

## Leadership Essentials

# Aligning Values

Authentic leaders understand their values and how they align with those of the organisation



**Your personal values reflect your beliefs about the world. Those beliefs are formed by your experiences, by what drives you, by the needs you have, by what you care about and by the type of personality you have (for example, introverted or extraverted). Your values will concern what you think is good and bad, what is true and not, what is beautiful, important, beneficial, and so on.**

**(Roccas et al. 2002)**

We have many values, but some are so important to us that throughout changes in society, government, politics, and technology they are still the core values we abide by. In an ever-changing world, core values are constant.

Core values are the basic elements of how we go about our work. They are the practices we use (we have a natural tendency to use) every day in everything we do. Most people have two sets of values: ideal values, set in an ideal world; and pragmatic values, to cope with the world as it is. Here, we are concerned with pragmatic values.

### Know Your Values

Self-knowledge, which grows from self-awareness, is basic to being a successful and effective leader. Knowing what your values are, and how you got them, is an essential part of self-knowledge.

The graphic below identifies the overall top ten personal values identified in the Institute's 2019 Research Report 'Colliding or Aligning: Reconciling Organisational and Personal Values':

1.	<b>Integrity</b>	6.	<b>Respect</b>
2.	<b>Honesty</b>	7.	<b>Caring</b>
3.	<b>Do the right thing</b>	8.	<b>Fairness</b>
4.	<b>Make a difference</b>	9.	<b>Trust</b>
5.	<b>Commitment</b>	10.	<b>Communication</b>

"We asked participants to identify their top three personal values and found that these predominantly clustered around community, integrity and respect for others, rather than what might be seen as the more functional values related to the measures of success."

Think back over the last week, at work and elsewhere, remembering things you've said and things you've done. What values are reflected in your actions and words? Even more tellingly, what are the values you feel you didn't live up to? Of all the values you identify, what are the five which are most important to you? Are they the same five at work as elsewhere?

Many of your pragmatic values will be apparent to others by the way you behave. If you have a trusted friend or colleague, ask them what they think you value and why, and compare it with what you selected for yourself.

Do any of the values you or your trusted friend or colleague identified for you surprise you? Think about where those values came from. Are all of them still relevant to you today? Or are they based on something that happened, or what somebody said or did, some while ago and which no longer has any relevance to you? What values do or would you want to pass on to your children?

Remember, consciously changing your values is not the same as wanting to have certain values and acting contrary to them. Are there any values you thought you had, but which do not seem to come out in your words and actions?

### Purpose

A purpose is something you intend to achieve; a goal towards which you move. A person without a purpose is like a ship without a rudder. Values and purpose are closely linked. When you pursue what you see as a worthwhile goal, you are demonstrating your values. And by examining your values you can also ascertain an intention- a purpose- for yourself. (Armstrong, 2012)

There is much evidence that, when we have a purpose which we have identified and are actively striving towards, we lead more fulfilling lives, are more resilient, and live longer (Frankl, 2004). Some people have several goals for different areas of their lives, such as their work life and their family life, but these often come under the umbrella of one overarching 'big' purpose; the purpose that makes their life meaningful. (Organisations have discovered that having an overall purpose other than profit maximisation attracts customers and motivates staff. Ironically, of course, this leads to more profit! See the section below.) So there are some important questions to ask yourself:

- **What motivates you?**
- **How does this relate to your values?**
- **What are you trying to achieve in your life, and why?**
- **How does this relate to your role as a leader, and to your career?**
- **How will you know you're going in the right direction? How will you know when you've achieved it?**

Remember Few of us have enough time or other resources in our lives to do everything we have to do, and everything we want to do. Knowing your purpose is a guide to what you should prioritise.

### Corporate Values and Transparency

The Institute's 2019 Research Report identified the top ten organisational values as:

1.	<b>Respect</b>	6.	<b>Collaboration/Cooperation</b>
2.	<b>Integrity</b>	7.	<b>Trust</b>
3.	<b>Excellence</b>	8.	<b>Quality</b>
4.	<b>Diversity</b>	9.	<b>Teamwork</b>
5.	<b>Accountability</b>	10.	<b>Customer</b>

Comparing 'personal values' and 'organisational values', the Report notes that:

*'We found that there is misalignment between individuals' values and organisational values across sectors and across industries. Only half top-rated organisational values are held in common with top-rated individual values.'*

However, merely having a statement of values is not enough. Previous research carried out by The Institute of Leadership & Management in partnership with Business in the Community (2014) found that 51% of managers had been asked to do something that went against their organisation's stated values at some point in their careers. It was also discovered that the further 'down' an organisation employees are (i.e. the more managers there are between staff and the CEO of an organisation), the less their behaviour is likely to correspond with the organisation's claimed values. The creation of effective corporate values should never be a superficial affair. Values must capture and articulate that which is genuinely believed within the company.

This earlier research found that 'consultation with staff and stakeholders is shown to have a positive impact on employees' engagement with organisational values.' Furthermore, if those values are translated into something that employees can put into practice in their working lives and are obviously built into the organisation's targets and strategies at all levels, then those targets and strategies will not pull staff in a different direction from the behaviours suggested by its stated values. In fact, the organisation's values should be embedded in all decisions and all actions. What message does it send out if you promote a person who has been seen to act contrary to the organisation's values, for example? As a leader it is important that you live your values and those of the organisation on a daily basis. In order to do this, you must ensure that the values of your organisation align with your values.

Core to all this is transparency. The organisation should operate in such a way that its dealings are not hidden and its real values are clear. Stakeholders – employees, customers, investors – need to know exactly what is going on in an organisation to be able to choose to trust it, and to be loyal to and supportive of it.



The current trend is for organisations to term their values 'guiding principles' as they continually strive to maintain them.

“Values aren't buses... They're not supposed to get you anywhere. They're supposed to define who you are.” - Jennifer Crusie

#### References

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## Dimensions Of Leadership

The Institute of Leadership & Management's Dimensions of Leadership offer, often elusive, insights into great leadership. This is not a static representation but an evolving description of the complex nature of leadership activity.

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