



UNDERSTANDING PERSONAL AND ORGANISATION VALUES

Each individual brings their own personal values to their working life. Whilst often unconscious, these personal values are integral to the individual's sense of identity and worth. If these personal values are at odds with organization values, then typically the latter will be compromised.

The values that the organisation brings to its activities can help or hinder it. Typically, the values have developed out of the mix of personal values brought to the organisation in the past. Large, diverse or dispersed organisations often have many value sets, brought by different mixes of people to different areas and activities. This unconscious development often leads to some negative, undesired, or irrelevant values being part of the culture of the organisation, as well as some appropriate ones.

As long as the organisation's values are unconscious, the potential conflict between these two sets of values will also remain unconscious, and dysfunctional behaviours will continue occur for no obvious "reason". It is only when the organisation's values are clear and explicit that these problems can be addressed. The organisation needs all people involved in the delivery of the organisation's activities to understand the values the organisation wants brought to those activities. As well, it needs to ensure that individuals become conscious about their personal values in the work context. Only when these two elements are clear can the person make conscious choices around ethical matters.

In effect, the individual must feel that their personal values and survival are not threatened by those of the organisation. This requires:

- That they see a framework of organisational values, into which they can fit

- They can see organisational resource allocation decisions clearly: the resource allocation decisions will be perceived as a concrete statement of the organisation's "real" values
- They can understand the resource allocation decisions in the context of that framework of organisational values: by understanding the resource allocation process, the individual will feel less threatened when "their" department, project, request or activity is not funded.
- That they see the organisation recognises where personal and organisational values do align
- That they see effective means of resolving clashes between personal and organisational values.

For large organisations with many different "silos" of activity and values, a further initial step may be a culture of tolerance, to replace that of "bunkering down in the silo". For those with exposure to many different elements of Australian society—such as the health and social services industries—this may be a desirable end in itself: a culture of tolerance will support a diverse client base more effectively.

Clearly, changing the culture of an organisation is a long-term matter. Nevertheless, if a start is made, then significant gains can be made even in the short-to-medium term:

- Staff have a framework within which to make appropriate day-to-day decisions ranging from "minor" matters such as filling out timesheets accurately, through to "major" decisions around service delivery
- The values can assist management in choosing between options: embedding the organisational values appropriately in statements of requirements can assist in selection of tenders, job applications, design options for business activities, etc.
- Managers can reward and recognise appropriate behaviours consistently
- Discipline can be managed consistently and coherently across the organisation
- At the governance level, the values provide a transparent basis for codes of ethics or codes of conduct

Pragmatically, we want to accrue these outcomes with the minimum of work. An effective model for achieving this is to initially understand the situation "as is"—both the desirable and the inappropriate aspects of the current culture. This maintains focus on the work environment, and also allows positive recognition of current behaviours.

The desirable behaviours can be incorporated in the new culture at no further effort; only the inappropriate ones are replaced. The new values are then defined in terms of concrete, realisable behaviours that people at all levels can practice, and that can be recognised and reviewed. Finally, the supporting structures that people need to see are put in place.

Values are the essence of decision-making—without values, decisions can not be made. Good governance therefore requires that organisations understand and manage the values that are brought to their activities.