

## Visionary Leadership

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### Abstract

Leadership has been at the center of social and organizational life throughout history and has been shaped under various approaches in different periods. Among these approaches, visionary leadership has become a prominent theoretical and practical leadership approach, especially since the last quarter of the 20th century. Visionary leadership involves not only creating a strong and inspiring vision of the future but also sharing this vision with organizational members and motivating them towards a common goal. In this respect, it is considered a strategic necessity for contemporary organizations to survive in an environment of change, uncertainty, and competition. This study examines the concept of visionary leadership through a literature review and discusses its basic components, its relationship with other types of leadership, and its functions in today's organizational context. The review of the literature reveals that visionary leadership guides organizations in strategic, psychological, cultural, and communicative dimensions and is closely related to factors such as corporate culture, innovation, and employee engagement. In addition, visionary leadership provides long-term competitive advantage to organizations in relation to current issues such as digitalization, sustainability, and crisis management. The study considers visionary leadership as an organizational reflex and a cultural construct rather than an individual quality and emphasizes that the concept should be understood not only as leader-centered but also as a shared and institutionalized vision. This approach provides a theoretical framework for the literature and a holistic view of the stages of vision development, sharing, realization, and maintenance for practitioners.

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## 1. Introduction

Leadership has been one of the most important elements of social and organizational life throughout human history. Guiding communities, managing change processes, and achieving common goals largely depend on the phenomenon of leadership. However, it is seen that leadership is not a uniform approach; different leadership approaches have emerged in the historical process. Following different paradigms such as charismatic leadership, authentic leadership, ethical leadership, and transformational leadership, the concept of visionary leadership has come to the fore in a remarkable way, especially since the last quarter of the 20th century. In its simplest form, visionary leadership can be defined as the ability to create a strong vision of the future, to share this vision with followers, and to enable them to take action by believing in this vision (Nanus, 1992).

In today's world of globalization, digital transformation, intensified competition, and increased uncertainty, the survival of organizations depends not only on the effective use of existing resources but also on having a strategic perspective towards the future. In this context, visionary leaders are not only managers but also individuals who guide their organizations, prepare them for the future, and inspire their employees.

In today's organizations, visionary leadership plays a critical role in successfully managing change and transformation processes. Developments such as digitalization, sustainability, artificial intelligence, green economy, and industry 5.0 require organizations to think not only about the present but also about the future. At this point, visionary leaders come to the fore as "road compasses" who can turn the uncertainties of the future into opportunities and mobilize employees towards common goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

The aim of this chapter is to examine the concept of visionary leadership in all its dimensions, to examine different approaches in the literature, to reveal the characteristics of visionary leaders, and to evaluate the effects of this leadership style on organizational performance, innovation, employee engagement, and social transformation. In addition, the findings of different academic studies on visionary leadership will be discussed, and a holistic perspective on the concept will be presented by addressing different orientations and trends.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

### 2.1. Concept of Vision

The concept of “vision” derives from the Latin verb *videre* (to see) and has the meanings of envisioning the future, determining direction, and mentally visualizing the target point. In general terms, vision is defined as a clear, meaningful, and inspiring picture of the ideal future that an individual, group, or organization wants to achieve (Nanus, 1992). This picture is not only an abstract dream but also serves as a compass that guides organizational decisions, prepares the ground for strategic planning, and mobilizes individuals towards common goals. Vision is a phenomenon that manifests itself at both individual and organizational levels. Accordingly, while individual vision includes one’s goals, values, and long-term expectations for one’s own life, organizational vision refers to the place the organization wants to be in the future, its social role, and strategic expectations.

According to studies emphasizing the importance of vision in the organizational context, there are some basic characteristics of an effective vision. Some of these can be listed as follows (Collins & Porras, 1996):

- *Clarity*: It should be easily understandable by the members.
- *Inspiration*: The organization should create motivation in its members and provide them with a meaningful purpose.
- *Realism*: It should be attainable, but with a challenge that transcends the status quo.
- *Inclusiveness*: Involve all stakeholders of the organization and create a shared sense of belonging.

Vision also has a cultural meaning. The visions of societies and nations shape their development strategies, development goals, and expectations for the future. For example, while the goals set out in national development plans reveal the social vision of a country, this vision is strengthened by the discourses of leaders (Yakısır, 2024; Geçgin, 2022). Therefore, the concept of vision is directly related to leadership. The formation, development, and adoption of the vision by the members of the organization largely depend on how the leader expresses and conveys this vision. The leader should not only define the vision, but also keep it alive and integrate it into the organizational culture. In this context, vision is a key concept in leadership literature that underlies charismatic, transformational, and especially visionary leadership approaches (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

## 2.2. Visionary Leadership

Visionary leadership is one of the most prominent types of leadership among contemporary leadership approaches and is of critical importance for organizations, especially in environments of change and uncertainty. In the most general terms, visionary leadership can be defined as the process of developing an inspiring, achievable, and meaningful vision of the future, conveying this vision to followers, making them believe in this vision, and mobilizing them (Nanus, 1992). Visionary leaders play an active role not only in managing the current situation but also in shaping the future. Therefore, visionary leadership can be considered as one of the approaches that makes the difference between management and leadership most visible.

In the literature, visionary leadership has been addressed by different researchers with various dimensions. According to Nanus (1992), a visionary leader is “a person who creates a strong and attractive vision of the future and unites organizational members around this vision”. According to Bennis & Nanus (1997), visionary leadership is “the ability to foresee the future, integrate this future with the values of the organization, and provide a meaningful direction to the members of the organization”. Kouzes & Posner (2007), on the other hand, define a visionary leader as “a person who not only envisions the future, but also shares this future with others and enables them to be part of this dream”. Yilmaki (2006) defines a visionary leader as “a leader with strong intuition, perception, understanding, and holistic perspective”.

Considering all these definitions, three main functions of visionary leadership stand out. These are:

- *Designing the future*: Setting long-term direction amidst uncertainties.
- *Sharing the vision*: Communicating the vision to organizational members in a clear, understandable, and inspiring way.
- *Mobilizing followers*: Motivating employees by making them believe in the vision and creating a collective sense of purpose.

In addition, when the definitions above are examined, it is noteworthy that there are some dimensions that constitute the essence of visionary leadership. These dimensions can be listed as follows;

**Strategic Dimension:** Visionary leadership is not limited to short-term goals. It involves determining the future direction of the organization and focusing on long-term success. Visionary leaders can foresee future opportunities and threats by analyzing current trends and environmental

factors. In this context, the vision forms the basis of the strategic plans of the organization. The strategic dimension requires the leader to think and foresee not only the present but also the distant future (Maxwell, 2007; Mascareño et al., 2020).

***Psychological Dimension:*** Vision is not only a rational list of goals, but also an important force that appeals to the emotions of employees. Visionary leaders create a sense of belonging, hope, and trust in organizational members. In this respect, vision serves as an “emotional bond”. Employees do not just see the vision as a text or a slogan; they make it a part of their lives. The psychological dimension becomes especially important in times of crisis and uncertainty. Under difficult conditions, the visionary leader strengthens motivation and organizational commitment by instilling in employees the belief that “the future will be better” (Elenkov, Judge, & Peter, 2005).

***Cultural Dimension:*** Vision is an important carrier of organizational culture. In organizations, vision becomes an element of identity and belonging when it is integrated with values, beliefs, and norms. Visionary leaders not only set strategic goals but also align these goals with the values of the organization. For example, a leader who adopts a vision of sustainability makes not only economic performance but also environmental and social responsibility an integral part of the organizational culture. Thus, the vision creates a common identity among organizational members and becomes an element of trust in relations with stakeholders (Kalyoncu, 2008).

***Communicative Dimension:*** One of the most important features of vision is that it not only remains in the mind of the leader but can also spread throughout the organization. This requires strong communication skills. The visionary leader should express complex future visions in a simple, understandable, and inspiring way. Metaphors, storytelling, and symbols are often used in this process. Effective communication ensures that the vision is not only communicated but also embedded in the hearts and minds of employees. The communicative dimension also means that the vision is constantly reiterated and integrated into organizational processes (Osborne, 2008). Thus, the vision becomes not only a written document but also a part of the daily life of the organization.

### **2.3. The Relationship of Visionary Leadership with Other Leadership Approaches**

Visionary leadership is not an isolated approach that exists alone in the leadership literature. On the contrary, it intersects with and feeds on other

leadership paradigms such as charismatic, transformational, authentic, and ethical leadership. Therefore, understanding visionary leadership requires a comparative analysis with other types of leadership. From this point of view, under this heading, the main leadership approaches related to visionary leadership are mentioned, and an attempt is made to draw a common denominator between these approaches and visionary leadership.

### **2.3.1. Relationship with Charismatic Leadership**

Charismatic leadership refers to the leader's personal charm, self-confidence, and impressive communication skills that create a strong impact on followers (Putra & Sari, 2024). While charismatic leaders influence their followers with their personal charisma, visionary leaders mobilize organizational members with the power of their vision for the future. However, the success of visionary leadership is not independent of charismatic characteristics. Leaders may need to have charismatic elements that can influence their followers to adopt their vision. Therefore, visionary leadership does not exclude charismatic leadership but deepens its future-oriented dimension.

### **2.3.2. Relationship with Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that motivates employees, unleashes their potential, and supports organizational change (Suryadi et al., 2024; Özdemirkol, 2025). Visionary leadership is also closely related to transformational leadership. While transformational leadership focuses on moving organizational members beyond the existing boundaries, visionary leadership determines the goal towards which this transformation will be directed. In other words, while transformational leadership activates the "change process", visionary leadership determines the "direction of change". In this respect, visionary leadership is a strategic and long-term complement to transformational leadership.

### **2.3.3. Relationship with Authentic Leadership**

Authentic leadership is based on the leader's sincerity, transparency, and ethical values that inspire confidence in the members of the organization (Ozturk et al., 2025). The success of visionary leadership also largely depends on the authenticity of the leader. Because an inauthentic vision loses its credibility with employees. The visionary leader facilitates the acceptance of the vision by the members of the organization by using authentic leadership characteristics. Thus, the vision becomes a shared sense of purpose, rather than merely a managerial tool.

### 2.3.4. Relationship with Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership is based on the principles of justice, integrity, responsibility, and honesty (Arslantaş & Dursun, 2008). The relationship between visionary leadership and ethical leadership emerges at the point of integration of vision with values. A vision that is not based on ethical foundations may create excitement in the short term, but it is not sustainable in the long term. Therefore, visionary leaders have to harmonize their vision with ethical values. Otherwise, the vision may lead to a loss of trust among employees.

### 2.3.5. Common Points

These comparisons show that visionary leadership is not completely independent from other leadership approaches. On the contrary, it draws on the influencing power of charismatic leadership, the capacity for change of transformational leadership, the trust-building quality of authentic leadership, and the value-based approach of ethical leadership. But what makes visionary leadership unique is its ability to integrate these elements around a meaningful and inspiring vision of the future.

## 2.4. Visionary Leadership in Contemporary Context

Today, when globalization is accelerating, digitalization is transforming business processes, and uncertainty has become a fundamental dynamic for organizations, visionary leadership has gained more importance than ever. It is not only sufficient for organizations to maintain their current performance, but they are also expected to achieve sustainable success by preparing for the conditions of the future. At this point, visionary leadership stands out as a leadership approach that both provides strategic direction to organizations and instills confidence and hope in employees.

Visionary leadership plays a critical role, especially in our age of accelerating digitalization and technological developments. With Industry 4.0 and Industry 5.0, technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, Internet of Things (IoT), automation, and blockchain have become an integral part of the business world. Visionary leaders view these technologies not only as tools for operational efficiency but also as strategic elements for redesigning the future of the organization. In this way, vision serves as a roadmap that turns technology into an opportunity rather than a threat (Wu, Liu, & Liang, 2024).

In addition, global problems such as climate change, depletion of natural resources, and social inequalities have made sustainability a necessity for

organizations. By making environmental and social sensitivity an integral part of their organizational vision, visionary leaders both reassure stakeholders and enable organizations to fulfill their social responsibilities (Fry & Egel, 2021). Thus, visionary leadership is shaped as an approach that prioritizes environmental and social contribution beyond economic performance.

Crises and uncertainty are also defining factors for today's leadership. The COVID-19 pandemic, disruptions in global supply chains, and economic fluctuations have made it imperative for leaders not only to produce short-term solutions but also to put forward a long-term vision. In this context, visionary leaders guide their organizations in times of crisis and strengthen organizational resilience by creating a sense of confidence in the future (Guan et al., 2023; Elkırımıř, 2024). In addition, with globalization, the workforce has become increasingly diverse and multicultural. As diversity management becomes a strategic imperative for today's organizations, visionary leaders bring together employees from different cultures, genders, and generations with inclusive visions. This vision sees diversity as a richness that enhances creativity and innovation.

In an intensely competitive environment, innovation is one of the key components of visionary leadership. Visionary leaders build an innovative culture within the organization by encouraging their employees to continuously learn, think creatively, and develop innovative solutions. In this context, vision is not only an indicator of future direction but also a strategic element that enables organizations to differentiate and gain sustainable competitive advantage (Zhang & Chen, 2024). In today's context, visionary leadership has become a strategic imperative for organizations in terms of seizing the opportunities offered by digitalization, placing sustainability goals at the center of organizational culture, managing crisis and uncertainty, integrating diversity with an inclusive vision, and encouraging innovation (Karadeniz et al., 2018; Bektař ve elik, 2021). Visionary leaders play a guiding role in the transformation of not only their organizations but also societies with their perspectives on the future.

## **2.5. Visionary Leadership Process**

Visionary leadership is not just about an inspiring vision of the future. In this leadership approach, the vision needs to be developed, shared, realized, and sustained in a systematic process (Dhammika, 2016). In the literature, the functioning of visionary leadership is generally discussed within the framework of four basic stages. These can be listed as developing vision, sharing vision, realizing vision, and sustaining vision.



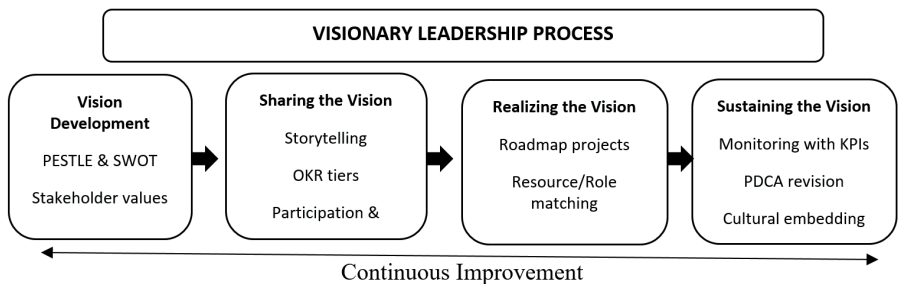


Figure 1. Visionary leadership process.

*Continuous Improvement*

**Vision Development:** The first stage of visionary leadership is the creation of a strong vision that will shape the future of the organization. This process requires an analysis of the current state of the organization and environmental factors. The leader draws a meaningful future picture for the organization by taking into account internal resources, sectoral trends, technological developments, and societal expectations. In developing the vision, not only the leader’s individual foresight, but also the values of organizational members and stakeholders’ expectations should be taken into account (Nsengiyumva, 2024). Therefore, vision development is a multidimensional process that brings together analytical thinking, strategic foresight, and creative imagination (Nanus, 1992).

**Sharing the Vision:** For a vision to be effective, it is not enough for it to remain only in the mind of the leader. The vision needs to be understood and adopted by all members. This stage is directly related to the leader’s strong communication skills. The visionary leader conveys the vision to the members of the organization in a clear and inspiring way. In this process, communication tools such as storytelling, metaphors, and symbols make the vision more understandable and effective. In addition, it is of great importance that the leader supports the vision not only with words but also with behavior. Thus, the vision can turn into a collective sense of purpose among organizational members (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

**Realizing the Vision:** Vision can only gain its true value when it is transformed into concrete actions and strategies. At this stage, the visionary leader develops strategic plans to achieve the set goals, uses resources effectively, and restructures organizational processes in line with the vision. This stage also involves change management. Because the implementation of a new vision often requires questioning existing habits and transforming organizational culture (Hermawan et al., 2024). In this change process, the

visionary leader manages the resistance of employees, motivates them, and integrates the vision into daily practices.

***Sustaining the Vision:*** Vision is not a static element that is created once and for all. It must be constantly reviewed, adapted to circumstances, and kept alive with the members of the organization. Therefore, the sustainability of the vision depends on the ongoing efforts of the visionary leader. The leader should regularly measure the progress of the vision, revise it when necessary, and ensure that it becomes an integral part of the organizational culture. In this way, the vision serves as a long-term roadmap for the organization, not just a periodic goal.

## **2.6. The Effect of Visionary Leadership on Organizational Culture and Performance**

Today's organizations are in an effort to adapt to rapidly changing environmental conditions and to achieve sustainable success. In this context, the role of leadership is not limited to making managerial decisions, but has become a strategic element that shapes the values, beliefs, and direction of the organization. In particular, visionary leadership is a leadership approach that attracts attention with its power to transform organizational culture and its capacity to increase employee performance (Mulyadin et al., 2023). Under this heading, the impact of visionary leadership on organizational culture and its reflections on organizational performance are discussed with a holistic approach.

Visionary leadership, as mentioned earlier, not only creates a vision of the future that inspires the organization but also has the power to unite employees around a common purpose by sharing this vision (Geçgin & Gülsoy, 2024). This form of leadership provides guidance, especially in times of change, while at the same time leading to the redefinition of organizational norms and cultural transformation. This type of leadership strengthens the psychological bonds that employees establish with the organization and creates a collective consciousness in achieving common goals (Casida et al., 2012).

Corporate culture, as a basic system that directs the behaviors of individuals within the organization, is a structure that has a direct impact on performance outcomes (Kanat & Geçgin, 2025). Visionary leadership positively shaping this cultural structure also results in increased performance. In this direction, a quantitative study conducted in a vocational high school in Indonesia revealed that visionary leadership had significant and positive effects on both organizational culture and teacher performance (Kurniadi et al., 2020).

Similarly, in another study conducted in another educational institution, visionary leadership was found to increase employee performance along with organizational culture and work discipline (Mulyadin et al., 2023).

The impact of visionary leadership is not only limited to direct performance improvement, but also contributes to performance indirectly through organizational culture. A study of small and medium-sized enterprises found that organizational culture significantly mediates the relationship between leadership and operational performance (Shah et al., 2022). This finding suggests that culture is not only an outcome but also a mechanism of influence. The impact of visionary leadership on organizational culture and performance is not limited to education or service sectors. Qualitative research in large public organizations, such as LEMHANAS, has shown that visionary leadership supports structural reforms, provides flexibility in decision-making processes, and fosters the development of a performance-oriented culture (Hermawan et al., 2024). These findings are noteworthy in that they show that visionary leadership can be similarly effective at different scales and sectors.

All these findings suggest that visionary leadership has a multi-layered impact that reshapes organizational culture and thereby increases employee engagement, motivation, and performance. This form of leadership enables not only individual achievements but also the holistic transformation and development of the organization. Therefore, visionary leadership is considered an inevitable strategic tool for organizations that want to build a sustainable and high-performance organization.

### **3. Conclusion**

In the 21st century, organizations are responsible not only for keeping pace with change but also for leading it. Leadership is no longer a choice but a strategic necessity for organizations that want to survive, be innovative, and achieve sustainable success in this era of transformation. At this point, the visionary leadership model, which goes beyond classical managerial approaches, inspires, directs, and internalizes transformation, occupies a central position in contemporary management literature.

The literature analysis, theoretical discussions, and field research discussed throughout this chapter strongly suggest the potential of visionary leadership to transform organizational culture and improve performance. Visionary leaders not only set a goal but also make this goal meaningful to the entire organization, create a sense of common purpose among employees, and shape the dynamics of the organization with a long-term perspective. In

this respect, visionary leadership is not only a management style but also a culture-building practice.

Research shows that the open and motivating environment created by visionary leaders increases employee engagement, innovation, and overall organizational performance (Kurniadi et al., 2020). However, despite this positive picture, it should not be overlooked that visionary leadership can also have some potential problematic aspects, such as context sensitivity, leader-centeredness risk, and sustainability. This fact reveals the need for a more critical and multidimensional approach to the concept.

How visionary leadership differs across organizational structures, cultural codes, and sectoral dynamics is one of the main variables that determine its impact. The participatory nature of the organization, its openness to change, and the extent to which the vision is internalized are as important as the leader's personal charisma or oratorical power. Indeed, in some contexts, visionary leadership can be a driver of cultural transformation, while in others it can become an externalized agenda that puts pressure on employees (Saba et al., 2017). Therefore, the power of visionary leadership lies not only in the content of the vision but also in how this vision is created and shared.

Today, organizations need to produce not only strong leaders but also institutionalized visions. Not a vision that disappears with the departure of the leader, but a vision that is continuous and intertwined with values can carry organizations beyond time. From this point of view, visionary leadership should not just be an individual's qualities, but should become an organizational reflex, a culture of governance. In this framework, the following recommendations have been developed for a more effective, inclusive, and sustainable implementation of visionary leadership:

*Creating the Vision in a Shared and Participatory Way:* Leaders building the vision together with employees, rather than alone, will facilitate its adoption and spread throughout the organization.

*Strengthening Institutionalization Processes:* For vision to be sustained, it must be supported by institutional values, norms, and systems. The impact of visionary leadership will become permanent as the structure becomes institutionalized.

*Leadership Development Programs:* Organizations should systematically develop visionary leadership through holistic training and development strategies that include not only current leaders but also potential leaders.

*Context Sensitive Practices:* The impact of visionary leadership is not independent of the cultural and organizational context. Therefore, leadership practices should be designed in accordance with the environmental conditions and social structures of the organization.

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