

Turning values into actions

We are what we do, not what we say we will do.

Behind the most successful brands and businesses there are always values – explicit principles that guide attitudes and behaviour - to ensure that promises made are delivered.

Values make an impact on all stakeholders, internal and external; and they have never been examined more carefully and taken more seriously as a measurement of the core strength of a business.

Inside the company they are the touchstone for leaders who want to create a performance culture, critical to the process of driving through change. Among customers, once stated they are an unequivocal basis for trust – brand loyalty depends on them. They shape relationships with suppliers are increasingly examined by shareholders and they form the foundations of Corporate Responsibility policy. Values are, therefore, of fundamental importance; an asset. But not one that can be bought or easily imported; they come from within. Live by them and you enhance the worth of your business. Fail to, and you undermine it. They are relatively easy to write and hard to deliver. And once they are posted above the door there are no hiding places, because we are what we do, not what we say we will do.

In the bloodstream of the organisation,
not just a tick in the box.

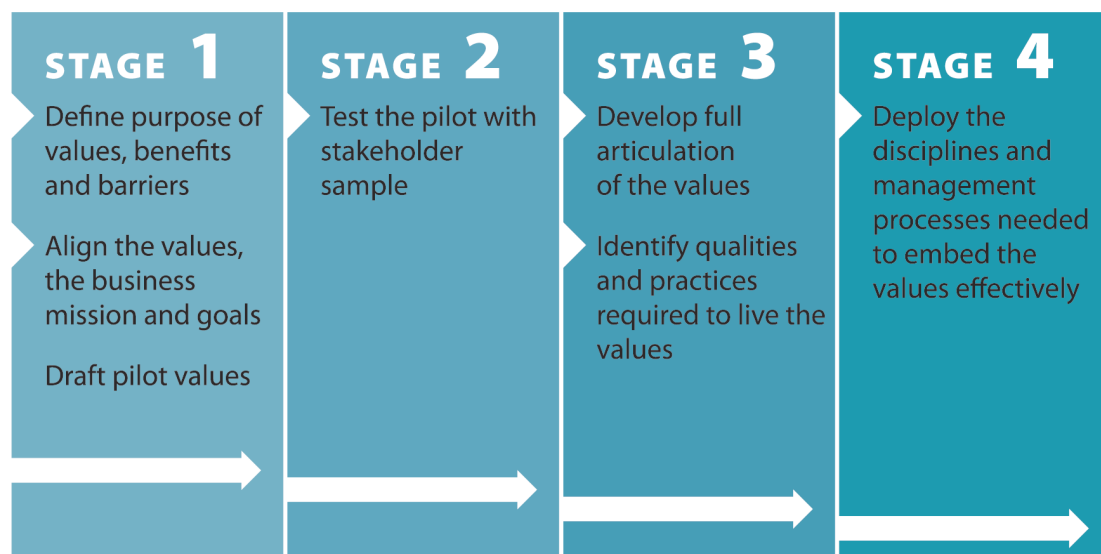
Talk to today's CEOs and values are on their personal agenda; leaders are determined to ensure values are in the bloodstream of the organisation, not just a tick in the box. They want values turned into behaviour that outclasses competitors and achieves missions and goals.

This paper looks at the approach developed by Smith Associates Kline – over many values-led assignments – for guiding clients through the challenge of defining, communicating and embedding values that are authentic, truly relevant to stakeholders and that act as a key driver in business performance and reputation.

The process described below is a typical one, not a blueprint; every organisation is different and by definition values must take account of culture and the reality of “the way we do things around here”. To impose a values process that is alien to a business would be an odd way to achieve authenticity. However, the process elements described here provide the basis for a disciplined, consultative values development method. It is an approach we have proven in different situations:

- with large, diverse, geographically dispersed organisations employing many thousands of people
- with small, emerging businesses
- with businesses focusing on values seriously for the first time
- and with businesses re-visiting existing values within a transformation strategy.

Key steps for defining and embedding values



Stage 1 - Steering Group and workshops

Define purpose of values to your organisation and set the framework for their development:

- Form a Values Steering Group comprised of senior managers, employee representatives, and key staff responsible for external stakeholder relationship management.
- Run a workshop for this Steering Group to clarify the purpose of values to the organisation, to identify the practical benefits that will result from their successful application and to assess barriers to acceptance.
- Draft pilot values that can be used as the basis for discussion and a starting point for further stages in the process.

We give the following guidance to our clients on the process of articulating and embedding values at this opening stage:

- Values are specific and unambiguous, fundamental, the DNA of the enterprise, and for the long term. They are the guiding principles that cause people who represent the organisation to think and behave in certain ways.
- They are not the same as vision or mission they enable vision, mission and goals to be achieved
- Values are not internal or external - they are relevant to everyone with whom we have a relationship in business. A set of values should cover all stakeholders. Not each value must do this, but the set of values taken as a whole, should address and be relevant to all stakeholders
- Realism should guide our judgment in writing a statement of values. To base the statement on what we are currently confidently capable of is the wiser starting point. To allow values to be hijacked by hyperbole will devalue them.
- Any values that are written to inspire us to reach new heights should have committed resources behind them, starting now.
- For values to stick and become actionable and to make a difference, they must be translated into specific responses to known issues and requirements in your business.
- Clarity in this translation from the principle to the practical is vital to success with values. If, for example, a company states that a key value is to always deliver on its promises, then it must go on to clarify what qualities in people, what policies, processes, disciplines and skills ensure that promises are made very carefully and that delivery will be reliable every time.

Stage 2 – Evaluation

- Research attitudes to pilot values through focus groups with internal and external stakeholders.
- Evaluate the implications of the pilot values for existing policies, disciplines and practices.

Stage 3.1 - Values Articulation – the values statement

- A second workshop for the Steering Group to consider the above research and to produce the first draft full values statement.

Stage 3.2 - Values Articulation 2 – practical interpretation

- Workshops with key function heads using the above draft to define the qualities (character strengths, talents and work skills) that are required to uphold the values
 - and to define the key working practices (policy, process, methodologies and approaches) that will align the values with day-to-day operations across all business functions.
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Stage 4 - Embedding the values

Steering Group workshops with the business leaders and HR to establish the specific learning and development requirements of the embedding process and supporting recognition and reward disciplines; and to plan for launch and ongoing communications to reinforce the values process with all stakeholders and to a design values monitoring vehicle.

We give the following guidance to our clients on the process of embedding values:

- Success in embedding values depends on building a bridge from the values statements to a set of defined attitudes, disciplines, policies, practices and actions.
- In hierarchical organisations it is fundamental that managers are motivated to take on personal responsibility for the stewardship of values and to lead by example.
- All employees must be empowered to use the values as a compass for decisions and actions, to challenge with them, to seek improvement, to insist on the standards the values imply; and they must be measured and rewarded for doing so.
- Communications must be organised to reinforce continually that values lived make culture and the right culture is the basis for trust, self esteem and performance.
- Having a statement of values, even with strong practical interpretation, is only the starting point. All the HR and management programmes and communications disciplines needed to achieve the above should be made ready, revitalized if necessary, to support the values process – to turn values into actions.

The role of Smith Associates Kline

Our role as experienced independent consultants has allowed our clients to move through the values building process invigorated by the self analysis involved and by examination of company vision and goals within the context of values.

By adopting this type of approach to defining and embedding values, a company can be confident it will arrive at a set of authentic values that, if properly managed, will enhance its performance and its reputation.

However, it is unusual for companies to be able to bring to bear the objectivity required for the task from within their own management team. Honest outside advice and experience in this particular field will help to create momentum, keep the peace, and hold up the mirror that is needed to make sure you are describing yourself faithfully.

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