

From Vision to Reality ~ the journey of a thousand miles...

*Hence always rid yourself of desires in order to observe its secrets;
But always allow yourself to have desires in order to observe its manifestations.*

~ Lao Tzu

*The human being can only develop in the creative process through engagement with material.
He is, after all, not an absolutely spiritual being. He is embodied.*

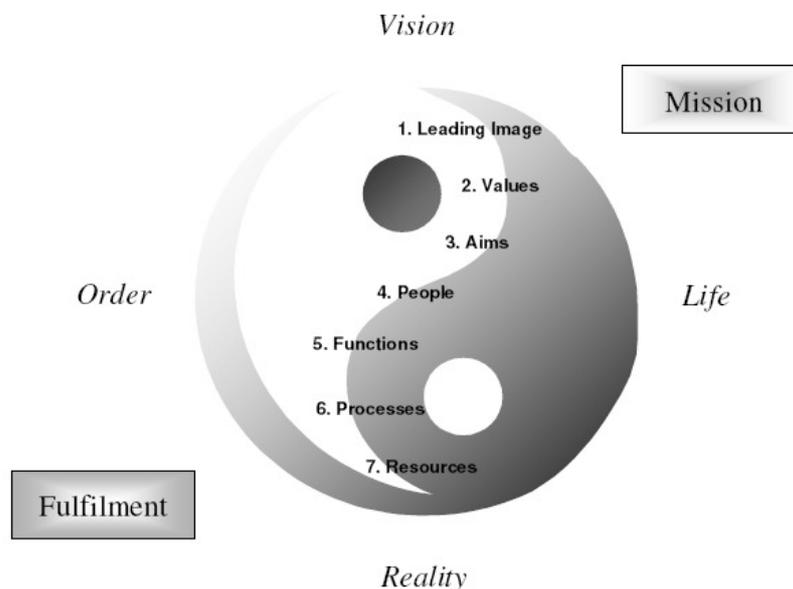
~ Joseph Beuys

When I consider what an *organisation* is, I find myself thinking simultaneously of 'organs' and 'organisms' — for an organisation resembles a living entity more than a mechanism. A mechanism can be understood in terms of physical forces, of cause and effect; but a living entity is both more complex and more mysterious. Sometimes a symbol can encapsulate the nature of life better than a definition; for instance, the Tao symbol can be taken to represent the dynamics of organisational form, in which we see an interweaving of contrary elements: light and dark, intellect and intuition, order and life, spirit and matter... It also suggests a reconciliation of opposites through a third element that manifests through movement, so that it seems to be continually turning inside out... Therefore, it is a figure of integral form.



The significance of the Tao is deepened when we note that the essential organisation opens up between the polarities of *Vision* and *Reality* — or we might say between spirit and matter; and between *Order* and *Life* — that is, between the tendency to impose formal structures, and the tendency to express spontaneous impulses. Everything tends in one direction or another.

There are seven steps on the pathway leading from vision to reality, between order and life:



Vision first appears out of the ‘depths of the heights’. It is always individualised through the minds of particular people. Rising from below to meet this impulse, both testing its validity and giving it substance, is *Reality*. In this initial encounter, through forming the *leading image*, *values*, and *aims* (as overall direction), a sense for *Mission* develops. This *Mission* will either engage *people* or it will leave them cold. Its *Fulfilment* comes about as a result of a community of committed individuals shaping effective *functions* (organisational forms) and *processes* to develop the best utilisation of *resources*.

1. *Leading Image / Vision*

‘Something mysteriously formed, born before heaven and earth...’

Vision originates in the ‘spirit’ — in the far-seeing mind — but initially it is concealed in a kind of ‘blind spot’. As an intuition, we cannot see its origins in the person of initiative until it is articulated. This is represented by that dark focal point in the light-filled ‘head’ of the Tao diagram. At the opposite pole, what becomes of it will be made apparent in matter, in its ordering into resources, illuminated by the focussed reflective light of our consciousness — ultimately, here, we know that ‘seeing is believing’.

What is first conceived as vision is the light chosen to live by — everything stands beneath this ‘star’, which tells us *why* we are undertaking this particular challenge. As a true vision it needs to be made perceptible to others, and to do so it must accurately articulate the impulse. When it does, it can be called a *leading image*.

One winter’s night in 1972, we sat in the back room of a café. Candles were burning in wax-encrusted bottles, and cigarette smoke curled in their light. We were a group of young people casting about for a cause... With opinions about everything. Suddenly one of us — a young woman — said, “I need a really good school for my boy, or else I’ll have to move elsewhere. What about a Steiner School?”

That was the beginning. In the following years, that conversation continued to shine in our minds like a star; and other conversations clustered about it — forming a constellation...

2. *Values / Policies*

‘Guiding without interfering; this is primal Virtue.’

The illuminating principles of this vision are then clothed — though sometimes shrouded — in whatever *values* are formulated to guide our actions — here are found all the attitudes that inspire the way to live and work, informing *how* we intend to conduct ourselves. From these values we will create policies and procedures. Some policies will govern straightforward and functional aspects of good business practice — but others must attend to relationships and their complexities...

It is important in this regard to not only articulate those values such as ‘support’, but also, in formulating policy and procedures — in a human resources policy, school enrolment policy, or a code of conduct — to consider what support looks like as a behaviour when practised — how will we know when we experience it?

Sometimes values are clearly described by someone early on. I recall one of us saying, "I want this to be a different kind of place — one where people feel welcomed, not because of who they are, but because they are. Because they exist, and because they come along, they have a place..."

Respect. This proved difficult — as all important values might be — to embody in many of the situations we found ourselves in during those first years. There can be a 'natural' arrogance that appears through drive towards accomplishment. But as the community has matured and developed some social skilfulness, it has emerged as an enduring value, as a prevalent way of being and doing.

3. Aims

'The Way of heaven is like a bent bow.'

The intent and direction of all policies and procedures are driven by *aims* informed by those values, whether consciously held or otherwise. An aim is determined whenever the impulse present in the vision or leading image is worked out into the practical substance of life. Here, reality provides a real test for the will. Our aim is true when we know where we stand, and look to see where we want to go... Then we can discover *what* to do.

Longer-term aims may be included in the Mission Statement; however, short-term objectives need to be set, planned, undertaken, and reviewed in an ongoing way through a conscious action-learning cycle.

"First we can do this, and then..." The possibilities seemed infinite. But one of the laws of vision becoming reality is that we live in a field of opportunity that opens out between possibilities and limitations. We were young, and so we just went at it — and as idealists we were slow to notice there can be casualties. The will can exhaust itself, and damage others.

Gradually we learned, to at least some extent to recognise the features of the times and circumstances in which we acted. Then we sighted the target more clearly; we knew the strength of the bow, the flight of the arrow, and could take more responsibility for our aim...

4. People

'Mastering others needs force; mastering the self needs strength.'

It would be possible to take the path alone — but only to this point of setting out to realise those aims. Here our relationships with other human beings stand right in the middle of the path. How we live and work — and play — depends upon encounter, and what can develop out of this. *People* therefore are at the centre of the creative and productive process, each one living in a dynamic field between impulse and resistance.

We can identify among them the *carriers* (who unite their lives with the Mission and embody leadership capacities and responsibilities) — the *co-workers* (who contribute vitally towards the Fulfilment) — and the *supporters* (including the customers, clients, suppliers, etc, whose

associated activities make the organisation viable). The cultivation of effective relationships amongst all these diverse people is a social art-form.

From the beginning we were a group — it's often like that with an initiative. It didn't seem to matter too much who was central and who was more peripheral. Later, it became a problem when at critical moments some of us were spun-off — and others who came towards us often felt the circle was impenetrable. The group could be a cyclone or a silo...

There is an art of community, and there are fundamental rights and obligations which facilitate the inter-actions between people. Pioneering individuals can seem oblivious to this, and it is a remarkable accomplishment when their leadership capacities are enlarged to encompass the wider community.

5. Functions

'Shape clay into a vessel; it is the space within that makes it useful.'

In accord with the needs arising from this world of relationships, to serve what is held as the vision, values and aims, we must design organisational forms — *functions* — through which they may be embodied. These structures have to make the fulfilment of our aims possible. The human body has various interdependent organs; similarly, an effective organisation will need particular organs in order to function well as an organism.

Clear function descriptions and mandates can provide a basis for understanding the roles, responsibilities, activities and authority of individuals and groups in their co-functioning. If there is any ambiguity in these functional structures, problems will arise. Problems *will* arise, inevitably. Suitable structures are one aspect of what will support resolution.

In those early years everyone did everything — it was as if there was a single amorphous organ or unicellular entity which fulfilled all functions. Differentiation was both painful and a relief, as structures emerged that could enable decisive, responsible action, without the involvement of everyone. It was a real challenge to entrust and empower these groups and individual positions of responsibility.

At first we worked more descriptively, seeing what was already present in the incipient organisation, and giving it definition; and then there was a need to be prescriptive, to see what else was needed and make it happen. Not everyone liked these imposed changes, which resulted from deferred development...

6. Processes

'The shape changes but not the form; the more it moves, the more it yields.'

These structural forms must be inter-connected and enlivened by living *processes* — we have to communicate, to connect everything, to ensure that the principle of movement still keeps things mobile, flexible, responsive to need. However, the impulsive actions characteristic of a pioneering phase need to become directed and consistent; therefore, the policies we have formulated must provide for procedures through which processes can be effective.

Procedures are conduits and valves for activity. They must provide for stages of unimpeded motion, and gathering points for reflection. A sense for timing and rhythm is critical — in every aspect of the organisation, the information-processes, relationship-processes and work-processes have to be integrated into methodical progression towards results.

Young institutions can seem chaotic! Some of us thrived in that time, when intuition and improvisation were the modus operandi. Then, along came others who wanted structure and procedures, and to know that this would be the way things were done...

Water offers a good analogy — if we dam it, obstructing its flow altogether, on one hand we then have great potential energy; but on the other hand, it begins to silt up, and stagnate. But if we cut a straight channel for it, water flows too fast — it gushes, and scours, and eventually reshapes its course to suit its inherent nature. So we had to find procedures that enabled the right flow of any process, through the pools and rapids of conscious action.

7. Resources

'What is firmly established cannot be uprooted.'

Out of all these processes, the final shape of the 'product' — the results, the accomplishment — is crystallised or precipitated into the world of *resources*. Here the resistance-forces of the physical world provide the test — has the provision of resources (the physical and material conditions, including the enabling fluid circulation of finances) been adequately attended to? Have they been utilised well? Is the organisation realising — *making real* — its vision?

It is possible here to evaluate the reality of the enterprise in both quantitative and qualitative terms. What measures confirm achievement? What are real indicators? Is this apparent in the balance sheet? Can it be expressed in an annual report? Is what is seen and experienced a direct reflection of the leading image, the mission statement?

When we gathered together at a commemoration point, we noticed the accomplishment and the sacrifice. The school buildings are very grand, a magnificent frozen music of all that striving. The grey hair and lined faces reveal the sculpting forces of life experience... That boy — for whom the question was first articulated, "What about a Steiner School?" — now has his children enrolled there.

The school is well-reputed, the waiting lists are long. These are indicators of something. Is the challenge now to return to that originating vision, to those values, to those aims expressed in the mission statement — "Through this education the human being shall become free and responsible" — and ask, "Are we there yet? How shall this beginning be continued...?"

The Journey of a Thousand Miles...

In each of the above stages, the people involved as 'carriers' (leaders) need to develop a kind of 'zoom-lens' consciousness — in both directions, in and out — through which the whole and the parts are constantly borne in mind. This is the real meaning of *attentiveness*. While characterised above as a sequential pathway, the true nature of the Tao is that everything is

related to everything, and so the movement keeps turning back upon itself even while going forward. Each stage is reflected also in all the others. For instance, already in the early stages of vision, human resourcefulness leads to some contemplation of resources; conversely, the outcomes will reflect the guiding star — or not, as the case may be. This is so in cultural or social enterprises as much as in commercial-industrial ones. If it has been a good journey, the substantiated, grounded idea will be perceptible as a tangible fulfilment of the mission.

I have narrated a particular story, but it is also every story. These seven steps represent the essential stages of the journey. Yet if we consider any single step, we realise it is formed by many micro-movements. Rudolf Steiner once referred to walking as a process of *statics and dynamics* — the inter-relationship of these gives rise to *equilibrium*. In an organisation we take each of the seven steps through many micro-movements of consciousness and action — and in undertaking these we develop attentiveness.

Attentiveness is *presence* — to live in both vision and reality. We decide on the way, we go on the way, we reflect on the way we are travelling...

The Way never acts yet nothing is left undone.

