an iconic image from motor racing, very recognisable and simple to draw

- **People:** a simple circle and curved body can be drawn by almost everyone. Adding shading is optional, plus the people can be coloured to convey whatever you want
- **Meetings:** a simple round table using the same people approach (keeping your icons common)
- **Documents:** can be expanded to include some wording/title
- **Email:** not a literal picture but one that aids recognition
- **Telephone:** to denote telephone meetings or individual calls
- **Presentation:** a combination of the standard person icon next to a presentation screen.

From this set, almost anything can be created. You will, of course, generate some icons and images specific to your company and industry.

Each of these then has a sequence of events that goes back to where the project currently stands. I can sketch out the big chunks of these, but this is where the team come in and fill in their details at the appropriate time.

That end picture can be further emphasised by a 'news headline' approach where you create a dummy newspaper headline with your project being successful and other details that will resonate with the team.

You need to get this vision clear in your head, and drawing it

helps clarify your thinking. You are the creator of this vision, and once you can articulate it clearly for others to see, then you are ready to share it.

Depending on your preference, you can start this alone or with an appropriate group.

## **MATURING THE VISION**

The key stages of building your vision of ‘What Does Success Look Like?’ are:

- **Formative:** the gestation of the picture where you strengthen it in your mind (and on the paper).
- **Brainstorming:** the point at which you draw in other people depends on you, how confident you feel, and how you involve other people. Without a doubt, a group of people will generate more ideas than a single person.
- **Checking Understanding:** creating your ‘understanding views’ and ensuring that the messages in the vision make sense to other people.
- **Consolidating:** does it all make sense? And capturing your and others’ thoughts about the overall vision.

Although part of a continuum of activities, the next two stages

fall more cleanly into Chapter 5. However, they are briefly covered here to explain the overall approach.

- **Engaging:** drawing in your stakeholders to become part of the vision, understanding their individual roles.
- **Selling the vision:** this is where you and the team become the 'Vision casters'<sup>25</sup> of the idea.

There will usually be one project related artefact that people can visualise. From my background, the aircraft itself was pretty easy as an endpoint visualisation. From there we can draw out the questions such as: do we need any pilots? Do they need training? Do we have any instructors? Is there a Flight Simulator? These questions form a logical trail back from the endpoint of a trained pilot stood by the aircraft ready to fly.

These logical elements constitute the **planning** element of the vision, turning that endpoint into a practical plan involving resources, time and people (the fundamentals of what we normally call Project Management).

Project planning can often be seen as a tedious documentation process that fills us all with dread. My approach is to make it creative. Furthermore, engaging the team harnesses their imagination and creates learning opportunities. You get the result (or better) with less chance of missing points.

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<sup>25</sup> See Andy Stanley's Book referenced in the bibliography.

Alternatively, one can see this as about turning a load of nonsense and promises from the Business Development team into a tangible and deliverable programme. My phrase that captures this is ‘I am terribly sorry, but you can’t have photon torpedoes<sup>26</sup> in 12 months for your aircraft.’ This picture becomes your ‘What Does Success Look Like?’ vision.

Whilst I have focused on the mechanics of creating a vision, there are five aspects that bring it to life:

1. Evoking Emotion: making people passionate about their work
2. Motivating people towards an end goal
3. Providing direction
4. Providing purpose: the strength underlying the vision which helps to push through bad days
5. Belonging: engendering the feeling belonging and having something to contribute.

Through this chapter, we have focused on the ‘What’ element which is the essence of your vision. The ‘How’ element brings the vision to life using the five aspects<sup>27</sup> above. This starts as you start to seed the vision into people’s hearts.

As a leader, there needs to be an element of a visionary within you, to see those things that other people cannot see. As Jonathan

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<sup>26</sup> No apologies for my geek reference to Star Trek; this my standard response when finally sat with the end customer after Business Development had weaved their set of unrealistic expectations based on a half understood and half expressed ‘requirements’. By my calculation, 75 percent of the information is lost before it gets to the people who know what they are talking about.

<sup>27</sup> Andy Stanley, *Visioneering* (see Bibliography for more detail) plus one from a friend in Ireland.

Swift<sup>28</sup> said, “*Vision is the art of seeing invisible things.*” This visionary work requires imagination and drawing on your breadth of knowledge to build that picture coupled with your approach to drawing out people’s knowledge to give you an enhanced view. It is this combined knowledge that gives you the edge; you don’t need to know all details but you do need to be able to draw them together.

Treat the work in this chapter as your internal preparation phase to create that core vision which will be further expanded with the team once you engage with them in discussions and ‘show and tell’.<sup>29</sup>

## REFLECTIONS

This chapter focuses on positive outcomes, building upon the data captured during the ‘Understanding the Context’ period. This picture is at the very core of what you are trying to achieve. The more clarity that you have in your mind then the more likely you can communicate your understanding to your team. This will require some discipline and perseverance to make sure that the clarity meets your requirements, and that no fundamental questions remain unanswered. Creating that clear picture of your goal is the first step to getting your vision out there and translating it into a meaningful, actionable plan.

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<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) was the renowned Irish author of *Gulliver’s Travels*.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Show and tell’ originates from the 1940s in elementary school children to encourage public speaking they would bring an object from home and talk about it.