BOARD GOVERNANCE: A GUIDE TO VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

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Visionary Leadership.

Competent, visionary leadership is critical to the ongoing success of any organization. In a growing organization, Board work can be complex. But it doesn't have to be overwhelming.

The Visionary Leadership model was designed to help make the work of the Board more rewarding and productive. It's compelling. It's focused. And when its implemented successfully, it provides an environment where solid principles of leadership and empowerment can be fully employed.

This following guide will help you navigate your way through this leadership model, helping you:
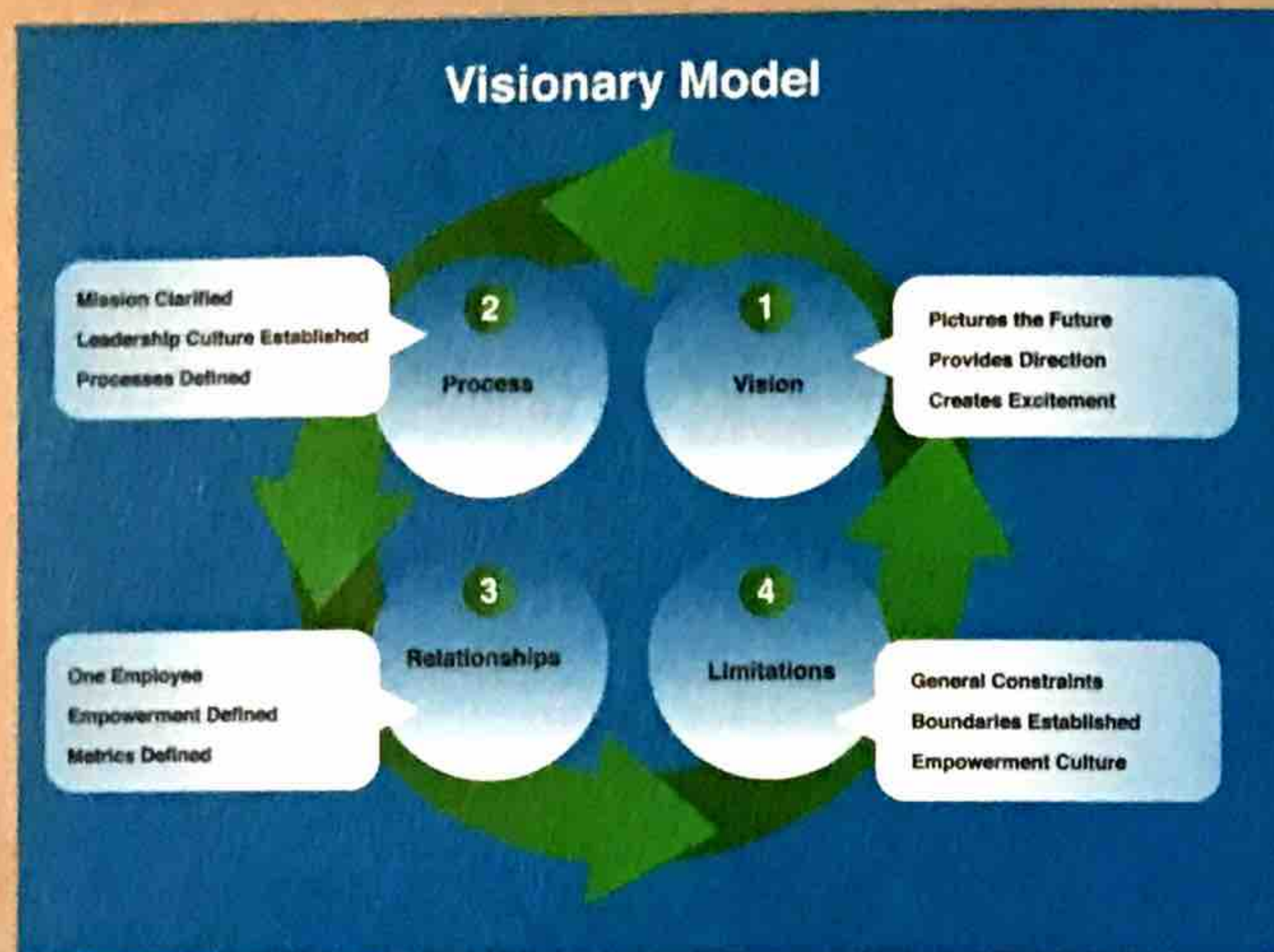
Understand the role of the Board

Recognize empowerment possibilities

Understand issues pertinent to the Board

Embrace the leadership model.

Visionary Leadership and strategic thinking are inseparably linked, and those who serve on the Board must demonstrate both—along with a high degree of diligence and discernment.

Visionary Model

2 Process — Mission Clarified, Leadership Culture Established, Processes Defined	**1 Vision** — Pictures the Future, Provides Direction, Creates Excitement
3 Relationships — One Employee, Empowerment Defined, Metrics Defined	**4 Limitations** — General Constraints, Boundaries Established, Empowerment Culture

Two Teams. One Organization.

As two distinct leadership groups, the Board and CEO (management) play a critical role in serving the organization, but they each have a different role. In the Visionary Leadership Model, the Board establishes the future vision for the organization and determines the best policies for achieving it, while management initiates and implements a strategic plan to fulfill the vision, using those policies as a guide. Effective Boards establish good policies, stay focused on monitoring achievement of the vision and avoid involvement in the day-to-day operations of the organization.

Working Toward a Common Goal.

"Policies" may sound impersonal, but they're simply a tool that allows the Board to speak with a collective voice, providing leadership on important topics while guiding current and future decisions of the organization. This model provides "overview" leadership of the organization and creates a framework for consistent decision-making, even as members of the Board change from year to year.

Building a Stronger Organization.

Visionary Leadership provides a comprehensive approach to building an effective organization. It demands Board members who are proactive rather than reactive. And it requires visionaries who are committed to the principles of empowerment and delegation. The Board seeks to empower its CEO (and management), entrusting the work of the organization to them with appropriate means for monitoring progress. In so doing, the organization experiences the success of fulfilling its mission and achieving its vision.

Visionary Leadership, when fully implemented and applied, has been shown to:

Provide clear roles for Board and CEO.

Leverage the full potential of Board and CEO.

Clarify mission and vision.

Eliminate trivial/unnecessary meetings.

Equip the Board to lead, not manage.

Establish practical tools for leading.

Cure micromanagement.

Focus agendas on vision and achievement.

Sponsor creative thought.

Foster a proactive mindset.

Facilitate advanced decision-making.

Deepen quality leaders.

Accelerate progress.

TEN COMPONENTS OF VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

VALUES

The Board is based upon a simple, but well-defined set of values that provides a foundational framework for the work it does. The team has a strong moral ownership of the values and governs itself with them regularly.

UNITY

The Board speaks with a single voice or not at all. This singleness of the voice encourages diverse discussion, followed by consensus on all decisions. Without a single voice, the team has little authority to lead. Board members serving as volunteers within the organization carry no voice of authority and remain subject to the direct supervision of those responsible for such programs.

DECISIONS

Board decisions are few. When exercised, consensus is required. While this may take longer, it elicits and values everyone's input instead of creating "losers"—a situation which decreases motivation, and may foster resentment and division.

EMPOWERMENT

In more traditional settings, Board members are accustomed to giving permission to the plans, ideas and requests brought to them, thereby entangling themselves in unnecessary details that limit the creativity and agility of those in front-line work. In the Visionary model, the Board seeks to define and delegate.

POLICIES

The leadership voice of the Board is expressed in policy. Judiciously written, policies provide clear and unwavering direction, freedom and empowerment, with appropriately defined limitations. Policies focus energy and resources on achievement and enable the Board and the organization to stay on course with its mission.

VISION

With a concise statement, appropriately layered with detail, the Board is strongly focused on achieving a preferred future. Believing that it is right for the organization, they seek to channel their leadership assets toward its fulfillment.

LIMITATIONS

For protection, all groups need boundaries. Through such a policy, the Board empowers the CEO (and management) to use all reasonable, legal, ethical and prudent means to achieve the prescribed vision.

PROCESS

The Board designs what they expect of themselves as a team—values, norms for personal behavior, job products and succession. While policies are always subsequent to change, the Board views those that govern themselves to be binding.

PERSONNEL

The Board is responsible for one employee—the CEO, who also serves as a team member. They forge empowerment and productive linkage to the management through him. This enables each to excel in their clearly defined roles and job products.

METRICS

Performance is monitored rigorously, but only against appropriately documented criteria in the form of policy. Monitoring is aimed primarily at measuring progress toward the achievement of the vision. The Board requires relevant data and spends 70% of it's time auditing the advancement of the organization and its progress toward achieving a predetermined vision.

CATEGORIES OF LEADERSHIP POLICY

UNLOCKING THE KEYS OF PROGRESS

As previously stated, polices are the collective expression of the Board on various topics that guide current and future decisions of the organization. Defining and executing policies in four key categories—vision, process, relationships and limitations—provides a healthy framework from which Board work flows. By making these documented statements, the Board expresses good leadership in a positive, proactive and productive manner. The details of each category, outlined below, are maintained in a policy manual.

Vision
Pictures the future, Provides direction, Creates excitement

Process
Clarifies mission, Establishes leadership culture, Defines processes

Relationships
Focuses on one employee, Defines empowerment, Defines metrics

Limitation
Outlines general constraints, Establishes boundaries, Creates an empowered culture

1. Vision Policies: Describing A Preferred Future

These documents focus on the future. They describe in detail what the Board intends the organization to be in the unfolding years. Through them, the Board gives definition to long-term outcomes and results.

When creating or reviewing these policies, it is urgent that key concepts are understood. Vision does not include services, programs, personnel, facilities, budgets or activities. Rather, attention is given to the products those items produce.

The vision for the organization has priority. All other policies guide the investment of people and resources for its achievement, and aggressively monitor progress toward it.

By establishing a clear vision and setting the direction of the organization toward its achievement, the Board leads effectively.

2. Process Policies: Doing Right Things Right Ways

These policies describe, in detail, the means by which the Board executes it's work. Beginning with team values, the Board moves through a series of norms, practices, procedures, and various methods employed to deliver and evaluate what the Board members expect from themselves.

By executing their work in this intentional manner, the Board leads effectively.

3. Relationship Policies: Delegating Responsibilities

These documents describe how the Board delegates strategic planning and day-to-day management of the organization to management through the CEO.

Effective organizations have a strong Board and strong CEO, with clearly defined differences between the roles and job products of each. Policies in this category also define what's expected of the CEO, how he is evaluated and how the strategic work of management is monitored.

The Board wants the CEO and management to achieve the vision they have defined without violating any of its limitations. Clearly defined policies on monitoring make it possible to evaluate their performance efficiently and fairly.

By delegating responsibilities into the hands of the CEO and management, then truly evaluating their progress toward the achievement of the vision, the Board leads effectively.

4. Limitation Policies: Defining Boundaries

These policies empower the CEO and management to conduct and manage the day-to-day operations of the organization. To that end, they provide general constraints that define functional and operational boundaries.

Setting limits can be done without being consumed by the details or the complexity of day-to-day operations. It's impossible to define all the activities and decisions that an organization is engaged in. But by defining boundaries or general constraints of what is acceptable behavior, the Board leads effectively.

The concept behind these policies is empowerment. Once these boundaries are known and understood, the CEO and management are empowered to take any actions necessary, within the limitations, to achieve the vision.

Foresight is 70/30. When Visionary Leadership is implemented, priorities naturally fall into place and micromanagement is replaced by focused meetings that address the larger needs of the organization. When this balance is reached, boards are able to spend the majority of their time working on vision-related issues.

More specifically, Boards using the Visionary Leadership Model spend 70% of their meeting time assessing relevant data they have requested from the CEO and management to measure progress toward the vision and monitor the health of the organization. In addition, the Board governs it's own deliverables to ensure that it establishes and maintains the best environment for leading. The remaining 30% of their meeting time is spent encouraging it's own development and fulfilling other policy directives.