

Vision, role, mission, goal

A framework for business motivation

Tom Graves : *Tetradian Consulting*
January 2007

© 2007 Tetradian Consulting

Tetradian Consulting
The Coach House
Balkerne Close
Colchester CO1 1NZ
England
[+44] (0) 781 560 6624
info@tetradian.com
www.tetradian.com

The VRMG framework

- **Audience**
 - enterprise architects, strategists, planners, process architects, technical architects
- **Objective**
 - illustrate purpose of organisational ‘visioning’
 - identify and resolve common visioning errors
- **Agenda**
 - define ‘vision’ in organisational context
 - describe visioning layers and their function
 - describe visioning process
 - describe visioning errors and their impact

The purpose of this slidepack is to introduce the Vision / Role / Mission / Goal framework for business motivation. (Or ‘VRMG framework’, for simplicity.)

It’s aimed at people whose work revolves around balancing ‘big picture’ issues with day-to-day practice – roles such as enterprise-architects, strategists and planners – but it should also be useful for most business managers.

What it tackles is the contentious issue of ‘visioning’ in business – contentious because it’s so rarely done well!

Some important questions

You're developing a new process...
or a new system...

or a new strategy, or suchlike...
and someone asks you...

“Why are we doing this, anyway?”

How would you answer?

How can you be certain that what you're doing...
does contribute...
to the organisation's purpose?

For that matter, what is your organisation's purpose?

‘Vision’ is one of those issues that may seem abstract at first, but addresses a real, concrete, practical concern: why do we do what we do? How does doing this help the organisation to achieve its purpose? – if there is a purpose, of course...

There are two key reasons why this is important:

-we might perhaps be very efficient, but we can't be effective unless we have some idea of whether or not we're ‘on purpose’; and

-having some sense of purpose is the key to business motivation – in other words, it's what gets people out of bed in the morning, wanting to do their work.

This isn't trivial. If we can't provide a clear sense of business-purpose, people can only bring to their work whatever motivation of their own they may have – which may not help the organisation at all...

Keeping on purpose

You can only know you're 'on purpose'...
...when there's a clear audit-trail of purpose.

In other words, when each **activity**
contributes towards a **goal**
which creates or maintains a **mission**
which supports an intended **role**
within an overall **vision**
of the organisation's world.

That's the audit-trail for business motivation:

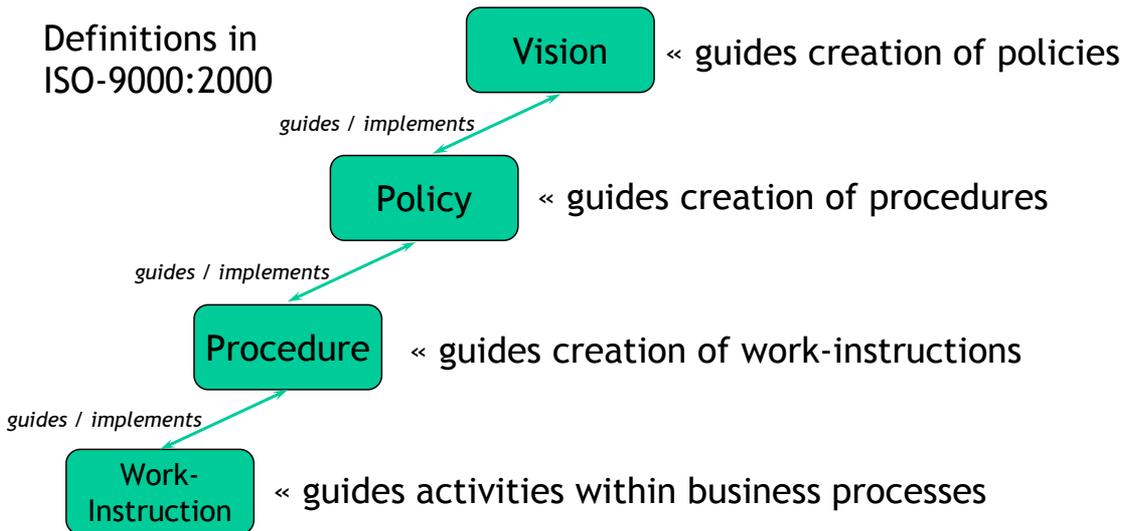
vision <>> role <>> mission <>> goal

So there's a real need for a kind of 'audit-trail' of business purpose, providing a clear reason and validation for every activity within the organisation.

And the four layers of vision, role, mission and goal provide perhaps the simplest framework for that type of audit-trail.

Role of vision in quality-system

Definitions in
ISO-9000:2000



Vision is the anchor for the entire quality-system

See how this works in a slightly different context, for an ISO-9000 type quality-system. This too requires a full audit-trail up and down a hierarchy of levels - in this case a trail of responsibility rather than motivation, but the principle is the same.

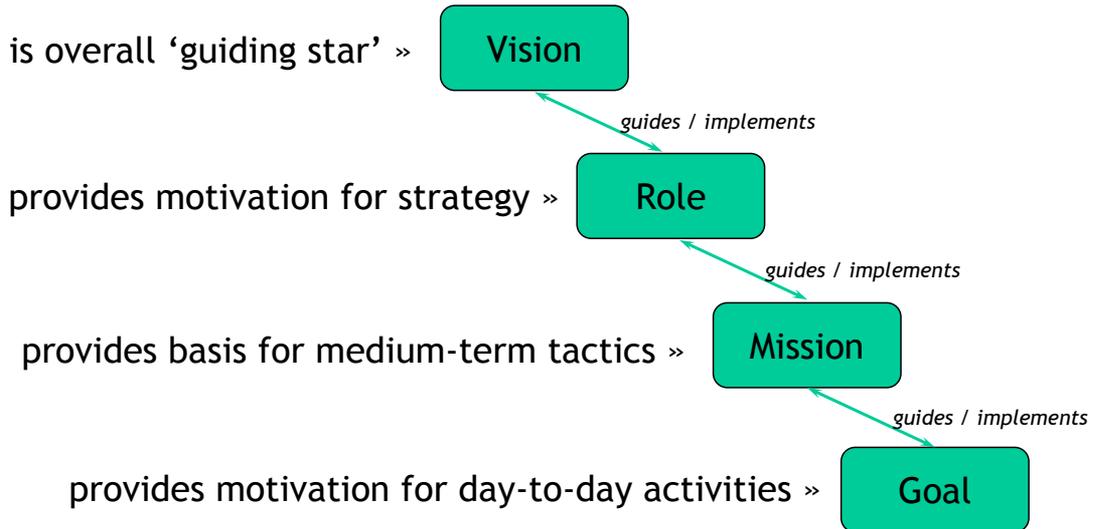
Work-instructions define the details of what to do on a day-to-day basis.

But whenever something changes, we need to change the Work-instruction. To do this, we go upward to the Procedure, which describes the overall process and responsibilities, but not the operational detail.

If the Procedure won't cover the change, we go upward again to the Policy level, to help us define a new Procedure as a basis for the new Work-instruction.

And if the organisation's 'world' has changed so much that the Policy won't cover it, ISO-9000:2000 tells us to go upward one further step, to the Vision layer – the ultimate, unchanging anchor for the quality-system.

Role of vision in business-motivation



Vision is the anchor for business motivation

We'll see much the same with business motivation.

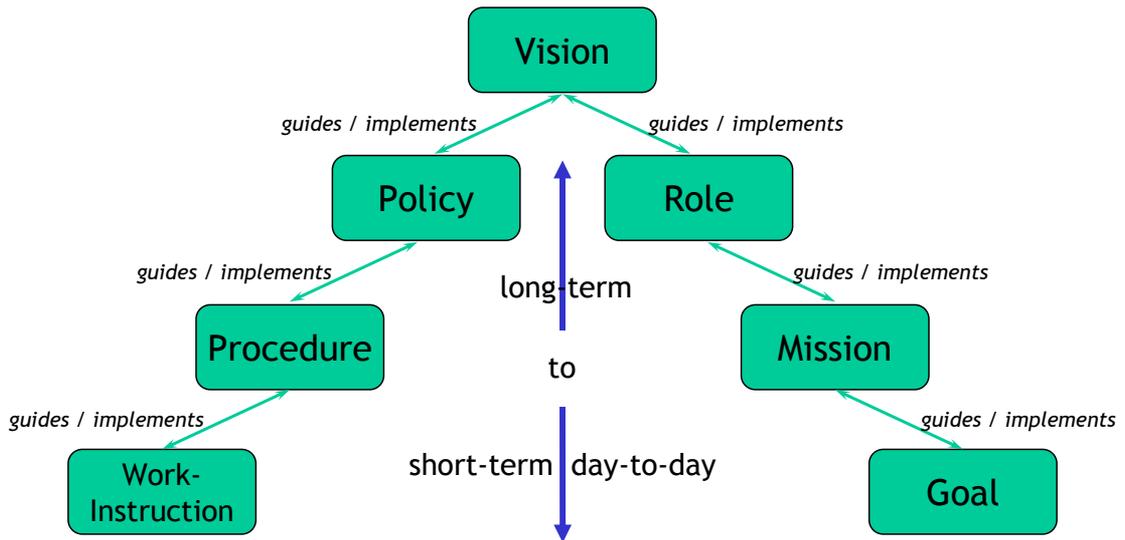
Each Goal should implement and support a Mission, and is also guided by that Mission.

Each Mission supports and implements a Role, which in turn provides the reason for that Mission.

And each Role – an organisation may have several Roles at once, such as manufacture, logistics and retail – implements and is guided by the Vision.

So as for the quality-system, the Vision is the ultimate anchor for business motivation.

Vision is the organisation's anchor



Work-instructions and Goals are similar: they both deal with the short-term, the immediate, the ever-changing day-to-day. But through their respective audit-trails, they each have anchors all the way up into the organisation's Vision.

The point here is that it's the same Vision on both sides: there's only one Vision. And it never changes – which is what makes it the organisation's anchor.

Vision, role, mission, goal

“The right for an organization to exist is the added value it delivers to its surroundings. This is partially expressed in the business goals the company strives to attain.”

- management-consultancy Sogeti/CapGemini *

- The ‘surroundings’ are defined by the **Vision**
- The ‘added value’ is delivered via the **Role**
- The value added is measured via **Missions**
- The creation of value is guided via **Goals**
- hence **Vision <<>> Role <<>> Mission <<>> Goal**

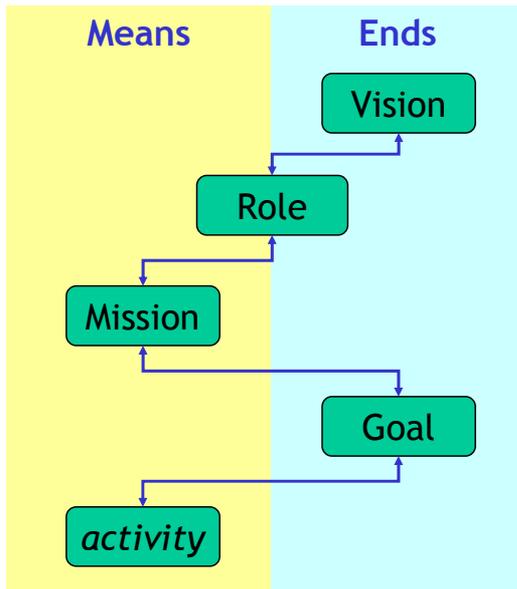
* Sogeti, “Business Objectives”, http://eng.dya.info/Home/dya/dya_technics/architectural_framework/business_objectives/index.jsp



The key point in this quote from management-consultants Sogeti/CapGemini is that the organisation does not exist in isolation: it's merely one part, one player, within a much larger 'eco-system'.

This hierarchy of Vision, Role, Mission, Goal, and on down to everyday activities, helps to clarify what value the organisation adds, and how, to that overall eco-system.

Ends and means



- **Ends:** the results we wish to achieve
- **Means:** the methods and activities by which we will achieve those Ends
- Vision and Goal are Ends
- Mission and day-to-day activities are Means
- Role is the chosen bridge between Ends and Means
- Organisational roles bridge activity and Goal, or Goal and Mission

Another way to look at this is in terms of ends or means: what we want to achieve, and the way we want to get there.

This kind of framework is used, for example, in the Business Rules Group's draft ISO-standard *Business Motivation Model*. (The main difference here is that that model doesn't recognise Role.)

The high-level Role and other organisational roles are the bridges between Ends and Means. All those roles in the 'org-chart' link activities to Goals; whilst the activities of specialist roles such as planners and the Programme Management Office merge all those Goals in support of the respective Missions. It works; that's how it works.

What this model doesn't tell us, though, is what any of these things are. ISO-9000, for example, tells us we must have a Vision, but doesn't tell us what one would look like. So that's what we need to turn to next.

Vision - description

- **Summary:** describes a desired 'world'
- **Purpose:** identifies the overall space shared with competitors, customers, partners, suppliers and other stakeholders
- **Examples:**
 - "a more sociable world" (brewers Lion Nathan)
 - "boundaryless sharing of information" (Open Group [IT])
- **Scope:** always larger than the organisation; should never change
- **Measurable?** not measurable as such; never 'achieved'

Let's start from the top, even though Vision is at the kind of abstract layer with which many people are uncomfortable.

Where most attempts at defining a Vision go wrong – and we'll look at this again later – is that they look only at the organisation itself: the classic marketing-style 'vision' of "to be the best this-that-or-the-other".

But to work properly as an anchor for everything the organisation does, the Vision needs to be much broader, and much larger than the organisation itself. It needs to describe a 'desired world', with space for all the other players we need to make the enterprise work – our customers, suppliers, partners, even our competitors, and so on.

And it's not something we can measure, or 'achieve': it just is.

Vision - business function

- **Identifies domain shared with partners, etc**
 - clarifies common characteristics of probable stakeholders
- **Provides stable anchor for quality-system etc**
 - key point: it does not change
- **Describes ‘the passion’**
 - clarifies desirable / undesirable characteristics in hiring
 - also “it’s what gets me out of bed in the morning”
- **Provides focus-point to identify ‘weak signals’**
 - emergent strategy: ‘weak signals’ are easily missed in everyday activities, but are forerunners of future change

So as we saw from the examples, the Vision is a short, simple statement that describes that ‘desired world’. It’s about who ‘we’ is, as an organisation; it’s about what we aspire to; the kind of thing that’ll “get us out of bed in the morning”. (Interesting point: if it doesn’t appeal to us in this literally emotive way, we’re possibly in the wrong organisation...)

Although it may at first seem abstract, it’s also immediately practical: a Vision of “a more sociable world”, as in the Lion Nathan example, tells us a great deal straight away about what kind of hiring-policies we’d need, what kind of customers we’d have, some of the regulatory problems we might face, and so on. In other words, a really useful ‘anchor’.

And the Vision’s implied boundaries around our organisation’s interest also help us to identify those subtle but all-important ‘weak signals’ of future changes in technology, in society, or whatever, that are so important to strategy.

Role - description

- **Summary:** what the organisation aims to do and not-do within the Vision's 'world', as its contribution towards the Vision
- **Purpose:** clarifies points where the organisation intersects with customers, partners, stakeholders etc
- **Examples:**
 - brewer and distributor (Lion Nathan)
 - provider of police services (Essex Police)
- **Scope:** identifies boundaries of operation within the Vision- 'world', and complementary roles for other stakeholders; will change slowly over time
- **Measurable?** only in the sense of "how well are we maintaining this role?"; 'achieved' only in a dynamic rather than static sense

The Role describes where the organisation fits, as one actor amongst many contributing to the world of the Vision.

There's no qualifier to the Role - no "best of", or "premier provider of", or suchlike – just a simple statement about what the organisation does in this Role. By placing this boundary around what it does, the Role automatically implies other Roles that would be needed to make the Vision-world happen. For example, if we see our Role as a 'brewer and distributor', for a Vision of 'a more sociable world', we'll need to connect with a wide variety of other Roles – not only the obvious ones such as 'customer' and 'supplier', but others such as 'a provider of police services'. Our Vision and Role tell us that these odder intersections with other Roles would be an expected part of business – which reduces possibilities for unpleasant surprises.

Unlike the Vision, the Role does drift or change shape slowly, over time. We may find that a different set of boundaries to our Role may be a better fit with our capabilities – our Missions; we may choose to change it when a new technology makes possible a new Mission; and so on. But we don't really 'achieve' a Role: it's simply what we do – what we choose to do.

Role - business function

- **Clarifies what to do and not-do to in chosen market**
 - processes, overall activities, geographical constraints
- **Highlights potential partners**
 - complementary providers in the same space
 - “we provide public-security police services; others provide private security, law-courts, custodial services, etc”
 - customers are partners in creating the Vision-‘world’
- **May ‘surface’ hidden opportunities**
 - e.g. unexpected customers, services, partners etc
- **Reduces risk from unexpected stakeholders**
 - NGOs, pressure-groups, unions, community groups etc

So that’s a Role. It puts manageable boundaries – our processes, overall activities, geographical constraints – around the part (or parts) we choose to play within ‘the everything’ of the Vision-world.

It gives us some strong indications of other necessary partners and players – other Roles – in our chosen Vision-world, and our likely relationship with each.

And it clarifies both opportunity-management and risk-management – helping us to be prepared for surprise, rather than futilely struggling against it.

Mission - description

- **Summary:** new capabilities and/or services the organisation intends to create (via Goals), and maintain thereafter
 - like a trade-mission, not a military mission
 - (two-stage 'mission': create, then continue indefinitely - not a once-off)
- **Purpose:** identifies the means needed to support the 'ends' of the Vision, and measures needed to verify required support
- **Example [new capability]:**
 - “achieve and maintain 20% market share for brewed products in ANZ”
 - “provide DNA-based forensic evidence facilities for Essex”
- **Scope:** must identifiably support the Role and Vision; does not end when 'achieved'; will change with business strategy cycle
- **Measurable?** must be measurable/verifiable; transitions to continuous-improvement once initially 'achieved'

Like 'vision', 'mission' is a word that's been much misused and mangled in many business-motivation models. As we'll see later, a mission-statement is frequently misdescribed as 'a vision' – with unfortunate results in most cases. So what's meant here by 'Mission' is a simple description of a capability or service to be created (via Goals) and maintained indefinitely thereafter.

A Mission has two distinct phases: the initial stage when it's created, and the subsequent phase of continuous operation. (There's also a third phase for wind-down when the Mission ends.) In that sense, it's like a trade-mission, not a one-off military mission – in fact the latter is really a type of Goal. And we'll often need different people, and certainly different Goals, for each phase.

In motivation terms, the Mission description's job is straightforward: it tells us how we will deliver the Role.

This is one place where we must have measurements – the whole collection of KPIs, KSCs, SLAs and all those other wonderful acronyms. These metrics tell us whether we're on track in delivering our Role to the Vision-world. But note that we don't actually 'achieve' a Mission: we measure it instead.

Mission - business function

- **Specifies and clarifies capabilities needed for Role**
 - Mission is the *means* by which value is delivered to the Vision
- **Is point of contact with others' Roles**
 - provide service or product to 'customer' Role
 - receive goods or services from other 'provider' Roles
 - contribute via taxes to 'community stakeholder' Roles, etc.
- **Provides placeholder for performance-measurement**
 - Service Level Agreement (SLA), Key Success Criterion (KSC), Key Performance Indicator (KPI)
- **Is locus of continuous-improvement processes**
 - measurements are key input to quality-management

One key point is that in most cases Missions aren't just about us: they're as much about our partners, the other Roles in the Vision-world, because those Missions are our points of contact with them. And the metrics associated with the Mission exist to monitor and manage that interaction.

(For Missions that act solely within the organisation itself, the other Roles – 'customers', 'suppliers' and so on – are internal rather than external, but the same principle applies. This is the basis of concepts such as service-oriented architecture, for example.)

Missions also need regular review, not only against their own metrics – the locus of continuous-improvement processes – but also compared against the respective Role, because each may change the other.

Goal - description

- **Summary:** ‘project’ with a specified set of deliverables and a target date for completion
 - every transit through a value-chain is a ‘project’ with a finite goal
- **Purpose:** identifies a single finite set of activities required in order to support and/or maintain a Mission
- **Example:**
 - “bring DNA database on-line for all Essex forensic units by <date>”
- **Scope:** must be associated with / contribute to a Mission; should end on completion; will change frequently in accordance with business tactics
- **Measurable?** measurable only in 'true/false' terms, as conformance with deliverables and/or completion date

And here we arrive at concrete, tangible Goals – the day-to-day Ends of business-motivation. The description consists of two mandatory parts – the deliverables for the Goal, and the required start-date and completion-date – and an optional list of additional metrics to be checked on completion.

A Goal must always contribute towards a Mission – it never exists in isolation.

Although we say that the Goal completes at the end of its main activities, at its completion-date, there needs also to be a brief additional phase to capture ‘lessons learned’. Although all too often this phase is skipped, simply from pressure of other Goals, this is the only place where criteria for success or failure can be applied; and the information gleaned in this final phase provides key information for process reviews.

Goal - business function

- **Provides clear boundaries to activities**
 - concrete, immediate, time-boxed start and end,
 - permits narrow focus on task to hand, without distraction by past, future or abstracts
- **Provides motivation via sense of urgency**
 - hierarchy of scope/duration of goals improves throughput
- **Provides turning-points in continuous-review cycle**
 - transition to 'Check' review-stage in TQM (Total Quality Management) cycle: Plan, Do, Check, Act
 - transition to 'Adjourning' review in project-lifecycle: Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, Adjourning

Goals are straightforward, immediately concrete and practical; they also provide clear boundaries of time, space and context, making it easier to concentrate on the task to hand.

And well-constructed Goals provide a useful sense of urgency, of need to complete. By arranging Goals in hierarchies, with longer-term Goals (such as the creation of a new Mission) partitioned into smaller Goals through some kind of 'work breakdown structure', the same urgency can be maintained through much longer periods – which can greatly increase overall productivity.

Cyclic models of the project lifecycle also remind us of the importance of that brief review-period that needs to occur after completion of the Goal. In TQM, for example, it's the 'Check' phase, whilst in the Group Dynamics cycle it's described as 'Adjourning', but the principle is the same in each case.

Vision, strategy and tactics

- **Strategies and tactics implement path to Vision**
 - strategy links Role «>» Mission, tactics links Mission «>» Goal
- **Question: why do good managers set bad strategy?**
 - Michael Porter: “an obsession with ‘shareholder value’ is the Bermuda Triangle of strategy”*
- **Answer: invalid Vision, Role, Mission and/or Goal**
 - successful strategies depend on clear Goals etc
 - clear Goals depend in turn on clear Missions, Roles, Vision
- **Misframed Vision will render strategy unreliable, unstable and error-prone**
 - “maximise shareholder value” is an outcome of good strategy and vision, not a substitute for it

* Michael Porter, “Why do good managers set bad strategies?”, <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=1594>

Once we understand the nature of Vision, of Role, of Mission, of Goal, we build strategy and tactics to tie the framework together. Through strategy, we review the continuous subtle changes needed in our Role, and create and maintain Missions to match. And tactics define the Goals and activities needed to support each Mission. Straightforward and simple, as such.

Yet so often we’ll see strategies that simply don’t work. For example, Michael Porter, the guru of strategy-development, describes the common obsession with shareholder-value as “the Bermuda Triangle of strategy”.

And the reason: strategies don’t work – in fact can’t work – if the Vision and Role aren’t framed correctly.

This is why a systematic visioning process is so important.

Visioning process: Vision

- **Rule #1: it's not a marketing exercise!**
 - mistaking a market-pitch for visioning can kill the company
 - (see *Erroneous 'Visions'* slides following)
- **Identifying the Vision**
 - clarifies the organisation's overall area of interest
 - about “who we are, what we aspire to”
- **Phrasing the Vision**
 - consists of <descriptive-adjective> + <noun>
or “a world of ...” + <descriptive-adjective> + <noun>
- **Validating the Vision**
 - should trigger a *feeling* of ‘rightness’ about it
 - should trigger a response of “we operate in this space because it's who we are!”

Before we look at the visioning process, we must re-iterate one essential point: a market-pitch may feel like a Vision in some ways, but their business functions are entirely different – a pitch is a short-term appeal to the market, whilst a Vision is an unchanging anchor for the organisation itself. Never confuse these two functions, because doing so can literally be lethal to an organisation. More on that later.

Identifying a valid Vision does take time, because it's not so much a choice as a feeling. Look for hints of it in the organisation's history; in the anecdotes and stories people tell each other; and in the real values that people express in their work.

See the previous examples for typical phrasing for valid Visions – it's not complicated.

And to be certain that the phrasing of the Vision is right, again test the feeling: it should bring out an almost indignant response of “we do it because that's who we are!”

Visioning process: Role

- **Identifying an existing or desired Role**
 - expresses the chosen means to contribute toward the Vision (i.e. what the organisation does)
 - *note*: organisation may have more than one Role
 - clarifies Roles of other stakeholders in the Vision-‘world’
- **Phrasing a Role**
 - consists of <action-verb> + <noun>
or <role-noun> “of” <product/service>
 - where <role-noun> is ‘provider’, ‘consumer’, ‘monitor’ etc
- **Validating a Role**
 - will feel more considered / ‘thought’ than the Vision
 - should trigger a response of “that’s what we do!”

A Role is usually easier to identify than the Vision – though as you explore the sense of the Vision-world, remember to take note of all the implied Roles of other stakeholders, because an understanding of these becomes important later when creating and assessing the organisation’s Missions.

For phrasing, again see the previous Role examples: it’s fairly straightforward.

Overall, the Role will need to seem more considered than the Vision, more ‘thought-through’, but will still essentially be based in feeling – easy to recognise as a bright, assertive response of “but that’s what we do!”

Visioning process: Mission and Goal

- **Identifying Missions and Goals**

- derive via standard strategy/tactics tools and methodologies
- note differences in earlier descriptions, especially:
 - at end of cycle, Goal completes, but Mission continues
 - measure/review after Goal, but during Mission

- **Phrasing and validating a Mission**

- *phrasing*: <capability/service> + <measures/success-criteria>
- *validation*: response of “that’s how we do what we do!”

- **Phrasing and validating a Goal**

- *phrasing*: <deliverables> + <deadline> [+ <success-criteria>]
- *validation*: ‘SMART’ - specific, measurable (at end), achievable, relevant, time-based

To identify Missions and Goals, use a standard project or service-management methodology such as PRINCE2, PMBOK or ITIL.

The phrasing of a Mission will often include key criteria, but they must always be measurable criteria – not fluffy ‘market-speak’ such as ‘the best’ or ‘premier’ or suchlike.

In the same way phrasings for Goals should be validated against the classic ‘SMART’ checklist. There are several variations of meanings for the acronym, most of which would be useful here: the slide shows one example, but another would probably work as well.

Erroneous ‘visions’

- **Role as ‘vision’**
 - *example*: “providers of brewed products to ANZ market”
 - confuses ends and means: invites ‘so what?’ response
- **Mission as ‘vision’**
 - *example*: “achieve and maintain 20% of market share”
 - self-referential, leaves no room for partners/customers
- **Goal as ‘vision’**
 - *example*: “beat Benz!” (Lexus cars)
 - kills motivation stone-dead when achieved
- **Desired future-condition as ‘vision’**
 - *example*: blueprint for ‘to-be’ IT-architecture framework
 - ‘future state’ is effectively mission-as-vision

Perhaps unsurprisingly, most of the problems with visioning are around the framing of the Vision.

When a Role is used as the ‘vision’, it just feels flat – the automatic response is “so what?”, rather than a true Vision’s feel of “I’d like to be a part of that!”

Misframed Missions are commonly mistaken for ‘vision’ – “maximise shareholder value” is a classic example. Again, it confuses ends and means – and because it’s self-referential, the most likely response would be “Why? What’s in it for me?”

Using a Goal as a ‘vision’ is even worse: true, it is an end rather than a means, but all motivation is lost as soon as the Goal is reached. Not a good idea...

And a subtle semantic problem, describing a concept of some desired ‘future state’ as ‘a vision’. It’s valid in its way, but it’s not the same as we’re concerned with here. A simple test: if it’s temporary, or narrow in scope – a ‘future-state architecture’, for example – then it’s not a Vision.

Combinations of errors are common

- **Success-criterion as ‘vision’**

- *example*: “taking a lead in the security of Essex”
- blurs activities of role, measures of mission
 - neither role nor mission are clearly expressed
- criterion for success may be spurious, unmeasurable
 - how would you measure “taking a lead”?

- **Marketing-slogan as ‘vision’**

- *example*: “to be the best bakers of the century!”
- common ‘to be xxx of yyy’ form combines every error
 - role-based, self-referential, goal-driven, spurious measure
- **WARNING!** - this dangerous form is promoted as ‘vision’ in many texts (e.g. BRG’s *Business Motivation Model*)

We’ll also see attempts at ‘vision’ which combine the previous errors.

The first example here is a muddled mixture of a Role – something about providing security services – and the measures from a Mission – the “taking a lead” part – which ends up as something like more like a PR-slogan than a Vision. Key points: a Vision can’t be measured or achieved - it simply is. And if you’re going to use a measure – which you should only do for the framing of a Mission – then make sure that it is something that can be measured!

The final example is a classic misuse of a marketing slogan: combining almost every possible mistake, it’s a near-perfect illustration of what not to do when defining a Vision. The “to be” tells us it’s a Role; the spurious measure of “the best” shows it’s also a Mission; “the century” means it’s also a Goal; and it’s entirely self-referential - there’s no space that can shared with partners, customers or anyone else – so it’s not a Vision. What it is is a mess...

So it’s unfortunate that this is the style most often recommended in business books, and even in ‘standards’ such as the *Business Motivation Model*. Be warned: it doesn’t work. It simply cannot do the job that a Vision needs to do.

Summary

- We should be able to link every activity to Vision:
 - “this activity of *pppp*...
 - implements part of the deliverables of the Goal *qqqq*, to be completed by *dd/mm*...
 - which will assist in creating or maintaining the Mission *xxxx*, as measured by KPIs *iiii* and *jjjj*...
 - which supports our Role *yyyy*, with supplier *mmmm* and customer *nnnn*...
 - which contributes to the Vision, *zzzz*.”
- Visioning identifies each step of this link
 - VRMG provides an audit-trail of business motivation
- The end-result: clarity and motivation at work
 - “Okay, so that’s why we’re doing this.”

So, to summarise, this sequence of Vision, Role, Mission, Goal provides a framework for gives a complete audit-trail for business motivation. linking everyday activities all the way up to the organisation’s Vision – its ‘reason to be’.

In principle we should be able to write a complete ‘purpose-statement’, in the form on the slide, for every activity in the organisation. We wouldn’t do this in practice, of course – it would be an enormous waste of effort, creating the same kind of dreaded paper-trail that killed early implementations of ISO-9000. But this framework does mean that whenever we do need to know the business purpose of what we’re doing, we can find out straight away.

Being able to answer, with clarity and certainty, the question “Why are we doing this?” makes a big difference to business motivation.

And that’s how we do it. Vision; Role; Mission; Goal.