

are your values actually what you value?

a case for inclusive values development

by giselle diego

It's graduate recruitment season. You're sitting in the meeting room waiting for the next candidate to walk in the room. But you're the nervous one. You know that you are going to be asked again about your organisation's culture and values.

You should probably check and see if they're all reading the same HBR article no doubt titled 'how to be a discerning interviewee' or 'why values are the best indicator of whether a workplace is the right place for you'. Maybe the Netflix manifesto is still doing the rounds?'

You're nervous because the last three times you've been asked about your organisation's values you've stumbled through it, rattled off a list of nouns that could be used for any organisation. If values are supposed to be timeless why can't you put your hand on your heart and speak to them confidently? You feel that while they still hold true they seem to be what Lencioni (2002) calls the 'permission to play' values. You've been thinking about this since that first candidate asked, 'What are your core values? What is at the heart of what the organisation values?' At the moment they don't feel sacrosanct. And they should. If you're feeling like this, then how can you expect your employees to live and breathe the values?

'The actual company values as opposed to the nice-sounding values, are shown by who gets rewarded, promoted or let go.'

'Actual company values are the behaviours and skills that are valued in fellow employees.'

Netflix Culture: Freedom & Responsibility

Over the last 18 months we've seen increased interest among clients in values projects. We can surmise that CEOs and management teams are having some version of that internal dialogue. They are searching for an expression of their organisation's values that is compelling, meaningful to employees and a genuine expression of what the organisation values.

We have seen a shift in how organisations want to approach examining and redeveloping their values. Our clients want to engage the entire organisation in the values redevelopment process, which flies in the face of the dominant views in the literature (for example, Lencioni 2002) much of which argues that values should not be built by consensus. We are certainly seeing the tide turning towards a more collaborative approach.

According to Schein (1992), shared values are just one of the three expressions of an

organisation's culture, the others being tangible artefacts (for example, company statements, awards), tacit assumptions and unspoken rules. The development of values for our clients is seen not only as an expression of an organisation's culture, but the process itself is also a way of fostering and strengthening culture.

The rise in popularity of 'manifestos' of culture championed by the tech elite (for example Netflix¹, Zappos) is indicative of a renewed emphasis on workplace culture as critical to employee engagement. The employee work contract has changed; workers have become more mobile; they demand more from their employer and employee engagement is being redefined as creating 'irresistible workplaces' (Bersin 2015). This trend provides a mandate for organisations to use inclusive processes when redefining their values as it places culture front and centre and signals to employees that they are part of it.

Right thinking

Your organisation's values should be an expression of what behaviours, mindsets, and skills are coveted in an organisation because they represent what your organisation is about. There is an increasing focus on values, culture and behaviours as critical aides to a successful organisation. We are seeing the benefits of applying an inclusive values development process, involving all layers of the organisation.

¹ The Netflix Culture manifesto has been viewed over 15 million times

At Right Lane we have worked with clients on two distinct approaches for inclusive values development:

1. Culture champions

The client:

- Our client, an Australian based global company in tech and digital advertising, wanted to revamp their values to better reflect their organisation, which operates in a fast paced environment, has expanded into new geographies and grown its market share.
- The CEO had one clear condition for the project: it had to be led and wholly owned by the people, not the leaders.

The approach:

- Right Lane facilitated a workshop at the beginning of this process with a small group of 'culture champions' who had been selected to drive the process. In the workshop we defined a compelling story for change; put their old values into 'therapy' to understand what we wanted to keep and what needed to change; developed tests to be used for funnelling ideas throughout the engagement process; and set up the project architecture (project plan and communication plan).
- As part of the process, Right Lane developed 50 creative staff engagement ideas, both in person and online approaches, for the champions to use as their starting point to develop their plans for seeking input from across the organisation.

The outcome:

- The champions drove a broad based engagement process both in Australia and in all international offices.
- The inputs were collated and synthesised into draft values, which were then presented and considered by the senior leadership of the organisation for approval.
- The values were launched at a global event and the client is committed to embedding the values as a continuous and living process.

2. Ask and listen

The client:

- Our client, working in the financial services sector, wanted to define new values and corresponding behaviours to better serve their people and aspirations.

The approach:

- The client coordinated a series of interactions with all employees using different methods; the intention behind this was to ensure the organisation captured the nuances arising from different perspectives:
 - Vox pops: employees were randomly selected and asked a series of questions; for example: What motivates you to do your best at work? What is special about working here?
 - A series of focus groups to get people talking about the organisation using different lenses and scenarios. During the focus groups a graphic facilitator captured the outcomes of each session on a series of posters.
 - An organisation wide online survey.
- Right Lane facilitated a workshop with a cross functional team of people from different levels (board members, executives, and staff) to review the inputs and land a set of values that did justice to their employees' perspectives, but would also serve the purpose of the organisation.

The outcome:

- A truly inclusive forum for decision making; as one participant noted: 'I think the participants all felt special playing a key role in developing the new values and behaviours'.
- A set of values statements and corresponding behaviours that employees can share and feel proud of.

A values development process provides your organisation with a rare opportunity to put yourselves under a microscope and grapple with the more 'existential' questions while maintaining a strengths-based focus. It is a challenging and rewarding process.



References

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- Lencioni, P 2002, 'Make your values mean something', *Harvard Business Review*, July.
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want to know more?

If you would like Right Lane to facilitate an inclusive values development process please contact **Giselle Diego**:
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About Right Lane

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We employ our distinctive ideas and processes, and our absolute commitment to delivery, to help clients we care about pursue their inspiring missions.

We work alongside clients who do great work within the sectors they operate, and we are excited to be involved in creating outcomes that truly make a difference.

We are an ethical consulting firm with a strong belief in the work we do, and with a passion to give back to the broader community with the skills and expertise available within our walls.

Right Lane was established in 1997 to help private, not for profit and public sector clients to clarify and accelerate their future plans. Over the past 20 years, we have helped the executive teams and boards of more than 150 organisations to define and adapt their direction and strategy, identify and clarify their priorities, align their efforts with their aspirations, get their major projects started and finished, and measure and improve their performance.

Our areas of focus

- Developing and managing strategy and planning processes for clients
- Leading strategic growth projects, such as pre-merger analysis, pricing, new product feasibility, marketing expenditure effectiveness and growth options evaluation
- Implementing strategy through aligning and engaging the organisation, and measuring and monitoring performance
- Assisting clients with governance projects – from board culture and capabilities to board appraisals and reviews

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