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Moving into the future

Multiple Sclerosis Limited's journey to invigorate its aspiration, purpose and values, and how these critical statements became the "glue that holds us all together".

Q&A with Multiple Sclerosis Limited

John Blewonski, CEO of Multiple Sclerosis Limited, talks about the organisation's journey to reinvigorate its vision, mission and values, and how this will contribute to the organisation's success.

Multiple Sclerosis Limited (MS) is the go-to provider of information, advice and support for people living with multiple sclerosis and other neurological conditions.

At its core, the organisation exists to help its clients (and the carers of its clients) to live well; providing services, support and referral pathways to help achieve the best long-term options and life outcomes.

MS recently worked with Insync to reinvigorate its vision, mission and values. In this article John reflects on the process and why he made this a fundamental part of the successful implementation of MS's Strategic Directions 2020-2025.

To learn more, and to be inspired by John's passion, you can watch his interview with Sophie Owen from Insync on our website here: <https://insync.com.au/insights/bring-your-vision-to-life-with-data-driven-resources/#msvideo>

What brought about the need for change?

MS has been doing what it does, really well, for 60 years. However, in a new consumer-directed world, we needed to ensure the services that we offer are still relevant and ultimately, if what we're doing is sustainable into the future.

In this context, MS undertook significant stakeholder consultation as part of a comprehensive strategic planning process. Through that process, it became pretty evident we needed to change a few things... We needed to become more contemporary, more relevant and ensure ownership of the organisation's direction by the team (including staff, volunteers, consumers and the board).

What challenges were evident with MS's previous vision, mission and values?

The journey for people living with MS has changed dramatically, even in just the last five years; therefore, our service response needs to change, be agile and adaptive.

Through the strategic planning process, we also identified that the services we could provide into the future would not only be relevant for people living with MS, but also people living with other neurological conditions.

We saw an opportunity that if we could broaden the scope of our services, and in effect, grow some level of scale, then the ultimate beneficiary of that would be people living with MS.

The strategic planning process was quickly moving us in new directions. Therefore, it was important for us to be able to go back to the team, and say, 'in light of where we've said we want to go, how relevant is our vision and mission?'

There was a clear disconnect; nobody could really articulate what the previous vision, mission and values meant in the context of their role and what they do on a day-to-day basis.



What did MS seek to achieve from the process?

We wanted our people to connect with a new vision, mission and values that we're collectively buying into through our Strategic Planning.

Completing this process in the context of COVID-19, it also became even more important that people felt a sense of connectedness; that we're all on this journey together.

We saw that the pandemic, and the dramatic changes required to the way we work, posed a big risk to our organisation's culture. This project and where we ended up was a great way of keeping the team together over those challenging months.

How did you go about redefining MS's vision, mission and values?

Insync guided the implementation of the process. All employees were invited to participate in

an employee poll and numerous workshops. Outside the ELT and the board, participation was completely voluntary.

Insync facilitated the initial employee workshops with the ELT and SLT, effectively developing a group of trainers; people who experienced the process and were then able to take it out to their networks and staff groups to run the same process.

Everybody got to see what previous groups had done, they could critique that, and add their own 10 cents' worth.

What we saw was that it got better and more refined as it went along. The draft options that resulted from the employee consultation process were reviewed and critiqued by a small group of MS clients and carers.

This resulted in another draft of options, which really reflected the sentiment from all stakeholder groups.



Concept	Previous	New
Aspiration (previously Vision)	<i>Find a cure, minimise the impact</i>	<i>The home of comprehensive support for neurologic conditions</i>
Purpose (previously Mission)	<i>Face the Challenges, Retain the dreams</i>	<i>Together on the journey to break down barriers, achieve goals and live well</i>
Values	<i>Respect, Care, Commitment, Leadership</i>	<i>Empowerment, Community, Expertise, Creativity, Spirited</i>

Why the change from vision to aspiration?

We knew we needed to be more contemporary. It needed to be relevant to today, and not necessarily what the previous expectations were of an organisation such as MS.

In the context of challenging our organisation through the strategic planning process to be thinking about being more dynamic and more responsive to our community, many felt like these words of 'vision' and 'mission' were keeping them back.

The various teams played around with these words and came back with 'aspiration' and 'purpose'. There was a general consensus that these concepts were much more inspiring and in-line with where we want to go.

What contributed to the success of the process?

There were many aspects that contributed to its success, including:

- It was voluntary; the people that wanted to be there could be there
- It wasn't prescriptive. It was staff and teams getting together and having conversations about the future and what resonated with them; it was different faces and different ideas, engaging;
- There was a sense that we were providing a really safe and legitimate environment for these conversations; there were no rules. The words could be what people wanted;
- It facilitated cross-team collaboration. People got an opportunity to hear what other parts of the organisation were thinking about the future direction. This resulted in collegiate development and also an eclectic set of words that reflects the experiences of everyone
- We kept it in a relatively short timeframe; end to end it took about 8 weeks. We also kept everyone up to date via weekly staff updates to say where we were up to

It was a simple yet comprehensiveness approach.

Within 10 minutes of a one-hour meeting, the MS Board confirmed support for the new aspiration, purpose and values.

They recognised that many hundreds of people had input into the process, and it wasn't about word smithing. This was a true testament to the process that was followed.

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Why is an organisation's vision, mission and values so important, and how do you see it contribute to MS's success?

It's the glue that hold us all together. We don't necessarily describe the words to the organisation, but we're really comfortable that people embrace them in different ways, depending on what their role is in the organisation. It's not a prescriptive formula. We want the words to have meaning and we promote these through our day-to-day experiences.

The really powerful part about redefining your vision, mission and values in consultation with your staff is that there is no right or wrong answer.

What you come up with, as long as it's owned by the recipients, it's right. It's right for the time, it's right for the people, and they will stand behind that.

What's next and how will the new aspiration, purpose and values be embedded?

All the traditional ways will be covered (published in annual reports, on letterheads etc). However, we also want to continue down this path of staff engagement in the journey, and we want them to own the process of embedding the values as well; so, we want to hear their ideas.

We're going to start by running some further workshops across the organisation to re-present the work we've done, and to gather their ideas. It will provide a good opportunity for employees to take time out of their day to reflect and to get creative.

We might also look at an ongoing working party, who'll be responsible for driving this through the organisation. Some of the ideas that have already come up include:

- Manager reflection at the bottom of each monthly report about how the values have been lived by their team

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- Opening meetings and sharing stories with examples of how the values have been lived by the team members
- Renaming meeting rooms aligned with the Values
- Ensuring values continue to form a key part of induction processes; including discussions with the CEO and other inductees about the Values and what they mean
- Ensuring Values continue to form a key part of employee appraisal processes

All of these practices, including other ideas that will come about, is helping us to define our culture. It prescribes this is how we do things around here; this is how we behave to get things done. That's what culture is; and the values will frame that culture.

If we can keep reminding people of that, we have a really fantastic tool to deliver on the plan of Strategic Directions 2020-2025 and to shape what MS looks like in five years' time.



Insync focuses on four critical success factors to enhance your success.



Attract and retain the right people



Align and engage your employees



Understand and meet client needs



Build cohesive leadership teams



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