

Thoughts on Values

In our daily roles we often talk about and hear others talk of values. Ever stopped to really get under the skin of what they are and how they are developed?

Here are a few thoughts and references for you.

Corporate Values

Set in the context of an organisation having a vision, for itself and its community or clients/customers, a sense of mission (rather than a mission statement), values are the bedrock of a corporate culture.

A Value is?

A value is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct is preferable to another.

Values govern goals considered legitimate as well as the means of achieving them

Values provide:

A sense of common direction for employees and govern expected behaviours. They are the background for the behaviours we expect of people when they are delivering whatever they do without regular reference to managers, policies or procedures, i.e. getting on with the job.

Values can be:

- Grand in scope
- Or more narrowly focused, e.g. pride, enthusiasm, efficiency, quality, freedom
- Capture the imagination
- Simply drive towards targets, e.g. improved service performance or goal attainment

A Value is for real and therefore can and does inflict discomfort through change, limit certain types of action, shape behaviour and put the organisation in a position where it can be criticised for not following its values.

There are different kinds of Values:

1. Core

Deeply ingrained principles to guide an organisation's actions, cultural, sacrosanct and capable of being encapsulated in one brief sentence

2. Associated

Reflect the minimum standards required in managing the:

- Overall, e.g. power, reward, long-term planning
- Task, e.g. effective, efficient, economic, citizen focused
- Environment, e.g. safety, opportunistic, competitive
- Relationships, e.g. equity, diversity, empowering, collaboration

3. Aspirational

Values an organisation needs for the future but lacks now, e.g. a new value to support a particular purpose or focus

4. Accidental

Spontaneously created not 'handed down' taking hold over time and can be positive or negative

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Identifying Values

Values identification is a leadership task, with those at the head of the organisation espousing and acting upon the agreed values. The aim must be to minimise the gaps between what's said and done.

Values creation cannot be rushed, they need to be reflected upon, developed and then integrated into the life of an organisation, not just published, e.g. manifested in the recruitment, selection, advancement, reward and even dismissal processes.

Values need to be promoted consistently and regularly, yet avoiding the cynicism that builds around the sloganeering of values.

Living by them is hard, hence the 'pain' mentioned above.

¹ From Patrick M. Lencioni, Make Your Values Mean Something, Harvard Business Review, July 2002

Individuals' Values

We all have belief systems we live by. Even the worst of us has a bottom-line, something they believe in.

Our belief systems and values are deeply connected. We are motivated to make decisions based on our belief systems and values. Often those values are unconscious.

We do not all share the same values and each of us thinks some of these values are more important than others. In a position of conflicted values the value with the highest priority will decide the outcome.

We each have a hierarchy of values and they are to do with:

- Identity, e.g. reputation, integrity, self-respect, creativity, character
- Connectedness, e.g. love, honour, friendship ethics, religion
- Potency, e.g. success, power, money, talent, choice, revenge

To finish, whereas values are principles, standards and qualities considered worthwhile or desirable, criteria are perceptions that we have judged to be important and are qualities we notice first with our five senses. Criteria capture our attention and matter to us. These are our sorting principles: we sort through our perceptions and choose to notice those we deem important.

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Hope you found this food for thought. If you have a view, let me know.

Steve Loraine

² From Genie Z. Laborde, Influencing with Integrity, CHP, 1984