

¶39 Vision

Alias: Product Vision

Confidence stars: **



The moon landing program started with a vision.

... having come out of [¶12 The Mist](#), some core visionary individual or group must make their passion concrete, in a conceptualization that can be shared, and excite a group of people to work as one mind to build something that will increase the quality of life for their constituency.

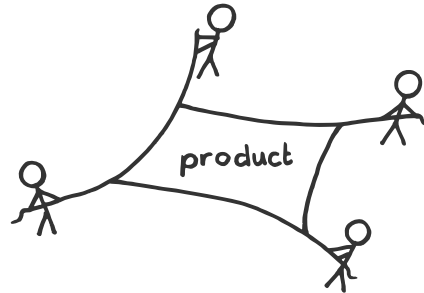
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People thrive within constraints that channel their creativity and work towards a common good, but it's also true that overly specific constraints can turn contributors into subservient robots who blindly follow orders rather than following with their heart.

To achieve a great vision usually requires the work of an aligned team, as well as alignment between that team and its stakeholders. Teams comprise individuals with opinions and feelings, and though they all may be well-meaning, each may conceptualize and express their anticipated contributions in different ways. This creates the appearance of a conflict between team members. Yet if one strips off such noise that can dominate how team members view each other, one can usually tap into shared feelings and conceptualizations that draw deeply on the shared culture of the stakeholders.

This diversity in perspective within a team brings great value, because it raises the probability that the team will overlook no great idea. Admitting multiple perspectives and soliciting the input of people with different backgrounds and experiences helps the effort explore a wide variety of options. The different experiences and ideas open additional, innovative perspectives

that can be valuable. Unchecked, these differences can fracture the team by taking the team in multiple directions.



For a team to be truly effective all members need to be pulling in the same direction.

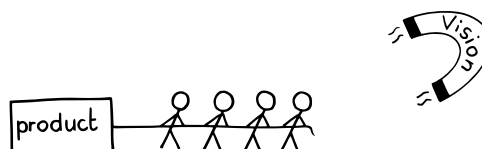
The team works in the direction of a shared goal. When the shared goal is too broadly defined or vague, the team risks exploring too many lower-value directions. The effort can lose energy and momentum in the false starts of unnecessary experimentation. If the shared goal is too narrow, it overly constrains the team and they may leave valuable directions unexplored — a waste of intellect and creativity.

A goal becomes shared when the team takes ownership of it. The team takes ownership of the goal when it co-creates it so that it becomes theirs.

The future is inherently unknowable; therefore committing to a final result or plan over a long time frame is fraught with danger. There are too many external forces to consider. Yet teams need a shared goal to create cohesion and direct performance.

Therefore:

The individual who embodies the passion for this new product effort takes on the role of **Product Owner**, around whom stakeholders and potential future coworkers rally to articulate and together to define and refine a *Vision*. The *Vision* is a description of how the product supports a desired future toward which an envisioned future *Product Organization* advances (as described in the [Product Organization Pattern Language on page 11](#)).





We can think of the *Vision* as having two components. The first — which we just refer to just as the *Vision* — is a broad future direction, while the *Product Vision* breaks down that broad direction into more specific business components. The *Vision* provides a flexible, explicit rallying point to guide the emergent group forward as a team. It supports systems-thinking understanding of how the envisioned product effort will benefit their own lives and those of their end users and of other stakeholders. One key aspect of the *Vision* pertains to the product itself. The *Product Vision* goes beyond being a vague motherhood statement and is quite concrete. The *Product Vision* lies at the intersection of the passion behind the idea, the demand for the idea, and the feasibility of building something great. Typically the *Product Vision* ([Agile Product Management with Scrum: Creating Products That Customers Love, 1st ed. \[Pic10\]](#), p. 24) covers these considerations:

- Key features of the product
- Who is going to use the product
- Customer needs the product will address
- How the vendor will benefit

The *Product Owner* owns the *Vision*, and sets out to realize it by creating a [Product Organization Pattern Language](#) as well as by defining a [¶41 Value Stream](#). The *Product Owner* articulates a path toward the *Vision* as a [¶45 Product Roadmap](#), and works with stakeholders to reduce it to a concrete, specific [¶54 Product Backlog](#). Each of these helps clarify the *Vision*, in varying forms and degrees, to the *Product Organization* and particularly to the [¶7 Scrum Teams](#). The *Vision* gives everyone a greater sense of direction and collective purpose (see [¶117 Unity of Purpose on page 489](#)). The *Product Organization* and the teams can in turn vet deliverables in terms of their support for the *Vision*. Teams can measure their progress against bringing this *Vision* to reality.

Having an effective *Vision* can help set direction, help inspire and unify the *Scrum Team*, and can help shape the behavior of the team without constraining their creativity. A great *Vision* is one that gets you out of bed in the morning and charges you up for the day. The *Vision* guides the creation and enactment of a *Value Stream* to realize the *Vision* and deliver a series of product increments to stakeholders.

Visions evolve over time, and some product efforts discover rather quickly that while the original *Vision* was off the mark, that basic ideas can carry

through to support what is sometimes an even grander *Vision*. Because we are agile, we can adjust our progress towards the *Vision*, or can even adjust the *Vision* itself over time.

Katsuaki Watanabe, then CEO of Toyota, believed in setting “impossible goals” as visions that drove Toyota’s strategic direction:

Many of Toyota’s goals are purposely vague, allowing employees to channel their energies in different directions and forcing specialists from different functions to collaborate across the rigid silos in which they usually work. For example, Watanabe has said that his goal is to build a car that makes the air cleaner, prevents accidents, makes people healthier and happier when they drive it, and gets you from coast to coast on one tank of gas ... [The Contradictions that Drive Toyota’s Success \[OSTD08 TOS08\]](#)

At the end of the 1970s Bill Gates and Paul Allen had a vision of “a computer on every desk and in every home.” The *Vision* became reality when “there was kind of a magical breakthrough when the computer became cheap, and we could see that everyone could afford a computer.”¹ Now in the twenty-first century Elon Musk is working on his vision “to make humanity a multiplanet species.”² He already made successful steps in accomplishing his vision by making reusable rockets to lower the cost of launches.³

A great *Vision* aspires to some, perhaps transcendent, [193 Greatest Value](#). For example, journalists in the Netherlands started a new chocolate company, Tony’s Chocolonley, out of a vision of creating chocolate bars made with slave-free labor.⁴

1. Bill Gates. Interview. Academy of Achievement. <http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/gat0int-1>, 2010 (accessed 27 August 2016).
2. Carl Hofman. “Elon Musk Is Betting His Fortune on a Mission Beyond Earth’s Orbit.” Wired.com, <http://www.wired.com/2007/05/ff-space-musk>, 22 May 2007 (accessed 27 August 2016).
3. Julie Johnson and Dana Hull. “Musk’s SpaceX returns rocket for perfect upright landing.” In *The Seattle Times*, <http://www.seattletimes.com/business/boeing-aerospace/musks-spacex-returns-rocket-for-perfect-upright-landing/>, 22 December 2015 (accessed 27 August 2016).
4. —. Tonys Chocolonely Annual Report. https://tonyschocolonely.com/storage/configurations/tonyschocolonelycom.app/files/jaarfairslag/2017-2017/tc_jaarfairslag_2016_en_totaal_01.pdf, 2017 (no longer accessible; accessed 6 June 2018).