

Time to audit your values

Making time to compare your personal values and those of your workplace can boost performance and decrease stress, writes **RACHEL SETTI**.

In my last article (*LSJ* August), “The Impact of Core Values at Work”, I discussed how firms can develop a positive corporate culture that espouses healthy values. But what can you, as an individual, do to successfully enhance an alignment between your values and those of your workplace? And does it matter if there is a mismatch between these values?

Clients who have presented with ongoing personal vs work-values conflicts often find it difficult to articulate the exact issues and speak of an intuitive sense that something isn't right – they feel anxious for no reason, they procrastinate and doubt their decisions, or feel different from others at work. In many cases there is a metaphoric void and, sometimes, feelings of shame. One client recently disclosed, “I would be utterly embarrassed if my friends knew how I behaved at work in order to make my boss happy”

Conversely, when our environment is well aligned with our core values, challenges are addressed more easily, there is clarity in our solutions, and we feel more (psychologically) safe.

Assessing personal values

If your hunch is that your personal values are at odds with your firm's culture, the first step is to explore and understand your values. The exercise here can be applied to your personal or working life,

though for the purposes of this exercise, use work-based examples.

Step 1: Identify a job or task (current or previous) that makes you most happy. What were you doing? Which part did you enjoy the most? Who were you with? Where were you? What was the environment like? What were your objectives? What did you accomplish?

Step 2: Repeat Step 1, thinking about a time when you felt least happy.

Step 3: Compare the two situations. What patterns emerge? What are the similarities and differences?

Step 4: Focusing on the differences, write down as many pieces of self-advice you can distil about what makes you happiest at work. Based on your advice, pull out 10 words and write them down. If you get stuck, log onto rachelsetti.com/home-7/personal-values/ for a list of values.

Step 5: Think about your current working environment. If you adhered to your top 10 values, would your behaviour change? How closely would your decisions and actions be aligned to the norms of the firm? Where would there be areas of divergence?

Making choices

Coming to the realisation that your values are mismatched with your work environment is not easy. Essentially it presents three options: accept it, leave it or change it. Accepting it requires

you to reframe the way you define your values and behaviour. This can work for a while, depending on the magnitude of the disparity between values. However, personal values tend to be unwavering and, in my experience, this works only until a situation triggers a resurgence of dormant negative feelings.

Leaving it requires you to face the fact things are not right. Sometimes moving on is the right option for all. If that is your decision, do not to repeat the pattern. Seek out firms whose core values match your own by identifying what's important to them, asking questions, and understanding their corporate culture.

Changing it is the most challenging, yet satisfying, of all the options, and success is most likely if you make a strong business case. Link changes to bottom-line business imperatives and you are more likely to affect the culture. For example, were you to make a case for a new client-focussed IT system and frame your idea in terms of evidence-based return on investment, increased client satisfaction, and increased billable hours, you would be in a much stronger position to shift the norm. **LSJ**



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