Designing the Future

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Aligning Future Vision in Large and Diverse Organisations

A mapping tool for vision alignment

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Co-creating future visions in large organisations can be a daunting task, involving multiple stakeholders with diverse viewpoints, cultural backgrounds, levels of influence and commitment. At BBVA, we have found that achieving tangible outcomes means not just listening to and incorporating leadership feedback, but working alongside and involving leadership teams at every stage in the design process. To meet this challenge, the BBVA service design team has developed an internal tool known as the "stakeholder vision map".

As William Gibson wisely noted, "The future is already here. It's just not evenly distributed."[1] Like many large organisations today, BBVA can resemble a collection of silos. In our case, these silos stretch across a range of countries as diverse as Spain, Turkey, the United States, Mexico and Peru. With each country having its own interests, technological capacities and adoption timelines, the stakeholder vision map enables us to understand different positions and align the entire organisation around a common vision of the future. This early alignment provides us with the support necessary to tackle global projects that will more 'evenly distribute' that future across BBVA.

In this article, we will explain the stakeholder vision map and illustrate how we use it to co-create and align 'preferable futures' – understood as those that represent what we want to happen, as referred to by Dunne and Raby (see Fig. 1).[2]

1 William Gibson, 1999 November 30, National Public Radio: NPR: Talk of the Nation, The Science in Science Fiction, Interview with William Gibson, [Quotation is spoken around 11:50] (Accessed npr. org on 2018 August 27th)
2 A. Dunne & F. Raby, "Speculative Everything", MIT Press 2014.

The stakeholder vision mapping process

Step 1: Carry out provocative interviews through speculative scenarios and 'Strategic GPS'
Typically, the work of designing futures is based on trends research, user co-creation or speculative scenarios. However, Brian David Johnson, a futurist at Intel, talks about futurecasting not only as a multidisciplinary endeavour involving all the above techniques, but primarily as a way of discovering value through conversation[3].

As a part of the typical service design process, teams conduct internal interviews to understand the context of a problem and uncover organisational insights. Similarly, our first step is to trigger meaningful conversations using disruptive insights drawn from initial trend analysis and user research.

In order to nudge stakeholders into taking a firm position, we prepare a set of provocative and speculative scenarios to stimulate and establish disruptive positions (see Fig. 2). Incorporating this information into the stakeholder vision map helps us measure not only how 'preferable' a given future might be, but also allows us to push the boundaries of 'probable' futures which may apply to the organisation .

Strategic GPS, inspired by the Global Positioning System, is another powerful exercise we learned from our partners at Designit. In the context of the project at hand, we create a list of opposing strategic statements, all of them equally desirable, defining possible directions that the organisation might take which could impact the end user.

In order for us to gather information about mid- to short-term plans, which might influence future scenarios, each stakeholder is asked to mark and then explain the reasoning behind their selected positions (see Fig. 3). With these responses we can gather information about the specific technologies, partnerships or capacities each department or country is developing which can help us identify project enablers.
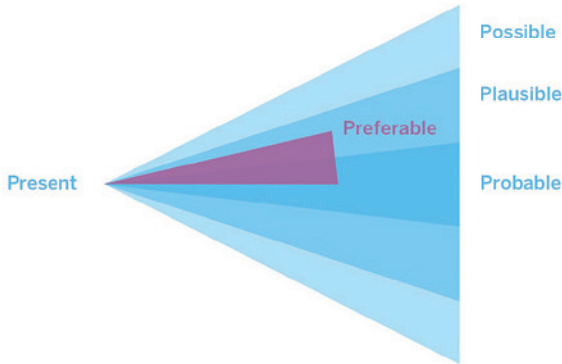
3 Brian David Johnson from Intel, https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=pPpYpyphxJ0

Fig. 1: 'Preferable futures' represent what we want to happen. This 'Futures cone' representation is based on A. Dunne and F. Raby, "Speculative Everything", MIT Press 2014.
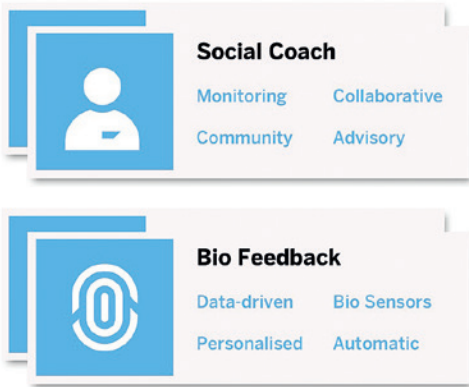

Fig. 2: Speculative scenarios are high-level concepts described with provocative phrases and images that represent 'probable futures' based on trend research.

Fig. 3: A hypothetical example of Strategic GPS. The marks represent the position a stakeholder took in relation to each of the opposite statements presented. Exercise learned from our partners at Designit Madrid.

Step 2: Analysis through mapping

Tim O'Reilly, pioneer publisher and new technologies visionary, argues that maps are the most important tool to understand and anticipate the future. According to him, "Maps are a system to understand where we are and where do we want to go."[4]

To achieve maximum value from your stakeholder vision map, we recommend systematically going from general to specific as you create it. This means beginning with mapping the organisational objectives stated by the stakeholders along with their assumptions about customer needs in Level 1.

To best represent stakeholder discourse, it is important to select the most relevant variables and visualise diverse positions with the respective data behind each diversion point. For this reason, we represent insights together with accompanying data and anonymised quotes. Keep in mind that while anonymous data is important, the map should list all stakeholders interviewed and the date of the project as a footnote, because this information may have an impact on the final conclusions as well as decisions taken outside of the project context.

Level 2 explores a set of speculative scenarios that represent possible futures, as a way to understand the level of disruption the organisation is willing to embrace and how daring or conservative leadership views are.

Level 3 comes from Strategic GPS insights. Here we visualise anonymised votes with dots indicating stakeholder positions with respect to the opposing concepts that were presented to them. The more dots that cluster around a particular concept, the more supporters it has within the organisation. In case stakeholders hesitate to take a position, their position can be placed in the middle, but always backed-up with a rationale.

Optionally, there could be tactical decisions to be made in certain aspects of a project due to existing differences in capacities, for example: technological legacy, local acquisitions or cultural aspects.
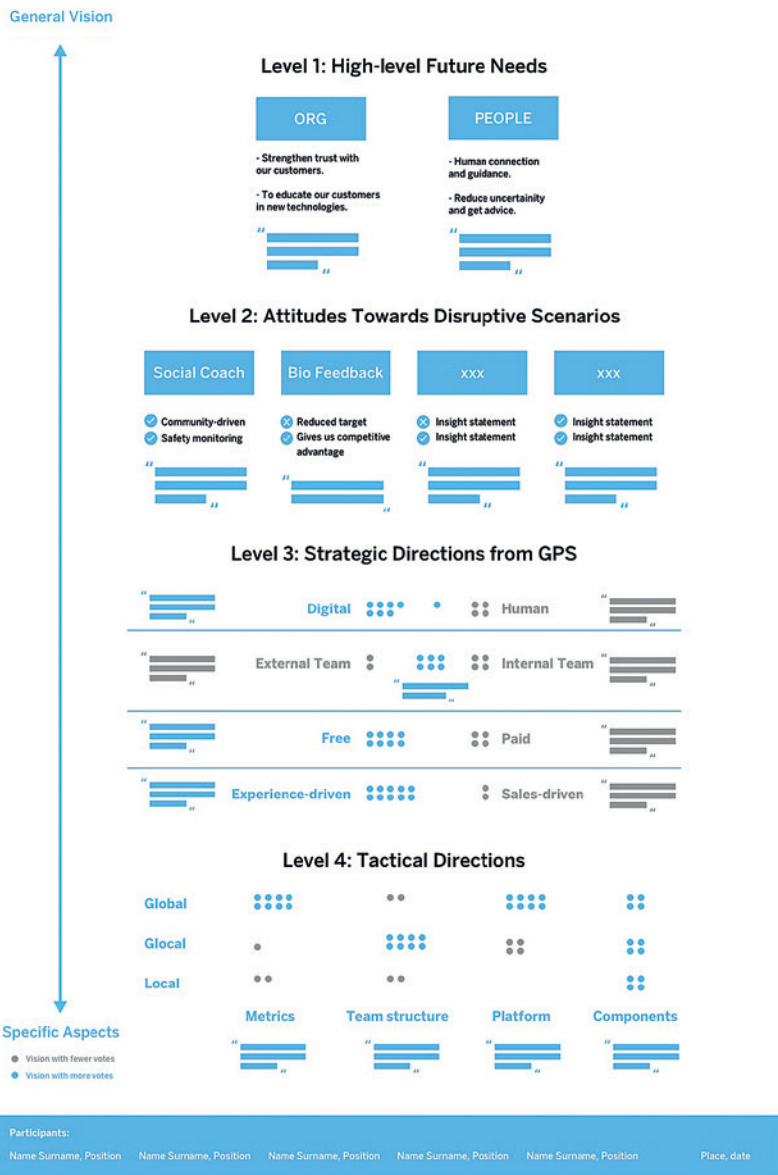

Fig. 4: Sample stakeholder vision map – a tool which visualises a range of organisational viewpoints. Each dot represents the weight of opinion, which then links to corresponding quotes or insights.

When approaching analysis, it is also important to understand the degree of alignment across stakeholders. At times, leadership will be focused on short-term goals and problems, or simply not have had an opportunity to shape a united vision toward a particular future. In other cases, there will be diverse viewpoints on a matter. The reasons behind this disagreement should be explored in detail.

Remember that when presenting insights, they must be rooted in quotes and data. Be sure not to lose divergent opinions in the analysis process. As a best practice, we also recommend involving at least one person with insight into the company's high-level strategy in order to understand and put stakeholder responses into context.

Finally, note that for the most impactful result, information design and visualisation skills are important, because a well-articulated set of insights reflect and project a clear and actionable position.

Step 3: Aligning future visions through sharing

At BBVA, we have found it essential to not only nurture and sustain futures conversations, but also to share them back to stakeholders. We see this process as the equivalent of holding up a mirror to show how the organisation is looking into the future. It is useful to establish alignment, and either support or challenge the current direction and vision of the organisation. In fact, we consider leadership vision as a hypothesis of the future, which must be continuously challenged and validated through a design process involving end customers and other stakeholders such as technology, legal, security, etc.

The stakeholder vision map has the most value when it is shared with all relevant stakeholders across the organisation, but most of all with all those who took part in the interviews, because they might lack visibility into their peers' visions of the project. The map will encourage stakeholders place the project within the overall organisational strategy, as well as challenge teams or reduce uncertainty around expectations, scope or desired impact. The map also helps teams see first-hand how vital it is to align on a common vision – not only across teams and countries, but also vertically

within different levels of leadership, from top to middle management or execution teams, anticipating tensions and misalignments.

Conclusion

Design projects that look into the future are commonly used as exploratory or experimentation exercises that rarely achieve implementation. However, we have found the mapping process to be helpful to accomplish tangible outcomes. By identifying strategic directions, platforms, capacities and supporters, the team will feel empowered to generate more disruptive yet still feasible ideas.

Mapping future visions of an organisation brings with it a host of difficult questions:
— What hypothesis are we testing?
— How far into the future are we projecting?
— How disruptive should our future vision be?
— How much money/time/resources do we want to invest to implement this vision?
— Who is going to push the implementation of this future vision?

Stakeholder alignment around these questions is crucial. Ultimately, it will be the organisational leadership who will leverage platforms and teams to build futures. Ultimately, it will be the organisational leadership who will leverage platforms and teams to build futures and drive implementation towards the agreed direction. For this reason, it is crucial to provide leadership with a clear visualisation of their options and choices. The stakeholder vision map does just that, showing points of strategic convergence as well as highlighting associated challenges.

At BBVA, we have found the stakeholder vision map to be an indispensable tool for visualising the full range of organisational viewpoints and finding common ground among stakeholders. On the other hand, as service designers we should never forget to always contrast the organisational vision with the needs of the end users.

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4 Tim O'Reilly, WTF? What's the Future and Why It's Up to Us, *Harper Business*, October 2017.