**Accessing the Vision Within:**

**Creative Visualization Experience in an Active Learning Framework**

**Abstract:** Leaders must envision the future state of their organization and chart the direction of the firm. A popular tool used in beginning stages of creating a vision is the vision board. By combining proven techniques like guided meditation, mental imagery, and creative visualization, leaders can access conscious and unconscious information from their reservoir of tacit knowledge. Similarly, students can use creative visualization manifested in vision boarding to synthesize course material and capture personal vision. In this activity, we will engage attendees in the vision board process as experienced by graduate and undergraduate business students using an active learning framework.

Keywords: Vision, Creative Visualization, Active Learning

**Introduction**

Active learning “involves students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing” (Bonwell & Eison, 1991, p.2). Key elements include an emphasis on developing skills; involvement in higher-order thinking (analysis, synthesis, evaluation); engagement activities (e.g., reading, discussing, writing); greater emphasis on exploration of one’s own attitudes and values; and allowing students to do more than just listening (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). This approach to instruction proved to be effective in maximizing student learning in our behavioral management courses, both face-to-face and online. Over multiple semesters, we used active learning through creative visualization in a vision board activity to explore personal leadership vision and synthesize course material. Our approach to creative visualization through vision boards is well-suited for both graduate and late undergraduate business students in management, leadership, and organizational behavior courses. Face-to-face and distance students can benefit from the experience. In demonstrating the exercise, we will share outcomes, challenges, and successes in the varied instructional formats and student populations.

**Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications**

Creating a vision is a critical activity for business leaders. Daft (2014) defines vision as an “ambitious view of the future that everyone in the organization can believe in, one that can realistically be achieved, yet offers a future that is better in important ways than what now exists.” Great visions are the cornerstone of successful organizations. Vision and vision communication have been linked to growth in organizations, particularly entrepreneurial firms (Baum, Locke, & Kilpatrick, 1998). One of the most influential leadership experts, Ken Blanchard and his colleague, Stoner identify vision as important in times of growth, change, opportunity, and uncertainty (Blanchard, 2004). Brecken (2004) finds that leadership vision links the present to the future, energizes people, garners commitment, brings meaning to work, and sets the standard for excellence. All these insights on vision include the inference to creating direction toward some future state on the part of the leader or a team. The challenge is in how to make a vision.

The process of creating a vision, or the visioning process, is a combination of creativity and knowledge synthesis. Creating something new and bringing it into “vision.” Visualization is a technique for creating a mental image of a future event. Visualization can be outcome or process-oriented (Mayer, Allen, & Beauregard, 1995). Moreover, creative visualization is how we use our imagination to help create whatever we want to happen in our life, and this is supported by the subconscious mind and does not rely on knowing rather on using imagination and feeling to communicate (Benner, 2016). By visioning, the leader can tap into knowledge they are not aware of or unable to quantify and the knowledge they are aware of. A powerful combination that results in a form of tacit knowledge, knowledge that is difficult to transfer by means of writing it down or verbalizing it. Thus, the use of images is the best initial step in crystallization of the knowledge transfer of the vision.

Vision boarding is a method of journeying toward one’s vision using images. The process of creating a vision board allows the free flow of ideas from the conscious and the subconscious. By allowing intuitive discovery, expertise is unfolded in non-reflective judgment (Claxton, 2006). The outcome vision board becomes a tool for use in mental imagery as the vision is coming into focus. Mental imagery is a pathway to future desired states (Anthony et al, 1993). Mental imagery is linked to creativity (Pearson, 2007).

Where active learning includes key elements of doing, thinking, and reflecting, visioning exercises involve all these activities. Creativity and creation of a clear personal vision and value statement are at the core of developing a vision board. Much like business leaders, students often have trouble in academic environments freeing their thoughts to be creative. In the vision board development process, the guide (e.g., instructor, facilitator, teacher) is able to demystify the vision board and the creative process. The student is given hands-on experience in accessing conscious and unconscious knowledge to create a vision, which is useful for their long-term career and life focus, and in synthesizing course material with life relevance.

**Learning Objectives**

At the end of the session participants will:

1. Be able to enhance student engagement through active learning.
2. Learn strategies to incorporate creative visualization in undergraduate and graduate courses using vision boards.
3. Apply session learnings via creating a personal vision board.
4. Develop strategies for debriefing creative visualization exercises.

Management, organizational behavior, and leadership courses are most appropriate for this active learning activity. We will discuss our varied applications of the activity in graduate versus undergraduate and face-to-face versus online course formats.

**Exercise Overview (logistics, flow, debriefing)**

The exercise will use the active learning framework. Participants will be exposed to prior exercises and asked to compare and analyze the processes and results. Then participants will be involved in engagement by doing (i.e., creating their personal vision board), and discussing their own vision board experience.

Exposure of the past vision board experience will be provided for participant review. Participants will be briefed on three vision board experiences and provided the feedback from each.The first vision board experience they will be briefed on is an off-campus example in which Professional MBA students in a Leadership Skills course created personal vision boards in an art gallery as a part of a lesson on leadership vision. The second vision board experience is an on-campus example which allowed Master of Science in Management students to creative vision boards as the culminating synthesis activity (last day of class) in an organizational behavior course. The activity allowed for the synthesis of concepts learned over the course of the semester with each students’ personal vision and a self-portrait crafted from feedback from persons that knew them well (developed from the Roberts et al. (2005) Reflected Best Self exercise). The third vision board experience is a board created remotely for an undergraduate Responsible Leadership class co-offered online and face-to-face.

Student feedback solicited from the following questions will be discussed during the session.

1. Please briefly share how the vision board experience was useful to you in a graduate course (e.g., synthesizing concepts, thinking about your future, unique application, etc.).
2. How did the vision experience enhance your ability to discover your leadership goals?
3. How did the vision experience *in conjunction with the RBS assignment* enhance your ability to discover your leadership goals?
4. What challenges did you experience completing this activity in an online course?

Pictures of the actual experiences will be provided. Participants will be allowed to ask questions and provide feedback at the end of all three of the presentations.

Next, the participants will be allowed to create their own vision boards. A questionnaire will be given to assess the goals of the vision board. Then the participants will have a short, guided meditation to allow access to imagination (Psychology Today, Junes 25, 2016). Background meditative music will be played while participants work. Music has been found to be useful in mental imagery (Mayer, Allen, & Beauregard, 1995). Participants will use the provided materials to create their personal vision board.The segment will end with a debrief and sharing on the academic linkages for the exercise and questions.

**Session Description (including timeline and participant involvement)**

**Opening: Welcome, Context, Definitions, and Expectations (10 minutes)**

The session will start with a welcome and introduction of the facilitators. We will introduce the key elements of creating a vision and how it is inclusive of guided meditation, creative visualization, and mental imagery. Definitions of each concept will be provided. The participants will be asked to share if they have prior experience in the activities and the outcomes they are expecting in the session.

**Overview of Sample Vision Board Experiences and Feedback (15 minutes)**

The facilitators will provide three examples of vision board experiences for graduate and undergraduate students in both face-to-face and online delivery. The feedback from the students will be shared.

**Mini-Vision Board Creation Participant Activity (20 minutes)**

Participants will be given the opportunity to create a mini-vision board. Materials will be provided by the facilitators (i.e., boards, scissors, glue, vision words, and pictures, etc.). The ideal class size is 15-50 persons.

**Session Closing: Questions (15 minutes)**

The session will close with feedback, questions, and sharing from the participants. Other types of vision and creative visualization activities will be solicited from the audience. We are requesting 60 minutes for this session, however, more or less time can be utilized, based on conference needs.

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