

Exploring our future with LVT

The Operations Management Team engaged in a development event for the direct reports of the incoming Director of Operations. There were sixteen participants, including three from HR. A LogoVisual Technology (LVT) session was requested by the Learning and Development manager who had responsibility for the overall design of this away day. His aim was to introduce members of the team to LVT as a potentially useful methodology and also to have them use it to help clarify how they would deliver the business plan. Most of the morning was allocated to LVT.

The venue was a four star hotel, a former country mansion, and we used a fine room with grand chandeliers, plush carpet and views onto delightful gardens. The room had been set out 'boardroom style' but we scrapped this in favour of a horseshoe of chairs facing a projection screen at one end, a lot of open space and a syndicate space in each corner. The only tables were reserved for refreshments.

The day started with a briefing on teamwork from the Learning & Development Manager and a short 'team exercise'. The Operations Director then provided an overview of the challenge of becoming an effective leadership team to deliver on the five-year business plan.

John Varney from Centre for Management Creativity introduced himself, explaining his own background in relation to leadership and team development and expressed urgency in relation to current threats and opportunities. He then asked people to identify who had a stake in the team's work. He outlined the process of LVT and how it would be applied to help the team address their approach to the business plan and to clarify how they saw themselves meeting the expectations of all stakeholders in the future.

The focus question: "Take a trip to 2012. What does success look like?" was explored briefly before the team was divided into four diverse groups of four to address it. Each group was equipped with a kit of 3" yellow hexagons, dry wipe pens and an A1 whiteboard on an easel. The room was large enough to allow all the action to take place without having to re-locate.

20 minutes was allowed for Gather and 10 minutes each for clustering, titling and developing a systems model (making connections). In another 20 minutes, each group presented its work-in-progress, noting what was good, points of difference and any surprises or corrections to post on Post-its as feedback to each group (in fact very little feedback resulted).

PHOTOS OF FOUR MODELS



Image 8404 yellow



Image 8408 blue



Image 8410 red



Image 8413 green

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Titles of each group's clusters were copied onto larger hexagons (4.5" green) and displayed on a single board. Working as a whole group and with the help of the facilitator, the titles were clustered, with the aim of bringing together similar topics and reducing the total number of clusters to less than fifteen. There should have been a rule about not clustering together more than one item from any one group but this was overlooked. In the event we arrived at nine clusters, which were titled in turn, all in about half an hour.

The original board has been photographed and also copied using Visual Concept software (in this document the definition is not sufficient for them to be read, for reasons of confidentiality, but full definition was available to the participants)



Image 8406 – distilled titles



Image – Visual Concept model of distilled titles

Note; colour coding has been added to enable the participants to trace each title to its original cluster contents

These nine titles were copied onto larger (6" yellow) hexagons, displayed around the edge of a new board. The idea of ring composition was briefly explained and people were invited to string the items together to tell their story of the future. A volunteer started things off by choosing a starter title and its successor and others followed, building on what had been begun. Then another person wanted a different starting point and made variations to the composition with a shift of axis.



Steve's story



Lee's story

There was some brief discussion about how the composition worked and whether there were connections across the circle. After some fine-tuning by the group, the facilitator drew the rungs on the second version of the composition, which was judged to be a reasonably sound basis for further work. Composing the story had taken half an hour.

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Visual Concept version of the story of success

The rungs (horizontal connections) were allocated to the same groups of four people who then worked for 25 minutes to determine actions and strategies for their realisation. The task was to work in the gap between the two opposite ends of the rung and allow the reconciliation of the tensions between them to stimulate new ideas.

The following are the four discussion topics:

1. Create organisation clarity **AND** Help save the world
2. Be recognised as an employer of choice **AND** Use excellent platform to upscale to other locations
3. Create and deliver a platform of operational excellence **AND** Achieve our commercial objectives
4. Be recognised as the partner of choice **AND** Show the world what we're good at

The output of which was captured by the participants on flipcharts. By re-grouping into four groups, each composed of one person from each of the former workgroups, we were able to have four simultaneous presentations. As the groups progressed around the room, one member was familiar with the material and presented to their three colleagues. Thus every participant presented what they had worked on and all ideas were shared in 20 minutes.

We were now short of time, partly due to a delayed start from which there was no recovery. The session was meant to include half hour periods for consideration of team and personal roles and responsibilities. This was reduced to a fairly blunt question about whether people chose to take seriously the challenge they had outlined for themselves – a push to a personal decision point (with the promise of guiding questions to follow).

REVIEW OF LVT SESSION

The closing 15 minute review of the LVT session revealed that everyone had been engaged, the team as a whole had clarified and addressed the challenge and people had enjoyed the interaction with different colleagues. The methodology had proved very engaging and useful and had provided some insights. Although the task had hardly begun, all the raw material was there to be worked upon.

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THE REST OF THE DAY

In the afternoon participants worked on Belbin profiles and related team tasks with the HR team. Key people refined short presentations to the Managing Director that they had been prepared. The MD joined them for dinner and a high level dialogue brought about a resolution for significant change.

WHAT NEXT?

This work was done at high speed, which helps break free from habitual thought forms and avoids getting involved in detail. Now it is necessary to be more rigorous. The team will find it worth combing through all the material to look for gems. At the same time refinements can be made. It is useful to trace some ideas back through from the final 'story' to their source clusters and individual contributions in the original groups. Additionally, of course, it is necessary to build on the last session in which strategies and actions were briefly considered. Some of this might happen just because individual team members are curious. However, it is probably necessary to appoint a small group to the task and have them report progress to the whole team.

COMMENT

The LVT session was a resounding success. It certainly stirred up thoughts and made clear that, as it is, the team will not achieve what is required. What emerged in the evening was the need for some radical re-thinking of the structure, scope and capability of the team. Additionally, team members need to see themselves as being on a development journey. In this they need to work together to excel, taking care not to fall back on what is merely 'good enough'. Team and leadership development are essential if the team is to have the capability of delivering the plan.

As LVT is valued it will be good to import the skills and tools into the organisation. Additionally attention should be given to developing the capability of Real-Time Knowledge Capture, which would, when appropriate, put high quality output into people's hands at the close of workshops, rather than losing valuable work and insights. A third factor to take on board is the value and relevance of external facilitation of team development events.

John Varney
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