

## Engaging people with organisational values

One of the ideas that we share on our seminars is that individuals' behaviour can be driven both consciously and non-consciously; deliberate and 'free-flow'. As implied by the phrase '*free-flow*', behaviours come easier to us and are more 'high-performing' when they are driven 'naturally' or without conscious thought. [Be wary of the phrase 'high-performing' in this context. We can be non-consciously high-performing even if the result is disastrous. Hence, our use of the phrase relates to fact that we can do things faster and more efficiently when we don't think about it, regardless of whether the outcome is positive or negative].

The reason that our non-conscious process is so efficient is that it uses our engrained beliefs, habits and attitudes to circumvent the need for rational thought which, by comparison, is an extremely slow process and easily disrupted by stress and pressure. In addition to speed, our non-conscious driven behaviour is often perceived by others as far more genuine than deliberate, carefully thought out actions.

So, why is it that organisational values are far too often not engrained into the behaviour of people, even when they consciously 'agree' with them? The first big stumbling block is the fact that the organisational values need to be engrained into the non-conscious beliefs of the individuals, not merely 'agreed with' after a brief consideration. In other words, individuals need to either join organisations with values in line with their own, or make effective adjustments to their own beliefs, habits and attitudes. If they do not do this then, to align with organisational values, they need to pretend to be something they are not and behave in ways that require conscious and rational thought. This a bit like being pleasant to someone you don't like. You can manage it for a while then it becomes hard work and, under pressure, your true thinking emerges. So, building individuals' alignment with organisational values requires careful planning and process.

Another challenge is that organisational values are often expressed using a single word or short phrase and this creates a vulnerability to two potential problems. Firstly, individuals will interpret a word or phrase in different ways. For example, "respect" will mean very different things for individuals across a diverse range of contexts, roles, cultures and relationships. Secondly, we often use words that are inherently broad and poorly defined or offered from a different language.

In a similar way to our approach to high-performance goal setting, we need to create clarity, commitment and action with regard to our organisational values and include this process within the Involvement Culture. Clarity comes from people telling their own story of the values alive in their context at an individual and team level. It is the individual and team stories and actions that need to be in alignment not the word or label attached to it.

Commitment comes from a genuine connection to personal wellbeing, purpose and emotional significance. We align with the organisational values because we believe this will help us be who we want to be, achieve what we want to achieve, have the type of relationships we want to have, feel valued and empowered, and feel good about ourselves and our actions.

In our experience, there is generally a good level of conscious agreement around values. In fact, groups often choose very similar values even across a wide variety of contexts. The challenge is where to go from there.

For example, let's say you have chosen a set of values and your leadership team have created brief descriptions of these to help people focus down from broad labels (words).

- Team leaders work with their teams to create contextual descriptions of what each value means to the team in their own context. This helps people to connect and align the organisational values to their own daily lives and priorities.
- We encourage teams to create a charter in the form of two lists: behaviours that team members agree to do and not do to support the values. This further clarifies the 'values in action' and provides a framework for internal accountability – a key characteristic of high-performing teams.
- To help shift from words to actions we have used a process involving posters showing images of people engaging in behaviours that represent the values in the team context. This is particularly powerful and influential for clients, patients, and others who move around the organisation seeing the same values poster but with different images showing behaviours in the various contexts.

Of course, this is dependent on identifying values that are relevant and applicable across the organisation and absolutely dependent on key culture-leaders modelling the values consistently through their own behaviour.