

## Tip sheet: Five tips for a successful team vision

We become research leaders because we're successful as researchers, but it's rare that people are naturally gifted at leading and managing people without any training. Something that distinguishes leaders from other competent workers is their clarity of vision and ability to articulate and regularly communicate their vision to different audiences.

A key to your success is to have a strong vision which will help to unify the team and keep you focused when making important decisions and prioritising. The following five tips might help you define and articulate your vision to your team.

Alongside these tips you will find the following videos useful for thinking about your own research and career vision and finding a way to turn the vision in to a strategy. Perhaps watch them whilst thinking about your team vision, or even ask your team to watch them and come up with their own ideas for the team vision.

- [Being strategic part 1: Big picture career vision](#)
- [Being strategic part 2: Turning your career vision in to strategy](#)

### 1. Be Future-oriented

A vision lives in the future. It's about movement toward a goal, betterment, growth, or success. This requires a redefinition of focus for most new leaders. Developing as a doctoral researcher (acquiring specialist skills and experience), postdoctoral researcher (gaining skills in managing research projects), we're focused and rewarded for execution, an endeavour which exists primarily in the present. We're considered successful when we deliver outputs and deal with more immediate challenges in the shorter term: weeks and months.

Of course, leaders need to stay aware of current objectives, but they must also be taking a 'helicopter view' looking out toward a future that lies further ahead. If you want to strengthen your vision, spend time considering what your team should be moving toward a year, or even five years, from now. You must see it first to be able to orient everyone else toward it.

### 2. Create context

Unless you're at the very top of an organisation, your vision doesn't just come from you, it's connected to the larger vision of the organisation. In a research and innovation context, there is also a wider landscape of funders, policy makers, your discipline area (and many others), who will have a vision to which you may have to align. You must take account of their roadmap for your team and make it relevant for your team. And because we don't just exist within our organisation, a good leader also provides context to the outside environment.

In this way a vision creates shared meaning for others, and you are showing your team how their work impacts on the overall organisation and research and innovation landscape for your particular field.

Don't assume people already know this context! It's better to be redundant than to keep people guessing. You see more by the leadership position you hold, and it's easy to forget that others don't have the advantage of your perspective.

### 3. Be Positive

We don't want to run toward a future that's dark, so a vision needs to be positive. Visionaries communicate possibility. Instead of fixating on problems, they envision solutions. This doesn't mean a vision shouldn't be based in reality. Visionary leaders see the challenges, but instead of getting down, they get focused. This type of positivity is contagious— so much so that it inspires others to be equally positive. When times get tough, their vision allows a team to cohere and push through the tribulations. To put a finer point on it, this doesn't mean that a leader must be constantly upbeat. Challenges and setbacks are part of the job. A vision might be wrong or need to be adjusted. The vision itself, however it's recalibrated, should always point in an inspiring direction.

You may naturally be a 'glass half empty' personality, but we are aware of how contagious this may be. People are more likely to be motivated in the long term by orientation towards something they wish to have or to achieve, rather than avoidance of something they don't want.

### 4. Be Inclusive

One dispiriting aspect of work is that you can't always tell why your work matters in the greater whole. The "cog in the wheel" syndrome undermines innovation, creativity, and job satisfaction. Working for a leader with a vision helps everyone to see how their work connects to larger objectives. In a research group, you are likely to have researchers who are working on separate projects and don't see how they contribute to one another's projects or the overall vision. Your vision should also include the culture of the team, the environment you create together, how they support and encourage one another. This is common to

everyone irrespective of the project they are funded to work on. You may find our [tip sheet on creating a positive research culture](#) helpful.

Visions are intentionally inclusive. They paint a picture where everyone has a role that's meaningful and important. Again, even if this feels obvious to you it doesn't mean that others see it. For a vision to truly come to life, a leader must consistently and urgently share that vision with others. Find a way to naturally reference and reconnect with it at all your team and individual meetings.

#### **5. Be Active**

If you want to be visionary, you must actively keep the vision alive through action. A vision that's carefully developed and then rarely discussed is pointless. Most visions fail because leaders get bored of talking about them.

Strong visions aren't rolled out so much as woven into the fabric of the work. If you want your vision to stick, bring it into conversations, meetings, and presentations at every opportunity. In fact, make it a personal tagline. At meetings, give examples of an achievement or a team member's work that aligns with the vision.

Keep your vision out front in whatever capacity is possible for you given your role in the organisation. And remember, part of keeping a vision active is that it evolves. Your team isn't looking for certainty, but a path forward. People, leaders, and entire organisations learn as we go. You might find our [video](#) that introduces a regular 'stock take an review' process useful.