



# Bring your **vision** to life

Insights from 36,000 NFP employees

Half of employees at not-for-profits are uninspired – so what lessons can be learned from successful NFPs?



# A vision that inspires?

## Purpose is fundamental for not-for-profit (NFP) organisations

By definition, NFPs do not exist to make a profit for shareholders. Instead, they exist to fulfil a social purpose – to address disadvantage and help people live fuller lives.

The vast majority of NFPs communicate their distinct purpose in their mission (which outlines why they exist) and vision (which describes what they want to become and achieve).

A clear mission and vision bolsters support from the people who have a stake in the organisation's success – the people who use its services (clients), the people who provide its services (employees) and the people who fund its services (funders).

This paper focuses specifically on vision – its impact, efficacy and success requirements.

To understand the current situation and extract lessons for improvement, we have analysed the feedback from 36,000 NFP employees collected via 180 employee surveys.

Our findings are presented in three parts:

- **Does vision really matter?** Part 1 considers what evidence there is that an inspiring vision makes a difference.
- **How many employees find the vision inspiring?** Part 2 looks at how well NFPs are communicating their vision.
- **What lessons can we take away from their experiences?** Part 3 looks at what the most successful NFPs are doing to inspire their employees with their vision.

# Part 1

## Does vision matter?

Our analysis indicates that:

- Inspired employees are strongly linked to critical organisational outcomes
- An inspiring vision answers the need for meaning and enhances employee engagement



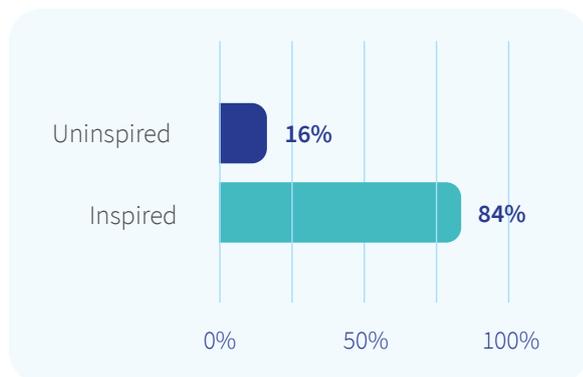
# Finding #1

## Inspired employees are strongly linked to critical organisational outcomes

Inspired employees are much more likely to recommend the organisation, see how decisions relate to client needs, feel encouraged to innovate and perceive the organisation's performance positively. That there is a difference is not surprising. The *quantum* of the difference is noteworthy – inspired employees are five times more likely to recommend the organisation and twelve times more positive about innovation than uninspired employees.

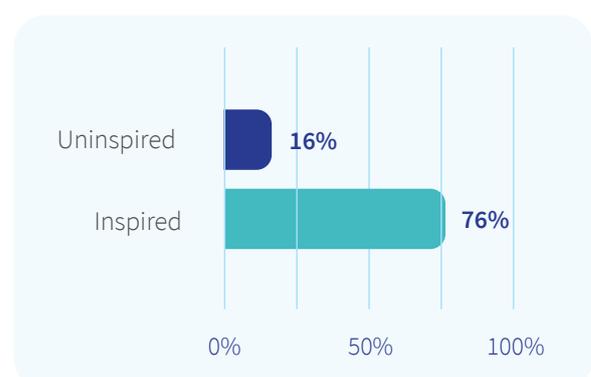
### Employee attraction

*Agreement: I would recommend our organisation as a workplace*



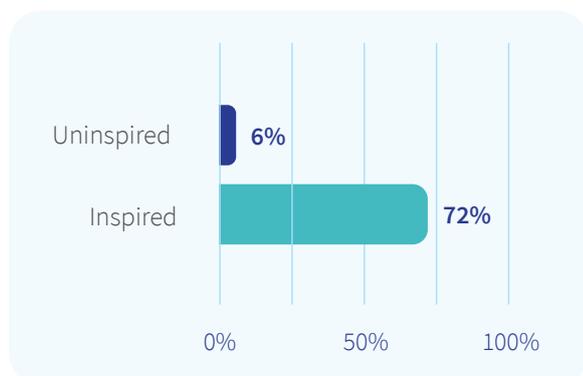
### Client focus

*Agreement: Client needs feature prominently in decision making*



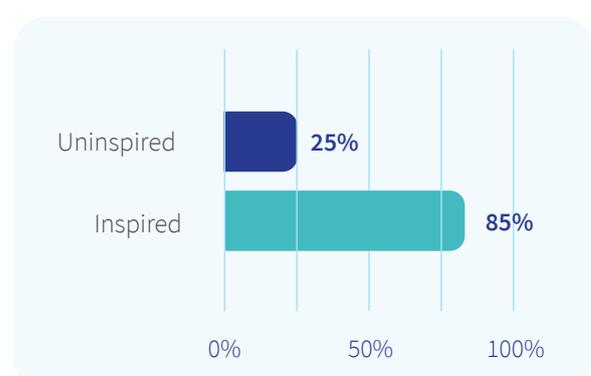
### Innovation

*Agreement: Our leadership team encourages creative ideas*



### Performance

*Agreement: Our organisation is committed to high standards of performance*



Charts show the percentage of respondents who Agreed or Strongly agreed with each statement, based on whether they indicated that they were inspired or uninspired by the organisation's vision.

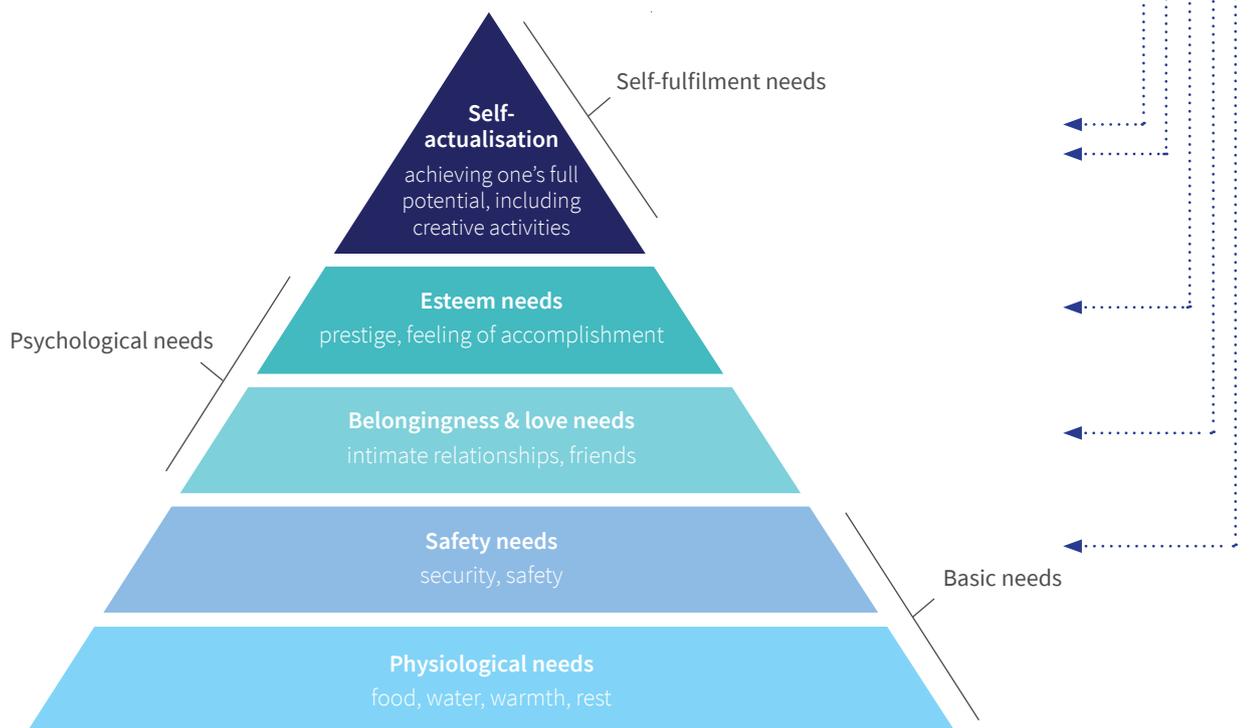
## Finding #2

# An inspiring vision answers the need for meaning and enhances employee engagement

People come to work with their own hopes, needs, aspirations and values. The leader's task is not to create *extrinsic* motivation for unmotivated people, rather to tap into their *intrinsic* needs and aspirations, and align them with the organisation's vision and mission. This is one of the most challenging and impactful tasks that senior leaders must undertake.



### Maslow's hierarchy of needs



## Part 2

# How well are NFPs inspiring their employees?

Our analysis indicates that:

- Less than half of NFP employees are inspired by their organisation's vision
- Inspiration is adversely impacted by internal and external factors



## Finding #3

### Less than half of NFP employees are inspired by the vision

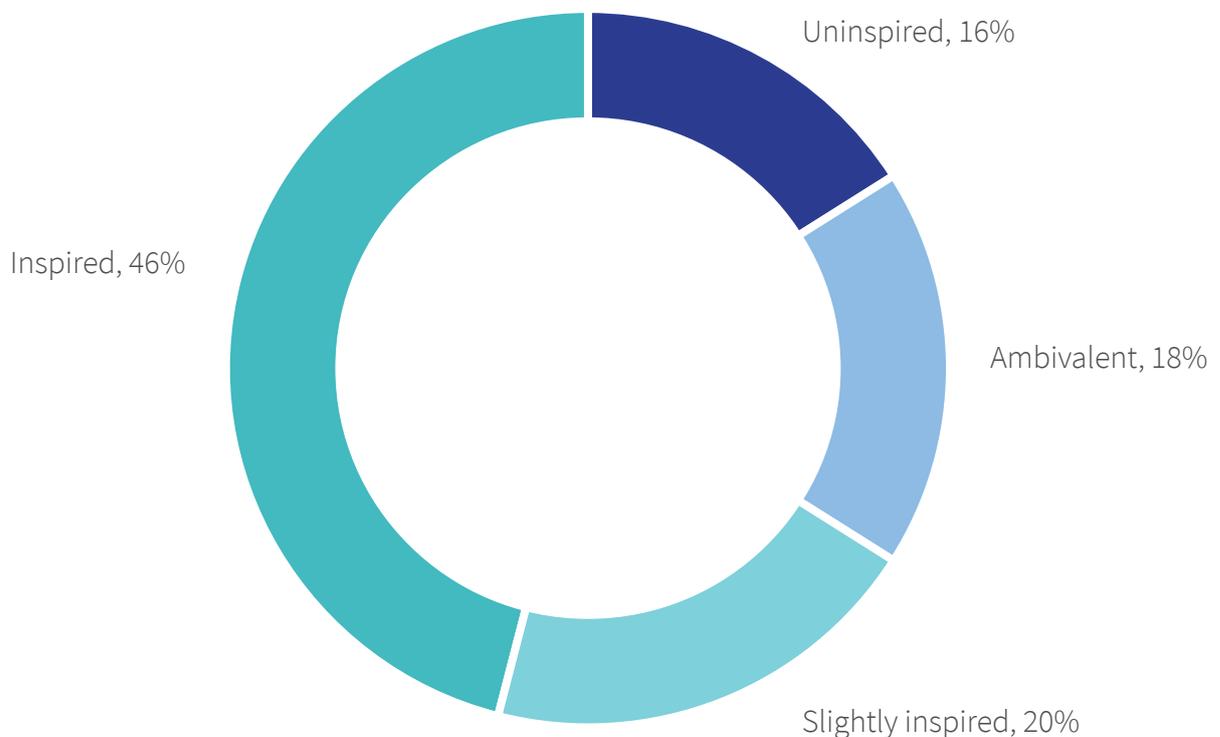
Insync's NFP database of 36,000 responses indicates that **only 46% of employees are inspired by their organisation's vision.**

This is based on the 46% of respondents who 'Agree' or 'Strongly agree' with the statement: ***Our senior leadership team has a vision for our organisation that inspires me.***

The balance were found to be Slightly inspired (20%), Ambivalent (18%) or Uninspired (16%).

This low level of inspiration is likely to surprise and disappoint some readers. Factors that reduce employee connection with the vision are discussed on the next page.

**Breakdown of responses to  
"Our senior leadership team has a vision for our  
organisation that inspires me"**



## Finding #4

### Inspiration is adversely impacted by internal and external factors

What explains the fact that less than half of NFP employees can unambiguously say that they are inspired by the organisation's vision? There are a variety of determining factors, many of which are challenging to get right:

#### Internal / more controllable factors

- **Clarity** – it's hard to encapsulate everything that the organisation does (particularly where there are multiple services) in a statement that is compelling and meaningful to all employees – much consultation is required to get it right
- **Climate** – connection with the vision can only thrive in a positive organisational climate where senior leaders are open to feedback, act with integrity, acknowledge people and act as good role models. In a poor climate, employees become less positive about everything – including the organisation's vision
- **Competing priorities** – some NFP employees feel stretched with inadequate resources – people under a lot of pressure may just run from task to task and focus less on the organisation's vision

#### External / less controllable factors

- **Confidence** – job insecurity is as real in the NFP sector as in other sectors – insecure employees may quite naturally be more concerned about securing their livelihoods than on delivering the organisation's vision
- **Continuity** – where NFP organisations have high employee turnover (over 20% p.a.) it is harder to truly embed the vision as new employees typically try to fit in and learn the job, and it takes time to understand the vision and its practical applications
- **Contracts** – many NFPs are funded through government contracts. Bidding for contracts that have their own performance and reporting criteria can lead to mission drift and sometimes take the organisation away from its central vision

# Part 3

## How the most successful NFPs inspire their people

- #1 – The vision is clear and compelling
- #2 – Strategic goals and plans are aligned with the vision
- #3 – Authentic leaders nurture a positive climate
- #4 – The vision is reinforced through dialogue
- #5 – Streamlined communications bring the vision to life
- #6 – The vision is embedded in all management processes
- #7 – They measure and celebrate understanding and delivery of their vision



## Good practice #1

### The organisation's vision is clear and compelling

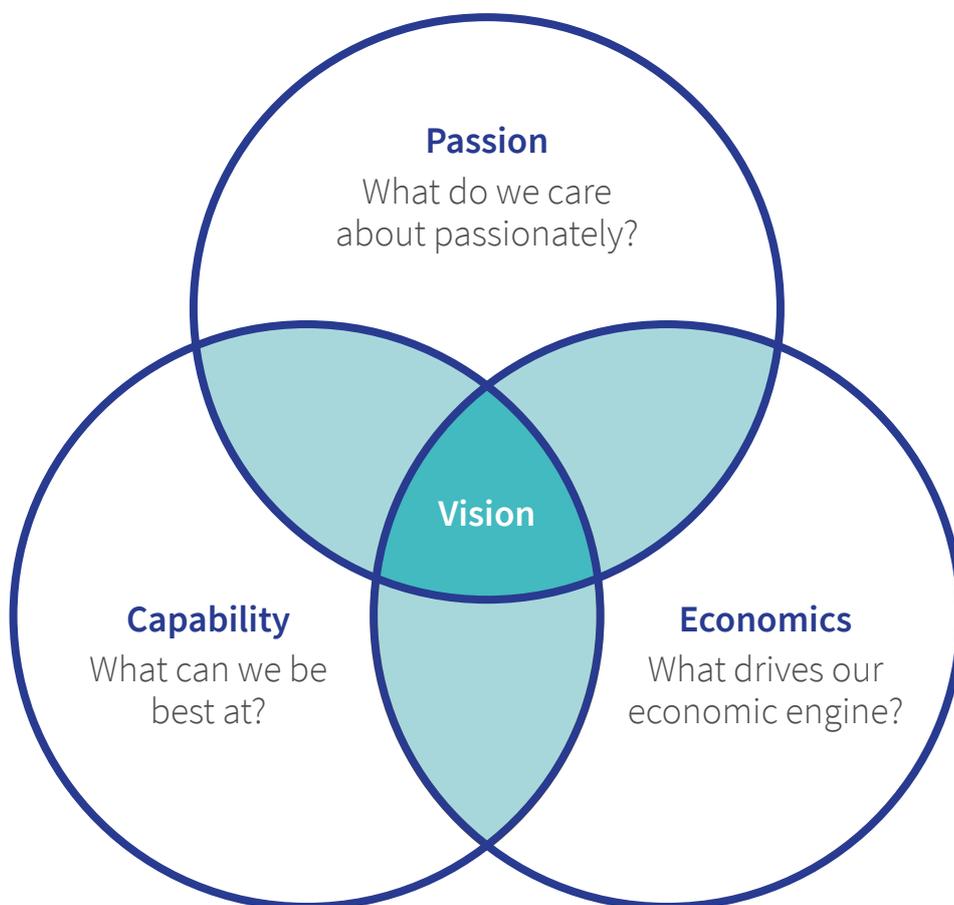
The best-performing NFPs demonstrate singleness of purpose.

Firstly, their visions provide great clarity about how to produce the best long-term results. Their visions are robust because they consider passion, capability and economics. They recognise that passion is critical but is not enough by itself. It must be backed up by genuine capability and financial sustainability.

Secondly, they demonstrate great discipline by focusing purely on opportunities that are inside their vision (and saying “no thank you” to others). They are serious about their vision and devote all their energy and resources to pursuing it.

They are like hedgehogs that know one big thing and stick to it, rather than foxes that know many things yet lack consistency.

#### The hedgehog concept



Source: Jim Collins – Good to Great

## Good practice #2

### Strategic goals and plans are aligned with the vision

The most successful NFP organisations have a robust and coherent strategic and business planning framework that clearly indicates how the vision will be executed.

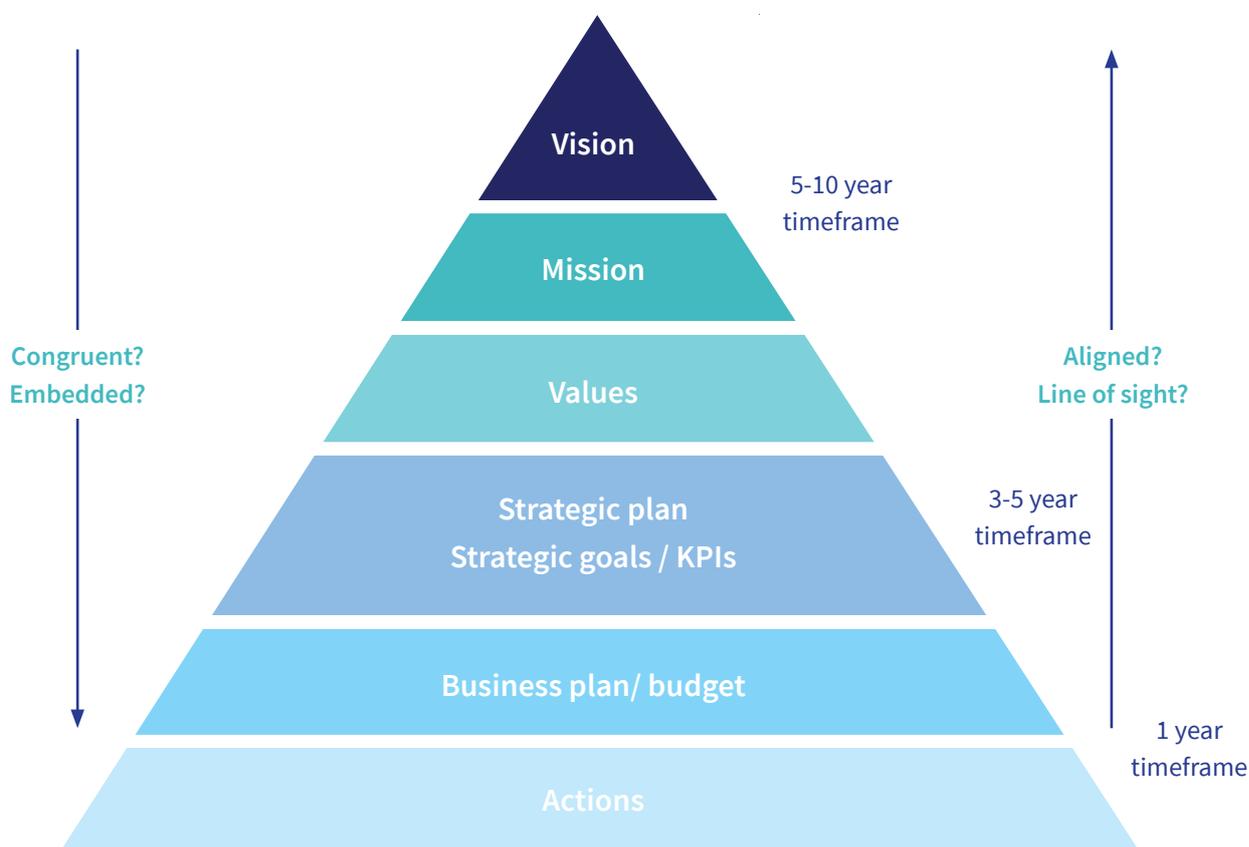
Successful NPFs take great care to align the key elements of their strategic framework:

- **Vision, mission and values** – the long-term anchor points that guide their direction over a 5-10 year timeframe
- **Strategic plan and goals** – outlining what they want to achieve and how they will achieve it (over a 3-5 year timeframe)
- **A business plan and budget** – which guide daily actions (updated annually)

In some NFP organisations there is dissonance between these levels. The vision can be very aspirational and humanistic, while the budget can be tough and demanding, and the link between the two might be hard to see.

In the most successful organisations there is clear line of sight, congruence and alignment between all of these elements.

#### Formulating a clear and coherent direction



Source: Nicholas Barnett – GPS for Your Organisation

## Good practice #3

### Authentic leaders nurture a positive climate in which vision can flourish

One of the most powerful findings from this research is that buy-in to the vision is heavily dependent on the organisational climate.

Our analysis shows there are very high correlations (0.66 and above) between the items that measure the overall climate senior leaders create and how inspired people are by the organisation's vision.

Connection with the vision flourishes where senior leaders are perceived to be:

- Open to feedback and encouraging of new ideas
- Good role models who act with integrity
- Willing to engage with people, motivating them to achieve the organisation's goals and getting the most from their talents and knowledge

Conversely, connection with the vision wilts when a disconnect is apparent between the behaviours of the senior leadership team and what the organisation espouses.

**Strongest correlations with the item**  
*“Our senior leadership team has a vision for our organisation that inspires me”*

Item	Correlation
Our senior leaders are good role models	0.72
Our senior leadership team motivates me to work hard towards achieving the organisation's goals	0.71
Our senior leadership team encourages innovative and creative ideas	0.69
Our organisation cares about and is committed to me	0.67
Our senior leadership team is open to feedback	0.67
Our senior leaders act with integrity	0.66
Our senior leadership team gets the maximum from people's individual talents and knowledge	0.66

## Good practice #4

### The vision is reinforced through dialogue (questions and stories)

Ongoing and meaningful dialogue will keep the organisation's vision front of mind for employees. The way to keep this dialogue fresh and compelling is to ask stimulating and thought-provoking questions, and to tell and listen to stories about the people touched by the organisation's services.

#### Asking questions

Inspiring leaders know that people will focus their attention on the questions that they most persistently and passionately ask. By regularly asking questions about the organisation's vision, team members have the opportunity to reflect on what it means for them, their colleagues and their clients.

These leaders ask questions that:

- Provoke thought and invite reflection/ finding deeper meaning
- Expand possibilities or focus attention
- Bring underlying assumptions to light
- Stimulate curiosity and creativity
- Can help the team move forward

#### Storytelling

People have been fascinated by stories through the ages. Storytelling is a very powerful way of communicating the vision and making it real to people. Inspiring leaders develop their storytelling skills and those of team members via:

- A clear purpose – there's a reason why they're telling this story, to this audience, at this time
- Personal connection – the story involves either them, or someone they feel connected to
- Common reference points – the audience understands the context and situation of the story
- Detailed characters and imagery – they have enough visual description that people can see what they're seeing
- Conflict, vulnerability, or achievement people can relate to – highlighting the challenges that were faced
- Pacing – there's a clear beginning, ending, and segue way back to the topic



## Good practice #5

# Streamlined communications bring the vision to life

Leaders know all too well how difficult it is to cut through the noise and communicate effectively with employees. The most successful organisations ensure that their communication processes are fit for purpose.



**1. Assess** – They understand how effective the current communication practices are:

- What proportion of employees understand and buy into the vision and goals? Are they aware of the progress the organisation is making in delivering its vision and achieving its goals?
- Do internal communications cover the topics that employees are interested in and is the organisation using their preferred modes of communication at the right frequency?

**2. Align** – They update their communications plan and approach as needed, ensuring that:

- The needs and interests of different employee groups are clearly defined
- Communications are well crafted, relevant and consolidated to avoid information overload
- The most appropriate communication channels are used, depending on the nature of the message

**3. Activate** – They assign responsibility to leaders to manage communications within the framework:

- Two-way communication is a core part of their role
- They must understand, support and cascade key messages through the organisation
- They must seek and provide feedback on how well communication is working and how it can be improved

## Good practice #6

### The vision is embedded in all management processes

The most successful NFP organisations review and update all management policies and practices as appropriate to ensure their vision and values are embedded in all of them; making it very clear what is expected of employees, and acknowledging and rewarding those who are exemplars of the vision and values.

#### The vision and values are embedded in...



## Good practice #7

### They measure and celebrate delivery of their vision

The most successful NFP organisations seek to systematically embed their vision and values deep in their DNA by regularly measuring progress, and by celebrating and reinforcing their successes.

The most successful NFPs:

- Use feedback mechanisms such as surveys, polls, focus groups, interviews, discussions and meetings.
- Make the client experience visible even for those in support functions. This can range from having an occasional cup of tea to holding an annual dinner for clients and having as many employees as possible attend.
- Work hard to minimise a reality gap between their vision and the ongoing and pervasive nature of some wicked problems (such as the confluence of homelessness, unemployment, substance dependence and mental health issues). They measure success one client at a time. They measure and communicate impact carefully – how they are moving the dial and evaluating results to determine how their approach can be improved.
- Set realistic goals connected to their vision, measure the results achieved and celebrate both small and big wins with clients and employees. Celebrating achievement of realistic goals is a fundamental aspect of making the organisation's vision clear and compelling to employees and clients.

# Reflecting on your organisation's practices

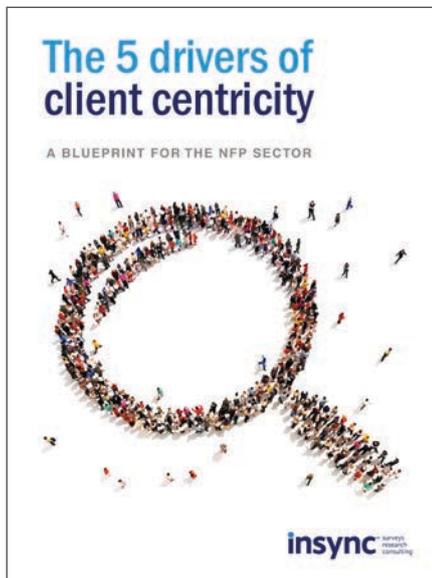
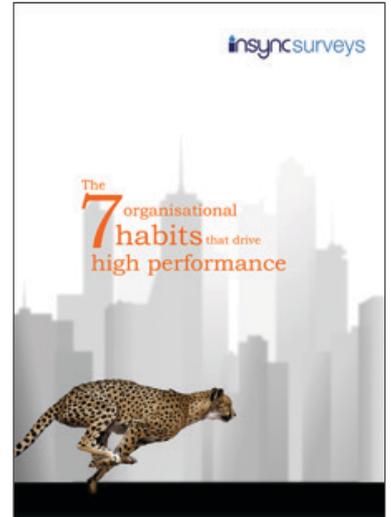
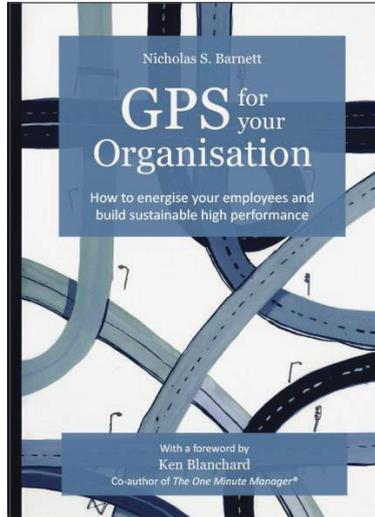
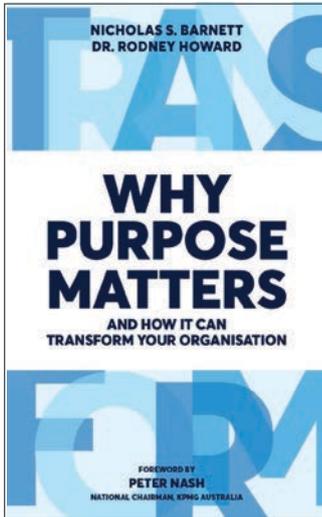
## Reflection – good practices for inspiring employees with your vision

Yes No Unsure

- |    |   |                          |                          |                          |
|----|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. | Our organisation's vision is clear and reflects our passion, capabilities and financial drivers   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. | Our strategic goals and plans are aligned with our vision – there is clear line of sight  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. | We have a vibrant organisational climate characterised by openness, integrity and role modelling in which our vision can flourish             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. | We foster dialogue about our vision by asking thought-provoking questions and telling stories about the difference we are making in the world | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. | We have implemented streamlined communication processes that bring our vision to life   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. | We have embedded our vision into all our management practices – we recruit and promote only those people who buy into our vision              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. | Measuring and celebrating delivery of our vision is built into our DNA  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

# Additional resources

[insync.com.au/insights](http://insync.com.au/insights)



# How Insync can help you discover and embed an inspiring vision for your organisation

If you need to build a stronger connection with your organisation's vision, Insync can assist with an integrated program from start to finish or alternatively focus on specific aspects of the process...



## Defining your vision

Getting the input of employees and other stakeholders via online polls, workshops and focus groups



## Improving communications

Developing an integrated plan to promote awareness and support for the organisation's vision and values



## Aligning your leaders

Equipping leaders to engage employees in the vision and values on a regular basis by asking questions and telling stories



## Updating management processes

Reviewing and updating HR processes to ensure that the vision and values are explicitly considered when recruiting, onboarding, promoting, developing and recognising people.



## Engaging employees

Holding workshops to give employees the opportunity to reflect on the vision and values, why they are important and what their own role is in making them real



## Measuring connection with your vision

Conducting employee surveys to get feedback on how well-connected they are with the organisation's vision, strategy and direction

# About Insync

## We help our clients engage their stakeholders more effectively.

We're leaders in integrated experience management, research and consulting. Our purpose is to inspire success. And that's what we've done for over 100 leading organisations in the health, aged care, and community services sectors.

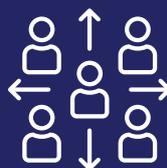
We provide evidence, expertise and actionable insights to shape the employee and consumer/patient/family experience, ensure good governance and help organisations manage the risks that matter most.

Clients such as St Vincent's Health, Epworth, YMCA, UnitingCare, Mater Health, Anglicare, Guide Dogs, CatholicCare, MS, the St Vincent de Paul Society and the Royal Flying Doctor Service trust us to deep dive into their culture, experiences and risk processes, and surface with actionable insights that drive real change.

## We focus 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



Success. Mapped.

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