

THE IMPACT OF CORE VALUES AT WORK

DEVELOPING A POSITIVE CORPORATE CULTURE

BY RACHEL SETTI

Core values – essentially, they are a set of beliefs so ingrained and so fundamental to our personal make-up that most of us rarely question or challenge them. They underlie our attitude, behaviour and working style, and can have a profound impact on our wellbeing and satisfaction at work. That is because values are a set of rigid rules regulating how we run our lives. They are developed at a very young age and quietly underpin our sense of right and wrong, good and bad. They are like our own inbuilt satellite navigation system, directing us in a certain way. We can override them for a while, though in contrast to our electronic sat navs they are not easily disabled.

Unlike behaviours, values are not readily seen. Rather, they exist under the surface and can seem invisible. So how can we identify and influence them? Social psychologist Milton Rokeach, one of the first to scientifically study this area, concluded that there are two types of values: terminal values, which refer to goals a person would like to achieve (such as happiness, recognition or wisdom) and instrumental values, which refer to the modes of behaviour employed to achieve the terminal values (such as ambition, self-control and capability). Corporate culture is the institutionalisation of

certain core values. It is highly resistant to change, which is a good thing when the values are healthy. Conversely, outdated or counter-intuitive systems can also remain unchallenged simply because “that’s the way we do things around here”.

What can firms do to develop a positive corporate culture and ensure a good employee-organisation match? Considering the factors that constitute a healthy corporate culture is a good starting point. Professor of Human and Organisational Learning, Dr Neal Chalofsky, says that the values embraced by good workplaces are pride, credibility, respect, fairness and camaraderie.

These are often displayed in three ways. Firstly, senior echelons within the business really live people-centred values. For example, managers embrace work/life balance by displaying the relevant behaviours rather than just talking about them. They communicate the cultural landscape through words (e.g. open discussions about a tangible vision for the future) and actions (e.g. setting metrics to measure important changes and reward people for meeting them). Secondly, employees are treated as true associates and addressed with respect, trust and inclusion. They are consulted and their opinions matter. Subsequently, they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to work hard, regardless of the material

perks of the role. Finally, these organisations hire the right people for the job, invest in communication and collaboration on the corporate mission, and give employees the trust and autonomy to do a good job.

Individual-corporate value alignment needs to exist at the start and be reinforced throughout the individual’s tenure. Recruitment processes that consider whether candidates’ motivational drivers align with the current or aspirational company values are far more likely to ensure a positive outcome. Questions to be asked at the outset include what is our desired culture?, what type of person would thrive here?, what kinds of behaviours wouldn’t fit in this environment?, what personality attributes would be unsustainable?, what do we need to assess during recruitment?, and how can we recruit to our values and still maintain diversity within the firm?

Though these can be challenging questions to answer, organisational change expert Manfred Kets de Vries claims that individuals who are recruited based on cultural fit will often “contribute faster, perform better and stay in the organisation longer”.

Simply put, corporate culture plays a key part in employee behaviour, satisfaction and wellbeing. A healthy values system can propel the firm towards sustained commercial success via the positive, inspired and motivated behaviours of its people. Change can be achieved by doing a holistic review of the firm’s behavioural modus operandi, prioritising positive values, clearly communicating and, above all, openly displaying the desired values. Critical to this is the need for change to be driven by the senior echelons of the firm – successful transitions have to come from the top. **LSJ**



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