

### ***HR in the Gulf Region:***

## Organizational Values are They Useful?

By Dave Millner

MR. MILLNER: Hi, I'm Dave Millner and I wanted to talk about organizational values. Are they useful? Now, a lot of businesses, especially in the gulf region, seem to strongly talk about and espouse their organization's values. And it made me think, why do we bother with values, for any organization, when there are just so many different functions, units, teams and individuals—all of whom have their own way of working? Is values just another fad?

Well, from my perspective, organizational values define the standards that govern the behavior of individuals within an organization. Now, without them, individuals would be left to pursue behaviors that are in line with their own individual value systems—and, of course, those may not be the type of behaviors that the organization wants to encourage. Now, as a concept, that sounds fine, but how realistic is it?

Given the challenges in the region, where complexity and change are everyday occurrences, organizations need to be able to relate to some common language in a way of operating that says something about how the organization should operate with its customers, its colleagues and its suppliers. Clearly, the organization's values must be in line with its purpose or mission, the critical success factors and the culture envision that it's trying to achieve. Remember, the vision is a statement of a desired future state—and this describes the overall goals and aims of an organization. And the values of an organization can, therefore, help to support and reflect the cultural brand of an organization, outline how work should be completed and provide some collective leadership that encourages common norms of behavior for everyone that will support where the organization wants to get to.

Now, values, in isolation, are by no means the complete answer because, as with all things, they must support and encourage high performance—and not just reflect some nice-to-do things that makes everyone feel good about themselves. They must not be about vague labels that people can interpret in different ways. For them to be useful, they need to be defined and explained in simple terms that let people know what the organization means by the values and the types of examples that could be—for example, trust, openness, teamwork. If you don't, the organization has wasted its time and the values will end up being just another poster on the wall that people ignore. Now, it's one thing to have a set of organizational values, you know, which may be on a poster or may be in a folder on your desk, but it's quite another thing to have living values which shape the culture, the way that things get done around here.

To ensure that your organization has values that have some meaning, that's the way in which it operates, there are some key actions that, to my mind, can make a difference. Firstly, communicate the values constantly, both internally and externally.

Secondly, acknowledge and thank those people who've achieved something that particularly emphasizes the values. Make a fuss about it.

Thirdly, the values should be explicitly available as part of the recruitment process so that individuals know what's expected of them in this respect. With the behaviors associated with the values, you can integrate these into most criteria-based processes to gauge their organizational fit. And this is particularly vital in the gulf region where there is a lot of expat recruitment and there is a need to ensure that you're recruiting, not just the expertise that you're after, but also those people who can operate in the way in which the organization would want you to.

Fourthly, I think we need to ensure that feedback is given to those individuals whose behavior does not reflect the values of the organization. If people are allowed to reflect behavior that contradicts the values, then over time there's a clear danger that these would just usurp the desired values, particularly if it's the more dynamic,

dominant individuals who are espousing these contradictory values.

And finally, I think we need to make sure that all the associated people programs and processes that promote behavioral assessment development—things such as performance management, recruitment, promotion, selection, training, learning, development, etc.—that these are all changed or refined to reflect the values and the associated behaviors. Take every opportunity to reinforce and to promote them. The organization has to be serious about them, otherwise, just don't bother using values.

Now, values frameworks can help significantly to improve the quality of management by promoting what is required from its people. The crucial question to be answered, though, is that if you're serious about organizational values, then you must be rigorous in how they're developed, and more importantly, how they're implemented across the organization. They must be a part of the organization's strategy, otherwise, their intrinsic value will never fully materialize. So why bother about them then? Values are another way of helping to shape behavior across your organization. And we all know that behavior is an integral part of driving performance and business results. Can you leave it to chance? I don't think you can, because if you do, your competitors can be guaranteed not to.

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