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Developing a shared vision

Explanation of Daniel Kim's pyramid: the hierarchy of choices

When developing strategic policy and vision, there are usually two problems:

1. The piece is prescribed by the management or by a working group with the result that it is experienced as "prescribed" (imposed) by the people who are going to carry out the moving. This doesn't change when we ask people to respond to a prescribed concept. It is crucial that the people on the work floor can contribute to the building blocks of a mission and a vision; they must be able to recognize themselves in a concept as their own planes of a diamond.
2. In many processes and plans, all kinds of concepts are confused without a clear definition. Often it is not clear what exactly is meant by mission, vision, goals, strategy, identity. This causes great confusion and contributes to the fact that the intentions are not converted into actions.

The assignment is to avoid both problems.

The first problem can be solved by involving *everyone who has to deal with the consequences of the development policy in its development*. Give people a voice.

This is a golden rule in a learning organization. Bring the system to the table! For a school board, this means that in developing the mission and vision, at least:

- the upper school leaders and/or administrators
- the school leaders
- a representation of the GMR (teachers and parents)
- the children

This group jointly develops a mission, then from this mission and identity the values, then the vision and finally the strategy.

Here we are immediately confronted with the second problem: *the lack of clarity about the concepts. This is where Daniel Kim's pyramid can help us.*

If we look at the choices that are made in a school or at board level, there is a distinction to be made between six different layers. Daniel Kim has framed this hierarchy of choices in a pyramid. It is very important when developing policy to distinguish these aspects and to address them in a logical order and in a correct way. It must be clear to everyone involved what we mean by the different concepts so that we do not talk past each other. This can lead to us, for example, writing something about the mission while we mean the values; or that the part about the identity is mainly about the strategy to be followed.

Another golden hedgehog is to work in the order described below: 1. first the mission:

1. formulate the core task of the Foundation or the school;
2. then the values and the identity: who do we want to be?
3. then the vision statements;
4. only then the strategic choices.

Working with the pyramid can get extra impulses if we use the method as described by Otto Scharmer in Theory U. It goes too far to go into that in the context of this article.



- mission

Working with the pyramid *starts with the mission*. A mission expresses the answer to the question: "why are we there"? She answers questions such as: **What is the reason for our existence?** What makes us so special? Why should our school (or Foundation) not be closed down? What do we want to do with our school (Foundation)? Why do we make a difference for the children, the parents, the teachers, the environment, society? What is in the suitcase with which we let the children enter society and where their chances will be greater?

At whichever school of the Foundation parents place their children, they can in any case count on the children to receive this as baggage. What does the Foundation mean for the employees who are employed? And for the region in which the schools are located?

The mission is the moral goal of the school or of the Foundation. In a learning school, this means, among other things, that the team asks itself the question: How can we be the best school *for* this environment? Instead of: How can we be the best school *in* this environment?

The mission is the foundation for further development. The values, vision and the layers above must find their basis in the joint living mission.

- values and identity

If the mission is clear, the question arises: what **values do we need to successfully fulfill this mission?** In the mission we answer the question: Why are we a team. What do we give our children? What do we do for the employees and for the region?

In the values we answer the question: How do we want to be a team on the way to our mission and vision? They form **the guideline for the behavior** that people in the school (Foundation) show. The values form the framework for identity, they indicate who we are and how we want to be recognized by others. The identity and the values indicate the considerations from which we shape our mission and work towards our vision. Values can be expressed in terms of

behavior or ways of thinking. How do we treat each other? How do we view our children and their parents? We certainly don't want to cross any boundaries?

It is of great importance that in a school or in a Foundation there is one set of values that is known to everyone in the school and is a guideline for action and on which everyone is accountable. It works best if, for example, ***six core values are formulated that are then translated into standards*** (concrete observable behavior: class, school, Foundation). If we don't do this, the values usually remain "blah-blah blah". Here too, the fit between individual and collective mission is important. Moral awareness of teachers is one of the most important levers for successful school development. We do not get better student care through a good test calendar, but from teachers who want to make a difference for the children they work with and who work together to make this happen!

- vision

After the mission and the values have been made clear and alive, we can get started with the vision. By the concept of vision we mean in eand learning school ***a description of the image of the future that we want to create***. By formulating our vision, we show which direction we want to take and what it will be like when we get there together. The word vision comes from the Latijnse verb *visère*. This means "to see". This connection with seeing is important: the clearer we have the image of the future, the more compelling we experience it. ***What will our school or Foundation look like in two or three years? What do I see when I walk in? What do I see people doing? What do I hear people say?***

Vision statements can be made in different areas. Consider, for example: – personnel policy

- buildings
- quality of education
- professionalization and support
- appropriate education
- yield-oriented work and leadership
- cooperation in the region

The question is always: what will this aspect look like in two or three years' time?

The joint vision gives shape and direction to the future of the school and helps the people to make this future for the organization come true. She gives direction to the actions in the school. This is only possible if the vision is described cinematically.

- strategy

How are we going to realize our vision in the coming period? In the vision we have described where we want to end up, the strategy is about the path we are going to follow.

Questions such as:

- who are we going to involve in this development?
- what support do we need?
- who do we work with on the way to our goal?
- how do we know if we are on the right track?
- how much time, money and energy are we going to spend on it?

Strategy is about the how-questions. These are certainly important, but they are generally asked far too early. "A wonderful idea, but how do I do that tomorrow in the classroom or in my school?" In many cases, the answer is not (directly) possible. Peter Block wrote in a book titled, "The answer to how is yes." In it he states that in this time of quick actions we constantly ask the question "How is that done?" with the intention of getting a ready-made answer from others. A quote from this book:

"I believe that in our culture we have succumbed too easily to what is feasible and practical. In doing so, we have often lost what lives in our hearts. We give in to our doubts, we hold on to what we already know and can do from the past, instead of going for what we really want with the adventure and uncertainty that this path requires of us. "

In a learning school, the first thing is the question "Why are we doing this? What matters?" and only after that is "How do we do this?" Working in a learning school means learning to do what matters together, looking together for new ways, for creative solutions, creating a new future together. There are no ready-made solutions for this, it is an ongoing joint search.

- tactics

The tactics are about what we will be working on in the coming period. ***What choices do we make? What are the priorities?***

This layer involves, for example, making an annual plan. Such a plan must be so flexible that we can respond to current events. Especially in this rapidly changing time, good planning is 50% of success and not sticking to it the other 50%!

It is also important to work with success loops and not with success factors. The problem in many boards and schools is not the number of innovations, but the pick-up of changes that have nothing to do with each other. The assignment is to look for aspects that have the most influence on other variables and put the most energy into them. An example is the work of Robert Marzano: "What works in school?"

Marzano offers many opportunities, the limitation is in the large number of points for improvement (success factors) without people seeing the coherence. At the layer of tactics, look for levers. Systems thinking can help with that!

- activities

These are ***the concretely observable actions*** that take place in all layers of the Foundation or the school.

A final golden rule: in tactics and activities it is not necessary (or even desirable) that there is uniformity. Diversity in these layers only makes the system stronger and, moreover, people can learn a lot from each other.

However, the differences between schools or in the team should not occur in the lower layers of the pyramid (identity and central values, mission and vision). In the layers above, that is not a problem and even desirable. ***"People should be free to do what needs to be done!"***

Lessons from the hierarchy of choices

The biggest sticking point in developing strategic policies is ***the prescription*** by a small group who then "sell" the piece in the organization. People are asked to respond to the plans.

Practice shows that this does not lead to real involvement. In many leaders and teachers we even see mistrust and cynicism: "What have we come up with again, up there?" There is often a big difference between the intention of the organization and the effects on the workplace.

The practice of many schools and boards is also that they start working too quickly in the upper layers. It is ***very important to start in the layer of the mission***. After it is clear what the mission of the school (Foundation) is, the central values can be formulated from there. Daniel Kim puts it this way: ***"The core values only make sense in purpose!"***

When we start with the values or if we mix values and mission, teachers will hold the school hostage with their values. Moreover, putting values first hinders yield-oriented working.

An example:

An inspector finds that the results for reading comprehension in the school are weak.

Teachers are frustrated and angry. "Our children feel very safe at school.

Why doesn't he pay attention to that?"

Safety is an (important) value in a school! Safety is not the mission!! It is the mission of the police or of the army.

When developing policy, it is of great importance that there **is coherence between the layers of the pyramid**. If the lower layers are missing, the policy rests on quicksand. If discussions or conflicts arise when determining the strategy or when making the choices, always go down the pyramid! Why are we doing this? What did we want to achieve?

Make sure that the values and the mission come to life in the organization. Discuss them with everyone involved, work together with parents. Make the mission and the values visible in all kinds of ways, for example in the form of mind maps, photos, videos, etc. Discuss the mind map with the values with the children. Hang them up in each class as a basis for our amount. Encourage people to address each other on the observance of the values.

That way we will ensure that the leaders are not the boss, but the values and the mission!!

Need support at school level or above school?

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