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Visual Leaders | *David Sibbet*

Visual Leaders explores how leaders can support visioning and strategy formation, planning and management, and organizational change through the application of visual meeting and visual team methodologies organization wide—literally "trans-forming" communications and people's sense of what is possible. It describes seven essential tools for visual leaders—mental models, visual meetings, graphic templates, decision theaters, roadmaps, Storymaps, and virtual visuals—and examples of methods for implementation throughout an organization.

Visualization is a critical part of leadership excellence in our times.

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Part One: *The Visual Leadership Advantage*

The Visual Leadership Advantage orients the reader to the advantages of visualization and David Sibbet's seven essential tools for effective visual leadership. These Tools are tangible, distinct, and learnable processes or practices that you can do for a desired result and repeated for greater effect.

Watching a slide presentation does not support real learning. Working interactively with visualization does – assuming you want to foster awareness, engagement, insight, and ownership – a level of understanding that translates into real results.

According to Sibbet, every leader should know how to work with visual meetings and visual practitioners. Leaders set the norms for how everyone relates in meetings. There is creative room for shaping expectations and opportunities if you have a clear idea of what results you would like to achieve. He makes a distinction between the two different types of meetings and then suggests different visual tools that are most effective in each.

Regular meetings:

- Introduce new people
- Check progress
- Enforce discipline
- Make decisions
- Delegate work
- Examine assumptions
- Experience new ways to work
- Explore visions/goals

Special meetings:

- Develop strategies and plans
- Develop leaders

> The visual displays listed below express their own unique "visual language" most appropriate to the needs of the leader.
>
> - **Posters – focus attention**
> - **Lists – energize the flow**
> - **Clusters – activate comparisons**
> - **Grids – build combinations**
> - **Diagrams – grow understandings**
> - **Drawings – animate meaning**
> - **Mandala – shows unity**

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Part Two: *Looking at Your Own Leadership*

Looking at Your Own Leadership invites you to start with your own development. This section defines some of the key ideas, distinguishing metaphors, models, and operating systems.

If you plan to help your organization take advantage of the visualization revolution, you need to start with yourself.

Metaphors, analogies, and mental models are the "sentences" in our brain's visual language. Metaphors are deeper than simple comparisons; analogies are extended metaphors. Mental models are highly developed analogies. Visual frameworks are special kinds of conceptual models.

Of all the mental models of the world that you have in your brain, the ones you use to think about your organization as a whole are the most important to understand. The Sibbet/LeSaget Sustainable Organizations Model introduces a visual framework for thinking about organizations and the various stages of development they go through.

Stage Name	Intentions/Driver
Startup	Bright idea
Growth	Strong leaderships
Specialization	Clear strategies
Institutionalizations	Reliable returns
Regeneration	New growth
Co-creation	Agility and innovation
Transformation	Lasting impact

It takes practice for you to develop your own visual intelligence. Consider using the following exercises to help develop your visual IQ:

- Visual notes – using words and simple shapes to capture ideas
- Exploring metaphors – a lens or window using simple concepts to understand complexity
- Personal visioning – using charts to explore your personal vision
- Personal decision wall – using sticky notes to understand context and choices
- Diagram a process – using shapes to diagram a core process
- Scenario mapping – exploring what is possible though speculation
- Truth tracking – understanding the deeper truths below the surface

This process literally creates new neural networks that lead to new levels of awareness and upgraded mental models, which in turn lead to more effective responses to situations.

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3 Part Three: *Power Tools for Visual Leaders*

Power Tools for Visual Leaders is the heart of the book. A chapter for each tool reviews case examples, tools, exercises, and virtual adaptations. These tools are about both setting strategy and implementing it.

Metaphors & Models: Helping people see what you mean

The first essential tool set for visual leaders consists of the visual metaphors and models that you use to filter your understanding of how things work in your organization.

If you think about it, your brain has never been outside your skull. You have pulled all the images, pictures, sounds, smell, and memories together out of raw sense data. They are all representations of things in the outside world and not the world itself. We understand what we don't know by comparing it with what we do, or comparing it with some model we've learned. This is metaphoric thinking. Visual metaphors are the patterns of understanding that we can visualize explicitly.

Visual Meetings: Stimulating engagement & creative contribution

Visual meetings are ones in which you use visualization actively to inspire, engage, support thinking, and support enactment. It includes both things you as a leader do with visuals and also the visual support you can get from others.

The most powerful thing about being interactive with visuals is you get four things right away – even if the charting isn't practiced:

- Imagination – visuals spark new thinking.

- Participation – engagement increases immediately.

- Big-Picture Thinking – display making is the key to systems thinking, seeing relationships, and developing aligned group understanding.

- Group Memory – Visualizing produces a memorable product that everyone sees being created. Retention increases. Follow-through is stronger.

Graphic Templates: Visuals for any kind of planning

An effective way to get visual without facilitators or consultants is to use simple graphic templates for both collecting information and having staff and others report information.

Graphic templates have prestructured areas for information and are designed to optimize everyone being able to see important relationships. The benefits of using Graphic Templates include:

- Insight – making the graphic template requires that you and your team determine the most relevant information to share.

- Panorama – templates placed around a room create a full surround of information so that everyone can see critical relationships.

- Retention – templates can be rolled up and unrolled in another room with almost no loss of memory and can stand out from other communications by being big, yet easily shared with digital photography.

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Visual Leaders | *David Sibbet (cont'd)*

Decision Rooms: Making choices in a big-picture context

Seeing the forest and the trees is essential during decision-making. As a leader you need to know how to ask staff and others who are supporting you to display critical information in ways that enhance decision-making.

Much of this involves thinking through what needs to be compared with what. Many of the best tools are large matrixes with sticky notes. Decision room design helps enhance your use of visual meeting and graphic template tools.

Roadmaps & Visual Plans: Managing milestones

Can you imagine project management without timelines and milestones? Many project management tools are too detailed for regular use in your leadership's role of keeping attention on the right things and encouraging timely execution.

The roadmaps and visual action plans described as an essential tool for visual leaders are high-level visualizations – essentially "freeway maps" – that allow you and the rest of your leadership to tell an aligned overview story about big projects and plans. Key uses of Roadmaps include:

- Commitment to Implementation – Get leadership to buy into implementation by having them co-create roadmaps and plans.

- Project Pacing – Focus your organization on key milestones.

- Stakeholder Engagement – Be able to explain your process easily to those not directly involved.

Graphic Storymaps: Connecting plans with culture

Large murals and posters that integrate history, visions, challenges, values, critical behaviors, and other key ideas into one graphic are called "storymaps".

During culture change or any high-impact organizational change, these tools help people link visions and goals to the culture that people experience every day. You generally create large murals with the help of internal or external information designers. Your role is to guide what story you need to tell and how to use the creation process to align your leadership team. Key uses of Storymaps include:

- Alignment – Use the product to align key language and goals.

- Culture Change – engage everyone in understanding what behaviors need to change to reach your visions and goals.

- Authenticity – provide a way for you and other leaders to show up authentically and personally – and tell your story in a flexible way.

- Organizational Dialogue – Iterate Storymaps over time to show that you are listening.

Video & Virtual Visuals:

Mobile video, tablets, animation, & panoramic display Video, smartphones, and tablets are changing everyone's way of working.

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As a leader you need to know how to use these tools efficiently, what their advantage are, and how you can make sure your teams have the correct infrastructures for visual work at a distance. The other six essential tool sets can work virtually on webinars and conferences.

The power of Virtual Visuals includes:

- Focusing Attention – one consequence of having so much digital communication is that it makes it tougher to get through the "noise" and keep everyone's focus on the important things.

- Personal Touch – Videos capture motion and emotion better than any other medium. There are ways of combining videos with the other tools.

- Mobile Memory – if your people can reference key documents in easy, visual ways, it will help them remember.

4 Part Four: *Managing the New Media*

Managing the New Media looks directly at the role of the leader in regard to new technology. It is no longer advisable for leaders to sit on the sidelines and let technology experts dictate the means by which an organization communicates. Media shapes everyone's perception.

Technology & Visualization: Enabling the right tools

- How do you make choices about what media to use for your communications?

- Which will support visual work?

- What are the critical requirements that when met, will clear the way for your people to work more visually?

In your role as a leader, you can support your organization by being able to focus work in a collaborative way and get results by reducing the fragmentation and chaos that distracts energy and attention from the work you need to accomplish.

Virtual Leadership: Communicating with Intention & Impact

As a leader you need to be able to communicate clearly in the midst of all the changes.

You also need to stay oriented yourself, keep people's attention on the right things, make sure that your critical messages are getting through and that everyone feels engaged and committed.

5 Part Five: *Leading Organizational Change*

Leading Organizational Change illustrates how all the tools considered in previous chapters come to play when you are leading your organization through change.

Anticipating the Need to Change: Putting visual tools to work

Change and transformation take you into territory in which your organization will have new priorities, new behavior, and will implement new processes.

It's confusing for all if there are no guides on how to make this happen. The Storymapping approach is a useful framework for anticipating the stages of change.

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The Chrysalis Effect: Creating the conditions for transformation

Organizations are full of human being who have awareness, feelings, a wide diversity of skills, and real constraints in term of how much change they can handle and how fast it can happen.

The heart of visual leadership is how you create the conditions of trust that allow your organization to transform. Using the analogy of the caterpillar becoming a butterfly, the authors show how visual leadership can help with the change challenge while at the same time making sure your people are having fun and seeing results as you help them develop their visual IQ and capabilities.

6 **Part Six:** *Links, Books, & Other Resources*

Links, Books, & Other Resources shares the literature on leadership and visualization that inspired the book.

Being a visual leader moves well beyond the wall, tablets and digital devices illustrated in this book. You and your fellow leaders are the buoys and beacons that point out direction and highlight what is "right" to focus on. In times as dynamic and uncertain as ours are now, your willingness to show up as a learning leader – someone who can listen as well as direct, who can explore and question as well as declare – is at a premium.

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Recommended Resources

1. Read Auxano Founder and Team Leader Will Mancini's thoughts on "The Power of Visual Thinking Applied to Church Leadership."

2. Is there such a thing as virtual leadership? Read author what David Sibbet says is possible when you take charge of new media tools rather than have them take charge of you.

3. Listen as author David Sibbet gives a brief video introduction to *Visual Leaders.*

4. Watch a stunning visual presentation of the concepts found in Visual Leadership made by author David Sibbet at the Systems Thinking in Action Conference.

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Go Ahead Actions for Vision Clarity

by Clint Grider, Ph.D., CFRE

Vision Clarity Connection

As Picasso once mused, "There are painters who transform the sun to a yellow spot, but there are others who, with the help of their art and their intelligence, transform a yellow spot into sun."

Called to be leaders of our organizations, how often do we inadvertently miss the "sun" by skimming past key issues that mandate a depth of intellectual and emotional investment in our leadership teams? And how often do we miss the chance to build transformational ownership among our teams by not engaging them with a variety of formats based on the goals at hand?

In *Visual Leaders: New Tools for Visioning, Management, and Organization Change,* David Sibbet provides a substantive review of techniques that help bring the vision of "sun" to life. Sibbet delves deeply into the "how" of implementation using proven, fundamental tenets of organizational theory with a special emphasis on continuous process improvement and the interdependence of systems.

The power of an iterative, creative process that maximizes the use of visuals cannot be overstated. People learn, grow, and contribute when they "get" the dynamics of complex issues from a variety of perspectives, and they get it best when they can visually see it. As a result, to most effectively lead, regardless of our organization's life stage or current issues, we must consistently build skills to facilitate using different visual tools and formats.

How do we get there? Sibbet says, "Becoming conscious of your mental models is a first step toward upgrading them and becoming more able to work with people who have different ways of thinking" (p. 55). Starting there, we shouldn't stop, but instead continually upgrade our mastery of interactive, visual-based decision-making among our teams. At Auxano, we call this "Carnivorous Learning" (this actually is one of our fundamental values individually and corporately). Rather than emphasizing a few approaches, Sibbet encourages leaders to create an environment that rewards risk-taking to "harvest all [the strategic mental models] for gifts of insight" (p.55). Such nimbleness is essential if we are to forge vision clarity with depth, purpose, and long-lasting meaning.

Go Ahead

1. Sibbet uses a visual framework to introduce the stages of development that organizations transition through their lifecycle (Sums chart p. 2, book p. 72). Using the Stage Names from the chart, create a "V" on a whiteboard as follows:

Startup	**Transformation**
Growth	**Co-Creation**
Specialization	**Regeneration**
Institutionalization	

- Discuss where your organization is at the current time. Come to a group agreement and circle the appropriate stage.
- Match the chosen stage with the accompanying intentions/driver from the chart on Sums p. 2.
- List at least 3 types of visual tools your organization can use to illustrate the stage you are in and the intentions that drive it.

2. Raise your team's awareness of metaphors by: having each member listen for metaphors used in their ministries, drawing sketches of metaphors, underlining in leadership articles, and clipping strong imagery from other magazines.

   At your next team meeting, write the name of each ministry at the top of a newsprint sheet and hang those around the room.

   - Have each team member share his/her selected metaphors by writing, drawing or placing them on the appropriate newsprint sheet.
   - Note commonalities that are shared between the various ministries. Which words and pictures are strong metaphors that reinforce and communicate the church-wide mission, values and vision.
   - Have each team member select his/her top three. From these, create a "library" of metaphors that can be used by the team for vision casting.
   - Repeat with staff and key lay leaders to complete your metaphor library.

3. Do you have someone on your team well versed in the process improvement tools outlined in Sibbet's book? Do you need help to look objectively at where you are and next steps to consider? Call or email me for a free one-hour assessment.

More About Clint Grider

Highly regarded as a "vision optimizer," Clint can keenly identify the key people and strengths that are at the core of an organization's culture. With this discernment, he guides leaders through a vision process that results in meaningful results and sustainable momentum. Bringing the gifts of encouragement and creativity to the process, he helps teams advance vision through increased passion and ownership. Blending this ability with years of experience building healthy organizations, Clint guides churches and non-profits to realize big dreams.

Clint has served in leadership and campaign roles for over twenty years in a wide range of non-profit organizations and ministries including the local church, major universities, and national parachurch organizations. He received his bachelor's in business administration and marketing from Baylor University, master's in educational psychology from Baylor, and Ph.D. in educational administration with specializations in process improvement and strategic planning from Texas A&M University.

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