

Measuring Organizational Vision Content and Articulation: Testing a Comprehensive Vision Model and Identifying Implications for Senior Executive Leaders

By **Philip T. Willburn**, Adjunct, Center for Creative Leadership, **Michael Z. Hackman**, Professor, Department of Communication, University of Colorado-Colorado Springs, and **Corey Criswell**, Research Associate, Center for Creative Leadership

Academic Citation: Philip T. Willburn, Michael Z. Hackman, and Corey Criswell, "Measuring Organizational Vision Content and Articulation: Testing a Comprehensive Vision Model and Identifying Implications for Senior Executive Leaders," Kravis Leadership Institute, *Leadership Review*, Vol. 8, Fall 2008, pp. 113-136

About the Authors: Mr. Willburn is an Organizational Development Consultant with a systems, solutions, and technical service company in McLean, VA. He currently runs a hi-potential leadership development course and provides consulting services to organizations such as NASA, Johnson Space Center, and the Air Force. He completed his B.A. and M.A. at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs while working as an Adjunct at the Center for Creative Leadership's Senior Executive leadership development program. Phil recently worked for the National Leadership Institute where he managed custom leadership programs, contributed to course curriculum, and facilitated leadership modules for public sector clients such as the NSA and the FBI. His primary research interests include executive vision statements, and leadership development. E-mail: pwillburn@gmail.com

Dr. Hackman is a Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs and an Adjunct at the Center for Creative Leadership. He teaches courses in communication and leadership at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Michael also has extensive experience as a consultant. He has developed and delivered training, guided organizational development initiatives, and provided executive coaching services in numerous public and private sector organizations throughout the United States and in Australia, Austria, Canada, China, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and New Zealand. His clients have included Agilent Technologies, Bristol-Meyers Squibb, Ernst & Young, FIAT, Georgia-Pacific, Harley-Davidson, Hewlett-Packard, J.D. Edwards, Telecom New Zealand, the United States Air Force, the United States Golf Association, and Wells Fargo. Michael earned his B.A. from The University of Colorado-Colorado Springs and his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Denver.

Ms. Criswell is a Research Associate with the Center for Creative Leadership at the Colorado Springs campus. She researches senior level executives and manages a component of the Leadership at the Peak program designed to help executives hone their executive presence. Current research projects include CEO tenure and a cross-nation comparison of lessons of experience. Her work has been published in *Leadership Excellence*, *Journal for Quality and Participation*, *South China Morning Post*, and *USA Today*. She graduated from the University of Colorado-Boulder with a B.S. and from the Florida Institute of Technology with an M.S. Prior to joining CCL, she was a research assistant for Lockheed Martin.

Keywords: Vision attributes, leadership, organizational effectiveness

Abstract

In the present study, we examined a comprehensive vision model and examined its relationship with measures of leadership and organizational effectiveness. Based on the data collected from 150 multi-national senior executives and 2,600 employees, we found that the articulation of a vision had a strong influence on perceptions of leadership effectiveness while the content of a vision had a strong influence on perceptions of organizational effectiveness. We also identified three key attributes, ideological goal, clarity, and challenge, as necessary for effective organizational vision statements at the senior executive level. These findings are discussed in terms of the theoretical implications for vision statement research, implications for senior executive leaders, and recommendations for future research.

Introduction

While we have long known that vision is an important tool for an effective leader, researchers have used different theories and/or models in studying vision statements. Researchers have shown that effective leaders create meaningful and lasting organizational visions (Bass, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; House, 1977; Sashkin, 1988) which have a positive impact on employees (Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996; Deluga, 2001; Filion, 1991; Larwood, Falbe, Kriger, & Miesing, 1995; Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996; Westley & Mintzberg, 1989). A number of researchers have also linked organizational vision statements to organizational effectiveness (Barling et al., 1996; Filion; Howell & Avolio, 1993; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996; Larwood et al., 1995). However, until recently there has not been a common vision model that unifies many of the attributes researchers have discovered about leaders' visions.

The lack of a common vision model in the leadership literature may be due to several factors. For example, definitions can vary widely, ranging from the simple "projected image" (Bennis & Nanus, 1985) or "image of the future" (Kouzes & Posner, 1987) to the more complex--an ideal that represents shared values that should guide the organization (House & Shamir, 1993). Although some research allows the leaders to determine what constitutes a vision (e.g., Baum et al., 1998), it seems that most leadership theorists still do not agree upon a single definition of vision. For the purposes of this study, we have decided not to propose a new definition of vision, but, rather, to examine attributes that draw connections among the various definitions of vision that have been proposed. Zaccaro and Banks (2001) identified ten attributes that are necessary for a vision to be effective. Their vision model combined much of the leadership research and studies on vision over the last 30 years. They suggest that these ten attributes can be categorized into two vision factors: content and articulation. Content refers to *what* is said in a vision, while articulation refers to *how* a vision is expressed in speech. As seen in Table 1, Zaccaro and Banks identified five attributes for the content factor and five attributes for the articulation factor. They suggest it is the combination of all ten attributes that are necessary for a vision to be effective. Many of these attributes have been individually tested (i.e. Berson et al., 2001, Baum et al. 1998, Awamleh & Gardner, 1996), but testing of the complete Zaccaro and Banks model has not been performed. Thus, the purpose of this study is to test whether these two vision factors, with the respective attributes as

noted by Zaccaro and Banks, are viable components of an effective organizational vision statement.

Table 1

Zaccaro and Banks's Vision Attributes

Content	Articulation
Ideological goal	Use of inspirational imagery
Value-based core	Inclusive language
Frame of reference	Clarity
Growth themes	Challenge
Change-oriented	Task and goals specification

Testing the Two Factor Vision Model

Most researchers have tested their vision theories by showing a positive relationship between a specific vision attribute and measures of leadership and organizational effectiveness (i.e. Berson et al., 2001, Baum et al. 1998, Awamleh & Gardner, 1996, Kirkpatrick, Wooford, & Baum, 2002). Thus for the present study, testing the two vision factors proposed by Zaccaro and Banks, must be done by examining the relationships between the ten vision attributes in Table 1 and measures of leadership and organizational effectiveness. If the two vision factors have a significant positive relationship with the measures of leadership and organizational effectiveness it would suggest that Zaccaro and Banks have, indeed, identified factors that are necessary for a vision to be effective. We propose the following hypothesis:

H1: For each vision factor, content and articulation, there will be a significant positive relationship with measures of leadership and organizational effectiveness.

To examine these relationships we had to find a sample of leaders that had the necessary types of information: both the content and articulation of a vision for his/her organization (in this study we used video tapes), a measure of his/her leadership effectiveness, and a measure of his/her organizational effectiveness.

Method

Sample

The surveyed population included participants attending a five-day leadership program, Leadership at the Peak (LAP), at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) in Colorado Springs, Colorado, between July 11, 2005, and February 27, 2006. A total of 150 senior executives were included in the sample. The average senior executive was 48 years old. Seventy-eight percent of the sample was male, and 22% was female. Although the majority of participants (82%) were from the United States, other represented countries were Australia, Belgium, Canada, Cuba, Denmark, France, Germany, Lebanon, New Zealand, Philippines, Portugal, Russia, Spain, United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom. The majority of the participants (80%) were from private corporations, while

10% were from public corporations and 10% were from nonprofit corporations. The executives had a wide variety of titles and were in the top three levels in their organizations. These executives held positions in fairly large organizations. Table 2 shows the distribution of executives across the size of the organizations.

Table 2

Participants' Organizational Size

Size	Frequency	Percent
10,000 or more	46	31
5,000 to 9,999	19	13
1,000 to 4,999	38	25
100 to 999	38	25
10 to 99	8	5
Not reported	1	1

Measures

To test the relationship among the two proposed vision factors and leadership and organizational effectiveness, four measures were used: attribute coding of the leaders' videotaped vision statements; the Campbell Leadership Index (CLI) and Executive Dimensions (ED) as measure of leadership effectiveness; and the Campbell Organizational Survey (COS) as a measure of organizational effectiveness. These three instruments (CLI, ED, and COS) are commonly used by CCL to measure leadership and organizational effectiveness.

Coding for vision attributes

Videotapes were recorded as part of a public image module used in LAP to help senior executives think about the impact they have on their organization. Senior executives were asked to describe their vision for their business unit or organization in front of CCL faculty and course participants in an interview format. Executives were given up to seven minutes to articulate their vision; however, most executives described their vision in less than two minutes. Within our sample, executives used between 32 and 402 words to describe their vision. These vision videotapes were coded for the five vision attributes of content, and the five vision attributes of articulation. Since many of these attributes had been coded in other vision studies, we chose a coding schema that was consistent with previous studies. The attributes were coded based upon Baum et al.'s (1998) vision analysis study. Each attribute was scored on an 11-point scale, on which 8, 9, and 10 represented the vision containing high levels of the attribute. Visions with implications of, or moderate references to the attribute were given a midrange rating of 4, 5, 6, or 7. Low ratings of 0, 1, 2, or 3 were given for visions with no implications or reference to the attribute. A guidebook for rating the vision tapes was developed based on the above-mentioned model. Similar to Baum et al.'s study (1998) each rater practiced rating 15 sample visions that contained extremes from each attribute and referred to the sample visions during the rating of the actual visions. Below is a description of how we defined

each attribute and an example of a vision that represents that specific attribute. These attributes were not theorized to be mutually exclusive, thus each videotaped vision was coded for all ten attributes and, in some cases, one sentence could contain more than one attribute.

Content Attribute 1: Ideological goal. An ideological goal provides overall direction to the employees and guides their work toward long-term goals (House, 1977; Bass, 1990). The core of the ideological goal should represent the idealized state of the organization (Zaccaro & Banks, 2001). Using these definitions, we looked for vision statements that focused on long-term goals and represented an idealized future state. One example of a vision that received a high rating for presence of an ideological goal comes from an admiral. He states:

Our vision is fundamentally to protect the American people. We do it, obviously as the Navy, on the sea. And so it involves protecting the sea and air approaches to the United States of America and elsewhere overseas where Americans reside.

In this example, the ideological goal is the statement about protecting the American people. This vision does not refer to a specific achievement, but more of an idealized state of what the Navy is doing. Vision statements with low presence of ideological goal typically provided a description of what the organization was already doing. Such statements focused on the short term and did not describe an idealized future state. An example of a vision statement that received a low score on ideological goal was stated by a member of the Senior Executive Service in the Air Force:

I would say the fundamentals of the [organization's] vision has not changed. We're regulated by auditing standards, professional standards, we adhere to those and those will never change. What has changed a great deal is our client. And because of those changes I think that we have to make changes ourselves. We have to be in the location where the Air Force is which means overseas and ... the Middle East right now. It means that we need to pay attention to the priorities that the Air Force has. We need be technologically adept, while at the same time, as I said, adhering to those professional standards that have served us so well for such a long time.

In this example, an executive describes how things are currently running in his organization. He describes the need for a new location and to be technologically adept but does not clearly articulate a long-term goal or an idealized future state for his organization.

Content Attribute 2: Value-based core. Vision statements should represent the primary value orientation of leaders and their organizations (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Senge, 1990). Collins & Porras (1991) state that core values “are the organization’s basic precepts about what is important in both business and life, how business should be conducted, its view of humanity, its role in society, the way the world works, and what is to be held inviolate” (p. 35). Collins and Porras identified visions with core values that

focused on people, customers, products, and business and management. For example, Marriott's vision emphasizes the importance of its people, "See the good in people, and try to develop those qualities." However, Collins and Porras did not see a vision as having strong values if it focused on making money, and or having operations run more efficiently. In scoring for this attribute, we looked for visions that included the four areas mentioned above, as well as statements about how business impacts humanity, its role in society, and its interaction in the way the world works.

An example of a vision statement that received a high rating for value-based core comes from the CEO of a large pharmaceutical company. When stating his vision, he describes that the core-value of the company as focusing on their patients (their customers). The CEO states:

[our company] strives to keep our focus on the fact that patients depend upon us, not only for safe products but to have products that are affordable and accessible so that no one has to choose for example between food and medicine so that every one in the world eventually gets the great benefit of the incredible research and development that produces these great products to save lives and battle disease. It's that simple. If we can keep looking through the eyes of patients we're going to make good decisions.

This company's vision is focused on its customers with references to how its products impact the rest of the world. It identifies the need to keep "looking through the eyes" of its patients as the key ingredient to focus on customers. It also brings in references to how its business impacts humanity by emphasizing that he does not want patients to choose between "food and medicine." This executive was able to articulate his company's core values in a clear and persuasive manner. Other executives were not able to articulate their company's values as well as this CEO. However, most of the vision statements that were rated low in value-based core typically described their vision in terms of financial goals as being their primary value for their company. An example of this comes from another CEO in the same industry. He states,

Our vision has been pretty consistent for the last four years, what we're working towards doing is building a billion dollar innovative consumer health care products company.

In contrast to the vision provided earlier, this example does not include a value-based goal. This CEO does not describe his vision in terms of people, customers, products, or business and management ideals, nor does he reference his company's impact on humanity or its place in society. This CEO decided to describe the vision for his company in financial terms.

Content Attribute 3: Frame of reference. Sashkin (1988) and Sashkin & Fulmer (1988) emphasized that a leader's vision must address the changing nature of the environment, reflect the environmental and strategic challenges of today's businesses, and include a rationalizing frame of reference. Frame of reference refers to how the vision fits in terms

of an organization's history, culture, and values, and is consistent with the organization's present situation (Nanus, 1992). When coding for this attribute we looked for visions that included statements referring to the organization's or industry's current state or history. An example of a vision that we coded high for frame of reference comes from a Vice President of a leading aerospace company. He states:

Space is becoming evermore important to our nation. The short access to space and being able to deliver key payloads for our national security is evermore important today than it ever was before. So our vision is to provide exceptional access to space and space equipment so that our nation will be the best at protecting its citizens in every way possible.

In this example, the executive relates his company's vision to the larger aerospace industry problem of providing access to space. This vision provides a frame for understanding the reason for his vision. Visions statements that did not include any background or current situational context received low ratings for frame of reference. An example of a vision that was low in frame of reference comes from an executive from an oil and gas company. His vision is very simple, he states:

Vision for [our company's] employees is to have every employee understand what they contribute to the goals of the company. And to help us perform a strategy of growth, 15% growth per year, every year, for the next decade.

In this vision, we do not know why each employee must understand how they contribute to the company's goals, why the company needs to grow, or in what sector it needs to grow. Because of the vague nature of this vision, it was coded as having a low frame of reference.

Content Attribute 4: Growth themes. Not only must the vision statement incorporate themes that reflect the changing times, it must also emphasize growth themes (Baum et al. 1998). These themes can refer to a number of things related to the expansion of business resources including profit, sales, employees, facilities, market share, and products and offerings (Baum et al. 1998). One example of a vision that received a high rating for growth themes comes from an Executive Vice President as he discussed how his energy company's vision had always been focused on growth. He states:

The vision of [our company] is basically one that we've had since we started the company in 1996 ... We have a vision of growth. This year [our company's] three to five year vision is to be a three to five billion dollar company.

Not all visions with growth themes discuss financial goals, however, given our sample population of executive business leaders, most of them referred to growth in financial terms. On the other end of the spectrum, those executives who did not discuss expanding, growing financials, or doubling in size by a specific date received a low rating for growth themes. One example of a vision that had an absence of growth theme comes from an Executive Vice President of another energy company. He states:

Our vision for the future is, in the energy business, is how do we deal with the constant change in the cycles that are in front of us relative to the price of the commodity, natural gas which is primarily the commodity that we deal with in our pipeline operations.

This vision did not mention any theme of expansion or financial growth, but was more focused on adapting to changes in prices. Since the focus was on change and not growth, this vision received a low rating for growth themes.

Content Attribute 5: Change-oriented. Many scholars state that leaders must set a vision for change that separates their organization from the status quo (Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Collins & Porras, 1991; Sashkin, 1986, 1988). Change-orientation refers to taking the company from where it currently is to a new future place (Locke & Kirkpatrick, 1991). Thus, when coding for the change-orientation attribute, we looked for language that referred to changing the current conditions and/or looking far out into the future. An example of this comes from this Vice President in the paper mills industry. We can see in his vision that he describes his company as being in a saturated market and then states how the company needs to change in order to stay competitive. He states:

The vision for [our] corporation is we are going to double our size or need to double our size literally in the next three years ... The coated mill division is in a very mature market and over supplied market in North America, and my vision for the next three, maybe exceeding into the next five is actually helping consolidate this market in North America, and that will include [our company] and hopefully some other companies that compete against us.

This executive points to the fact that in order to be competitive their company must change which could include merging with other companies. This is a drastic change from this company's current position. Visions that were not change-oriented typically included statements describing what the current state of the company was, and/or the current initiatives that the company was implementing. This can be seen in this next vision from an executive for an accident investigation organization: He states,

Our mission is to investigate chemical accidents at fixed facilities. It is world wide. We have concentrated on the U.S. for the first five to seven years of our development. We are branching out to other safety organizations in England, France, Korea, and the European Union. The chemical industry is global. Accidents occur all over the world. And you have to understand the root causes of those accidents wherever they occur.

This executive simply states what his organization is currently doing, and does not provide information about the future of his organization. He does not state anything about how his company needs to change in order to remain successful.

Articulation attribute 1: Use of inspirational imagery. Concepts of inspirational imagery refer to leaders using a captivating voice tone, direct eye contact, and vocal variety to

catch the listeners' attention during articulation of a vision (Bass, 1985; Conger, 1989, 1991; Friedman, Prince, Riggio, & DiMatteo, 1980; House, Woycke, & Fodor, 1988; Howell & Frost, 1989). Coding for inspirational imagery was performed by looking for verbal and non-verbal cues in the videotape that reflected passion and charisma. Those who scored high in inspirational imagery typically included vocal variety, intonation, hand gestures, facial expressions, and enthusiasm, while those who scored low in inspirational imagery were typically void of gestures, spoke in phlegmatic tone, and lacked enthusiasm. This attribute was coded by viewing the non-verbal communication in the video tape.

Articulation attribute 2: Inclusive language. Unifying language terms such as *we* and *our* are more effective in motivating employees than language terms that divide, such as *them* and *they* (Fiol, Harris, & House, 1999). Unifying language unites employees and organizations and is important to the dissemination of the vision statement. A good example of using inclusive language was provided by a Senior Vice President from an energy company. Instead of stating his own personal vision, he emphasized his company's vision by stating:

[our company] is a company that's focused increasingly on its customers we're in a business of providing services essential to all of our customers. We provide electricity. We provide natural gas, and we provide other energy services. We know that our customers care about reliability. We know they care about reasonable value, good high quality products, at a reasonable cost, and that's what we're about as a company.

This executive reinforces the company's perspective by using the word *we* at the beginning of each statement. This demonstrates that he is fully integrated with his company and is behind his company's vision. This is quite, unlike what we see in the next example. This executive clearly states that he is the person in charge of his own department. He states:

My vision for the department is to first gauge what my people need, and then give everything I can to meet those needs, and then try to asses the future and where I want to take the department.

In this vision, we see an executive describing what he is personally doing instead of focusing on what his company is doing. He states where he personally wants to take the department. There is no reference about the other people in the department and where they, as a whole, need to go and achieve.

Articulation attribute 3: Clarity. Nanus (1992) described the necessity for clear and understandable vision statements, noting that vision statements should be "[...] unambiguous enough to serve as a guide to strategy and action and to be internalized by those whose efforts are needed to turn the vision into reality" (p. 29). Locke and Kirkpatrick (1991) state just how important clarity is in vision statements when they say, "The degree of clarity or precision of the vision statement influences how well it is

understood and accepted. Clear statements make the overarching goals understandable to everyone” (p. 51). When we examined clarity, we looked for vision statements that were easily understood, unambiguous, and well articulated. One example of a clearly articulated vision comes from a chief communications officer of a large real-estate investment company. She says,

The vision that has emerged in my mind, and I hope in the minds of our entire leadership team, is that [our company] in the next 5 years needs to be and must be recognized as the industry leader in real-estate investments.

The point of this vision is very clear. It is to be the best in the real-estate investment market. This vision is easily understood and identifies the goal of the company in no uncertain terms. We also discovered a number of visions that weren't very clear or understandable, as shown by this President of a large construction materials company.

Ok, well basically we're in the construction materials business. So we provide materials for building our world in all aspects of the construction industry residential, commercial, heavy high-way construction, etcetera. So we've been known historically as a company that was manufacturing based in the past. And we're trying to change our vision, improve our vision ... And I feel that if we are successful at changing our vision, I think that will give us a competitive advantage vis-à-vis our competition, vis-à-vis our customers and all of our stakeholders, and vis-à-vis our employees in terms of empowerment, stronger commitment to the vision of the organization and its principals.

This statement is difficult to understand and is unclear about the organization's goals. As demonstrated in the above example, vision statements that were not clear and to the point were coded as having low presence of clarity.

Articulation attribute 4: Challenge. Locke and Kirkpatrick (1991) state, “A vision is an idea that motivates people to work toward a desirable outcome; therefore, it must be inherently challenging” (p. 51). Challenging language that urges employees to commit to the vision helps gain momentum for and dedication to the vision. Visions that were ambitious and difficult to attain received a high rating for challenging. One example of a vision that was coded as being challenging comes from a Chief Financial Officer in an educational technology company. She states,

What we want to do is we want all children to be able to read in the United States. And that's our vision for the company and our vision for the country.

To make sure every child in the US is able to read is a difficult goal to achieve. Since this was a very challenging goal, it received a high rating for challenge. Vision statements that were coded as being low in the challenge attribute typically included descriptions of what people were currently doing, and/or included goals that seemed fairly easy to achieve. One example of a vision that received a low rating for challenging comes from a Managing Director from a large financial services conglomerate. He states,

Our objective is to build the efficiencies by using our scale. We provide this through common utilities and help the businesses focus on what they need to focus on which is generating revenue.

In this vision, we find a description of what the organization is currently doing. This executive does not provide detail about how difficult it is to “build the efficiencies” by using scale. He describes a tactic of providing “common utilities” but does not indicate whether such a tactic is already in place or whether the organization needs to develop new and innovative ways to create efficiencies. In contrast to the vision about having every child in the U.S. being able to read, this vision does not appear to be particularly challenging.

Articulation attribute 5: Task and goal specification. At all lowest levels of the organization, employees must try to convert organizational visions into purposeful tasks. By listing and specifying tasks, a leader can help employees transfer the vision into strategic tasks that draw the organization closer to its vision (Kelly, 1993; Kotter, 1990). In coding for this attribute, we looked for visions that included both the company’s vision and then how that vision is translated into specific goals throughout the organization. A good example of this comes from a Vice President for procurement of a multi-national construction company. She first states that the vision of the company is to be the “undisputable leaders in the construction materials industry.” She then goes on to state how the company’s vision impacts her own role. She states:

Within this overall vision for [our company], we have developed a purchasing vision. Our purchasing vision is three fold, one to leverage our spent [sic]. Second, is to drive transactional efficiency. And the third one is create a performance culture within purchasing.

In this example, she articulates her organization’s vision and then specifies exactly how that vision is translated to goals for her procurement office. Visions that did not receive a high score for task or goal specification, did not go into the details or discuss how the vision is translated into specific organizational goals. For example, this vision, from an Executive Vice President in the energy industry, received a low rating for task-specification because it does not lend itself to being broken down and implemented across the company. This executive states,

And so our vision for the future is, in the energy business, is how do we deal with the constant change in the cycles that are in front of us relative to the price of the commodity, natural gas which is primarily the commodity that we deal with in our pipeline operations.

The purpose of this vision is about dealing with certain environmental factors of the commodity natural gas. This executive does not explain how the organization should deal with it, and thus received a low score for task-specification.

Vision coding reliability

To ensure that these ten attributes were accurately identified, reliability was established for the attributes, and the two vision factors of content and articulation. Three raters, the lead researcher and two CCL research associates, independently coded each participant's vision statement on the ten attributes. Before the coding occurred, all three researchers reviewed the coding guidebook and performed a practice coding session in which the researchers rated sample vision statements. Using this workbook, the researchers shared their ratings on each sample vision statement and discussed rating discrepancies. After the researchers completed the coding workbook, a small sample of seven videos was used to practice the actual coding process. These seven videotapes were not included in the final analysis. All 150 vision videotapes were independently coded over a 1-week process. The researchers used both the transcriptions and the vision videos to rate the participants. For clarification during the processes, researchers frequently examined their vision coding guidebooks. Typically, the videos were viewed twice in order to examine all applicable variables. After all videos were viewed and rated, interreliability was computed.

Similar to Baum et al.' (1998) study, correlations were used to assess interrater reliability. Specifically, correlations for all content attributes and articulation attributes were computed among the three researchers. Also, the reliability of the content and articulation scales were computed for accuracy. Table 3 shows the average correlations of the three researchers on all ten attributes of the items in the vision model. The significant correlations in all cases, except for use of inspirational imagery, suggest the reliability of the coding. The reliability of the coding for inspirational imagery was unique to the study since it was the only attribute that was coded specifically by watching the video and examining only non-verbal communication. Although the level of significance was not as strong as the other attributes, given the nature of the unique coding aspects, the attribute was kept and used in the final analysis.

Table 3.

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Average Correlations for each vision attribute

Vision content attributes	M	SD	Average Correlation
Ideological goal	4.67	2.01	.76*
Value-based core	3.93	2.13	.71*
Frame of reference	4.95	2.13	.60*
Growth themes	2.76	2.30	.83*
Change-oriented	3.49	1.92	.70*
Content Scale	3.96	2.10	.72*
Vision articulation attributes	M	SD	Average Correlation
Use of inspirational imagery	5.19	1.54	.55*
Inclusive language	5.78	2.03	.77*
Clarity	5.17	1.95	.73*

Challenge	4.37	1.76	.65*
Task and goals specification	4.02	2.19	.73*
Articulation Scale	4.91	1.90	.69*

* $p = .01$, two-tailed

Measuring leadership effectiveness

Two different measures were used to examine leadership effectiveness, the Campbell Leadership Index (CLI) and Executive Dimensions (ED). Both are leadership multi-rater assessments used by the Center for Creative Leadership to measure leadership effectiveness. The Campbell Leadership Index (CLI) is a multi-rater assessment instrument that is commonly used to measure effective leadership characteristics that are directly related to the nature and demands of leadership. The CLI contains five orientations consisting of 22 separate dimensions as well as an overall leadership score (Campbell, 1991; Dominio, 1995; Hersen, M., Hilseruoth, M., and Segal, D. 2003). Some of the items include phrases such as “Confident – Believes that future challenges can be met successfully” and “Farsighted – Shows great vision in imagining the future.” Reliability data for this assessment can be found in Table 4, which reports internal consistency. Descriptions of test-retest reliability and content and concurrent validity can be found in CLI, Manual for the Campbell Leadership Index (Campbell, 1991). In the present study, participants were asked to distribute between 5 and 20 CLI rater forms to coworkers, including bosses, peers, subordinates, and others. For the CLI, 1,586 separate co-workers rated the 150 participants. On average, there were 11 raters for each individual participant. The overall index score was used in the primary analysis as the measure of leadership effectiveness. This score is a combination of all rater groups which, in studies using multi-rater feedback assessments, has been shown to potentially increase reliability of the assessment, and provide a more robust picture of the person and/or object in question (Barr & Raju, 2003; Hannum, 2007; LeBreton, Burgess, Kaiser, Atchley, & James, 2003).

Table 4
Cronbach Alpha Coefficients for the CLI Orientations and Scales

Orientations and Scales	Alpha
Leadership	.90
Ambitious	.65
Daring	.69
Dynamic	.69
Enterprising	.64
Experienced	.59
Farsighted	.69
Original	.85
Persuasive	.75
Energy	.75
Affability	.90
Affectionate	.56
Considerate	.77
Empowering	.72
Entertaining	.84
Friendly	.79
Dependability	.84
Credible	.65
Organized	.74
Productive	.67
Thrifty	.80
Resilience	.85
Calm	.87
Flexible	.62
Optimistic	.77
Trusting	.72

Note.

Based on a diverse sample of N=236

Orientations Median .85

Scale Median .72

Executive Dimensions (ED) is a multi-rater survey developed specifically for senior executives by the Center for Creative Leadership (Nilsen, 2000). The survey provides developmental feedback on leadership competencies shown to be important for executive effectiveness across a wide range of organizations and positions. This assessment contains 92 items that measure specific leadership activities, such as “Focuses others’ energy on common goals, priorities, and problems.” The 92 items are grouped into 16 homogeneous leadership competencies, which are further organized into three broad categories. Reliability data for this assessment can be found in Table 5, which reports internal consistency. Descriptions of test-retest reliability, and content, construct, and concurrent validity for this assessment can be found in the *Executive Dimensions Technical Report* (Nilsen, 2000). For use in this study, participants were asked to distribute between 5 and 20 ED rater forms to coworkers, including bosses, peers,

subordinates, and others. In total 1,352 separate co-workers rated the 150 participants. On average, there were 10 raters for each individual participant. The overall index score was used in the primary analysis as the measure of leadership effectiveness. Self-reported ED scores were not used in the analysis. Only the raters' forms were used to measure leadership effectiveness.

Table 5
Reliability Coefficients of Executive Dimensions

Dimension	Alpha
Leading the Business	
Sound Judgment	.83
Strategic Planning	.89
Leading Change	.80
Results Orientation	.83
Global Awareness	.74
Business Perspective	.78
Leading Others	
Inspiring Commitment	.82
Forging Synergy	.87
Developing and Empowering	.88
Leveraging Differences	.83
Communicating Effectively	.82
Interpersonal Savvy	.87
Leading by Personal Example	
Courage	.85
Executive Image	.82
Learning from Experience	.85
Credibility	.90

Note.

N = 3032

Measuring organizational effectiveness

The Campbell Organizational Survey is a multi-rater assessment instrument examines opinions and attitudes relating to organizational effectiveness. The COS consists of 17 separate dimensions, which when combined yield an overall score of organization's effectiveness (Campbell & Hyne, 1995; Mueller, 1995). Employees rate their companies on 67 items ranging from working conditions to pay to quality/amount of feedback. Such items include "My working space has the equipment that I need to do good work," and "A visible, clearly stated process is used to guide our future actions." Reliability data for this assessment can be found in Table 7, which reports internal consistency. Descriptions of test-retest reliability and content, construct, and predictive validity can be found in COS, Campbell Organizational Survey 2nd Edition (Campbell & Hyne, 1995). For this study, participants were asked to distribute between 5 and 20 COS rater forms to employees who were two levels below them in the organization. For the COS, 1,091 separate co-workers rated the participants' organizations. On average, there were 7 raters

for each individual participant's organization. The overall index score was used in the primary analysis as the measure of organizational effectiveness. Self-reported COS scores were not used in the analysis. Only the raters' forms were used to measure the organization's effectiveness.

Table 7
Internal Consistency (Alpha) Coefficients for the COS Scales

Dimension	Alpha
The Work Itself	.71
Working Conditions	.69
Stress Free	.70
Co-Workers	.74
Diversity	.77
Supervision	.88
Top Leadership	.85
Pay	.67
Benefits	*
Job Security	.77
Promotions	.71
Feedback	.78
Planning	.80
Ethics	.82
Quality	.78
Innovation	.67
General Contentment	.84

Note.

Calculated on a diverse sample of adults (N = 3,920)

Median alpha coefficient = .77

*Because the Benefits scale contains only one item, no alpha is computed

Procedure and Results

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed between (a) the ten coded vision attributes and the content and articulation scales (b) the CLI overall score, (c) the ED overall score, (c) and the COS overall score. Correlations among the ten attributes and vision content and articulation with the CLI, ED and COS can be found in Table 8. There is partial support for our hypothesis that these two factors are necessary for an effective vision. The articulation scale significantly positively correlated with each of the three measures (CLI $r = .27, p < .01$; ED $r = .28, p < .01$; COS $r = .20, p < .05$), however the content scale, only had a significant positive correlation with the measure of organizational effectiveness (COS $r = .25, p < .01$). The results also indicate that specific attributes may provide more influence for a specific vision factor than other attributes. For the content scale, Ideological goal had a significant correlation with all three measures (CLI $r = .20, p < .05$; ED $r = .22, p < .01$; COS $r = .23, p < .05$), while the four other attributes of content did not have any significant relationships. For the articulation scale, clarity had a significant correlation with all three measures (CLI $r = .25, p < .01$;

ED $r = .26, p < .01$; COS $r = .16, p < .05$) as did challenge (CLI $r = .24, p < .01$; ED $r = .21, p < .05$; COS $r = .20, p < .05$).

Table 8

Vision Attribute and Scale Correlations with CLI, ED & COS

Vision Attributes	CLI	ED	COS
Content Scale	.15	.16	.25**
Ideological goal	.20*	.22**	.23**
Value-based core	.06	.12	.09
Frame of reference	.01	.00	.11
Growth themes	.05	.03	.07
Change-oriented	.05	.02	.04
Articulation Scale	.27**	.28**	.20*
Use of inspirational imagery	.15	.13	.03
Inclusive language	.04	.09	.00
Clarity	.25**	.26**	.16*
Challenge	.24**	.21*	.20*
Task and goals specification	.04	.08	.11

Note.

$N = 150$.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Discussion

Overview and Implications for Theory

This study fulfills the need stated by other vision theorists for the identification and testing of a comprehensive vision model (Kirkpatrick et al. 2002). This study provided partial evidence for the applicability of the Zaccaro and Banks vision model by showing a positive relationship between their two vision factors (content and articulation) and measures of leadership and organizational effectiveness. This study also advances the research on vision statements by providing evidence for the different effects that each vision factor has on different parts of the organization. Lastly, this study identifies the three most important attributes from the vision model and highlights the need for potential revisions of this model.

The findings from our study suggest that the articulation of a vision has a closer relationship with leadership effectiveness (as measured by the CLI & ED) whereas the content of a vision has a stronger relationship with issues related to the organizational effectiveness (as measured by the COS). These findings provide insight to the impact of these factors on different parts of the organization. The articulation of a vision clearly has more of an impact on those people who interact with the leader in person. In this face-to-face context, it is not surprising that vision articulation has more of an impact than the content. In other words, how a leader describes a vision impacts perceptions of his/her

individual leadership ability, while what a leader says in his/her vision impacts perceptions of the organization's overall effectiveness.

Our findings suggest that the impact of clearly articulating a vision only goes as far as those people who interact regularly with the leader. One possible suggestion for this connection between content and organizational effectiveness is the ability for a vision's content to remain unchanged throughout all levels of an organization. Vision content can be posted on websites, made into posters for the office, or passed along in emails and memos. Once the content of a vision is developed, it can be communicated in various ways across the entire organization. So people who do not interact with the leader directly are more likely to respond or react to its content. From this study alone, it is not clear as to which areas of the organization are most impacted by the content of the vision. Future research should examine how the content of a vision interacts with an organization's effectiveness and identify the specific areas within an organization that are most impacted by the content of the leader's vision.

Another important finding from this study was the identification of three key vision attributes that had significant relationships with our measures of leadership and organizational effectiveness. The ideological goal, clarity, and challenge attributes, described by Zaccaro and Banks, had significant relationships with our measures. Future research needs to reexamine this model to determine whether other attributes identified by Zaccaro and Banks are as important in the development of an effective vision statement. Our findings suggest that the three attributes highlighted above are the most salient attributes in effective vision statements, and although the other attributes may play a smaller role, ideological goal, clarity, and challenge are critical for the success of any vision statement.

Overview and Implications for Practice

Since this study focused on C-level senior executives in the top three levels in large multi-national businesses, it has particular implications for business leaders, and in particular senior executives. This is important given that Zaccaro and Horn (2003) concluded that less than five percent of the leadership research literature has focused on executive leadership. This study examined the vision statements and resulting data from 150 senior executives, representing more than 140 different organizations from 16 different countries. The data included questionnaires from more than 2,600 employees. The study identified the attributes and combination of attributes every leader should be aware of when developing and articulating a vision. This study suggests that a leader should focus as much on the articulation of a vision as the content of a vision because they have particular implications for different areas of leadership.

When developing and articulating a vision statement, senior executives should create a vision with an *ideological goal*, and articulate that vision using *clear* and concise language that *challenges* the organization and its employees to achieve compelling goals. Our results suggest that the most effective senior executives included these attributes in their visions statements. These executives were also shown to be in the most effective

organizations. Leaders should not only be aware of these three important attributes, but they should also strive to include these attributes in the vision statements they develop.

Leaders should also be aware of the difference between the content and articulation of a vision. Our study showed a unique relationship between the content of vision statements and its perceived impact on the organization. Those leaders who were rated as having effective vision content were also rated as leading organizations that were perceived as more effective. Our study also showed the importance of vision articulation. Leaders who accurately and succinctly articulated their visions were rated as being highly effective leaders.

Limitations and Perspectives for Future Research

Caution should be taken when trying to draw empirical conclusions from this study. The research methods used in this study do not allow causal inferences to be made. More sophisticated techniques such as structural equation modeling are needed to examine the causal effects of leadership vision statements. For example, based on this study we are not able to determine if creating and articulating an effective vision (as measured by our attributes) is the product of a great leader, or if creating and articulating that effective vision makes the person a great leader. Theoretical research has hypothesized the former, but future research needs to be conducted to examine the directionality of leadership visions. Future research also needs to be conducted to examine if other attributes fit into the articulation and content factors identified by Zaccaro and Banks. More research should examine specific effective leadership characteristics and behaviors that have a relationship with effective visions. This would help leaders know which characteristics and behaviors they can try to change in order to become more effective at creating and delivering visions. Additionally, more research into the relationships between specific organizational issues and effective visions should be conducted. This research could show leaders which areas of their organizations are most impacted by effective vision content. We would suggest that researchers also investigate the relationship among the Zaccaro and Banks articulation and content factors and leadership and organizational effectiveness utilizing other methods (e.g. leaders public comments, written vision statements, organizational documents) and measures. Further, other contexts such as political leadership and athletic coaching might be explored to determine if articulation and content factors cut across other leadership domains.

Other limitations to this study include the measures used to examine leadership and organizational effectiveness. Although the Campbell instruments (CLI & COS) have been published by well respected measurement sources (Dominio 1995, Mueller 1995; Hersen, M., Hilseruoth, M., and Segal, D. 2003), little research has been published recently utilizing these measures. On a similar note, the other leadership effectiveness measure used in this study, the Executive Dimensions, has been thoroughly tested by the Center for Creative Leadership (Nilsen, 2000); however, the measure has not appeared previously in academic journals. As such, the measures in this study do not have a robust publication history and future research should be conducted to enhance the reliability and validity of these measures. Future research should include the use of other multi-rater

leadership questionnaires to identify potential differentiating relationships between the proposed vision factors and other leadership models. For example, one could hypothesize that the vision attribute *value-based core* would have a stronger relationship with measures of moral leadership as opposed to leadership effectiveness.

Lastly, more research should be conducted on the method of vision attribute coding. Reliability coding was strong in all attributes except for inspirational imagery. This attribute was difficult to code accurately because this attribute was given a score based on non-verbal cues and vocal intonation. A more succinct coding method for dealing with this attribute would enhance the current coding methods. Many of the studies on vision suffer from their inconsistent methods for vision attribute coding. A robust and flexible method should be developed so that each new proposed vision attribute can be easily and consistently coded for future vision studies. We believe that most of the difficulties and lack of coherence in vision studies are due to the difficulties in consistently and accurately coding for vision attributes.

Despite the limitations, this study provides researchers and practitioners with a way forward in discovering the ideal attributes for effective organizational vision statements. It continues to progress the research on vision statements by testing new and comprehensive theories of vision statements. We continue to believe that creating and articulating an effective vision is a critical responsibility of a leader and is often the distinguishing factor between successful and unsuccessful leaders. Over the last several years, the research and leadership development activities on leadership visions have slowed. However, through our work with senior executives in our professional and academic professions, we see a greater need than ever for quality research and training in this area. We hope that the present study will again engage the community of leadership scholars and practitioners to progress the study of leadership visions.

References

- Awamleh, R., & Gardner, W. (1996). Perceptions of leader charisma and effectiveness: The effects of vision, content, delivery, and organizational performance. *Leadership Quarterly, 10*, 345-373.
- Barling, J., Weber, T., & Kelloway, E. K. (1996). Effects of transformational leadership training on attitudinal and financial outcomes: A field experiment. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 81*, 827-832.
- Barr, M. A., and Raju, N. S. (2003) IRT-Based Assessments of Rater Effects in Multiple Source Feedback Instruments. *Organizational Research Methods, 6*, 15-43.
- Bass, B. M. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York: Free Press.
- Bass, B. M. (1990). *Bass and Stogdill's handbook of leadership: Theory, research and managerial applications* (3rd ed.). New York: Free Press.
- Baum, J. R., Locke, E. A., & Kirkpatrick, S. A. (1998). A longitudinal study of the relation of vision and vision communication to venture growth in entrepreneurial firms. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 83*, 43-54.
- Bennis, W., & Nanus, B. (1985). *Leaders: The strategies for taking charge*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Berson, Y., Shamir, B., Avolio, B. J., & Popper M. (2001). The relationship between vision strength, leadership style, and context. *Leadership Quarterly, 12*, 53-73.
- Campbell, D. (1991). *Manual for the Campbell Leadership Index*. Minneapolis: National Computer Systems.
- Campbell, D., & Hyne, S. (1995). *Campbell Organizational Survey* (2nd ed.). Minneapolis: National Computer Systems.
- Collins, J. C., & Porras, J. (1991). Organizational vision and visionary organizations. *California Management Review, 34*, 30-52.
- Conger, J. A. (1989). *The charismatic leader*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Conger, J. A. (1991). Inspiring others: The language of leadership. *Academy of Management Executive, 5*, 31-45.

- Conger, J. A., & Kanungo, R. N. (1987). Toward a behavioral theory of charismatic leadership in organizational settings. *Academy of Management Review*, *12*, 637–647.
- Conger, J. A., & Kanungo, R. N. (1988). Behavioral dimensions of charismatic leadership. In J. A. Conger & R. N. Kanungo (Eds.), *Charismatic leadership: The elusive factor in organizational effectiveness* (pp. 78-97). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Conger, J. A., & Kanungo, R. N. (1998). *Charismatic leadership in organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Deluga, R. J. (2001). American Presidential Machiavellianism: Implications for charismatic leadership and rater performance. *Leadership Quarterly*, *12*, 339–363.
- Domino, G. (1995). Campbell Leadership Index. In J. C. Conoley & J. C. Impara (Eds.), *The twelfth mental measurements yearbook* (pp. 146-153). Lincoln, NE: Burros Institute of Mental Measurements.
- Friedman, H. S., Prince, L. M., Riggio, R. E., & DiMatteo, M. R. (1980). Understanding and assessing nonverbal expressiveness: The affective communication test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *39*, 333-351.
- Filion, L. J. (1991). Vision and relations: Elements for an entrepreneurial metamodel. *International Small Business Journal*, *9*, 112–131.
- Fiol, C. M., Harris, D., & House, R. J. (1999) Charismatic leadership: Strategies for effecting social change. *Leadership Quarterly*, *10*, 449-482.
- Hannum, K. M. (2007). Measurement equivalence of 360 – assessment data: Are different raters rating the same construct?. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, *15*, 293-301.
- Hersen, M., Hilseruroth, M.; & Segal, D. (2003). *Comprehensive Handbook of Psychological Assessment. Volume 2, Personality Assessment*. San Francisco, CA: Wiley.
- Hooijberg, R. & Choi, J. (2000). Which leadership roles matter to whom? An examination of rater effects on perceptions of effectiveness. *Leadership Quarterly*, *11*, 341-364.
- House, R. J. (1977). A theory of charismatic leadership. In J. G. Hunt & L. L. Larson (Eds.), *Leadership: The cutting edge*, p. 189-207. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University.
- House, R. J. & Shamir, B. (1993). Toward an integration of transformational,

- charismatic, and visionary theories. In M. M. Chemers R. Ayman (Eds.), *Leadership theory and research: Perspectives and directions*. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- House, R. J., Woycke, J., & Fodor, E. M. (1988). Charismatic and noncharismatic leaders: Differences in behavior and effectiveness. In J. A. Conger & R. N. Kanungo (Eds.), *Charismatic leadership: The elusive factor in organizational effectiveness* (pp. 98-121). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Howell, J. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1993). Transformational leadership, transactional leadership, locus of control, and support for innovation: Key predictors of consolidated-business-unit performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 78*, 891–902.
- Howell, J. M., & Frost, P. J. (1989). A laboratory study of charismatic leadership. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 43*, 243-269.
- Kelly, J. (1993). *Facts against fictions of executive behavior: A critical analysis of what managers do*. Westport, CT: Quorum Books.
- Kirkpatrick, S., & Locke, E. A. (1996). Direct and indirect effects of three core charismatic leadership components on performance and attitudes. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 81*, 36–51.
- Kirkpatrick, S. A., Wofford, J. C., & Baum, J. R. (2002). Measuring motive imagery contained in the vision statement. *Leadership Quarterly, 13*, 139-150.
- Kotter, J. P. (1990). *A force for change: How leadership differs from management*. New York: Free Press.
- Larwood, L., Falbe, C. M., Kriger, M. P., & Miesing, P. (1995). Structure and meaning of organizational vision. *Academy of Management Journal, 38*, 740–769.
- LeBreton, J. M., Burgess, J. R. D., Kaiser, R. B., Atchley, E. K., and James, L. R. (2003). The Restriction of Variance Hypothesis and Interrater Reliability and Agreement: Are ratings from multiple sources really dissimilar? *Organizational Research Methods, 6*, 80-128.
- Locke, E. A. & Kirkpatrick, S. (1991). *The essence of leadership: The four keys to leading successfully*. Toronto: Lexington Books.
- Lowe, K. B., Kroeck, K. G., & Sivasubramaniam, N. (1996). Effectiveness correlates of transformational and transactional leadership: A meta-analytic review of the MLQ literature. *Leadership Quarterly, 7*, 385–425.
- Mueller, R. O. (1995). Campbell Organizational Survey. In J. C. Conoley & J. C.

- Impara (Eds.), *The twelfth mental measurements yearbook* (pp. 149-153). Lincoln, NE: Buros Institute of Mental Measurements.
- Nanus, B. (1992). *Visionary leadership*. Jossey-Bass. San Francisco: CA.
- Nilsen, D. (2000). *Executive Dimensions Technical Report*. Greensboro NC. Center for Creative Leadership.
- Sashkin, M. (1986). True vision in leadership. *Training and Development Journal*, 40(5), 58-61.
- Sashkin, M. (1988). The visionary leader. In J. A. Conger & R. N. Kamungo (Eds.), *Charismatic leadership: The elusive factor of organizational effectiveness*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Sashkin, M., & Fulmer, R. M. (1988). Toward an organizational leadership theory. In J. G. Hunt, B. R. Baliga, H. P. Dachler, & C. A. Schriesheim (Eds.), *Emerging leadership vistas*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Senge, P. M. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York: Doubleday.
- Shamir, B., House, R. J., & Arthur, M. (1993). The motivational effects of charismatic leadership: A self-concept based theory. *Organizational Science*, 4, 577-594.
- Westley, F., & Mintzberg, H. (1989). Visionary leadership and strategic management. *Strategic Management Journal*, 10, 17-32.
- Zaccaro, S.J., & Banks, D. (2001). Leadership, vision, and organizational effectiveness. In S. J. Zaccaro & R. J. Klimoski (Eds.), *The nature of organizational leadership: Understanding the performance imperatives confronting today's leaders*, p. 181-218. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Zaccaro, S., & Horn, Z. (2003). Leadership theory and practice: Fostering an effective symbiosis. *Leadership Quarterly*, 14, 769-806.
- Zaccaro, S. J. (2001). *The nature of executive leadership. A conceptual and empirical analysis of success*. American Psychological Association. Washington, DC. (19)