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Every month **Attractors** shares tips and tools from human systems dynamics. In this month's edition, Glenda Eoyang reflects on

VISION

For years, I avoided the "vision thing."

I dodged a personal vision by telling myself that my real present was much more interesting and exciting than anything I could have envisioned before.

Our HSD Institute vision was developed to aid communication, not creation, of who we are and what we do.

I helped my clients consider opportunities and options, but I found discussions about vision to fail them in one of two ways. Either the conversation was bogged down in the present, so the statement was uninspiring and turgid; or it was flying in the clouds to land on something that was fuzzy and/or unrealistic.

So, for years "vision" was not a part of my personal, leadership, or professional practice. In 2007 my mind and practice were changed, thanks to George Johnson (<http://www.telavision.tv>) and Malcolm Cohan (<http://malcolmcohan.com/home.html>). What did I learn from them about building and living a vision in the midst of complex adaptive human systems dynamics?

Future possibility comes from present action. A vision has to influence what I do today, or it cannot influence what I will experience tomorrow. For me, that is the difference between a vision and a dream. I can dream of being/doing anything in the world, but it is not a vision unless it informs my choices, decisions and actions today. The future will not come to be all at once in a whole new pattern. It self-organizes over time, based on the conditions I set in everything I do or think about today, tomorrow, and the day after that.

I can set the conditions for the future I desire. In HSD we understand the uncertainty of human systems. We know that we can neither predict nor control the future because of the nature of complex adaptation and self-organization. On the other hand, we are not helpless. We can influence the conditions that influence the emergent patterns. We can focus on or strengthen the boundaries within which patterns will emerge; we can focus on differences that truly make a difference; and we can establish or sustain connections that generate new insights and energy. Through the vision, we set the conditions.

More distinct is easier to replicate. A pattern can be crisp and distinct or fuzzy and unclear. In complex human systems, there is no better or worse, there is just fit. Sometimes a fuzzy pattern is a better fit for the current situation and needs, and sometimes a distinct pattern is more effective. Every pattern has its own benefits and risks. One of the benefits of a clear pattern is that it is much easier to recreate. I'm creating a pattern for the future I desire. The clearer it is, the easier it will be for me (and others) to move it from imagination to reality.

Focus on differences that make a difference. Every day is full of noise—differences that are disruptive but insignificant. Many days I find myself chasing after the most trivial and absurd issues because I haven't asked myself whether or not they make a difference. An effective vision codifies the differences that make a difference for the pattern I see as a future I desire. It provides a filter that supports my daily (minutely?) choices about where to put my attention and energy. It helps me be sure that I'm focusing on the conditions (containers, differences, and exchanges) that will constitute the patterns of the future I want to see.

Medium matters. Malcolm invented a fabulous method to create visions and move them toward reality. The idea is simple and incredibly powerful. During a visioning process, you create a video that carries the pattern of your vision in words, music, and images. New technologies make it easy to bring these elements together, and the vision video creates a transforming exchange on many, many levels. You can see examples on the web at

http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=hdsinstitute&search_type=&aq=f .

Repeat. Repeat. Repeat. One of Malcolm's rules is that you watch your vision two times each day—upon rising and before sleeping. It only takes about ten minutes, but it makes a tremendous difference. First, like any self-respecting nonlinear system, the iterative processing builds resilience and robustness into the patterns. Second, (or maybe just the subjective view of the first) the experience is a kind of meditation in which I reflect on my actions of today and plan my actions for tomorrow. The ritual becomes a reinforcing learning/planning cycle that builds a bridge from the patterns of today toward the patterns of a preferred tomorrow.

Go public. Another gift of emerging technologies is the ability to “put it out there.” In the same way that a spoken promise is more binding than an implied one, a vision made public is more powerful than one held privately. Before I started my first vision statement, I had no interest in broadcasting it to the world. The whole idea seemed crazy. By the time I finished it, though, I wanted to share it. I wanted others to see it. I wanted to commit myself publicly to the future I could create.

It is fun. We often consider doing the right thing as painful (at worst) or boring (at best). Creating a vision statement is fun! I have never thought of myself as creative or artistically gifted, and even I lost myself in the journey of exploration and discovery. Every step along the way is fun—if you can overcome the lurking technophobia. As the pieces come together, you see new ideas and spark new possibilities. Each word and every picture can be a new delight.

Ultimately, I've begun to think about this vision creation experience as an analogy for building the future itself. Is it possible that I might see my own life's work as naming the conditions for the pattern I want to create? I would see my life as searching for the words, images, and music to embody that pattern; discovering surprises along the way; and making choices that reinforce and strengthen the pattern when it appears.

If so, then I'm committed to that “vision thing.”

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