

PMWorldToday

Why Don't Big Visions Translate into Big Outcomes? *The Answer Is in the Code!*

By John Foppe

Unfortunately, having a big vision is simply not enough to set a company in motion. Nor is it the way for employees and managers to achieve a specific outcome just to align their initiative with the vision. *If only it were that simple.* Even when the vision is stated clearly, employee initiative doesn't always materialize. Instead, they believe there is nothing they can do that is new or innovative. As a result they just step back and watch as things happen or don't happen around them. At the same time, people can often identify countless things coworkers and team members can say or do differently. When this occurs, they begin to shift responsibility onto others. Leaders point the finger at employees and vice versa. Management then claims employees simply won't take the initiative, while employees believe management doesn't truly support their efforts. Ultimately, progress stagnates. What's happening? People are surrendering to an overwhelming sense of exasperation.

The Code of Exasperation

For many reasons including lack of vacation time, increasingly longer workdays and the need to take work home, for example, workers are being stretched. Their exasperation manifests itself in the form of anxiety, depression, burnout, frustration and turnover. We have all experienced these types of emotions on the job at one time or another, and we have seen it in others as well. Think of the harried customer-service worker who is overwhelmed and curt, suggesting we take our business elsewhere if we don't care to wait in line.

Or consider the employee who tells us to, "Write to the company president" if we don't like the service we receive.

Adding fuel to the fire, this exasperation is accompanied by certain ways of seeing, doing and being. In other words, once someone feels that sense of exasperation, it becomes a lens through which they perceive what is happening around them (the "seeing"). Then, their perceptions influence the actions they take (the "doing"). Finally, they develop a set of

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practices (a way of "being") that helps them cope with what is happening around them. Once they embody the exasperation, they perceive everything through that same distorted lens, which further reinforces their interpretation of what is happening as justification for being exasperated.

Around and around it goes. It is a vicious cycle where people are literally creating their experience of the world based on the way they perceive it to be. In this case, it is a cycle of exasperation.

Add another layer to the mix, and the cycle creates an organizational reality, not just a personal one, where exasperation is the norm. This reality becomes encoded into the very fiber of

the organizational culture. The patterned ways of seeing, doing and being become predominant, and people are completely unaware of these encoded "rules" that guide their conduct in the workplace.

The cycle of exasperation becomes, in effect, a code that prevents employees from translating

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a vision into a successful outcome. The vision is actually encrypted or garbled by the presence of exasperation. This creates a permanent "translation gap" between vision and outcome. Employees begin to believe they are unable to make a difference, and then they create the reality they perceive. That's why cracking the code is essential to filling in the translation gap and ultimately replacing the old code with a new one that supports the translation of vision into outcomes.

Cracking the Code

So what does it take to crack the code of exasperation? Well, it's not leadership's responsibility entirely. Employees at all levels need to become aware of what is happening. They need to recognize there is a significant, causal relationship between their personal feelings of exasperation and the translation gap between vision and outcomes.

To crack the code, everyone in the workplace must learn to identify how the code of exasperation manifests itself in the daily lives of workers and then develop a heightened awareness the code exists. The first step is to learn to recognize incidents that initiate conditions for exasperation. Some of these include:

- When targets are missed and initiatives grind to a halt.
- When people make excuses, and there is residual frustration from consecutive failures to generate an outcome.
- When everyone points the finger of responsibility, and preoccupation with avoiding the blame for a big fiasco influences most decisions.
- When non-committed participation is abundant, credible approaches are steamrolled before they are ever given a chance.
- When silent resistance prevails, or the voice of progress is permanently muted.
- When "CYA" shifting of accountability is the

common practice.

- When frequent turnover is the rule, or a sense of uncertainty is always lurking.

A caveat here: A mere random occurrence of these incidents and conditions does not suggest the state of exasperation has been encoded into the organizational culture. It is considered encoded only when these incidents and conditions occur habitually throughout the organization.

It's usually clear when exasperation has set in, but often employees won't talk about it openly. In many cases, it may even be considered a taboo subject. One of the reactions in an organization where employees experience the code of exasperation is "engaged apathy." That may seem like an oxymoron, but in truth, some people are actually invested in keeping things status quo. Why? Because it is safe. They are entrenched, and from a behavioral standpoint, they can complain about things and never have to be accountable for making any changes. It may also be seen in the "poor me" attitude, a self-victimization that puts the person into an irreproachable position: "Things are so bad for me, there is no way you can criticize me." It is this attitude that sets the stage for the mediocrity and bureaucracy that leads to failed visions.

Once the conditions for exasperation are present, people become susceptible and react in predictable ways. Employees profess:

- To be motivated, but they usually end up going through the motions and marking time.
- To be enthusiastic about the vision, but often do not completely buy in, remain skeptical, or are afraid to speak up.
- To be empathetic to the organization's challenges, while they are often concerned about how those challenges will affect them.
- To be clear about priorities for moving forward, but mostly demonstrate a lack of interest or concern about taking any action.

At the same time, leaders profess:

- To notice those employees who have withdrawn, but are not comfortable addressing this problem because they are themselves unsure about how to move forward.
- To be optimistic and tend to believe everything is fine because they don't hear any complaints (no news is good news).
- To be interested in the employees' challenges and concerns, but often think the employees are just making excuses.
- To be aware of difficulties that employees may be having, but they sometimes unwittingly fear, even dread, digging deeper, insisting that

employees will figure out a way to pull through the challenge and come out on top.

Here is the challenge: No one person can “purge” this code of exasperation.

People have their own ways of seeing, doing and being, so they must rewrite the code themselves – but leaders can help.

The Code of Execution

Cultivating an awareness of the conditions of exasperation is the first step to filling the translation gap and translating vision into outcomes. It’s a matter of recognizing what is going on. Once people become aware of how they see, what they do and who they are “being,” they are more likely to understand why they subconsciously adhere to these patterned ways represented by the code of exasperation. When that awareness is in place, they can start down a new path to execute a shared vision.

The key to this path is the Code of Execution. Like the Code of Exasperation, it also functions as a cycle, characterized by specific patterns of seeing, doing and being. This time, however, people consciously

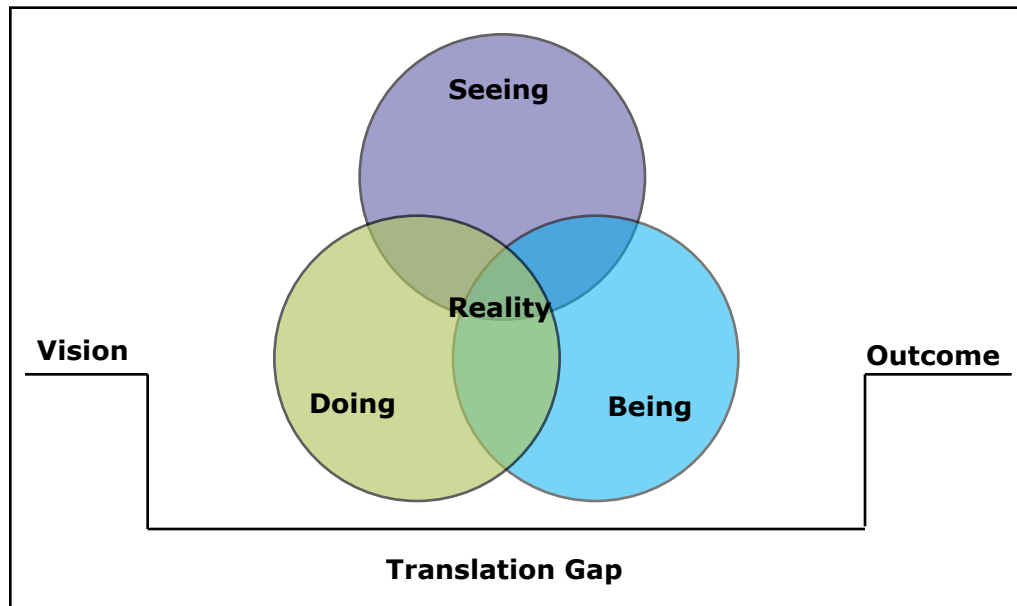
choose perceptions, reactions and practices, ways of seeing, doing and being that will perpetuate a cycle of execution instead of exasperation. By taking into consideration how their personal changes will impact others, others influence how they choose to change. They hold each other accountable and co-create a reality of execution and initiative instead of a reality of exasperation.

For this shift to occur, people need to look honestly at what they feel but leave unacknowledged. This is no small feat. Yet when the new code begins to take shape, people’s perceptions – their ways of seeing their workplace – can change drastically. These changing perceptions can be classified in four ways. First, employees

begin to feel there is *purpose* in their work. They believe they can help, that they are competent. Second, a sense of *viability* begins to arise, where employees start to think there is value in the vision and that they can make a contribution to achieving that vision. Next, they begin to perceive themselves as able to find new ways of achieving goals, spotting possibilities and feeling more self-assured. And finally, employees start to realize “we are all in this together” – management and employees alike. They feel inspired.

From a change in perception automatically flows a change in actions and how a person can actually *be* in the workplace. The results can be tangible. Employees begin to ask questions and seek answers. They start to take ownership and offer help and inspiration to others.

It’s Not About Doing: It’s About Being



It takes time to create a culture in which people are so self-motivated. It takes willingness on the part of leadership to engage in nurturing behavior and speak plainly about issues and problems that, before now, may

have been swept aside. Make no mistake: external incentives will only go so far until everyone is back at the drawing board asking what is missing that prevents employees from achieving outcomes.

Shifting from a Code of Exasperation to a Code of Execution doesn’t require a lot of doing, but it does require our full being. Visions cannot consistently translate into outcomes unless employees internalize and commit to executing outcomes. Internalizing a vision means being the vision – living it, eating, breathing, sleeping and sharing the dream. When employees embody the vision, they make things happen.



Born without arms, John Foppe has had to break down and re-engineer every aspect of day-to-day life. He learned that the inability to do something didn't rest on the lack of resources or vision. Instead, it has more to do with one's subconscious perception to meeting a challenge head on. In the field as part of his master's degree in social work, John saw this scenario play out repeatedly. To his surprise, he discovered that many people subconsciously substitute personal improvement with systems to support their perceived limitations. As a speaker, John also witnessed this resistant mindset operate in all sort of companies. He repeatedly heard leaders complain about how difficult it is to motivate their people. John has addressed this common challenge through years of research, clinical study and field

testing, which ultimately led to the discovery of the primary cause of failed vision execution. In light of this important, personally significant discovery, he has developed a variety of solutions to help individuals and leaders overcome their exasperation and translate their visions into outcomes. His compelling story and methods caught the attention of the legendary Zig Ziglar, who broke his long-standing rule of promoting from within and recruited and mentored John. In 1995, John launched a successful training business that has taken him to 15 different countries, pro-football organizations like the Miami Dolphins, and to Fortune 500 clients such as Boeing, GE, and State Farm. John's insights on how the biggest vision can be derailed by the smallest bit of resistance are now being used to orchestrate the missions of visionaries and change agents around the world. John Foppe speaks, coaches and trains on how to maintain momentum when executing initiatives and translate visions into outcomes. He is the CEO of Visionary Velocity Worldwide, based near St. Louis, MO. For further information, visit www.visionaryvelocity.com or call 618.526.5500