

Mapping the envisioning landscape: A literature analysis of vision at the organizational level

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Summary:

Crafting and conveying a viable and compelling vision is considered as a sine qua non condition in the exercise of outstanding leadership. Envisioning is a complex process used in the literature to explain organisational performance at different levels of analysis. However, a literature review that accounts for all the different perspectives in which the concept is employed is still missing. The absence of a comprehensive review reduces scholars' possibility to grasp how extensively the concept is present in the literature and which areas are most promising – and urgent – for future development. In this study we adopt a bibliometric technique to synthesize the contributions provided in the last forty years that constitute the organizational envisioning field of study. We applied co-word analysis on titles and abstracts to map the intellectual structure in the most objective manner. After providing an in-depth description of the four thematic clusters found, limitations and future lines of research are highlighted.

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Introduction

Crafting a powerful vision is often considered as a *sine qua non* condition in the exercise of outstanding leadership (Strange and Mumford, 2005). In distinguishing leadership from management, Kotter (2001) ascribes to vision the important role of setting the direction and guiding the company toward change implementation. Indeed, vision, as a tangible representation of the organizational long-term goals and its idealized future state (Conger, 1999), helps align leaders and followers “on the same page” as they make decisions that affect the organization. The value of vision is reflected in different other moments of the organization’s life. Gioia et al. (2010), in asking about the ingredients for the formulation of corporate identity, places as the first element the articulation of the vision, whereas Carrington et al. (2019) emphasize the role of vision during organizational crisis.

Leadership theories, with specific regards to the transformational and charismatic approaches (Conger, 1999; Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1996), have related a leader’s vision an array of positive outcomes, including organizational performance (Ashford et al., 2016; van Balen et al., 2019), followers’ creativity (Pan et al., 2018), job satisfaction and performance (Hobman et al. 2011). Especially in the last decades, characterized by relevant transformation in the business environment, companies and leaders need to fully understand the strategic importance of crafting and communicating a compelling vision. Building an inspiring and viable vision that spurs people to challenge the status quo and pursue organizational change has been often associated with a company’s top-level responsibility. However, as organizations become increasingly horizontal and more focused on self-managing individuals and teams, the vision formation increasingly asks for a shared process that allows the translation of the vision into a “reason for being” for each employee. Moreover, in order to navigate the current uncertain business environment, companies might benefit from an envisioning capacity that enables them to orient their decision-making process while strengthening leaders and followers’ resilience to pursue common goals that transcend personal interests.

Given this premise, it becomes paramount to improve the understanding of the envisioning process, including the cognitive mechanisms at the basis of vision crafting as well as the way leaders translate the image of the future into a viable guide for actions. However, literature on leader’s visioning behaviour and related outcomes is still fragmented and an effort is required to systematize this body of research that has shown a significant increase in the last years.

Within the literature, the integrated review by O’Connell and colleagues (2011) represents the only contribution that accounts for the elements and phases involved in the process of organizational envisioning. Despite their construction of an “integrative framework of organizational vision and visioning by drawing from a wide range of conceptual and empirical literature” (O’Connell et al. 2011, 119), they do not seem to apply a systematic method of literature revision. Since then, no other literature reviews have been published in this scientific field.

This study aims to provide a reliable representation of previous scholars’ contributions about the concept of envisioning at the organizational level. The objective is twofold: on the one hand, to clarify the state of the art and to map whether there are relevant subtopics that relate to the study of vision. On the other hand, gaining new insights into the current structure of the subject could help target the areas that need further development.

To conduct the literature review a co-word bibliometric analysis was implemented in order to automate the screening of texts and to provide, as a result, a visual mapping of the main clusters that inform the knowledge bases in the envisioning literature. Thus, the present study represents the first attempt to systematize the meanings attributed to the concept of vision in the organizational context and explores the different areas in which it has been applied. In doing so, the study also offers preliminary insights on how researchers might advance the study of the envisioning process at the organizational level.

Method

We employed *Web of Science (WoS)* database as a source for identifying articles that address the topic of our interest. The search has been compounded by two categories of terms in order to select only those articles addressing the topic of vision at the organizational level and exclude the articles that tackle envisioning at the personal level of analysis. Thus, search terms related to the envisioning domain included “vision*” OR “envision*”, whereas search terms referring to the organizational context included “lead*” OR “CEO” OR “entrepreneur*” OR “top management team” OR “board*” OR “supervisor*” OR “group*” OR “firm*” OR “org*”. Among the two categories the preposition AND was applied to ensure the comprehension of at least one term from each category.

Through the field tag topic (TS) we delimited the searching of these terms within titles, abstracts and keywords of WoS database, resulting in more than 99000 items from 1986 to January 2023. We refined our research selecting only scientific articles written in English (68028); to delimit the scope to relevant outcomes, we selected articles from the managerial domain and some specific disciplines from psychological area; we included the WoS categories labeled “management”, “business”, “psychology multidisciplinary”, “psychology applied”, “psychology social”; this filtering resulted in 4092 articles. To assure articles’ relevance to the focus of the present research, titles and abstracts were then read separately by the authors. After that a discussion was made for doubtful cases, which were analyzed more thoroughly with a consultation of the text. The authors included in the final dataset only those articles that introduced the concept of envisioning in the proposed model and excluded those articles in which the concept presented a marginal relevance.

Moreover, we completed our sample performing a double manual search. First, we revised the scientific production to include articles of high relevance to the topic that had possibly been excluded from the search through WoS. Second, we checked citations of the seminal article by Strange and Mumford (2005) on the origins of vision to encompass all significant contributions that address organizational vision. The manual search resulted in two additional items that we added to the dataset. At the end of this process, 255 articles were included in our final sample. Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the literature’ search and selection process, as an adaptation of PRISMA 2020 flow diagram. Table 1 lists a section of the journals in which the selected articles were published, indicating contributions from level 4 and 4* ABS journals.

FIGURE 1 HERE

TABLE 1 HERE

As the chosen approach for evaluating the selected material, we proceed with a specific type of bibliometric analysis: co-word analysis. In general, bibliometric techniques of analysis enable scholars to gain new insight about the topic of interest through a graphical representation of some characteristics of the scientific production (i.e., references or keywords). In comparison with qualitative methods of literature revision, or the quantitative meta-analysis, this third option represents the opportunity to evaluate the scientific production in a more objective manner. It efficiently aggregates different contributions by the number of scholars involved in an academic debate and returns a single frame that maps both the intellectual

structure and the theoretical development of a scientific field. Furthermore, based on an accurate interpretation of such an unbiased representation provided by the software, bibliometric analysis increases the possibility of enhancing researchers' rigorous judgments (Zupic & Čater 2015).

We choose to focus our attention on text corpus analysis through co-word mapping. As a content analytic tool, co-word inquiry allows the decomposition of texts into elemental units - the single words - in order to provide an overall visualization of the semantic building blocks of a scientific domain. At the same time, regrouping of words into clusters of themes means the chance to highlight theories or more focalized sub-themes. This approach lies on the assumption that the most frequently used words act as keywords that reflect the conceptual structure of the field itself (Wu et al. 2021). Within the literature selected, co-word analysis screens text corpus of primary documents to establish the frequency of occurrence of any word in that sample, where identification of keywords marks important concepts within the field. Furthermore, co-word analysis also signals the co-occurrence of more than one term to measure the strength and the connectedness among terms (Zhang et al. 2012). In clarifying how terms are connected among each other, it fosters a way of making sense of the actual meaning of terms to grasp the deep essence of the intellectual production (Chen et al. 2016).

Procedure

Co-word analysis' objective is to produce a bidimensional semantic map that resumes both the most important concepts within a specific topic and the spatial distribution of that contents within a map space. We choose to apply this technique on only abstracts and titles of the entire set of articles we previously selected from WoS, as they represent the denser part in which authors synthesize the core beliefs of their research. In this way, we expect to encounter the theoretical core of the authors' thought, diminishing the extent to which recall to prior theories within the article text corpus pollutes the attempt to extrapolate terms that describe the novelty of the scholar's contribution.

To do this, the text corpus was imported to a computer software called Visualization of Similarities Viewer (VOSviewer), version 1.6.19 (van Eck & Waltman, 2017) designed by Van Eck and Waltman to elaborate and visually represent maps based on texts and bibliometric data. As in other studies (Zhao & Li 2019; Wu et al. 2021) we used the analysis function "term co-occurrence", to ask the software to return us a spatial map in which, firstly, some thematic clusters with different colours are visible and, secondly, linear connections between terms represent the association among them.

In accordance with previous studies (Jiang et al. 2022; Wu et al. 2021; Zhao & Li 2019), we attached some conditions to the software to reduce noise in the analysis of the set of words from the text we selected. We selected binary counting to overcome biases due to authors' writing styles and to preserve a truthful representation of the concepts that shape the author's theoretical thinking, since the "full counting" option – the other possible option in VoS – takes into account every mention of that word in the text. In addition to the database for the software to process, we loaded a thesaurus file to merge synonyms (e.g., "transformational leadership" vs. "transformational leadership theory" or "company" vs. "firm"). Alongside, we use the same tool to create some labels within which several words that are not relevant to the purpose of the analysis are grouped together: first, under the label "stop" both terms related to the natural description of the structure of the article and some very generic terms (eg., "present study" and "i.e."); second, under the label "method" some method related words (eg., "structural equation modeling"); third, under the label "vision" these words that were the fundamental criteria for article selection (e.g., "vision" or "envisioning" merged). In this way, we obtained a list of words highly relevant to the understanding of the clusters' content, as the software condensed

those terms that would otherwise enter the list but without adding value for the interpretation of the data.

Moreover, we set a threshold of minimum occurrences for each term to be considered within the clusterization to ensure the inclusion of terms that provide a relevant contribution to structuring the envisioning debate within organizations. Following prior research (Wu et al. 2021; Zhang et al. 2012) we set 5 as a minimum number of occurrences, a lower value that in other studies (Chen et al. 2016; Jiang et al. 2022) and in contrast especially when scholars review a macro area of the literature (Zhao & Li 2019). This is due to the fact that in interrogating a narrow part of the literature we aim for a fine-grained exploration and higher content density is preferred. 89 terms met the cut-off and for each of them the software calculated a relevance score and the number of occurrences. VosViewer's default settings suggest proceeding with the map-building process by considering only the 60% most relevant terms; instead, to verify terms' consistency, we looked at the list with 100% of the words reaching the threshold set. We excluded the aforementioned labels and some other irrelevant words. At the end of the process, the keywords visible in the map landscape are 78 - namely about 1,7% of terms in the 255 articles. These words are automatically divided by the software into four clusters, each of which has a different colour. Table 2 lists the terms included in each cluster and some significant studies that fall under each of them.

The graphical representation in Figure 2 is based on the default setting in the software. Lines correspond to the connections among terms, without suggesting any causal relations. Each node is a term that belongs to a thematic cluster; the larger the size of the node, the higher the frequency of occurrence of the term. In VosViewer, peripheral nodes co-occur less with other terms than central ones indicating terms connected with a larger number of nodes; the closeness of position between the terms indicates the degree of correlation between the terms, suggesting that those terms may more likely be covered in the same article.

TABLE 2 HERE

FIGURE 2 HERE

Results

By examining the connections among the key terms in the titles and abstracts of the 255 articles, the co-word analysis has identified four clusters graphically presented in Figure 2. Table 2 reports the keywords and sample documents included in each cluster and Table 3 shows the main definition of vision provided in the literature according to the different clusters.

TABLE 3 HERE

Co-word cluster 1 (red): Vision as a means for business competitiveness

Articles in the first cluster, which consists of 25 keywords, focus primarily on vision conceived as conceptions of business opportunities that contribute to create a market competitive advantage. According to Witt (2007, pp. 1127) “A business conception consists of subjective, sometimes highly idiosyncratic imaginings in the mind of (potential) entrepreneurs of what business is to be created, and how to do it”. For instance, van Balen et al. (2019), relying on real options and impression management theories, found that the articulation of a disruptive vision, which aims to change the ways in which organizations and markets operate, influences investor sensemaking, specifically increasing the likelihood of the new venture receiving funding but reducing the amount of funding obtained. In this cluster, the envisioning process is also associated with innovation outcomes at firm and team levels. In this regard, Mascareño et al. (2019) showed that vision, through goal alignments, contributes to team creativity and innovation. In their research, Ruvio et al. (2010) offers insights on how entrepreneurial vision differs according to the different types of ventures (for profit vs nonprofit) and that vision has different effects on the new venture’s strategy and performance. Indeed, in conveying their vision, non-profit entrepreneurs turned out to be more inspirational and realistic, in contrast to business entrepreneurs who appeared to be more conservative and flexible. The study also found that vision of nonprofit entrepreneurs was more directly associated with both the venture's growth and the entrepreneurs evaluation of success, and that the vision of profit companies was associated with a differentiation strategy, differently from the nonprofit vision that was related to a wide-ranging strategy. Preller et al. (2020), in a longitudinal study, explored how each members of founding team’s vision influences the level of vision congruence among the entrepreneurial team, namely the extent to which their visions are compatible, and how vision incongruence influences team member’s opportunity development. They described two equivalent new venture’s opportunity-development paths (focused vs comprehensive) which depend on the level of congruency of the vision.

Not surprisingly, vision communication falls into this cluster. Having recognized how vision is so crucial in triggering innovation in favor of corporate competitiveness, the ability to transmit the vision effectively from the leader to others is essential. Venus et al. (2018) attempt to unravel the antecedents of the leader's communication of vision on a daily basis because of the urgency to understand the mechanisms behind what is called the "key element of effective leadership" (Venus et al. 2018, 2677). They benefit from some important contributions, such as the model of possible collective selves theorized by Stam et al. (2014), which explains the mechanisms that make an effective connection between the visionary leader's communication and internalization of a future goal for others. Even before, some authors (Baum & Locke, 1999) identify the positive correlation between the more the entrepreneur is able to communicate a vision that contains a development scenario, the greater the growth that can be realized.

Co-word cluster 2 (green): Vision as a leader–follower inspiring relationship

The second cluster, comprising 21 keywords, shifts the attention to the role of vision in promoting positive followers’ outcomes. The articles in this cluster primarily address the motivational mechanisms associated with vision but consider different categories of followers’ performance. For instance, Fiset and Boies (2019), relying on self-concept-based theory, propose that “followers’ perceptions of their leader’s visioning behaviour act as a mechanism by which vision strength contributes to collective work beliefs” (pp. 1654). Indeed, they demonstrated that if followers perceive the visioning behaviour of their leader as strong, they demonstrate a higher level of collective efficacy and of group affective tone than employees whose leaders manifest weak visions, especially when messages are delivered in an

emotionally positive way. Focusing on creativity and innovation outcomes, Pan et al. (2018) show that a leader's visionary behaviours moderate the positive relationship between an employee's proactive personality and his/her creativity via informal leadership. Venus et al. (2013), using the regulatory focus theory, argue that leader emotion is more likely than verbal content to prime follower regulatory focus, showing that followers achieve higher level of performance when there is a match between leader emotion and end state in terms of implied regulatory focus (promotion vs prevention). Thus, followers achieve higher level of performance when leaders communicate a promotion vision (depicting end states in terms of hopes, wishes, and aspirations) with a promotion-related display (enthusiasm) and when communicate a prevention vision (representing end states in terms of duties, obligations, and responsibilities) with a prevention-related emotional display (agitation). Kohles et al (2012), adopting a follower-centric approach to the vision integration process, argue that when followers perceive that the communication of vision is bidirectional, they are more willing to integrate the vision in their behaviours, and in turn vision integration is associated to higher level of commitment, job satisfaction, and supervisory ratings of performance. Vision communication, especially if it is based on a charismatic approach, also favours the implementation of organizational changes, as discussed in the article Men et al. (2020). The authors found that charismatic executive leadership communication during change positively influenced employee organizational trust, openness to change, and behavioural support for change. In the context of organizational crisis and addressing the temporal issues of sensemaking and vision formation, Carrington et al. (2019) implement a longitudinal study that captures the shared mental models within and between leader and follower teams over time. They demonstrate that followers can play a relevant role in the process of forming vision consensus to resolve the crisis.

Co-word cluster 3 (blue): Create collective engagement through (shared) vision content and its impact on changes within organizations.

The third cluster consists of 17 keywords and focuses on the role of vision content, with a specific attention to shared vision, in creating collective engagement and promoting change in the organizational context. Followers' engagement has been described as "a positive, fulfilling, shared motivational state characterized by collective vigour, dedication, and absorption, which emerges from the shared experiences of each unit's members" (Eldon, 2020, pp. 180). A shared vision, namely the awareness of employees to the organization's strategic objectives and future aspirations, constitutes an antecedent of collective engagement since it creates meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability (Eldon, 2020). From a temporal perspective, the attachment and loyalty of each member to the aspirational desired future in the long run could be ensured by the collective recognition in a content that expresses the same values; this bond seems to foster the orientation of the organization's energy in a positive direction (Neff 2015). Moreover, important insights come from Boyatzis et al. (2015) who comment on the results from neurological studies that demonstrate how a vision could become "shared". They invite leaders to help people in finding a sense of purpose by sharing the image of the desired future, especially to ensure team adaptability when facing changes.

A closer look at the studies in this cluster revealed also the critical role of vision when some specific changes occur during the lifetime of organizations. Kavadis et al. (2022) point to the CEO succession as a critical moment in which organizational performance is undermined by the uncertainty that the market perceives in relation to the change's consequences; they test the moderating effect of charismatic content of vision exhibited by the successor. Vision content signals a promising future through its challenge to the status quo and represents an effective way to protect the performance of the company, to the extent to which "the more charismatic

the new CEO's vision, the more positively analysts and investors will respond" (Kavadis et al. 2022, 4). In a similar vein, some scholars (Alvarado-Alvarez et al. 2021; Neff 2015) underline the importance of having a shared vision in family business, especially when facing generational transition or to ensure a beneficial climate. Here, the focus is on the shared vision on the one hand because of the positive impact it has on organizational performance (Neff 2015) and, on the other hand, as an element that ensures the maintenance of the organization's distinctive culture, that is, what enables it to gain a competitive advantage (Alvarado-Alvarez et al. 2021). The connection between performance and vision is really at the core of this cluster. Firstly, because of the consequences of its change-promoting nature and its intrinsic influence that unifies efforts toward a common goal. Secondly, due to the demonstration that the opposite relationship is still valid: Awamleh and Gardner (1999) show that the more profitable an organization is, the more they will attribute visionary capabilities to those who lead them.

Co-word cluster 4 (yellow): The envisioning process at the basis of charismatic leadership: From mental models to rhetorical discourse

Differently from the previous clusters that shed light on the effects of vision on followers' attitudes and behaviours as well as on organizational performance, the last cluster, which includes 15 keywords, focuses on the envisioning process mechanisms, investigating, on the one hand, the cognitive approaches adopted by leaders to craft the organizational future and, on the other hand, the rhetoric language used to convey the vision imagery in a charismatic way.

Regarding vision formation, a stream of research which contributes to this cluster conceptualizes vision as a cognitive construction or mental model (Strange and Mumford, 2002; 2005), namely a conceptual representation used both to understand system operations and guide actions within this system. Strange and Mumford (2002) argued that mental models come in two forms: a descriptive or normative one which reflects the system as it is, and the prescriptive model, which reflects the system as it might be. According to these authors, prescriptive models, the models underlying a leaders' envisioned future, emerge from descriptive models since "reflection on experience applying this model, in relation to personal values and perceived social needs, allows people to abstract future goals and the key causes contributing to attainment of these goals thereby giving rise to a prescriptive model" (Strange and Mumford, 2002, pp. 345).

Adding to this body of research, Shipman et al. (2010) investigated the role of forecasting, namely mental simulations of the outcomes of events on actions with respect to relevant goals, in influencing the quality of vision statements. The authors showed that forecasting is integral to the process of vision formation and in particular "more extensive forecasting may provide a stronger, richer basis for revision of prescriptive mental models" (pp. 453). Similarly, Watts et al. (2019) demonstrated that analyzing stories favour leaders' sensemaking and in turn vision formation, especially when story events and the causes of these events are taken into consideration.

Concerning the communication strategies adopted by leaders to articulate the vision in a verbal and written language, the articles in this cluster consider the role of image-based rhetoric, namely "words and phrases that are readily envisioned in the mind's eye" (Carton and Lucas, 2018, pp. 2106). For instance, in their study Carton and Lucas (2018) demonstrated that, differently from conceptual rhetoric which stimulates only the meaning-based system relying on abstract words, through image-laden rhetoric, leaders activate also the so-called experienced-based system using words from the observable reality that favour temporal projection / mental time travel. Moreover, Carton et al. (2014) found that combining vision imagery with a small number of organizational values, leaders nurture a shared sense of the

organization's ultimate aspiration, and, in turn, promotes coordination. Moreover, this cluster also includes research that addresses the issue of training charismatic behaviours, improving in leaders their ability to craft the vision content through case-based knowledge and enhancing their communication style (Barrett et al., 2011; Towler, 2003).

Discussion

Mentally projecting the organization in the future and aligning people toward a common sense of purpose represents one of the most critical challenges leaders face in today's dynamic business environment. This review offers preliminary insights on the existing research on organizational envisioning. By adopting a bibliometric method, the study advances the understanding of how the vision concept has contributed to different research domains. From the analysis of the four clusters, we delineated the progress made in this field of enquiry but also contributed to identify several opportunities for advancing the investigation of the envisioning. In this section, we highlight the limitations of extant literature and provide guidance for future research.

Content of vision and measurement

The conceptualization of vision encompasses consistent elements across the four clusters (Table 3). The recurring elements in the definitions provided by the literature highlight an idealized mental image of the future, distant and motivational goals, shared set of values and a common sense of purpose, reproducing the core dimensions portrayed by Collins and Porras (1996) in their work "Building your company's vision", namely the core ideology and the envisioned future. However, due to the complexity of this construct, less clear is the contribution provided in the extant literature to vision's content measurement. Indeed, the issue of operationalisation of vision statement has been barely addressed by scholars, apart from few exceptions (see for instance Kirkpatrick et al., 2002). In analyzing vision statements, frequently in the form of leaders' speech and written reflection, scholars take into account a disparate array of attributes, such as clarity, challenge, ability to inspire, focused, risky (Baum et al., 1998; Ruvio et al., 2010). Consequently, the use of different measures across studies makes it difficult to compare findings and to draw meaningful conclusions about the impact of effective vision statements. Future research might open the debate on vision's content operationalization and offer new insights into those attributes that make vision effective also through the validation of new measures and reliable instruments.

Envisioning as a process

Among the clusters that emerged from the co-word analysis, the fourth cluster specifically addresses the definition of the envisioning as a process which encompasses the formation and the communication stages. The contributions in the literature mainly refer to vision formation theory illustrated in the seminar work of Strange and Mumford (2002; 2005), however in the last two decades no significant advancements have been proposed. Cognitive processes, that thus the generation of prescriptive mental models (the definition of the system as it might be), are at the bases of crafting and conveying a compelling vision. According to the vision formation theory, different factors may contribute to the process of envisioning, starting from individuals' values, personal beliefs, but also perceived social needs and events to change. Moreover, the projection toward an evocative future implies the cognitive ability to transcend the demands of the current situation. However, the knowledge on those mechanisms that allow individuals, and leaders in particular, to move from the present state (descriptive mental model) to an idealised future image (prescriptive mental model) is still limited. Besides the cognitive

approach, adopting a behavioural perspective, the charismatic (Conger and Kanungo, 1998) and transformational (Bass, 1985) leadership research has contributed to delineate on those leadership's visionary actions that if implemented contribute to the formation and communication of inspiring and viable visions. Bridging the cognitive and the behavioural approaches may offer a more comprehensive model to envisioning.

Follower-leadership relationship

From the literature review emerged that the envisioning process stimulates a complex relationship between leaders and followers, as discussed in clusters 2 and 3. The analysis of this relationship deserves further investigation to better clarify the psychological mechanisms through which a vision transforms leaders' and followers' cognitive representation of their work and motivates them toward change. Moreover, scholars are progressively shifting from a merely leader-centric perspective toward an approach that contemplates the role of followers in crafting and communicating the vision. The behaviours of followers in the envision process may be analyzed taking also into account the contextual/climate factors that contribute to vision formation and translation into everyday work. Thus, new mediating or moderating factors might be considered to enrich the extant models and identify effective leaders' and followers' visionary behaviours also in various contexts and scenarios.

Vision's outcomes

The extant literature has mainly devoted attention to understand the relevant outcomes associated with a compelling and viable vision (cluster 1 and 3). The literature is fragmented proposing different performance measures and examining the impact at several levels of analysis (individual, group and organization). Future research might consider to further systematise the literature on vision's outcomes and adopt a multi-level perspective in order to represent the effect of envisioning across levels. In so doing, a multi-level approach could help to disentangle the effect that the performance attained at individual or team level may have at the organisational one.

Limitations and Future Lines of Research

With the present effort, we have gained new insight into scientific knowledge on envisioning at the organizational level. We achieved this by reviewing the literature in association with a novel methodological approach, as we use bibliometric analysis techniques, which have recently been gaining momentum (Jiang et al. 2023; Wu et al, 2021; Zhao & Li, 2019). Despite the advancements made to visually clarify the literature structure and make sense of the different topics identified, our study presents several limitations. Indeed, it is necessary to highlight some caveats due to the use of the technique and to suggest possible research directions that will broaden academic knowledge, while also exploiting the potential of these methodological tools.

First, we focused on the conceptual structure of the field using only co-word analysis. However, with bibliometric analysis, different types of mappings could be conducted based on the same dataset to gain additional facets that could provide a more comprehensive knowledge. As an example, co-citation analysis applied to references of articles in a database is a powerful tool for discovering which secondary articles are most frequently cited together within a dataset. Being aware of this kind of data represents the possibility of learning about the more influential stream of literature on top of which scholars produce their own theoretical reasoning. Another possible extension of the results from bibliometric analysis is related to the temporal evolution of the field of study. Despite having witnessed the vividness of the topic (Abrahamsen et al. 2023; Fan et al. 2022; Guo et al. 2022; Kavadis et al. 2022; Kim et al. 2022), it would also be

enriching to reconstruct the dynamic development of the different topics, namely to trace which perspectives of analysis of the concept of organizational envisioning have most concerned scholars over the years. To do this, the VosViewer function “overlay visualization” could be a starting point by visualizing the co-occurrence of keywords over time (Jiang et al. 2022), to further orient a deeper understanding through other methods of analysis.

Second, we need to warn against some technical limitations related to the way we employed the methodological tools. As explained in the methodology section, we selected only articles as the type of publications allowed in the analysis. This entails the risk of missing some important contributions in other forms of publications, such as book chapters. Another source for the same risk is related to the fact that co-word analysis through VosViewer relies only on the co-occurrence of terms within the title and abstracts, excluding text corpus. For this reason, some pieces that make valuable contributions on the topic but without clear mention in the parts the software examines are not included in the automatically proposed results. This is the case with the definition of envisioning in Conger's article (1999), which has inspired several authors we have encountered (Kohels et al. 2012, Shipman & Mumford 2011; Watts et al. 2019; Ruvio et al. 2010); or some seminal definitions published in books (Conger & Kanungo 1998; Yukl 2012). In addition to this, due to the limitations of the methodology employed, when the goal is to obtain an accurate understanding of the meaning of the visual representation in the map, it is essential to make an accurate study of the articles in the dataset to which the extracted terms refer, in order to ultimately understand the theoretical lenses scholars adopted.

Lastly, another important limitation draws our attention. On one hand, when looking at the visual representation (Figure 2), the type of results of our analysis does not allow us to immediately grasp the structure of the construct *per se*. In fact, it allows us to understand which are the most central arguments related to envisioning, without an explanation of the causal connections between the various elements (since they are tied without any direction). On the other hand, if through the examination of the items within each cluster we make sense of the meaning attached to the keywords, we lose the dimension of the “big picture” that encompasses all the meanings attributed to the concept of envisioning. In order to fill this gap, we would like to continue our investigation with a more in-depth analysis of the selected articles to capture the logic connecting antecedents, outcomes, mediators, moderators and the underlying theories. The aim is to supplement this preliminary study with a systematic literature review, having as the ultimate goal to provide a nomological network that accounts for all intervening variables in a logical distribution that reflects the construction of the envisioning process within the organizational domain.

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Figure 1: Flow diagram for the search and selection process for dataset

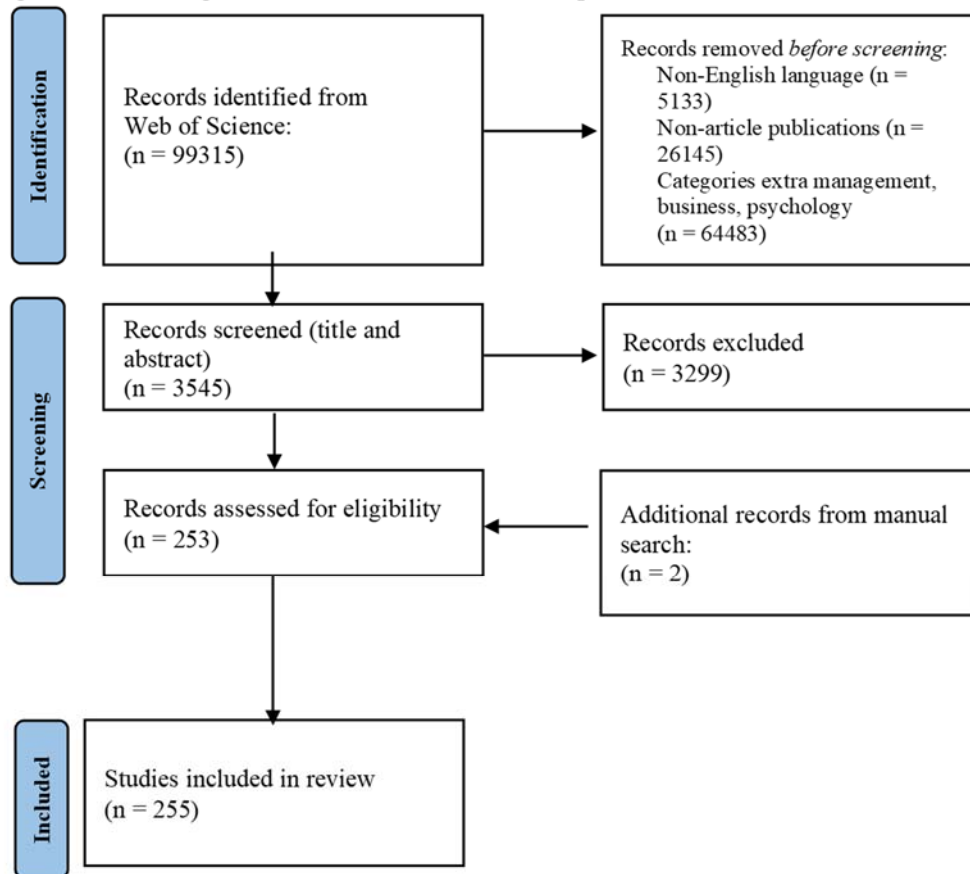


Table 1: Number of articles published in ABS 4 and 4* ranked journals (1986-January 2023)

Journal	Number of articles
The Leadership Quarterly	27
Journal of Management	7
Frontiers in Psychology	7
Journal of Applied Psychology	6
Academy of Management Journal	5
Human Relations	5
Journal of Organizational Behaviour	5
Journal of Management Studies	3
Personnel Psychology	3
Administrative Science Quarterly	2
Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology	2
Journal of Product Innovation Management	2
Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes	2
Organizational Science	2
Organizational Studies	2
Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin	2
Public Management Review	2
British Journal of Management	1
Human Resources Management Journal	1
International Journal of Operations and Production Management	1
Journal of Business Venturing	1
Journal of Vocational Behaviour	1
Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied	1
Journal of International Business Studies	1
Journal of Operations Management	1
Journal of World Business	1
Work and Stress	1

Figure 2: Co-occurrence mapping of 78 keywords in four co-word clusters.

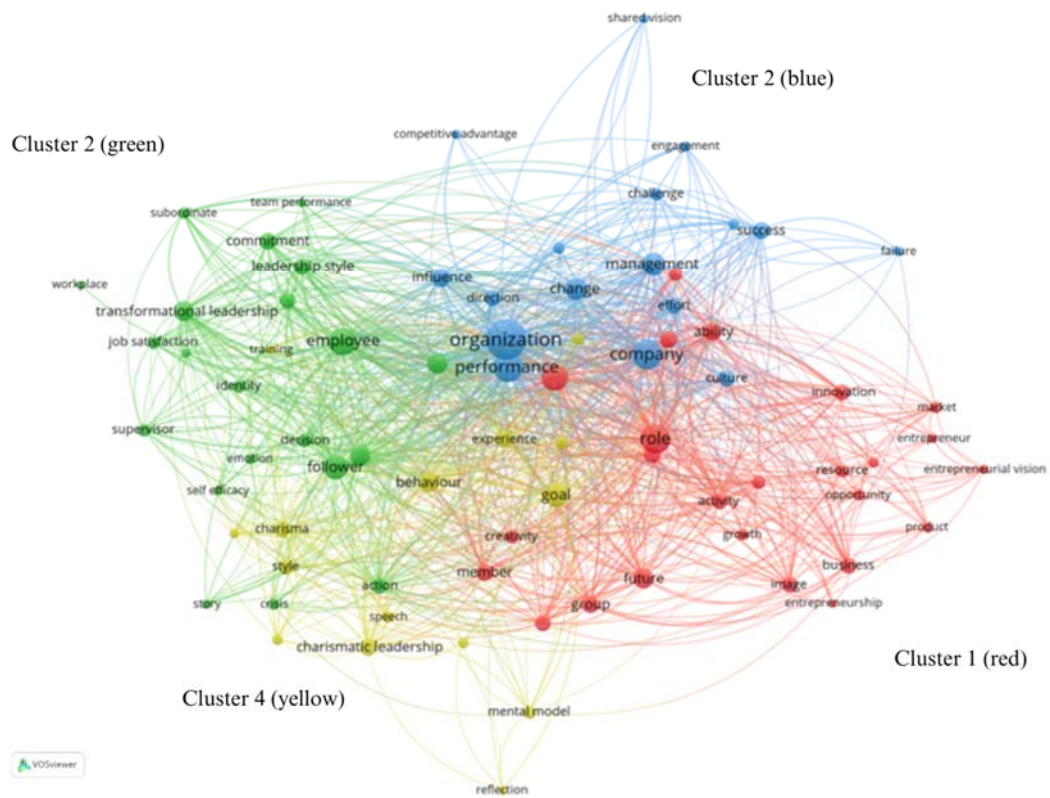


Table 2: Co-occurrence mapping of top 78 keyword in four co-word clusters.

Cluster	Keywords (with occurrence)	Total per cluster	Sample articles
Cluster 1: <i>Vision as a means for business competitiveness</i> (RED)	ability (21), activity (15), business (18), creativity (13), entrepreneur (8), entrepreneurial vision (6), entrepreneurship (5), expectation (8), future (29), group (19), growth (9), image (18), individual (18), industry (17), innovation (20), manager (47), market (9), member (20), opportunity (9), product (8), resource (11), role (62), skill (19), team member (14), vision communication (12)	25	Baum & Locke (2004); Mascareño et al. (2019); Preller et al. (2020); Ruvio et al. (2010); Stam et al. (2014); van Balen et al. (2019); Venus et al. (2018) Witt (2007);
Cluster 2: <i>Vision as a leader-follower inspiring relationship</i> (GREEN)	action (18), commitment (19), communication (29), crisis (9), decision (12), effectiveness (29), emotion (8), employee (54), follower (40), identity (12), job satisfaction (11), leader behaviour (16), leadership style (20), self efficacy (7), story (6), stress (6), subordinate (10), supervisor (11), team performance (5), transformational leadership (28), workplace (5)	21	Carrington et al. (2019); Fiset and Boies (2019); Grant (2012); Kohles et al. (2012); Men et al. (2020); Pan et al. (2018); Shippers et al. (2008); Venus et al. (2013);
Cluster 3: <i>Create collective engagement through (shared) vision content and its impact on changes within organizations</i> (BLUE)	challenge (11), change (35), company (59), competitive advantage (7), culture (17), direction (18), effort (17), engagement (9), failure (6), influence (24), management (37), organization (108), organizational performance (8), performance (56), shared vision (5), success (20), vision statement (10)	17	Alvarado-Alvarez et al. (2021); Awamleh and Gardner (1999); Boyatzis et al. (2015); Eldon (2020); Kavadiis et al. (2022); Neff (2015); Stewart (1993);
Cluster 4: <i>The envisioning process at the basis of charismatic leadership: From mental models to rhetorical discourse</i> (YELLOW)	attitude (6), behaviour (27), charisma (16), charismatic leadership (19), experience (18), goal (37), involvement (10), mental model (11), mission (11), reflection (5), rhetoric (8), speech (9), style (15), training (7), vision formation (8)	15	Barrett et al. (2011); Carton et al. (2014); Carton and Lucas (2018); Shipman et al. (2010); Strange and Mumford (2002); Strange and Mumford (2005); Towler, (2003); Watts et al. (2019);

Table 3: Summary of the definitions of envisioning in the literature

Article in the sample	Definition	cluster
Ashford et al. (2017)	An attempt by leaders to describe an appealing future state that the leader views the organization as capable of achieving (Bass, 2008)	3
Awamleh et al. (1999)	A mental image that a leader evokes to portray an idealized future for an organization (Conger, 1989).	3-4
Baum & Locke (2004)	A projected mental image of what a leader wants to achieve (Bass & Stogdill, 1990). Vision is a distant general goal, thus, it is motivational. It reflects the values and/or outcomes to which an organization should aspire (House & Shamir, 1993). An organization's vision can be formal or informal, even privately held	1
Carrington et al. (2019)	A set of beliefs about how people should act, as well as interact, to attain some idealized future state (Mumford & Strange, 2002; Strange & Mumford, 2002)	2
Boyatzis et al. (2015)	The desired images of the future, or a hoped for future, helps create, or remind people about their sense of purpose. [...]vision can provide a sense of mission	3
Hunt et al. (1999)	Linking followers' needs to important values, purposes, or meanings. [...] A form of interpretive scheme or theory of action that is different from the followers' previous world	2-4
Guan et al. (2023)	The ideal state an enterprise aspires to achieve in the future	3
Kirkpatrick & Locke (1996)	Overarching and enticing view of the future that directs effort towards a desirable outcome that is 'never fully achieved in practice	4
Kirkpatrick et al. (2002)	An ideal that represents or reflects the shared values to which the organization should aspire	3
Kohles et al. (2012)	A tangible representation of the long-term goals for the company and its idealized future state (Conger, 1999; Levin, 2000), helps keep leaders and followers "on the same page" as they make decisions that affect the organization	2
Preller et al. (2018)	"future-oriented image of the new venture, intended to motivate both the entrepreneurs and their followers (investors, future employees) toward this desirable future" (Ruvio et al., 2010, p. 145)	1
Ruvio et al. (2010)	Express the values, hopes and ideals of the organization with no immediate tangible benefits. [...] An idealized goal to be achieved in the future (Conger, 1999; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Elenkov et al., 2005; Kirkpatrick et al., 2002) or an ideal and unique image of the future that articulates the values, purposes, and identity of its followers.	1
Shippers et al. (2008)	A shared frame of reference for team members, which makes it easier for teams to reflect effectively on their functioning	2
Stam et al. (2010)	Ideal, future-oriented images that focus on values and norms	1
Shamir et al. (1993)	An ideal statement that reflects the shared values to which the organization should aspire	3
Shipman & Mumford (2011)	Leader's idealized image of the future that can be used to influence others (Conger, 1999)	3
Strange & Mumford (2005)	A set of beliefs about how people should act, and interact, to make manifest some idealized future state. [...] a cognitive construction—specifically a mental model.	4
van Balen et al. (2019)	Future-oriented impression management efforts and outline 'what the venture will become', and 'what it will attain'.	1
Venus et al. (2019)	Image of the future of the collective (organization, team, etc.) that is different from the current state of affairs. [...] visions of change in that they capture a future state that is different from the current state and that thus requires collective change to achieve	2
Watts et al. (2019)	An idealized future state and a plan for how this future state can be achieved (Conger, 1999; Strange & Mumford, 2002). [...] Prescriptive mental models of future organizational states that are logical, novel, and elegantly articulated (Strange & Mumford, 2005)	2-4