
Values and Leadership

Some notes for
#SysLeadershipMcr

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What are values?

Values are described in different words by different people.

Academics talk about “abstract” ideas that represent a person’s beliefs about modes of conduct or ideal end states, but are not associated with any particular object or situation (Rokeach 1979) or that values represent concepts or beliefs about desirable end states or behaviours that transcend specific situations, guide selection, or evaluation of behaviour and events, and are ordered by relative importance (Schwartz 1992).

These descriptions can be difficult to put to practical use. In his award winning book, “Finding True North” Michael Henderson writes

“Our values are our personal preferences and priorities. Values represent what is most important to us in life.”

Values are challenging to work with precisely because they are ideas that we may never have tried to put into words and because they tend to sit in our unconscious. Psychologists believe that our values are very closely connected with our sense of self. Grunert and Askegaard (1997) put it like this

“Values are commonly regarded as the point of intersection between the individual and the society because they help to know and understand the interpersonal world and guide the individual’s adaptation to the surrounding condition.”

This is akin to using values as windows through which to look out on to the world. They frame our view of what is happening and help us to make sense of what we encounter. Our values are part of how we know or feel what is “like us” and what is “not like us”. We use our values everyday in the decisions that we take. Through becoming more consciously connected with our priority values we can make better quality decisions; chose the actions or attitudes that bring out the best of us and enable us to feel content about the paths that we take.

In his bestselling “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People” Stephen Covey says that Habit No 1 is Be Proactive.

“Reactive people are driven by feelings, by circumstances, by conditions, by their environment. Proactive people are driven by values – carefully thought about, selected and internalized values.”

You have taken the first step towards thinking about and selecting your values by working through the online AVI. The next step is about in Stephens language “internalizing” or developing a sense of conscious connection with your values.

Simply stated a value is a preference, something we would rather experience in our life rather than do without, and it is something that we prioritise above other things.

You and Your Values

Using the AVI process has enabled you to put into words the things that matter most to you in your life at this point in time. Now you can use your values to look back over some of your choices and decisions and gain a greater understanding of why you feel the way you do about those events. It is likely that if you bring to mind something that did not honour your priority values you may not feel happy about it: you may feel cross with yourself for not having done something different; you may feel critical of the choice that you made. Make sure to also look back over things that turned out well; see how your values were lived in those moments and how right that felt.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing as they say. There is no point in us being hard on ourselves for things that are past. It can be useful, however, to understand where our feelings of frustration or disappointment may spring from provided this helps us to move on and harness our values for better results in the future.

What is powerful indeed is to look forward. Look at opportunities and decisions that are coming up and see how to live your priority values more fully in those moments. Values are powerful ideas. They provide us with motivation and our sense of meaning. If you have ever felt moved to shout at someone on the television: a politician, a reporter, a celebrity, it is probably because they were doing or saying something that offended one or more of your priority values. If you have favourite films or books that always have the power to lift your spirits or inspire you to try again it is likely that something in those story lines or characters chimes with one or more of your priority values.

Now you have your personal unique priority values it is your choice whether you decide to use them consciously or not.

About Your Top10E

Introduction

There are two main things that all the researchers and academics agree on in relation to values.

First: values are hierarchical.

This means values sit in a scale of importance in our minds we cannot hold two or more different values as equal in significance or priority.

Second: values sit in clusters that share a focus.

Values exist in a dynamic relationship with our beliefs about the world and our lived experience of how things turn out in practice for someone like us. Different sets of values have different “objects” of attention such as our relationships with people we feel close to which is different to how we conduct ourselves inside a formal organisation.

Minessence Values Framework Clusters

Probably the approach to a framework of motivation that most people have heard of is Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs. This was developed in 1943 and has five levels: Physiological Needs (food, water, warmth, shelter) Safety and Security (protection from danger and injury) Belonging (close relationships) Self Esteem (confidence, competence and achievement) Self Actualisation (using skills and talents, self fulfilment and growth).

You will see some parallels with Maslow in the Minessence Values Framework but here we have eight clusters:

Physical Function	values that relate to protecting ourselves from physical harm
Safety Security	our preference and priority for seeking physical comfort which is usually about emotional support or financial stability
Family and Belonging	focussed on friends and family these values are about seeking an experience of happiness or esteem through close relationships
Organisational	values to do with seeking and experiencing accomplishments within formal organisations and achieving fit with the structure
Self Actualisation	turning attention to our own unique individual mix of skills and talents these values are about what we seek to bring to the party
Emerging Order	values seeking new forms of work and ways of working that are more humane and dignify all parties in the process
Wisdom	attention upon understanding the nature of how things work - universal natural principles– and being able to share these insights with others
Global Transcendence	values concerned with issues of global significance that are greater than self or organisation

Each pair of clusters corresponds to an overarching 'world view' which has an impact upon leadership 'style' – more of that later in the theory section.

To the left hand side of the framework are four clusters of satiable values – these are values which can be 'handled' in such a way as they become satisfied and reduce in priority. This reduction does not mean that they cease to matter rather that we have

steps or strategies in place to ensure they are looked after: if you like we trust ourselves to be like this automatically without having to think about it.

To the right hand side are four clusters of insatiable values. These are values that pull us forward as there is always another chance, another way, another opportunity waiting for us to be active in this way. These values are often very energy giving and are central to our sense of motivation or initiative.

Using Your Values

Good questions to reflect upon with your values include:

- What opportunities do I have or can I create to live my insatiable values more often?
- Am I happy that I have strategies in place to manage my satiable values?
- What could I try if I am not happy that I have strategies in place to manage my satiable values?

The practical question becomes what steps can I take to improve this situation?

(for example examine whether the value is still valid in your modern day life.... remember these values have been part of your personal pattern of thinking for a long while now, maybe your place in the world has changed and you have achieved what you were seeking from prioritising that value in the beginning in which case it has done its job and can be mentally crossed off your list)

- Are my highest priority values working well for me – bringing me the outcomes I want?

If not then how shall I improve this situation?

(for example reduce the number, change the priority order, change how you use or direct the energy in one or more values)

Final Thoughts on Your Values

Values are dynamic and can change in response to changes in our underpinning beliefs and/or changes in the external world.

Your way of approaching the world and your relationships has done a great job of getting you to where you are today. If you are happy with how things are turning out then that's great and your map gives you insight into how to look after and conserve your current experiences. If you want something else then refocusing your values is a practical step forwards in creating the life you want to lead.

Values and Leadership

“The least of things with a meaning is worth more in life than the greatest of things without it”

Carl Jung

It's all about meaning.

Every day we are all bombarded with far more information than we could ever hope to consciously process. We see things, hear things; smell, touch and taste things which supply our brains with data some of which is useful and some of which is not. This filtering out of the 'not useful' takes place automatically in a fraction of a second and thereby shapes our sense of the world in which we live.

Two people walk into a crowded bar together. Person A is a sports fan and notices a semi-final match on a widescreen at the far end of the room, Person B is a real ale drinker and notices that only two of the five beer pulls on the bar are in service today. They turn to one another simultaneously and respectively say A 'this place is great' and B 'this place is terrible'. Same place, same time: opposite assessments.

To make it through our filters – our Reticular Activating System, and then get processed by our brains, information has to mean something to us. Values form those filters through which information is either determined as 'meaningless' to someone like me or 'meaningful' to someone like me.

Daniel Goleman, the founding father of Emotional Intelligence, describes personal values as:

*“.. not lofty abstractions, but intimate credos that we may never quite articulate in words so much as **feel**. Our values translate into what has emotional power or resonance for us, whether negative or positive.”*

He regards values as an “inner rudder” and cites a study of knowledge workers where the conscious awareness of its use, in the selection of actions, was shown to enable individuals to deliver optimal performance.

This impact of values on personal conduct is echoed by a whole host of other researchers such as Professor Adrian Furnham

“Attitudes, beliefs and values do shape (predict) behaviour. They determine in part the sorts of jobs people seek and shun; those they revel and rebel in; and those where they maybe optimally productive or unproductive”

Values are universal – everybody, every team and every organisation has them – there is no choice in that. The choice comes in either working in ways that are consciously connected to values or not.

“A leader will find it difficult to articulate a coherent vision unless it expresses his core values, his basic identity. One must first embark upon the formidable journey of self-discovery in order to create a vision with authentic soul”

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

Values Theory

During the intervening seventy years or so since Maslow shared his pyramid many more people have become interested in what drives motivation and why people do what they do. A variety of theoretical frameworks of human values have emerged and that not all researchers agree with one another. Two things that all researchers agree upon

- 1) Individual values sit in clusters and clusters sit next to one another in a specific sequence - not dissimilar to Maslow's original five levels
- 2) Values are hierarchical – they are prioritised by an individual or a group in a rank order and the higher up the order they come the more energy (or resistance) they will stimulate

From more than ten years experience in this field there two particular models that I have found to be useful in a wide variety of situations: the Schwartz Quasi-Circumplex Model (so called because it is almost but not quite a circle) and the Minessence Values Framework.

Schwartz

Schwartz defines values as 'desirable states, objects or goals, or behaviours transcending specific situations and applied as normative standards to judge and to choose among alternative models of behaviour'.

His model contains 10 clusters of values under the following headings:

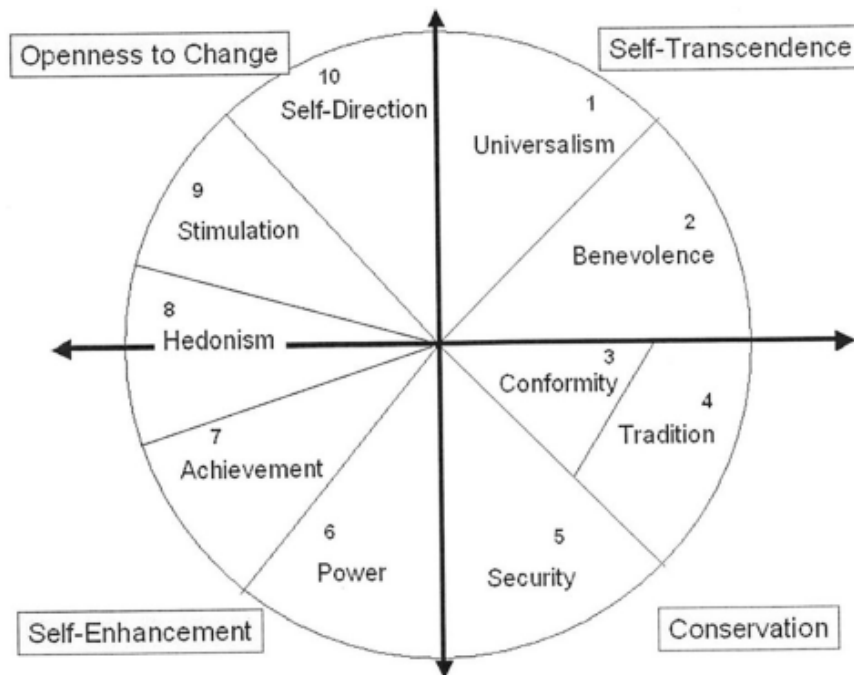
Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of other people
Benevolence	Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact
Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms
Tradition	Respect, commitment, and acceptance of customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide the self
Security	Safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships and of self
Power	Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people, and resources
Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards

Hedonism Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself

Stimulation Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life

Self-Direction Independent thought and action; choosing, creating, exploring

The 10 clusters are arranged in almost but not quite a circle like this:



One of the things this model helps us to see is those values that are most likely to harmonise with one another and those values that are most likely to conflict with one another.

So let's suppose a communications team has to construct a compelling case for a change programme and present it to a sales team which thrives on a culture of competition, targets, and deadlines. Let's further suppose the prime driver for the company is one of wanting to take the initiative (rather than wait to be pushed by regulation and/or public pressure) and shift practices to be more customer and community focussed. An argument drawing those ideas (values) that sit up in the Self-Direction and Universalism clusters will make no sense whatsoever to the sales team and they actually won't even be able to 'hear' the rationales because their filters (which sit in Achievement) will be rejecting some or even most of the information before it ever reaches their conscious mind.

In effect Schwartz tells us that we cannot walk someone across the circle. If we want to walk someone or some people to a different perspective then we need an argument that makes sense in terms of progressing through neighbouring clusters. So to get from 'Achievement' to 'Universalism' we can go clockwise or anti clockwise – direction doesn't matter. Let's go clockwise as it is slightly shorter.

Achievement:	this company wouldn't be what it is today if this team hadn't achieved such great results in the past
Hedonism:	there have been so many causes for great celebration – parties to celebrate awards – the big chairman's dinner
Stimulation:	and everyone knows that this team with its skills and track record still has masses of potential and bucket loads of ideas for the future
Self-Direction:	and it's that initiative and va va voom that is going to be truly key as we work to remain ahead of the industry by taking a bold step into 21 st century stakeholder focussed relationships, yes it means changes for everyone across the company but it also means opportunity for each of us to really shine
Universalism:	every part of this company matters when it comes to being able to deliver and we want to develop in ways that look out for the best for all the people: staff, customers, neighbours or the wider community and that's why we need you to.....

To the ears and eyes of someone with an achievement focus the above argument makes a lot more sense than jumping straight in with a big shining vision about how the world is changing (or already changed) and we need to change too. Also notice that in each step there is an 'echo' of achievement in the words – awards, track record, shine, best – so we don't leave what really matters to them behind.

Bear in mind that 'values' are "latent constructs" (that means ideas) involved in evaluating activities or outcomes, they have a general rather than a specific nature (so they pervade everything), and apply at multiple levels (me, you, us, them.....) Roe & Ester 1999 and values have a "coherent pattern of interrelations that helps define their meaning to a culture, group, or individual" Smith & Schwartz 1997. This makes understanding how patterns of values fit together a key strand of our practice.

Let's return to our eight cluster framework.

Minessence Values Framework.

Here values are defined in lay terms as "life-style priorities which are consistently preferred about other things'. We will go 'out of our way' to have these priorities in our life rather than live without them.

Each pair of clusters corresponds to an overarching 'world view' which influences leadership style. We can get a sense of which world view is dominant for an individual or an organisation by working out which clusters are present in the narrative people use to describe their perceptions and by noticing the focus of their decision making.

People will tend to have priority values in two or more clusters so depending on the context of the interaction you may find you notice different priorities at different times. This diagram shows each of the world views and the priority clusters from which they arise.

Minessence Values Framework							
		Family/Social World-View Caring for and supporting family, friends and peers. Security through camaraderie.		Self Actualisation/Service World-View Developing one's unique abilities and talents so as to better serve others. Improve the lot of others by being a competent facilitator.		Symbiotic System World-View Developing symbiotic relationships between people and organisations for the purpose of transforming society	
Alien/Threatened World-View Protecting self and others from harm in a hostile environment. Doing whatever is necessary to survive.		Organisational World-View Working in, or managing, a successful enterprise. Developing one's competencies to the highest level possible		Collaborative Project World View Working together with others on a project or common cause to transform the <i>world-of-work</i>		Global Transformation World-View Using the media and other technologies to influence people's world-views in order to transform the existing world-order.	
Self Preservation	Security	Belonging	Organisation	Self Actualisation	Emerging Order	Wisdom	Global Transformation
⌚ less open to change				more open to change ⌚			

In general terms those world-views to the left of centre can be quite conservative and the world-views to the right of centre can be quite open. Each world-view can successfully communicate with the two world-views that it spans so:

Self Actualisation/Service gets on well with Collaborative Project and with Organisational.

World-views that are adjacent or separate struggle to communicate because they essentially live in different worlds – ever heard someone say ‘what planet is he/she living on?’

How does world view affect leadership style? If we treat leadership as something that is experienced by ‘followers’ rather than a set of traits or competencies deliberately exercised by an individual’ then the world views approach starts to make sense. What those around us see/hear/feel in their interactions with us depends on the priority values shaping our behaviours at that time.

Minessence Values Framework Leadership & World View							
		Family/Social		Self Actualisation/Service		Symbiotic System	
		Autocrat Benevolent paternalist/maternalist with followers who 'blindly' obedient servants		Enabler Engaging leader acts as clarifier and supporter with followers who listen to gain clarity and find their place		Servant Collegial approach with followers who are interdependent participants	
Alien/Threatened		Organisational		Collaborative Project		Global Transformation	
Dictator Tyrant with oppressed followers who are totally dependent		Transactional Efficient leader with followers who are loyally devoted to the organisation and follow rules as laws		Charismatic Acts as facilitator, strategist, creator with followers who participate with peers to produce		Visionary Transcendent focus working through and with networks and peers to influence system wide outcomes	
Self Preservation	Security	Belonging	Organisation	Self Actualisation	Emerging Order	Wisdom	Global Transformation
☹ more hostile to others				less hostile to others ☺			
☹ less tolerance of uncertainty				more tolerance of uncertainty ☺			

Remember that values are dynamic and the ones that come to the fore in any given situation are influenced by the outcome being sought and the underpinning beliefs that shape the sense of the world of the individual at any given time.

So consider Manager A who is a sweetheart 95% of the time and everybody loves him. Out of the blue there is a rash of grumbles about how he is speaking to everyone and the phrase 'personality transplant' is being bandied around. If Manager A has an enabling style 95% of the time but has recently been delegated something really quite overwhelming then under that pressure his active values will move to the left and he will default to Transactional: apparently overnight becoming obsessed with deadlines, standards and doing things 'by the book'. As a consequence of his world becoming uncertain because the big job has thrown him off his stride his personal style has shifted left.

It happens to us all from time to time. The Enabling style though is the most vulnerable to being 'misunderstood' in difficult circumstances as it straddles the centre of the framework and if it tips from insatiable values into satiable or vice versa it feels to followers like a very big change.

Applying the Theory

A conscious connection with values helps by enabling coaches/managers/leaders to appreciate why the world looks as it does to them yet appears different to others.

“Whether or not you can observe a thing depends upon the theory that you use. It is the theory which decides what can be observed.”

Albert Einstein

It enables us to listen more accurately to what people around them are meaning (instead of what they are saying) and then to respond to the people with information/guidance in language that makes sense given the world view of the people around them.

“A leader will find it difficult to articulate a coherent vision unless it expresses his core values, his basic identity. One must first embark upon the formidable journey of self-discovery in order to create a vision with authentic soul”

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

For effective communication an awareness of the theory helps us to break down our message into constituent elements and then sequence those elements in a way that makes sense working either left to right through the Minessence Framework or working round the circle for Schwartz.

“The most powerful person in the world is the storyteller. The storyteller sets the vision, values and agenda of an entire generation to come”

Steve Jobs

If you only harness one value consciously to get you through the minefield of communication I recommend Empathy – to deeply relate to others in such a way as they feel understood. Truly being understood regularly makes the difference between success and failure.

Parting thoughts and personal lessons from my values practice

In an ideal world the first step is to really know your own values and understand how they prompt you to make sense of what is going on around you. Start to notice what you notice and figure out why you notice what you notice.

“The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice. And because we fail to notice that we fail to notice there is little we can do to change until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds”.

Daniel Goleman

Use the knowledge of your own values to challenge/examine your own underpinning assumptions about the current and future situations – this will help you explain things in terms that make more sense to others.

Tell the whole story, truthfully, as often as you can, to as many people as want to know. The more people that hear the complete narrative (that draws upon a set of aligned values clusters) about why we are doing what we are doing in the way that we are doing it the faster meaningful understanding will be built.

If/when things do not go according to plan say so – in a constructive way that does not gloss over what has gone on but simply states the facts.

Some senior people in conventional organisations appear to feel that to explain is to appear vulnerable or expose shortcomings. I believe however, if senior people do not explain coherently what is going on is to run the risk of appearing arrogant, distant and uncaring about the people and their futures – this does nothing to inspire acceptance and commitment.

“Always do what is right. It will gratify most of the people and astound the rest”
Mark Twain

Finally

I started out in grown up life as a zoologist. I spent two years in a West African jungle helping to rehabilitate captive chimpanzees for a life in the wild. I experienced firsthand just how much change in a short space of time we can cope with if we want to. We want to do those things that most closely align with our highest priority values – that’s what brings us happiness.

Human beings are fantastically equipped to change. Not only do we have tremendous powers of learning and the motor skills to alter the physical world in which we live but we can also conceive ideas of different ways of being. We can try out potential situations in our heads before we ever have to set actual foot in the room. It’s odd really that such a well equipped and versatile life form should apparently struggle so much with the one thing that is a constant in the modern world – change.

You may know this quote from John Kenneth Galbraith, an American economist,

“faced with the choice between changing one’s mind and proving that there is no need to do so, almost everyone gets busy on the proof”

As manager/leader we are in the privileged position of being able to build authentic, elegant narratives that bridge the values clusters that matter to the people around us, thereby making it possible for people to feel secure on their own foundations while opening their minds to the possibilities of the future.

Go for it.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

FAQ

Questions people often ask about their values

Q. Am I “normal”?

A. Unlike many other forms of profiling tool such as personality tests the AVI does not put people into “types”. At the time of writing approaching 18,000 people have used the AVI and no two people have come out with exactly the same values profile. This means that there is no such thing as “normal” – every individual is unique.

Q. Are my values alright?

A. Values are neutral – neither good nor bad. You will have your own reasons for the values that you prioritise and your values are a big part of what has enabled you to become the person you are. So if who you are is exactly who you want to be, not just now but in the future as well, then these values are perfect for you so carry on as usual.

If however you have ambitions that you want to achieve or changes that you would like to make in your life changing your values could help. It maybe that prioritising one or two other values or adopting a different approach to living the values that you already have will help you drive yourself to where you want to be.

Q. Have these values always been my priorities?

A. Maybe and maybe not. It is not unusual for our priorities to shift as we grow up and as we accumulate new experiences. Someone at an early stage in their career might focus upon studying and gaining certificates to help them progress; someone who has achieved the level they wanted to get to might focus on sharing their experience to help junior workers.

Equally someone who starts out valuing education/certification for reasons of career progression might still value it later on if they have discovered pleasure in learning for its own sake and simply enjoy the experience of having their expertise confirmed through gaining qualifications. This would be an example of a value staying the same but the experience of that value changing.

Q. What are the best values to have?

A. No single value is intrinsically “better” than any other single value. It could be argued that the best values to have are ones with which you feel a genuine and heartfelt relationship as opposed to picking values off a list because they sound impressive or because other people say they have them.

Q. Does it matter if my values are different to those of my family, friends or colleagues?

A. No. In fact it is highly likely that some or even all of your values are different and that you all get along great on some things and not so great on other things. What matters is that you know what your priority values are and can use them to form meaningful relationships with other people.

Knowing your priority values helps you to understand why certain behaviours or attitudes in others may irritate you. Having this insight creates an opportunity to stand back mentally and ask yourself whether your response is appropriate and if not, to choose to respond differently. I have a priority value around simplicity and used to get very frustrated in meetings when I felt people were over complicating things. I now appreciate that other people value order and procedure and to simply “cut to the chase” would have felt completely wrong to them. I learned to hold my tongue or send someone else to those meetings instead.

Q. What if I don't like one or more of my values?

A. Simple answer is get rid of it.

Decide to stop prioritising it above other things and over time it will fade. Although values tend to sit in our unconscious they can be changed through conscious thought. The unconscious takes its instructions from the conscious mind. So making a clear and deliberate decision such as – I am going to make enjoying my free time more important than worrying about whether my parent/boss/friend/partner/child would approve of my choice of leisure activity – will diminish the thing I used to value but don't want anymore.

Q. Can I just choose a new value?

A. Yes you can. Bringing a new value to life starts with choosing or preferring it to something else. The harder work comes with remembering to prioritise it over other things which may mean breaking old habits.

Suppose I used to prioritise efficiency more than empathy. Now I have decided at this point in my life gaining an even greater understanding of those around me is more important than keeping an eye on the clock. There are likely to be times, particularly in the early days, when for example I may interrupt someone so that I can get the conversation finished in order to get moving on the next task just because that's what I used to do when efficiency was at the top of my list. It is important not to be too hard on yourself when you are moving from one approach to another, just notice when you are being pulled in the old direction and alter course.

Glossary

Beliefs. Assumptions or convictions that a person holds to be true regarding people, concepts, or things. They come from our life experience and are open to being reformed based upon new experience.

Ethics. Ethics are the externally stated and agreed code or standards by which behaviours are evaluated for their morality – their rightness or wrongness.

Focus Values. The values of the present which when “lived” provide a sense of fulfilment and richness of meaning. If someone is unable to live these values they may feel stressed; often additional training or support systems will remove the barriers to living the focus values.

Foundation Values. Usually more important when a person is quite young, they form a foundation for life and are rooted in the past. If a person is unable to “live” their focus values the foundation values (which are satiable) increase in importance.

Morals. Our adopted viewpoints on what is right and wrong, good and bad.

Organisational Values. Shared mental constructs about the worth or importance of people, concepts or things in the organisation. They underpin the organisation’s identity. They indicate what it stands for. They come from the collective beliefs people hold about the organisation.

Principle. A basic truth or understanding about how “things” work. It is sourced in our beliefs and/or knowledge about how the “world works”. If you know the principles that underpin some action, then you will know, “if I do ‘X’, then I know ‘Y’ will happen”.

Values. Mental constructs about the worth or importance of people, concepts or things. They are lifestyle priorities. They spring from and are very closely related to our beliefs. A value may describe something you believe in while the belief itself is the reason why you are certain about that thing.

Vision Values. These values paint a picture of the type of world a person would like to live in. Vision values are powerful motivators and encourage people to experience their focus values in everyday activity. Vision values are always insatiable.

“Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.”

Carl Jung (1875-1961)