Vision development as a knowledge creating process

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Abstract

The ability to generate new knowledge and to transfer, use and apply existing knowledge is a crucial factor for systems in general and for companies in particular if they want to be capable to meet the future. One of the essential requirements for this process is the vision of the system. This vision has to adhere to certain criteria, i.e. transcendence of existing boundaries, commonly shared commitment and reflection of absolute values serving a common good. Our paper will explore how knowledge-based management and organizational learning from the future can interlock in order to generate an attractive and forward looking overall vision of the system. Moreover this approach should make possible the generation of new knowledge or the sharing and use of existing knowledge possible. The aim of this paper is introducing a framework for knowledge-based vision development in systems and analyzing its aspects of knowledge flows, transfer and sharing.

1. Introduction

“What differentiates firms from one another is their vision of the future and their practical ability to act to realize that future by using their aesthetic sensibilities to create knowledge.” [1] The process of creating such a vision is thought by some to be as important as the vision itself. Although widely accepted in practice, the idea of a shared vision as a driver or setting for sustainable change is elusive in academic literature. Yet, little to no theoretical work has been done in this research field so far. Especially the focus of the vision development process as a knowledge-based process during which new knowledge is created and existing boundaries are transformed, has not been discussed in research literature so far.

Based on preliminary work we have done in the last few years, the research question of this paper is the following: How can the vision development process be integrated into the model of the knowledge-based firm and its knowledge creating processes, so that the vision development process itself can be described as a knowledge creating process and the focus of learning from the future is captured?

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First we provide the theoretical background for our research question. Subsequently we introduce a framework for knowledge-based vision development, which is derived from our practical work in the last and several action-and-reflection-cycles in the context of action research and grounded theory. Furthermore we give a special focus on the aspects of knowledge flows, transfer and sharing of this framework. Finally we discuss our findings and present limitations of our work as well as implications for further research.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Economic and Organizational Theories

Long before the term knowledge society was known, Peter Drucker [3] coined the term “knowledge worker” in contrast to manual workers, hinting at the dawning shift from the industrial to the knowledge economy. It was recognized that “economic prosperity rests upon knowledge and its useful application” [4]. An increasing relevance of
knowledge as input and output factors for corporate activities then triggered the need for active management of this factor that rapidly was considered as “the only meaningful resource” [5].

Early approaches to knowledge management fitted the newly recognized business factor into established neoclassical economics and successive organizational theories of the firm. These had been emanated from the Western scientific philosophy of Cartesian dualism that assumed the division of object and subject, thus, a static and rational view on human individuals and companies. Structural theories of competitive advantage, like Porter’s activity-based approach [6] of cost leadership and differentiation, followed an objective and static view of the firm as an information-processing entity that strives for a kind of externally given, optimal state. These approaches could only serve for an objective, static understanding of knowledge, detaching it from economic knowledge and from the economic subject. During the 80ies, humanistic thinking and a look inside the firm emerged within business theory, bringing organizational culture [7] and organizational learning [8] to the agenda of strategic research. The perception of the firm as a unique bundle of non-imitable resources or core competencies [9], that establish competitive advantage superseded the static structural views and developed into new, dynamic approaches such as the resource-based view of the firm [10] and the dynamic capabilities approach [11].

Massive exploration of the thing- or substance knowledge as such led to greater appreciation for the human involvement and participation in its management. There was a quest for radical new ideas and approaches to organizational theorizing from beyond the usual disciplinary boundaries as a coherent knowledge-based theory still seemed to be missing [12]. Assumming that the most important resource, i.e. knowledge, resides within the individual subject, Grant [13] approached a subjective knowledge-based view as an outgrowth of the resource-based view. Within his concept of managing knowledge-based assets, Sveiby [14] stressed the importance of intangible assets including employee competence and therefore defined knowledge transfer as key activity in organizations. Also Davenport et al. [15] emphasized that knowledge is closely linked to the people who hold it and that it requires experience and interpretation and reflection for its application to decisions and actions.

However, seeing the primary role of an organization and the essence of knowledge management in accessing, transferring and applying existing knowledge rather than in creating new knowledge, these knowledge-based views of the firm could not fully leave behind the static, passive, rational Cartesian paradigm.

2.2 Organizational Knowledge Creation Theory

Nonaka recognized the above mentioned essential lack in Western perspective on knowledge management: the failure to capture the dynamic human process of knowledge creation and to consider it as the most important activity of the firm, and even as its “raison d’être” [16]. His consequent subjective and dynamic understanding of both, knowledge and the behavior of corporate entities [17], initiated a paradigmatic shift from static knowledge management to dynamic knowledge-based management. Instead of fitting knowledge management into existing theories, Nonaka revealed the need for a radical new perspective of a firm that adequately reflected the role of knowledge inside and outside the system. Based on his unified model of dynamic knowledge creation [18] he developed a process theory of the knowledge-creating firm [19]. This approach could synthesize scientific and humanistic approaches, i.e. objectivity and subjectivity, and thereby established a new chapter in management theory and knowledge management.

In this holistic approach of corporate leadership and strategic management, Nonaka regards companies as dynamic knowledge-based entities operating in an ecosystem of knowledge. They reshape this environment and themselves through continuous knowledge creation, and their capability to actively do so is considered to be one of the most important sources for competitive advantage [20]. Consequently, the focus is on the process of knowledge creation itself and its enablers, not on managing the knowledge assets, which are referred to as inputs and outputs of this process [21].

Based on Polanyi’s epistemological distinction [22] between personal tacit and objective explicit knowledge, Nonaka describes organizational knowledge creation as a spiral process of four different modes of conversion between these two types of knowledge (socialization, externalization, combination and internalization). This SECI process of dialogue and practice occurs in ‘Ba’, a time-space-nexus which is described as a dynamic, shared context. Ba can be described as a “shared space” of interaction, interpretation and dialectical processes, a form of “learning foundation” in its own right which generates knowledge. There are a number of mechanisms within it, ranging from communication, learning and reflection, to the codification of elements and the diffusion of knowledge, etc. [23].

The essential prerequisite to give direction and energy to this continuous knowledge-creating process
is a knowledge vision that acts as a road map for all corporate activities [24]. Driver and core enabler of the entire dynamic process is leadership that is based on phronesis. The latter is described as “practical wisdom to make the necessary decisions and take the appropriate action with the right timing to achieve a common good” [25].

Nonaka’s theoretical framework has been repeatedly discussed. Glisby et al. [26] argued that his model was strongly embedded within the Japanese culture and could not be transferred to Western companies. Schreyögg et al. [27] criticized his interpretation of implicit knowledge and the assumption that it could be externalized.

However, these critiques obviously evolve from a Cartesian view of rational distinction and do not recognize the universal dimension which Nonaka calls the ‘both-and’ view, in contrast to the ‘either-or’ view [28]. We follow Gueldenberg et al. [29], who acknowledge Nonaka’s framework as a powerful starting point for a comprehensive understanding of knowledge and knowledge management. They appreciate it for taking into account the roots of knowledge and for tracing back the process of knowledge creation to a pre-theoretical, pre-propositional shared nexus of meaning in which human beings inevitably always dwell: the tacit dimension. Referring to Polanyi they understand the tacit dimension in terms of a field which provides the fertile ground for phenomena to emerge [30].

2.3 Strategy in the Knowledge Economy

Knowledge assets represent an organization’s past, knowledge creation the present, and knowledge visions the future [31]. “Knowledge creation can be thought of as a process of realizing one’s vision of the future or personal belief through the practice of interaction with others and the environment” [32]. Vice versa, “in the knowledge economy, the firm doesn’t just plan for the future, it continuously creates the future. What differentiates firms from one another is their vision of the future and their practical ability to act to realize that future by using their aesthetic sensibilities to create knowledge” [33]. In the knowledge economy, strategic management is recognized as something which cannot just be planned, but emerges as a ‘just-in-time-strategy’ [34] based on insight, vision and intuition [35]. In contrast to the structural view, strategy is not about determining a static optimum that needs to be reached, but shows practical, subjective, future-creating aspects. Nonaka describes it as a dynamic just-in-time process of creating the future through distributed phronesis [36]. It is assumed that the successful organization is the one that best enables the knowledge creation spiral [37].

This is consistent with the dynamic capabilities approach of strategic management which argues that sustainable advantage requires unique and difficult-to-replicate dynamic capabilities which, among others, comprise the capacity to sense, shape and seize opportunities [38]. Teece stresses that the ability to recognize opportunities depends in part on the individual’s capabilities and extant knowledge (or the knowledge and learning capacities of the organization to which the individual belongs). Thus, it requires specific knowledge, creative activity, and practical wisdom [39] as described by Nonaka & Toyama’s concept of phronesis.

While Teece’s ambition is to explain the sources of sustainable, competitive advantage that can result in profit [40], Nonaka’s position is that profit is a result of a value-creation that serves the common good, but not a purpose in itself [41]. The concept of Shared Value [42] can link these positions as it focuses on identifying and expanding the connections between societal and economic progress. Porter et al. argue that at a basic level, the competitiveness of a company and the health of the communities around it are closely intertwined. A business needs a successful community, not only to create demand for its products but also to provide critical public assets and a supportive environment. Vice versa, a community needs successful businesses to provide jobs and wealth creation opportunities for its citizens [43].

The understanding of the knowledge-creating and therefore future-creating company can also be found within the underlying thoughts of Scharmer’s Theory U [44], a knowledge-based model for sustainable change processes to meet the need for positive societal change through advanced collective capacity and action. Based on the concept, that the way we pay attention to a situation, individually and collectively, determines the path the system takes and how it emerges, Scharmer proposes a U-shaped journey of five movements (co-initiating, co-sensing, presencing, co-creating, co-evolving) in order to shift from reactive fields of attention to generative ones. Again, to go through this U-process on an organizational level requires an inner journey that is based on seven essential leadership capacities (holding the space, observing, sensing, presencing, crystallizing, prototyping and performing). This process is able to open up the resistance of thought, emotion and will and reintegrates the intelligence of head, heart and hand - an important requirement for creating powerful breakthroughs and connecting to one’s best future possibility [45].

Scharmer and Käufer [46] argue that today’s organizational decision making is not only confronted with dynamic and social complexity, but
more and more with a new type of complexity which they call emerging complexity. This describes situations in which the solution to a problem is unknown, the problem statement itself is still unfolding, and the key stakeholders are not yet identified. The greater the emerging complexity of a situation, the less reliable are decisions based on past experience and the more it is required to ‘learn from the future’ [47]. Thus, in a world of continuous and rapid change, the capacity to sense and actualize emergent realities, i.e. perceiving the most attractive and compelling version of the future at the very moment it emerges and acting on it instantly and appropriately, is considered to be the most critical source of future competitive advantage and will distinguish successful leadership from the rest [48].

2.4 New Kind of Knowledge

Scharmer’s approach for sensing and seizing the future, thus, for achieving competitive advantage, is to tap into the sources of a new kind of knowledge which he calls self-transcending knowledge [49]. While Nonaka’s model is based on two existing kinds of knowledge – objective explicit knowledge and subjective implicit knowledge - Scharmer introduces self-transcending knowledge as a third kind of knowledge. He defines it as tacit knowledge prior to its embodiment that describes the ability to sense and see the emerging opportunities before they become manifest in the marketplace [50]. For Nonaka, knowledge is about enacting the reality it refers to. Knowledge is seen as tacitly or explicitly embodied in situated practice, being increased when externalized and shared by interaction in a spiraling process, guided by a future vision and driven by phronetic leadership. For Scharmer, this guidance and drive of the knowledge spiral is a knowledge process itself organizing around self-transcending knowledge which is situated in an incipient, not-yet-enacted reality [51]. Following this, Kaiser/ Feldhusen [52] formulated criteria for the functionality of a guiding knowledge vision within this process.

Also for Nonaka, future-building knowledge creation is a self-transcending process [53] and knowledge visions serve as a self-transcending objective aimed at getting the organization to surpass itself [54]. Personal subjective knowledge is validated socially and synthesized with others’ knowledge so that knowledge keeps expanding in the upward spiral. Individuals interact with each other to reach out beyond the boundaries of their own existence and transcend the old self into a new self by acquiring a new context, a new view of the world and new knowledge, and as a result, change themselves, others, the organization and the environment [55].

As a result, it seems to be essential for companies and organizations in the knowledge economy to be able to activate this specific kind of knowledge referred to as self-transcending knowledge by Scharmer, as phronesis by Nonaka, as specific knowledge, creativity and practical wisdom by Teece, and as emergent, potential knowledge by Smedlund. [56] While certain individuals in the enterprise may have the necessary cognitive and creative skills, the more desirable approach is to embed related processes inside the enterprise itself. The enterprise will be vulnerable if the sensing, creative, and learning functions are left to the cognitive traits of a few individuals [57].

2.5 Vision Development

As stated above a formulated vision is of high importance for knowledge-based management. Since more than two decades there has been considerable research attention focusing on the phenomenon of organizational vision. It has been argued that vision impacts organizational performance [58] and that the construction of organizational vision is a core competence of strategic leadership and change management [59]. Senge also stresses the important function of visions as an active force: “It’s not what the vision is, it’s what the vision does.” [60]

Vision can be defined in many ways, and often it includes an ideal, future-oriented image that focuses on values and norms [61]. Van der Helm sees a vision as „the more or less explicit claim or expression of a future that is idealized in order to mobilize present potential to move into the direction of this future“ [62]. Abolaji also sees the importance of a vision „….in that it guides and perpetuates corporate existence“[63]. Collins and Porras argue that a well-conceived vision consists of two major components: core ideology and envisioned future [64] and highlight the pictorial aspect when stating that „….you must translate the vision from words to pictures with a vivid description of what it will be like to achieve your goal“[65].

For our work it is important to look at vision development. On the one hand because an inspiring and strong vision is the driving force for knowledge creation and on the other hand because we identified the process of creating a shared vision as knowledge generating in itself. By engaging in the task of creating a vision together as a group new explicit, implicit, and self-transcending knowledge emerges. As mentioned above there is a number of scientific (and also non-scientific) work on the importance of an organizational vision. Not so much literature can be found on how to develop, create or co-create a vision and even less is found on the creation of shared visions. As far as we know, there is no research being done on vision development as a
knowledge-creating process.

In order to introduce our model and to elaborate on our argumentation about vision development as a knowledge-creating process we want to look at triggers for organizational visioning, we will outline differing ways in which visions can be developed and we will then focus on the specific aspects of co-creating a shared vision.

There are several phenomena and situations that could trigger a search for vision. According to O’Connell et al. „vision creation is triggered when there is perceived tension between what the organization is in the present and what it might be in the future“[66]. Concerning the life cycle of an organization this is often the case at founding, at times of leadership change and when it is necessary to purposefully plan for the future [67]. Senge also states that the principle of creative tension, the gap between our vision, where we want to be, and our current reality, where we are, is the starting point that creates energy for change [68]. Boyatzis offers a different focus when he proposes that the ideal self, and directly connected with it the personal vision, is the driver of intentional change [69]. The ideal self is described as “an evolving, motivational core within the self, focusing a person’s desires and hope, aspirations and dreams, purpose and calling” [70].

Developing or creating a vision can be done in different ways, depending on the nature of the organization or system, its dimension, the situation it is in and of course the culture that defines this organization. O’Conell et al. outline four approaches for vision development: 1) the vision is created and directly communicated by one leader, 2) a key leader and a group of top managers create and communicate the vision together, 3) the vision is co-created by a leader and followers, and 4) the organization as a whole engages in a collaborative process [71].

To put it simply, building a shared vision is a process of articulating what the members of an organization want to create together. Kouzes et al. emphasize this notion by saying that “somehow, through all the talk over the years about the importance of vision, many leaders have reached the unfortunate conclusion that they as individuals must be visionaries. (...) Yes, the leaders must ask, ‘What’s new? What’s next? What’s better?’ but they can’t present answers that are only theirs. Constituents want visions of the future that reflect their own aspirations” [72]. To achieve this high level of acceptance and assimilation, large group methods are used which allow getting the whole organization in a room, where each individual is given a voice in shaping the vision. [73]

One of the few scholars that engage in the shared vision approach is Peter Senge. According to him a shared vision emerges from the intersection of personal visions. He says that the “practice of shared vision involves the skills of unearthing shared ‘pictures of the future’ that foster genuine commitment and enrolment rather than compliance” [74]. For Senge shared visions cannot exist without personal visions (cf. his work about “personal mastery”) and therefore the vision development process has to start by encouraging each individual to develop his or her own personal vision.

3 Research Gap and Research Question

As shown above, the integration of methods for vision development, learning from the future and knowledge-based management is of high importance, promising and forward-looking. From our point of view the main research gap in this context can be identified as the lack of theoretical work to integrate existing approaches in the field of knowledge-based management and learning theory (especially learning from the future) into the design of a common vision development model. In detail we can break down this research gap into two areas / focuses:

1. Focus “integration”: No work has been done in the field of the integration of vision development processes in knowledge-based management
2. Focus “knowledge creation”: No work has been done in the field of modeling/analyzing the vision development as a knowledge creating process

Based on this research gap we can define the following research question:

• How can a vision development process be described as a knowledge creating process and the focus of learning from the future is captured and which tools and methods are helpful?

4 A framework for knowledge-based vision development

4.1 Practical work

We have already done some work in the field of knowledge-based management and vision development, and did a lot of practical work on the individual level as well as in projects with small and medium sized companies and systems, parallel to our research work.

On the collective level we have done three projects with small and medium sized companies, one project with a research group, one project with a group within a very large company and two projects with small non-profit organizations. Furthermore in the last ten months we had one vision development process with a community in Austria with nearly 7,500 inhabitants, which is of course a very large system, and another two projects, one with a group in
Italy and another with a department of one of the largest banks in Austria. Additionally we did a short vision development process with the senior faculty of a large department at our university.

4.2. Research Methodology

We opt for a combination of action research and grounded theory as adequate methods for our research. They reflect basic assumptions of the underlying theory, namely the integration of dynamics and subjectivity in human knowledge.

Action research itself can be best described as a framework that provides an orientation to inquiry. The quality of the inquiry process is a matter of clearly and transparently stating how one intends to design the procedure. It can be characterized as an iterative process of alternating action-and-reflection-cycles.

Our second methodological choice is grounded theory. Dick argues that it is “(…) possible to use grounded theory as a theory development process within an action research cycle.” The purpose of grounded theory is to “(…) develop theories which are grounded in the data” [75].

Action research and grounded theory both share a distinctive feature: their emergent nature. That is to say, in both of them the understanding of the given situation and the research process itself – or at least the sampling in the case of grounded theory – is gradually shaped through an iterative process [76].

Action research has already been our choice in the practical work on vision development that we have completed. With the aim in mind to create an attractive and compelling vision that is the basis of identity for all involved in the company, we have analyzed the situation together with the employees, mapped a rough process of vision development, introduced it in the respective companies, observed the results, and reflected on them. The insights we gained through this alternating action-and-reflection-cycle allowed us to take first steps in improving the process of vision development.

4.3 Description of the framework

Derived from the practical work and using several action-and-reflection-cycles in the context of action research and grounded theory, we have developed a framework for knowledge-based vision development. This framework which we introduced as “Vikobama” (Vision development and knowledge-based management) makes it possible to create an enabling space for systems to define their vision. We already presented some early versions of Vikobama in the scientific community [77]. Based on the additional projects we have done in the last months and the data generated in these projects, we are now able to modify and optimize our framework.

The main focus of this framework is the creation and definition of an overall vision and a mission statement on a collective level (organizations, firms, teams, communities).

There are three important and innovative aspects of Vikobama:

- the special focus on the creation of self-transcending knowledge during the whole process
- the integration of the individual visions of the system’s members into the vision development process of the overall vision of the system
- the implementation of a consistent bottom-up approach on a collective level

These three aspects are essential components for the development of a sustainable overall vision of any system. As a key success factor, a lot of enabling space is given to the development process of the individual personal visions. Based on this personal vision each individual is able to formulate a vision for the whole system, reflecting the key essentials of one’s personal vision. We call this vision the personal system vision. This personal system vision – which seems to be a unique and innovative feature – forms the link between the organization and the individual context. The various resulting personal system visions are the basis for the emerging overall vision of the system. During the whole process the personal vision is continuously action-guiding and constantly used as a corrective. So Vikobama consists of three consecutive steps:
1. formulation of a personal vision
2. formulation of a personal system vision
3. building of an overall vision for the corresponding system

Figure 1: The three steps of Vikobama

We could observe that the vision development process can be a highly intensive knowledge generating process in itself. As a consequence, different types of knowledge could be generated, e.g. need knowledge, knowledge about existing resources and other types of implicit and explicit knowledge which are important components of a compelling vision. Moreover the knowledge transfer and the knowledge sharing within a system as well as the transformation of knowledge could be supported.

4.4 Design of the framework

The experiences of the projects in the last twelve months showed us that it is helpful to split the whole vision development process into three parts.
Part-1: The main focus of the first part is to create some kind of enabling space or “ba” where it is possible to make the knowledge about the substantial need of each member of the system and also the knowledge about strengths and resources explicit. We have introduced this ba as vocation ba [78]. Within this vocation ba the access to self-transcending knowledge and the conversion to embodied knowledge are supported. Furthermore the focus on the success-stories of the system in the past is a very important step.

All these aspects can be integrated in a workshop with all members joining the vision development process. This workshop lasts for about 6 to 8 hours.

Part-2: After this workshop the employees are asked to write two visions: one vision about their personal life in the future containing private aspects as well as job-related aspects and another vision – the personal system vision – which is about the future of the company where they are working in. In most cases the personal system vision is a consistent transformation of the personal vision and therefore forms the link between the organization and the individual context.

Part-3: The key aspect of the third and last part is the sharing of the personal system visions (the personal visions remain private for each participant) and the finding of an overall vision of the system, so that all personal system visions are integrated in a satisfactory way.

To manage this, we have a second workshop joined by all participants. This workshop lasts for one day for small groups up to ten participants and for one and a half day for larger groups. From a methodological point of view we have to create two different kinds of enabling spaces during this workshop: one narrative oriented space in which it is possible to share the details of the emerging visions and one space where it is possible to generate an abstraction of each vision. The combination of these abstractions and having in mind the details of the shared visions, allows the definition of an overall vision in a rather efficient way. The private personal vision is continuously action-guiding, and constantly used as a corrective. So the overall vision created for the system is highly intrinsically motivated and strongly connected to the personal vision and the individual needs.

This approach proved to be very helpful and effective in practice. In fact the participants have to spend only two days with workshops, which is a very small investment of time compared to other organizational development processes.

4.5 Knowledge-based aspects

In the following section we will analyse the aspects of Vikobama in the context of knowledge-based management. Thereby we will especially focus on the aspect of knowledge creation, knowledge conversion and knowledge sharing. The following findings resulted from the reflection of our vision development projects and the evaluation of interviews held with participants of the process.

Knowledge creation:

Within the vocation ba, the self-transcending process, through which one transcends the boundary of the old self into a new self by acquiring a new context, a new view of the world and at least some new knowledge [79], is strongly supported. Furthermore the ability to formulate personal visions is strongly supported. For example in part-3 of the framework participants are facilitated to make their vision visible for themselves by applying the backcasting technique and define several milestones, beginning in the future and ending in the presence. Empirical evidence based on the feedback of participants in different processes showed us that thereby new knowledge has been created on the individual level as well as on the collective level.

This ability enables the person as well as the system to learn and act from the future as it emerges. As a consequence, self-transcending knowledge is created.

The creation of explicit knowledge of one’s own substantial needs as well as explicit knowledge of substantial needs of the whole system is strongly supported. As a consequence a special kind of explicit knowledge, which we call “need knowledge”, is created. For example in one project an employee found out that it is crucial for her to work within a team of about 5 to 10 colleagues, that she does not like to be the leader of her team, that the result of her work has to be visible and that the other team members have to mention what her part in the working process was. She also found out that continuous working-time and a certain level of flexibility within her working-time is very important for her and that she needs a work where she can make use of her main talent (organizing processes in a structured environment).

Furthermore knowledge about the priority of tasks in the near future and the goals which have to be achieved, as well as knowledge about the basic orientation of the system, which can be used to find suitable new staff for the system in the future, is created. For example in one company, shortly after the end of the vision development process, additional employees have been hired and two former employees left the company. The latter recognized that some of their substantial personal needs didn’t fit in with certain main aspects of the firm’s vision.
Knowledge sharing transfer and exchange:
The structure of the framework and the design of the two workshops are strong enablers of knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer. Let us show some examples of such enablers:

- Sharing the personal system visions with the whole group: this makes a sharing of knowledge about substantial aspects and ideas of the system’s future possible. Furthermore this enables a knowledge transfer cross about hierarchical levels and borders in a very efficient way.
- Work in small groups during the workshops: this allows the exchange of knowledge about personal resources and strengths as well as personal needs. For example several participants in different projects confirmed that although the staff knew each other for a long time, they could gain new knowledge from each other in the vision development process. This new knowledge could be used in their future work.
- Appreciative inquiry and creating a time-line of the system’s success stories in the past: this enables the transfer about important resources and knowledge used in the past and also the sharing of best practices scenarios within the system.
- Furthermore the knowledge transfer of implicit and tacit knowledge within the workshops with all members of the system takes place. Therefore an increased awareness of the group’s tacit knowledge of the system and the use of this knowledge is strongly supported.

Shortly after the process one CEO told us that he now takes all important decisions on the base of the vision which was created in the process. Some other examples of concrete actions that were implemented after the end of such processes were: re-design of workplaces, introduction of a new time management tool, enabling sabbatical months for employees, etc.

5 Discussion and conclusion
5.1 Implications for Theory and Practice

“Knowledge creation can be thought of as a process of realizing one’s vision of the future or personal belief through the practice of interaction with others and the environment” [80]. Following this definition of Nonaka, our framework can be seen as a method of knowledge-based vision development that provides an enabling space for both: generating a vision on the one hand and creating, sharing and transferring knowledge on the other hand.

The innovative aspect of our work lies in the promising combination of two sub disciplines, namely knowledge-based management and organizational development (especially vision development processes). On the one hand this offers new theoretical insights and on the other hand it is the basis for our practical work. The empirical data that we have already gained in our preliminary work and will still gain in the future seems to be of great value for contributing to the “state of the art”-discussion on knowledge-based management.

By identifying that a vision development process is a highly intensive knowledge generating process in itself and integrating the concept of self-transcending knowledge on an organizational level we add a new perspective to the scientific discussion. So we introduced a method which enables “learning from the future” on a collective level.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

A potential limitation of our research is that the results from our projects might not be generalizable for other systems. We have a rather huge basis of experiences with systems up to 20 members and participants, but very limited experiences with vision development processes in large systems. Moreover the existing diversity of different systems in the context of vision development as well as knowledge-based management has yet not been considered sufficiently. We cannot rule out the possibility that the structure of our method and framework has to be modified, if the structure and the requirements of systems are very different to those we have already worked with.

Based on these limitations on the one hand and the encouraging results of the projects in the past as well as our preliminary research on the other hand, our future research will cover the following areas:

- Gaining additional data from vision development processes with other systems with different requirements and structures.
- A process model is an abstract description of an actual or proposed process that represents selected process elements that are considered important to the purpose of the model and can be enacted by a human or machine [81]. The model of the knowledge creating firm which consists of seven basic components can be seen as a good example for such a process model. One main aspect of our future research will be to identify the main elements and components of a knowledge-based vision development model and describe the processes and correlations between these elements, as well as the dimensions and derived categories which have to be considered.
- Based on the additional empirical data we will try to deduct implications for practical applications, e.g. in the field of organizational development and knowledge-based management.

Due to the interdisciplinary approach of research in the field of knowledge-based management, the results
of our work can be applied to many other areas. For example the identification of the elements of the process model for knowledge-based vision development that can benefit from IT support and introduction of a method to enable such IT solutions.

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