

Is It TIME to REVISIT Your ORGANIZATION'S VALUES?

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Now Is the Winter of Our Discontent

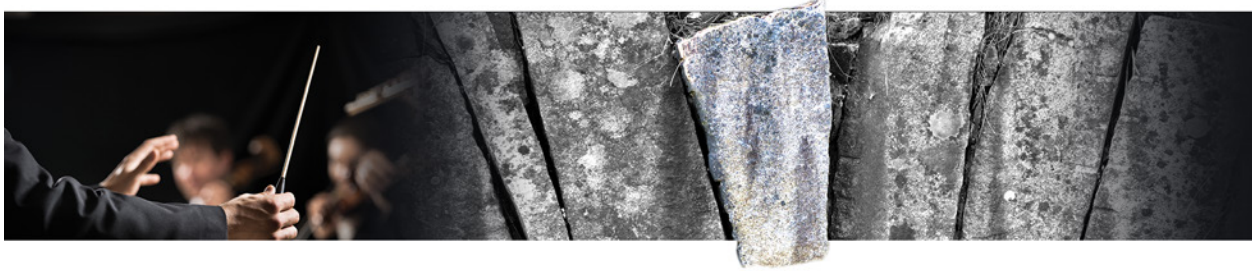
When Shakespeare wrote “Now is the winter of our discontent”¹ little did he know that, more than 500 years later, he would be describing the world of work.

Employees have been voting with their feet. Walking away from jobs by the millions.² The great exit! This isn't simply an indicator that things are not as they should be; it's a veritable tsunami of dissatisfaction. Many of those moving on are in lower paid jobs – service workers, those in poorly paid administrative positions and/or roles where the compensation was at, or just above, the minimum wage. Not all of those who quit are at the low end of the pay spectrum. Heading for the exit are also those who employers can least afford to lose. Moreover, according to one survey at the time of writing, 50% of US workers planned to look for a new job in the year ahead.

The question becomes why? Termination contagion is part of it. When some lead, others will follow – social media, inevitably, fanning the flames of frustration. Compensation is clearly part of it. If you are struggling in a low wage occupation and you overlay the health risks of interacting with the public, a lot of grass suddenly looks a lot greener. Remote work is a contributing factor – either the frustration of working in a remote location with little support or, conversely, not wanting to give up the personal freedom that working from home provides.



1 This is the first line of Shakespeare's *Richard III* (1594).
2 The great exit is a reality in developed countries generally.



Strip everything away, however, and you are left with the bare-bones reality that the fallout from COVID is a reinvented workplace. It has changed how people view what they want from work. The invisible corporate tether that, for many, placed work at the centre of their lives was severed. Millions of workers – not just in the US but across the developed world – started to question the value of what they do (contribute) at work. Legions of younger workers are asking, “If I can’t achieve the financial security of my parents, I should at least expect a degree of meaning from the work I take on.” And it’s not just younger workers; “meaning” has become a central issue for every generational cohort.

COVID may have been the final enabling catalyst, but a lack of meaning at work has been bubbling below the surface for a decade or more. You can’t discuss meaning without embracing its alter ego “a sense of belonging.” Meaning lies in the “why” – a compelling purpose. Belonging describes the “how” – the organization’s values. Pull the why and the how together in an inspiring way and you have two of the key ingredients in a recipe for retention.

“Now is the winter of our discontent.” You have a job that yields little intrinsic fulfillment, little to bind you to the job other than social interaction with those around you. Security trumps satisfaction. Then, seemingly overnight, that same emotional support system is blown hither and yonder. Blended employment is a given. Virtual employment, in some form, is here to stay. More administrative jobs will move offshore. Expect the number of temporary employees on the payroll to increase. By employing talent out of state, province or internationally, unearthing top talent just became easier. Those most in demand will exercise choice. Because they can. Elvis has left the building.

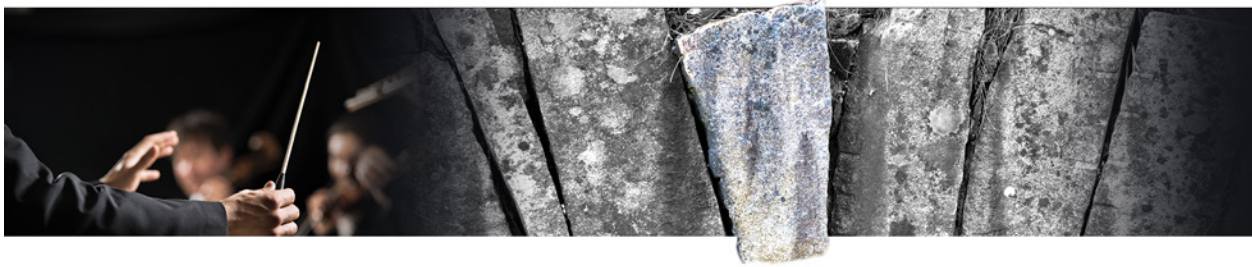
All change starts with a question. The quality of that question dictates the scope of change that is likely to follow. Does your organization have a compelling why? Do you have the right organizational values?

Note: there needs to be a clear distinction between the organization’s values and personal values? In a multicultural environment, the term “values” can cause some confusion. “Why is the organization telling me how to live my life?” “I already have personal values; do I have to be a different person to join this organization?” Describing the organization’s values as “guiding principles” avoids this dilemma.

What’s Next Is Now!

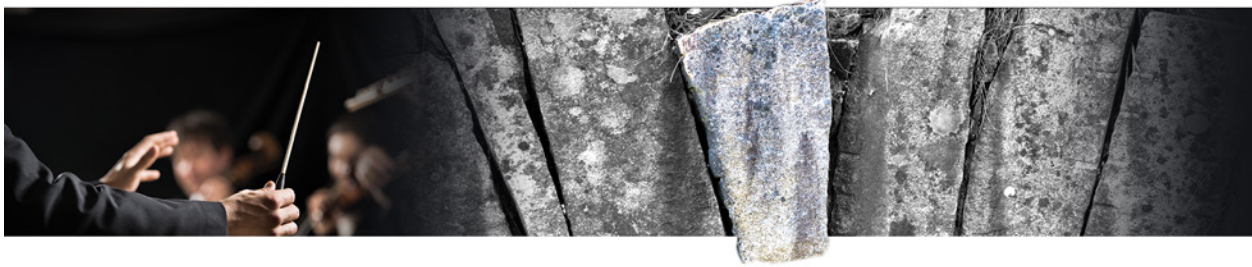
Before moving forward, we need to step back. Change without context is to assume that you can uncover possibility without fully understanding the wider challenge. Discontent is the start of it.³ Lack of a sense of belonging is clearly part of it. But what is at the heart of it? The organization that got us here won’t get us to where we need to be. The environment,

3 Millions of employees have voted with their feet.



and social and corporate governance (ESG) on their own demand new ways to think and act. Factor in the urgent need for diversity and inclusion, a whole generation who are disenfranchised economically, the combined and unrelenting forces of digitalisation, talent shortages, remote employment, market entrants that reinvent the sector, the avalanche of disruptive technology that lies just around the corner and we have little choice but to uncover new ways to organize.

- From shareholder – to stakeholder value. Unless all of the stakeholders count, none of the stakeholders count.
- From leadership based on “just like me” in hiring and promotion – to fully recognising the value of diversity. The greater the difference on the team, the greater the difference the team can make.
- From a 20th century board of directors selected on the basis of past relationships and capability focused on ensuring that the organization is doing things right – to a 21st century, diverse board that has the competence and experience to also ensure that the organization is strategically doing the right things. Board assessment that moves well beyond the traditional skill matrix.
- From an environment where strategy dominates the executive conversation – to one where culture takes centre stage. Long after the strategy has been shredded, what will endure is your culture. You can’t manage what you don’t measure.
- From Head (direction) and Hand (delivery) leadership – to an approach that, now more important than ever, also engages the Heart (developing self and others) and enriches the Spirit (authenticity, caring, empathy). Leadership balance.
- From the belief that rewards and benefits combined with goals and corrective feedback are the dominant force in shaping behaviour – to the realisation that, without a compelling purpose and work that matches capability with opportunity, everything to do with people is an uphill task, especially with middle managers.
- From a mindset where the employee supports the customer – to one where, in many ways, the employee is treated as if they were a customer. Happy customers draw on happy employees.
- From a culture of feeling disillusioned, disconnected and discontented – to one where there is a genuine sense of belonging on the part of employees. Research suggests that a sense of belonging is the single most important factor in retention.
- From a business development process dominated by “How do we make money from this relationship?” – to one that focuses on “How do we best contribute to the customer’s/client’s success?” Without trust, you ain’t got much.



- From an organization reliant upon hierarchy – to one that is Focused, Flat, Fast, Flexible, and Fertile to new ideas. The organization is a team of teams.
- From a business context where the team works for the leader – to one where the leader works for the team. Servant leadership prevails.
- From a platform where “what” people learn has precedence – to a setting where “how” people learn becomes the priority. Speed of learning is the only truly sustainable competitive advantage.
- From a reliance on rules – to a climate where the organization’s values give people permission to act. According to Gallup only about a third of employees in the US are engaged. Globally the number is 15%.⁴

The organizational shift demanded falls firmly within the realm of the organization’s culture. Culture, meanwhile, is like a jigsaw puzzle. When you access all of the pieces a clear picture emerges. When elements are missing, frustration is assured. Culture is a system. Work on culture that doesn’t consider all of the moving parts is self-defeating. It’s also likely to result in unintended consequences. Systems thinking means striving to understand the relationship between each element.

And this is where the organization’s values make their entrance. Values are a loadstone, a core/central element in culture that brace (link) the other elements. In particular, the four central pillars of organization culture: purpose, diversity/inclusion, brand and speed.⁵ Know that where those values are poorly defined or, as is the case with many organizations, live only as a statement of intent on the firm’s website, “managing” the organization’s culture is destined to be a bridge too far. From our research and that of others, only about 20% of organizations manage their culture. The rest are caught up in “cultural drift.” The underlying assumption? Being more of what we have always been will get us to where we need to be. Good luck with that.

There is Nothing New About Organizational Values

This cultural attribute we refer to as “the organization’s values” – specific and focused behavioural expectations – is hardly new. Abraham Lincoln built his team of rivals with values in mind. For John Cadbury and Henry Isaac Rowntree, their values were their

⁴ Jim Clifford and Jim Harter, *It’s the Manager* (2019), at page 13. The material, produced by Gallup, is based on the largest global study of the future of work ever conducted.

⁵ By way of example, purpose (a cultural pillar) without reference to the values is a why without a how. Similarly, speed (a cultural pillar) unless aligned with the values amounts to an accident waiting to happen.



legacy.⁶ Steve Jobs was a strong advocate.⁷ Reg Revans was a believer; James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner⁸ no less so. Jim Collins and Jerry I. Porras⁹ made organization values a centrepiece in their leadership work, as did Stephen Covey.¹⁰ And yet, in the digital, delayed, diverse, disruptive, discontinuous world in which we live, organization values have either been pushed aside or lost their cultural currency.

Although, over the years, a host of organizations have proudly touted their values, all too often those values were (are) disconnected from what really went on. Enron produced a 64-page manual outlining the company's mission and championing its core values.¹¹ Values misalignment is not simply “a communication shortfall.” Where there is a disconnect between the espoused values and how things actually happen – when the CEO mis-talks – talent walks.

As we move further into the realm of ongoing reinvention – resilience, responsiveness and resourcefulness become organizational and leadership imperatives. This speaks to moving beyond the rhetoric and becoming truly customer-centric, agile supply chains, shorter lead times and a serving – not simply a service – ethos. It means pushing decision-making further into the organization, an environment where candour (psychological safety) is the norm, competing on ideas is embraced, an ecology of collaborative partnership thrives and that if it can be digitalised, it will be digitalised.

And lest we forget, after COVID the next black swan lies just around the corner. The problem? The world is changing faster than the 20th century organization was built for. The conclusion? It's not enough to work to get it right – you have to be right at the right time. If you sleep, you weep.

Is It Time to Revisit Your Values?

No matter how hard the hurricane blows, at the eye of the storm lies an area of calm. Beyond COVID, there is no “new normal,” only the new reality: a societal, economic and business tidal wave that brings with it unprecedented turbulence. A level of upheaval that is impossible to manage unless you can create, at the centre of it all, an area of calm. In organizational terms, that “centre” is found in the organization's values.

6 In the middle of the 19th century both John Cadbury and Henry Isaac Rowntree brought their Quaker beliefs to the workplace. Cadbury was part of Mondelez International (originally Kraft Foods). Mondelez is the second largest confectionary, food and beverage company in the world. When it was acquired by Nestle in 1988, Rowntree was the fourth largest confectionary maker in the world.

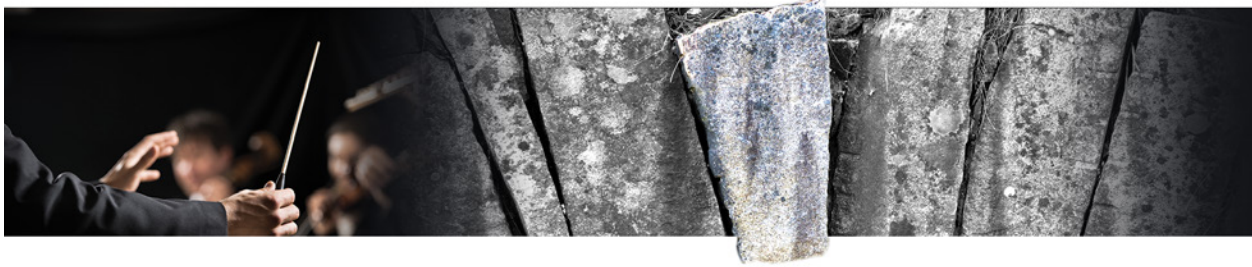
7 At the time of writing, Apple is worth three trillion dollars. That makes it worth more than the top 100 companies on the London Stock Exchange combined.

8 *The Leadership Challenge* (1987).

9 *Built to Last*. The first edition published in 1994.

10 *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989).

11 Enron listed its core values as: Communication – We have an obligation to communicate. Respect – We treat others as we would like to be treated. Integrity – We work with customers and prospects openly, honestly, and sincerely.



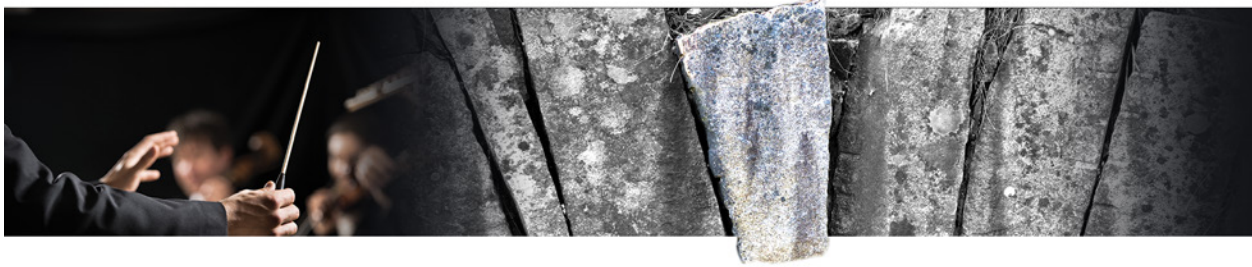
Is it time to revisit your values? To answer that question, in an informed manner, explore the six questions below. Concerns or ambiguity should be interpreted as a call to action.

1. Do you have one culture or several (many)? Every organization of more than 150 employees¹² is destined to have more than one culture. If appropriately defined, the organization's values shape, what can best be described as, the overriding "meta culture." Think of it this way – the organization's values beat out a dominant, organization-wide rhythm, a constant reminder, when faced with a choice, of the behaviour demanded. Other local and/or tribal rhythms (polyrhythms) can emerge, but they must be informed by and in harmony with the meta rhythm.

The good news? In a smaller organization where a strong CEO interacts daily with employees, the organization's values – written or not – become imprinted on the organization as an extension of the CEO's/top team's behaviour. In start-ups and



¹² This draws on the work of British anthropologist Roger Dunbar. It's clear from early hunter-gatherer societies that after reaching around 150 members a new community emerged. This is as true today as it was then. The highest number of friends that one can meaningfully support through social networking is 150.



smaller consulting companies this is commonplace. As a species we are behavioural copying machines.¹³

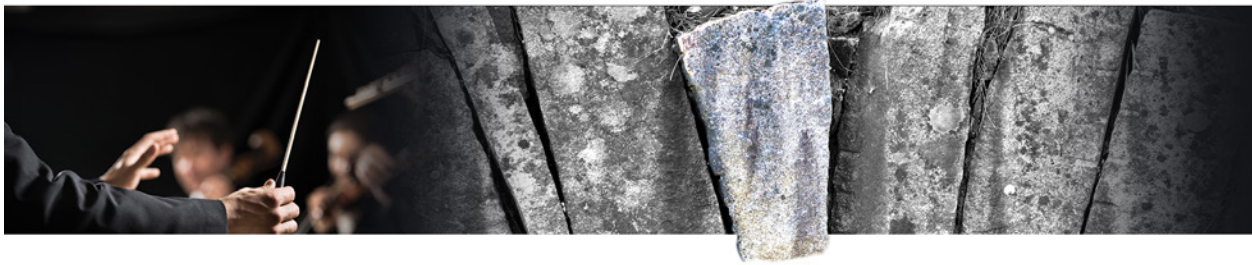
The not so good news? An inconsistent leader, an organization with hundreds of employees, multiple locations and/or operations in different countries and the assimilation of values by observing those at the top can't happen. Out of sight, out of mind. The result? The local way becomes the only way! If you take a portfolio approach to your business, there's not a problem. Conversely, if you want to build on the concept of "one company" and benefit from the synergy implied, then sound, specific and shared organization-wide values become a requisite building block.

Multinational organizations have come to accept that there are two sets of values. The meta values imparted from the centre and the values – informal for the most part – that lay out how things need to happen locally. The "tight-loose" approach to values doesn't mean that local values can be in direct conflict with the company-wide values. Nor does it imply that the latter lack primacy. View the two value sets as complementing each other, where the local values fill the white space between the organization-wide values and the local environment. Local custom and/or social mores that, in some instances, cannot be ignored. Diversity and inclusion don't mean the same in the Middle East as they do in California. Localised values also come to the fore in applying technology. Facial recognition technology that is perfectly acceptable in Shanghai would cause a riot in Seattle.

In looking at the link between values and culture it also becomes apparent that a good many organizations have attempted to define virtually every aspect of their – not infrequently aspirational – culture through their values. Apart from the cynicism this is likely to draw, this is too great a burden for the organization's values to carry. The notion that the values should be aspirational raises an important issue. It can be argued that if the values don't already exist within the organization in some places some of the time, those in key leadership roles will be faced with a lot of very heavy lifting. One aspiration value makes sense. Expect a full house of aspirational values to be trumped by the naysayers in the informal organization.

To support a flat/agile organization – where decision-making is pushed as far across the organization and as close to the customer as possible – the organization's values take on additional meaning. They authorise action (give people permission to act). Asking the values, by way of definition, to bear all of the cultural load takes away from their

¹³ It's this unique ability to copy the behaviour of those we trust and admire that allowed us to outcompete others on the hominin tree. It's also what makes "influencers" successful on social media. Cristiano Ronaldo has 318 million followers and makes \$1.6 million per post. Suggesting what kind of underwear to buy is a far cry from shaping people's values, however.



worth in self-management. Unless, that is, we step away from self-management and revert to dictate, rules and/or a general sense of making it up as you go.

Beyond values, managing the emerging culture draws on being externally context savvy, systems thinking, working on both the culture drivers and anchors, shaping the organization's story, developing the right leadership and, above all else, measurement. You can't contain cultural insight as it applies to the total system in a few values statements. And you can't manage what you don't measure.

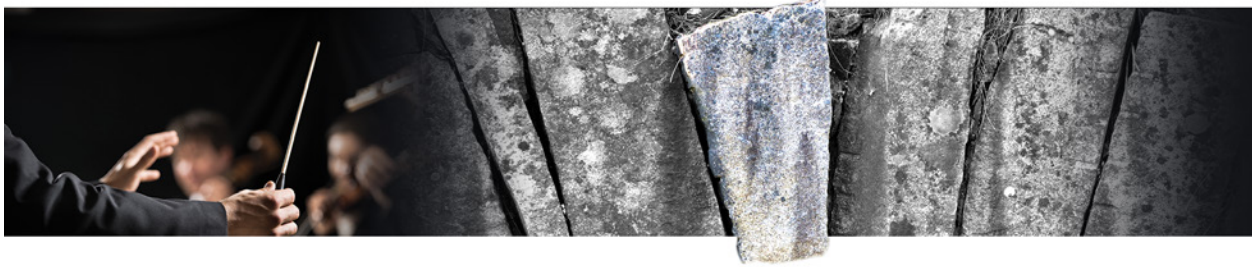
- 2. Are the values that emanate from the top of the organization current, clear and consistent?** Leaders live in a goldfish bowl. The higher they are in the organization, the greater the magnification. In turbulent times, the messaging from the top of a vibrant organization represents a silent baton that orchestrates how people act. When that inspirational presence is missing, a shadow of doubt is cast across the organization, an empty feeling of uncertainty that infuses even the smallest decision. If you want to ensure that what you do today is what you will do tomorrow, fill that vacuum with rules.

Evidence of the formative role of the CEO/top team is found in a remarkable piece of research. After looking at hundreds of companies around the globe, Chris Zook and James Allen, of Bain and Co., found that where the founder still played an active role, the organization performed 3.1 times better than any other kind of organization.¹⁴

What the founder brings to the table is passion, attention to detail and unwavering personal commitment. They also perceive the organization's values not as a framed inscription but as a personal mandate defining how they expect employees, regardless of level, to behave. The organization's values become the founder's alter ego. When decisions are made – symbolically and in a very real sense – the founder is always in the room at the time. That doesn't



¹⁴ *The Founder's Mentality: How to Overcome the Predictable Crises of Growth* (2016).



mean that the founder always gets it right. Facebook's values are "Focus on Impact," "Move Fast," "Be Bold," "Be Open" and "Build Social Value." Did someone just whisper "Do no harm"?

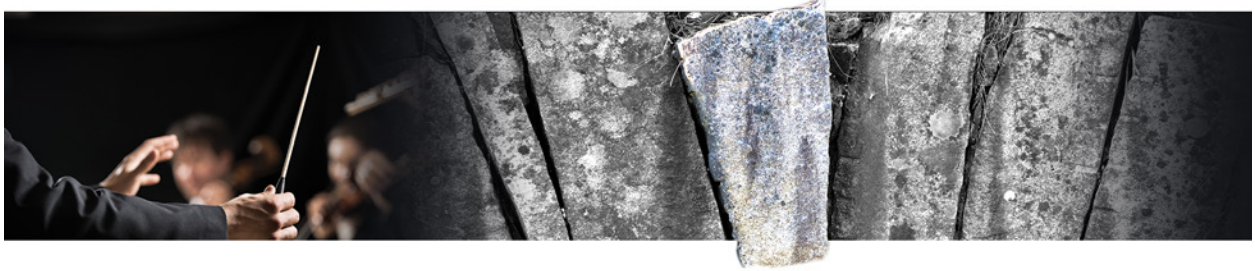
For the founder, read "the CEO and the top team." Are they fully committed to the organization's values? Are those who fail to live those values, especially those in mission-critical roles, quickly separated. Are the organization's values recognised, relevant and a rally cry for team excellence – no matter what role in the organization you have or what country you operate from? More specifically, if asked, would those in the middle of the organization know not only what the values are and mean but be able to quickly give personal examples of how they are being applied?

If you are of a mind to revisit the organization's values pay heed to the "founder lesson." The organization's values must be owned (emotionally, visibly and practically) by the CEO and the top team. If not, they will quickly become little more than irrelevant background noise. Don't let the crowd decide. To "co-create" the values – with employees and managers drawn from across the organization – is to end up with values that the top team feel forced to work with. They are also likely to look and sound like everyone else's. The expression "a camel is a horse designed by a committee" is not entirely inappropriate. The organization's values should be unique. Spread a wide net to inform, involve, validate and fine tune, but ensure that origination, ownership and, with it, operational commitment of the values rests with the CEO and top team.

- 3. Are they the right values? Do the values encourage engagement and infuse the business with the spirit of inclusion?** Indeed, are the values you embrace truly values, or are they deeply held assumptions about what it means to be successful in business? Values, ideally, shape decision-making. Decision-making, in turn, implies discretion and judgement. Quality, as an example, isn't a choice. The level of quality might be but no one who wants to stay in business makes the decision to ship substandard product or deliver less than acceptable service. That's not the end of the story, however.

Based on the business, "safety" might well be an organization value. Uber makes "stand for safety" one of their eight values. U.S. Steel coined the term "Safety First" in 1912, and safety remains its primary core value today.

Integrity comes up all the time as one of an organization's values. Whereas it might be important if you were thinking of buying a second-hand car from someone named Bruiser, it's hardly a reason for talent to join the organization – a handful of countries excepted. Of course, it depends on what we mean by the term "integrity." As it refers to all things financial and contractual, it's difficult to make the case that it is a value. Applied to privacy, access to data and personal freedom it takes on a whole different meaning.



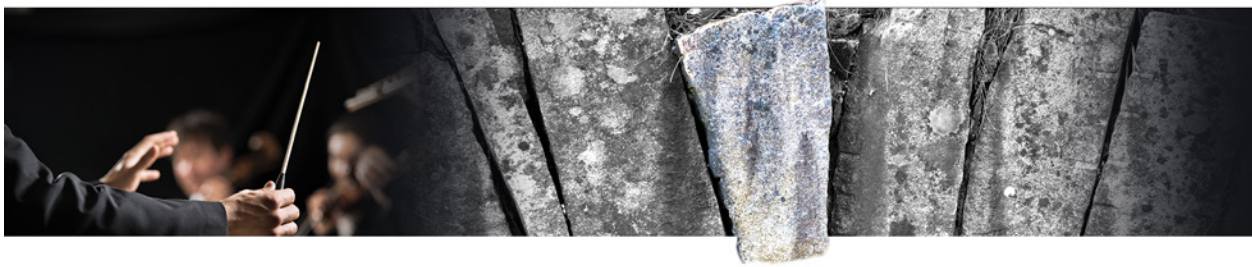
“Courage” has a certain appeal, but I doubt too many consumers are influenced to choose one washing machine over another, simply because the people that built it are striving to be “courageous.” “Passion” is often quoted as one of an organization’s values. It’s anyone’s guess what that actually means. Even more problematic, it’s a term that, dependent upon the country you are in, can be interpreted in ways that aren’t necessarily helpful. “Loyalty,” similarly, is pretty meaningless. You earn loyalty, you can’t mandate it.

And guess what? The inducement “a fun place to work” is, more often than not, corporate speak for “there is a lot of routine work.”¹⁵ For a customer it might well even be a deterrent. Do I really want the pilots who are flying me from Europe to Asia to be having fun? In truth, I want them to derive satisfaction from a highly skilled job very well done.¹⁶



¹⁵ There are clearly exceptions. One of Lego’s values is “fun” – where it clearly makes perfect sense.

¹⁶ Jet Blue: Fun translates to a friendly work environment where people like to be – when we enjoy our jobs, our customers enjoy the JetBlue experience.



Inclusion matters. To (i) successfully dismantle hierarchy (as we must); and (ii) to move beyond traditional line of sight leadership¹⁷ (as we have to), inclusion becomes a significant issue. A central role of the organization's values, thus, becomes to enable employees to manage themselves. In pursuit of that theme, values that nurture inclusion meet four important criteria.

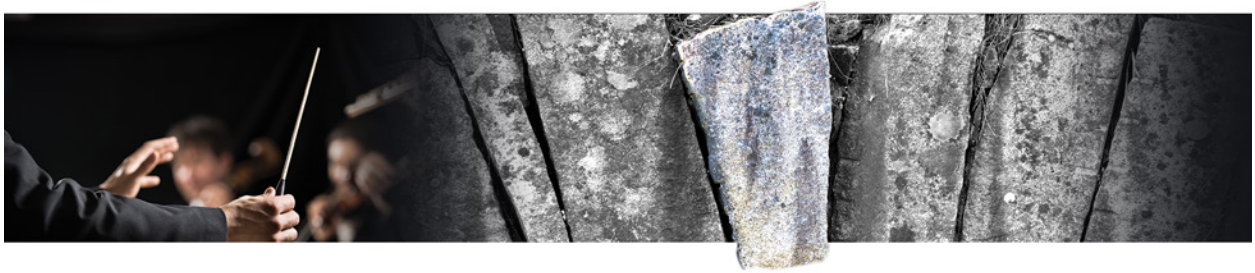
- *Persuasive* – I understand why this issue matters.
- *Personal* – I can make the values my own. The values are as relevant to the single mom confined to a home office as they are to an executive working out of a corner office.
- *Practical* – within people's discretion. With the best of intentions, not a few organizations include "innovation" in their values. Who can argue with the need to compete on ideas? Except, is that value inclusive? How many employees really see their role of providing an opportunity for innovation? Certainly not innovation with a big "I."¹⁸ For innovation to become a reality, a whole lot of other things need to happen first, starting with curiosity and challenging the status quo. Whatever role I happen to be in, I can always "challenge the status quo."
- *Pragmatic* – I don't need to think in abstract terms to understand how I can apply that value.

A decision-making/self-managing orientation to values flies in the face of a good deal of past thinking. Values such as "Create Fun and a Little Weirdness" (Zappos) were, no doubt, intended to create a climate where "being different" was part of what made the business special. The dilemma? Values along these lines could be seen to lack cultural sensitivity. No introverts need apply? Those from cultures/societies where pushing yourself forward is frowned on are not welcome. In today's societal setting, values that emphasise "be yourself" may well be a better fit. That is not to suggest that we want employees to behave like sheep. We need people to paint outside of the lines. We also need to ensure that the way we get there emphasises inclusion.

4. Are the values generational savvy? Each generational cohort interprets their work experience through the lens of the wider societal context. For "boomers," IBM (International Business Machines), it was suggested, somewhat humorously, stood for "I've been moved." For Generation X, IBM could well have been interpreted as meaning "Invent Better Management." For millennials, the bulk of today's workforce, IBM can be translated as "Inspire (a) Better Me." For Gen Z, IBM might well mean "Inclusion,

¹⁷ Blended employment, gig employment and the virtual workforce demand a competency best described as "leadership at a distance."

¹⁸ Innovation can be framed as small "i" innovation – incremental change – or big "I" Innovation – step change/reinvention.

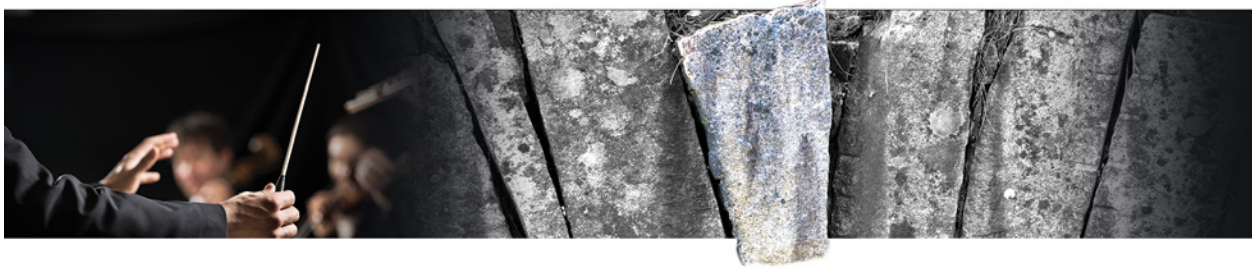


Belonging and Meaning.” Have your values been flexed to recognise the needs and orientation of those who have joined the organization in the last decade and a half?

This generational shift and, in particular, the underlying assumptions are played out in how the organization’s values are interpreted. Take, for example, an organization value already mentioned – “safety.” Traditionally this means physical safety. But is that expansive enough? Interpreted to include emotional safety, it starts to respond to the needs of the new workforce. A traditional view of safety + psychological safety. In like fashion, traditional notions of “quality” are limited to the product and/or service. A more inclusive interpretation embraces the work experience. A traditional view of quality + quality of work life.

To connect with millennials and their younger cousins you need to move beyond a Boomer and Gen X mentality. You need to consider not just how the values are so named





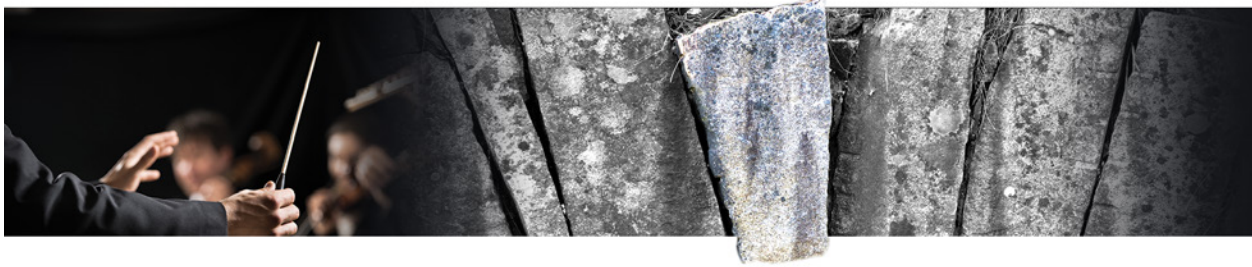
but how they will be interpreted. Bringing everyone into the tent implies addressing the following influences.

- *Communication.* Keep it simple. The language used in the values definition and the imagery behind the definition have to be carefully thought through. “Collaboration” is a case in point. Collaboration means something different depending on what part of the world you happen to be in at the time. Even in countries where they share (sort of) a common language (English), confusion between collaboration and cooperation¹⁹ is commonplace. Where ambiguity calls, commitment falls.
- *Community.* Ensure that the values, as defined, don’t exclude or leave any generational cohort behind. Ensure that they are just as relevant for those who work in a remote location as they are for those who operate out of a traditional work setting.
- *Caring.* Extra effort, training and investment are needed for those who, because of history, tenure, experience, location, access and/or language, are at a disadvantage. Include new hires, work-from-home employees, and a recently acquired business in this category.
- *Catching people doing it right.* Recognition, affirmation and reward are just as important in reinforcing the values as they are in driving day-to-day performance. Publicly recognizing how, in living the values, an individual or team made a difference during a crisis (COVID?) is especially powerful. No less important are team members affirming each other when actions aligned with the values made a difference.
- *Context.* Leaders in mission-critical roles need additional investment. They have to get it right. They have to have a deep understanding of: (i) the background and the thinking behind the values; and (ii) the role the organization’s values play in shaping the emerging culture. If those in key leadership roles don’t live and propagate the values, essentially, you have no values. If you can’t talk the talk, you can’t walk the walk.

Less is more. In most cases, five or six values are the most that people will likely recollect. Know also that people will better remember the values if each is accompanied by an image – a visual metaphor – that makes the value in question come to life. We explore the world through metaphor and learn through stories.

It should be added here that if the organization, somewhere between its compelling

¹⁹ Cooperation is two or more people who come together to deliver on a common goal – where it is assumed that all those involved will share equally in the benefits derived. Collaboration is two or more people who come together to deliver on a common goal – where your success is more important than mine. Collaboration draws on the altruistic spirit.



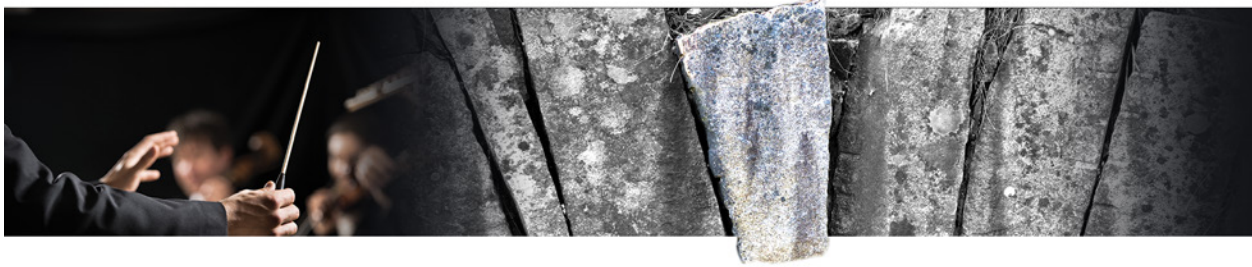
purpose, leadership competencies and/or its values, doesn't focus on sustainability, social justice and choice (as in work from home determination), plan on significantly upping the recruitment budget.

5. Do your values resonate with the customer? Or do they make you look like merely one of the pack? Winning tomorrow's customer can never be formulaic. That said, those who bring mastery to the marketplace start by creating a platform for success – a template that employs six critical building blocks:

- A strong brand;
- A winning value proposition;
- Assumed capability (location, reach, experience, know-how);
- Distinct values (“distinct” meaning both standing out from the competition and



strongly represented in all available marketing channels);



- Earned reputation (especially if that reputation is gained with past/current customers who targeted customers can relate to or admire); and
- Trust leading to a collaborative partnership.

People want to buy from people like them. The customer needs to feel that, when faced with a problem or unexpected disruption, the provider will act in a way that the client would endorse. Values that fail, at least in part, to support the organization's differentiated value proposition represent a significantly, underutilised asset.²⁰ Beyond that, your values should endorse how you win trust. The only thing that creates/builds lasting customer loyalty is trust.

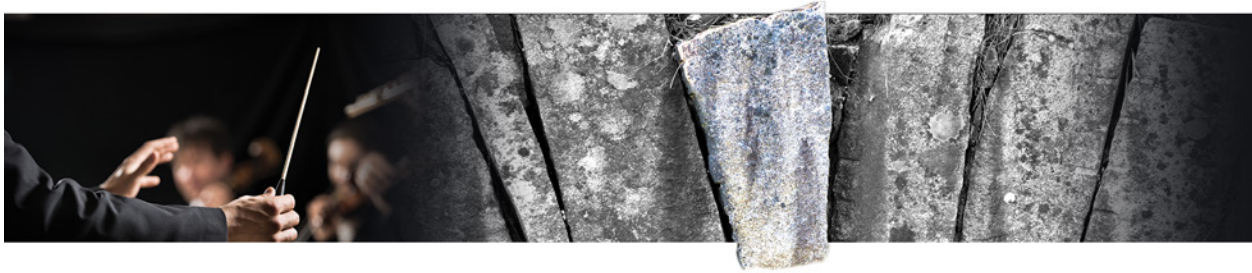
Mercedes-Benz states that “The customer is number 1. We do our very best to understand our customers’ needs and to exceed their expectations, wherever they are each and every day.” Bloomberg “Unleashes the power of information and technology to organize, understand, and improve our world.” Walmart’s primary value is “Service to the Customer. Serve customers by making them our first priority.” Whole Foods’ core value is “We sell the highest-quality natural and organic products available.”

A number of organizations fold statements about their intended customer relationship into their mission statement, leaving their values to describe “how” that mission is to be achieved. The challenge this presents is that the focus on “the customer” can easily become diluted. Far more impactful is to ensure that at least one of the organization’s values connects emotionally with both the customers you want to keep and those you want to win.

6. Do your values work for you in the job market? Do they enhance the organization’s employment brand? Do they inspire the candidate you really want to hire? Does one of the values, in some measure, in some way, endorse growth and personal development? Research indicates that organizations with a winning employment brand are far more successful in landing talent than those who are less adept in this area – not a secondary issue in a job market that is getting ever-tighter.

Know that who you hire today dictates what is possible tomorrow. For those who display mastery in hiring, playing silently in the background is values fit. Does the hiring process identify and, in doing so, disqualify candidates whose background and past performance are misaligned with your values? It’s relatively easy to identify the best candidate. Landing the right candidate means digging deeper. The best way to make your values central to how you operate is to hire the right people in the first place.

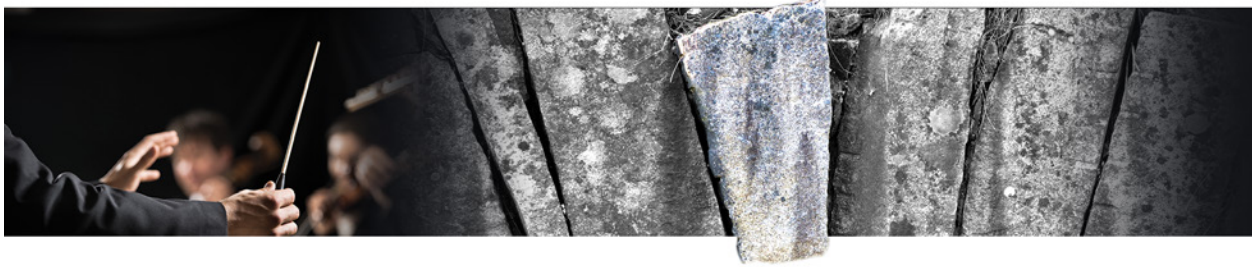
²⁰ In the public sector, values act as a bridge to the community.



One of Google's values states that "You can make money without doing evil." Another is "Learn and be curious." In order to alleviate poverty, TOMS shoe company gifts a pair of shoes to a needy person for every pair sold. Amazon identifies "invent and simplify" as a core value. Microsoft emphasises "continual self-improvement." Four Seasons' core central value is to "honor, respect, and reward its employees." McKinsey includes in their values "Sustain a caring meritocracy." Starbucks highlights "Being present, connecting with transparency, dignity and respect." Sony includes "To deliver new joy, excitement and awe to everyone" in their values.

Every business is different. What's common are people's aspirations, desire for intrinsic job satisfaction, to be treated with respect and that fairness applies to all. Peter the Great's military dictum was, "He who defends everything defends nothing." It may be that your organization's values can't fully cover off inclusion, the customer and employment branding while, at the same time, provide an inspirational/aspirational overview. Leadership is about focus. Focus means setting priorities. That being understood, at least one of your organization values should be market-facing, and another should answer the question, "Why work here?" Of the two, the latter may be the more important. Sir Richard Branson puts it this way, "If you take care of your employees, they will take care of the clients."





Conclusion

How they were treated during the COVID crisis will long last in employees' and customers' minds. The leaders best able to ride the most disruptive aspects of the virus were those where the organization's values were uncontestedly interwoven into the organization's DNA. Where there was doubt, the default action became "live the values." Where there was indecision, the default action became "live the values." Where there was a need to chart a new direction, the default action became "live the values." An outstanding leader never wastes a good crisis!²¹ If, for some reason, things do come off the rails ask yourself, "How do we fix this such that our values are front and centre?" Values matter. In the midst of a crisis, they matter a lot.

There is a case to be made that one of your values is "emotionally dominant" – a specific organization value that, if consistently delivered at a level of excellence, positively impacts the others. If you had to implement only one of your values which one would it be? Take advantage of "the flywheel effect." Invest extra time, effort and resources with the dominant value.

The absence of vibrant and vital values is like sailing into unpredictable seas without a good compass. The right organization values influence the customers you want, the culture you need, the future you deserve. When the values are poorly defined, outdated or largely overlooked, day-to-day decisions become subject to the whims and priorities of the day. Leadership overly shaped by the way the prevailing tide happens to be running isn't leadership at all. Action accompanied by apathy is abdication. Leaders must lead. Leaders do lead!

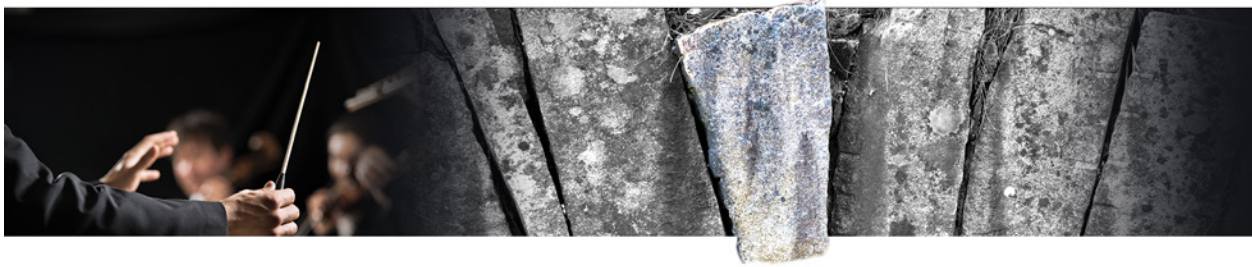
Look to the market leader in any sector and you will find that it's ultimately their culture that separates them from the rest. And the beating heart of that culture? An unswerving commitment to their values. A revitalised Microsoft, Daimler (Mercedes-Benz), Adidas, Starbucks, Lego Group, Southwest Airlines, The Walt Disney Corporation, Sony, The YMCA, Habitat for Humanity, Marine Corp, Doctors Without Borders – organizations that endure, those that excel, those that deliver what others say cannot be done are always values-driven. Always! Great organizations don't *have* values; they *are* their values.

One final thought. As you walk into (digitally connect) your place of work tomorrow, ask yourself a question. "In what way does everything we do – the technology, who we hire, how we amplify the customer's voice, how we run townhall meetings, our website, marketing material, the images used to project who we are, the leadership conversation, team dialogue, what gets challenged, the way we assess team success, the focus on storytelling, the reaction when things go wrong – bring our values to life?" How do I bring the organization's values to life?

²¹ Attributed to Winston Churchill during the bleakest days of WWII.



Now is the winter of
our **DISCONTENT**



John Burdett has worked in over 40 countries as an executive and as a consultant for businesses that are household names. He continues to work on leadership development and organization culture for some of the world's largest corporations. In 2019, his work with ABB's top 240 executives received a major international award for the most innovative leadership development initiative of that year. His ongoing partnership with TRANSEARCH International means that his proprietary work on talent acquisition, in any one year, successfully supports many hundreds of top leadership appointments on six continents.

He has written extensively on executive coaching and was awarded international coach of the year by the Finnish Institute of International Trade. Business graduates at the University of Texas indicated that his material on coaching was the single most valuable learning source they took away from their undergraduate degree. He has also coached numerous executive teams around the world in how to coach. He currently coaches a select group of CEOs. Apart from a range of corporate leadership workshops, he has taught at business schools on both sides of the Atlantic. His work on the MBA program at the University of Toronto received a teaching excellence award.

John holds a doctorate in management development and is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. In addition to numerous business articles and twice being awarded article of the year by MCB publications, he has published 15 books on leadership, talent management, coaching and organization culture. A number of them bestsellers. His Talent Trilogy was completed in 2016. *The A-Z of Organization Culture* came out in 2017. *Tomorrow Will Be Different – Will You?* was published in 2020. In addition to the publications outlined, his five-part *Leadership Beyond Crisis Series* came out in 2021. He has just completed his *Executive Playbook – It's Time to Rethink Succession*.



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