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Values of Organizations and Leadership

Contributors: Beverly Irby, Genevieve Brown & Ling Ling Yang

Edited by: Fenwick W. English

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Values are defined as beliefs and attitudes held by individual persons or collectivities. Values are also viewed as the principles that guide behavior. The values held within a group or an organization are the values shared by the group's members, which go beyond individual values.

An organization's or group's beliefs, desires, behavior, accountability, initiatives, innovation, integrity, and flexibility reveal its core values, which influence organizational perceptions and decisions. Core values are timeless, guiding principles that require no external justification. Such principles have intrinsic value and importance to those inside the organization. An organization's culture is made up of core values that unify the social dimensions of organizations. Core values become the foundation and conscience of the organization, which distinguish successful organizations from the unsuccessful.

Within enduring organizations, values became the organizations' essential and enduring tenets. Values cannot be instilled into people; people must already have a predisposition to holding them. However, it is acknowledged that a clear and well-articulated ideology will attract people to the enterprise whose personal values are compatible with the organization's core values, and conversely, may repel those whose personal values are not similar. The task for executives is to find and retain people who have a disposition to share the organization's core values.

Values inform leadership practices. Prominent leadership researchers recognize the significant correlation among attitudes, values, beliefs, leadership, and organizations. In their 2002 Synergistic Leadership Theory (SLT), Beverly Irby and Genevieve Brown stressed the interconnectedness of four particular factors: (a) beliefs and values, and attitudes; (b) leadership behavior; (c) external factors; and (d) organizational structure. The SLT theory proposes that an alignment between the leader's attitudes, values, and beliefs and those of the organization are important to the success of the leader and the organization. Without this alignment, those who do not share the similar attitudes, values, and beliefs may counter changes necessary for reform with resistance.

Sometimes value conflict occurs within organizations when the interest of one group indicates one course of action, while the other group's welfare demands another. Many scholars and researchers on value conflict resolution stress the "person-situation fit" in organizational settings, which is generally defined as the congruence between norms and values of organizations and the values of persons. Thus, leaders have two responsibilities: (a) to articulate, model, and emphasize the core values of the organization so that all members work together toward meeting organizational goals and (b) to make the effort to incorporate employees' values so that there is a congruity between an organization's values and the values of its members.

Beverly Irby, , Genevieve Brown & , and Ling Ling Yang

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Further Readings and References

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