

## INTEGRATING VALUES WITHIN A UNIVERSITY CULTURE

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### Abstract

The integration of shared organisational values is at the heart of many successful organisations. This involves achieving alignment between individual and organisational values through dialogue and feedback to raise awareness of common values. After establishing the shared core values of an organisation its managers can move towards agreeing a shared vision and mission.

Whilst a number of companies have undertaken values based change projects, there have been few projects of this type in the Higher Education sector. This paper describes a project within a University School which set out to establish a set of values which are truly shared between all staff (academic, administrative and technical) and managers within that School.

The methodology used a web-based values survey instrument which invited staff to choose their own personal values, the desired values for the School, and how they perceived current School values. The responses were then used as a basis for discussion with groups of staff. Staff were also invited to comment on current issues and areas for improvement. The results were then fed back to management, along with the survey findings about the School culture. These were, in turn, discussed with the whole School to move towards a shared set of values, a new School vision, mission and plans to improve School performance. An important factor in the discussion process was the opportunity for meaningful dialogue about shared values.

This project revealed the views that staff held of the School, the values that they felt were important for the future, and those areas in which they would wish to see improvement. The paper will describe the processes used and the results achieved. Conclusions will then be drawn on how it can be used to achieve an inclusive culture, to plan for a successful future and the applicability of this approach within a University context.

### Keywords

Organisational culture; shared values; dialogue; organisation transformation; gestalt consulting

## 1. Background

### 1.1 Organisational Culture and Performance

Substantial work has been undertaken on the association between company culture and long term performance. Kotter & Heskett (1992) found that strong cultures were associated with the best long term business results. Collins & Porras (1994) arrived at similar conclusions, that the strongest cultures were the most adaptive and produced significantly better financial results. This evidence supports the conclusions by Hofstede (1991) that company culture is the best predictor of long term company results. A study by Arie de Geus (1997) of factors contributing to corporate longevity confirms the importance of culture. From different perspectives, Egan (1994), Kets de Vries & Miller (1984), Merry & Brown (1990) have all shown the negative effects on corporate performance and survival of 'unhealthy' cultures or what Egan terms the *shadow side*.

Barrett (1998) has summarised the characteristics of high performing, long lasting companies from these and other studies:

- "A strong, positive values driven culture
- A lasting commitment to learning and self-renewal
- Continual adaptation based on feedback from internal and external environments

- Strategic alliances with internal and external partners, customers and suppliers
- A willingness to take risks and experiment
- A balanced, values based approach to measuring performance that includes:
  - Corporate survival (financial results)
  - Corporate fitness (efficiency, productivity and quality)
  - Collaboration with suppliers and customers
  - Continuous learning and self development (evolution)
  - Organisational cohesion and employee fulfillment
  - Corporate contribution to the local community and society.”

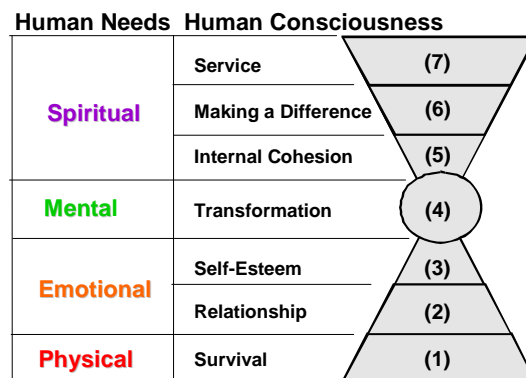
This whole systems view of a company has affinities with the EFQM Excellence model (1999), the RSA (1995) Tomorrow’s Company perspective or Kaplan and Norton’s (1996) Balanced Scorecard, which have been widely applied to assess and improve business performance. Corporate culture can be seen as an underlying enabler of sustainable company results which benefit a wide range of stakeholders, (Goyder 1997 and Laszlo 2003).

## 1.2 Individual and Organisational Values

Values are closely linked to individual motivation as described by Rokeach (1973). Maslow’s (1968) model of human needs has been extended by Barrett (1998) and linked to values to create a model of consciousness, shown below as **figure 1**. Barrett (1998) describes *consciousness* as “a state of awareness based on a set of beliefs and values through which reality is interpreted”.

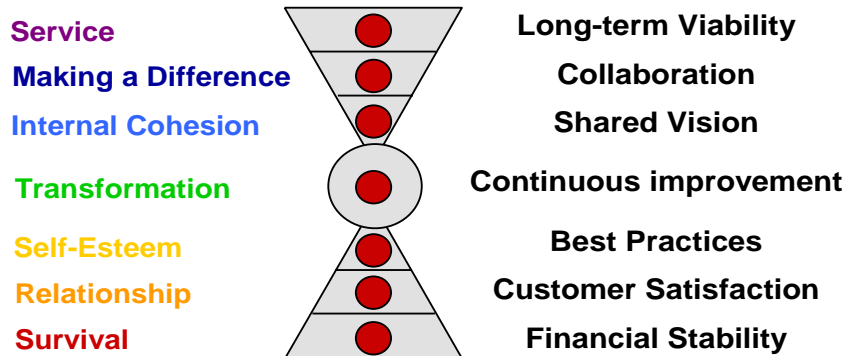
Figure 1

### Personal Needs, Values and Levels of Consciousness



Organisational culture has been extensively researched by Hofstede (1991) and Schein (1985), amongst others. Values are a key feature in many of these models, with one source describing corporate culture as “the *values, behaviours and beliefs* that distinguish the people of one organisation from another”, (Barrett 1998). The model of individual values shown above as **figure 1** has been applied to organisational values to create a spectrum of organisational consciousness by Richard Barrett & Associates. This is shown as **figure2** below:

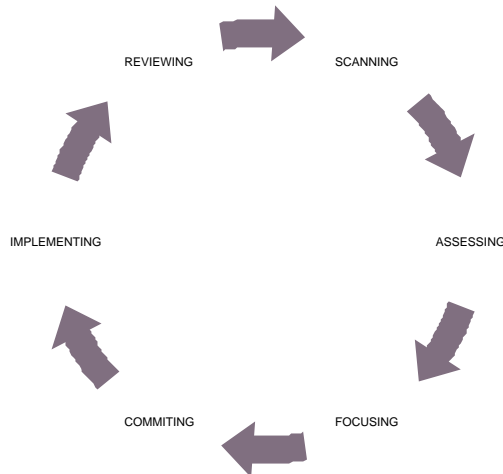
**Figure 2**  
**Organisational values**  
**Full-Spectrum Consciousness**



**1.3 Values and the Cycle of Experience**

Blakeley (2005) has suggested that values influence: what we pay attention to, our emotions, how we make sense of things, and our actions. When combined these elements are a powerful process for mobilising individual or collective energy and action: the Gestalt ‘cycle of experience’, Perls, Hefferline & Goodman (1951). Nevis (1987) describes how this cycle can be used as an effective approach to change in organisational consulting. See **figure 3** below:

**Figure 3: Organisational Cycle of Experience**



**1.4 University Culture and Context**

Whilst companies have undertaken values assessment and change projects, there have been few projects of this type in the Higher Education sector, where staff alignment often depends on a shared ‘core ideology’ (Collins & Porras 1994). Universities have been characterised by Etzioni (1964) as values based ‘normative organisations’. So a values driven path to improved performance seems particularly appropriate for universities.

The School of Computing and Technology is one of five Schools in the University of Sunderland. The School has c.1,500 students (full & part time; on-campus & distance study; foundation degree to PhD), with 150 staff (75 academic, 20 administrative, 15 technical, and 40 research or project staff). The School initiated a project to review its values, mission and vision with all staff.

The aims of the project were to:

- *Involve* all staff in a survey to identify their shared views on the School and its values
- *Align* staff personal values and the desired School culture *through dialogue*
- Review survey results with staff and discuss current issues to find a shared way forward
- Create a stronger culture by using this knowledge to create a *new shared School values* statement which staff can relate to
- Develop a new vision and mission for the School with a supporting action plan

To undertake this project the School worked with a consultancy, Integration International, with expertise in organisational transformation, supported by university Human Resources staff.

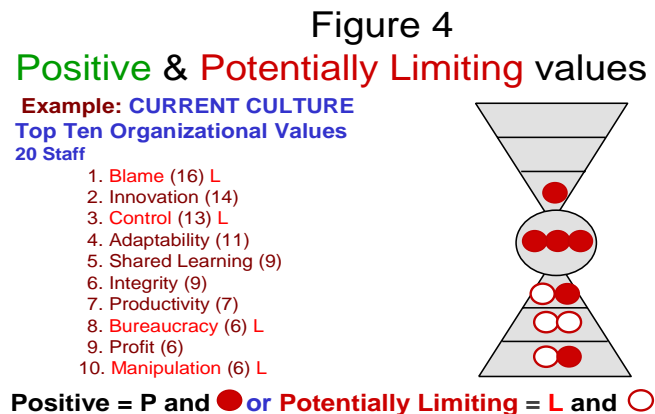
## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 On-line Values Survey

The survey used a customised, web-based, values survey instrument, based on the work of Richard Barrett & Associates (1998). This invited staff to choose their own personal values, the desired values for the School, and how they perceived current School values. After briefings about the project, each member of staff was asked to complete the questionnaire on-line. Around 50% of all staff (75 members of staff) completed the questionnaire.

### 2.2 Values Assessment

The results of all the staff questionnaires were plotted for each level of consciousness on ‘butterfly’ diagrams, based on the framework in **figure 2**. The survey provided assessments of: 1. Personal Values, 2. Current Culture values, and 3. Desired Culture values. These three values charts were analysed to produce quantitative and qualitative information on the values chosen. The alignment was assessed between the three sets of values: Personal Values with Current Culture; between Current and Desired Culture; and for Personal Values with the Desired Culture. A comparison was also made with the existing School ‘espoused’ values statement to identify the extent these had become part of the culture. Further analysis produced an assessment of *positive* and *potentially limiting* values in the culture, as shown in figure 4 for an example organisation.



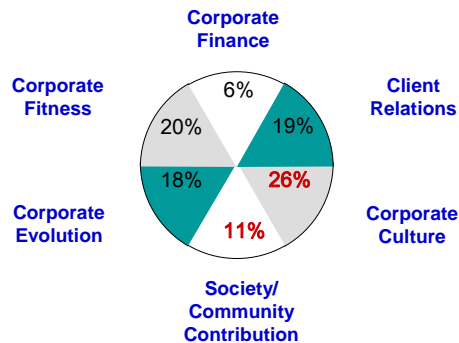
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### 2.3 Balanced Needs Scorecard Assessment

Organisational values data was used to generate a ‘Balanced Needs Scorecard’ (Barrett 1998), based on Kaplan & Norton’s (1996) Balanced Scorecard, with the addition of measures of Society & Community Contribution plus Corporate Culture Development. **Figure 5** gives an illustration of the balance between the six areas for Collins & Porras (1994) ‘long lasting successful companies’

**Figure 5**  
**Balanced Needs Scorecard**  
**of Long-Lasting Successful Companies**

Based on mission and vision statements from  
***Built to Last*** – Collins and Porras



#### 2.4 Dialogue: Staff Sessions

A key part of the Gestalt consulting process, (see **figure 3**), is heightening everyone's *awareness* of emerging '*figures*' when 'scanning' and 'assessing'. Feeding back and reviewing data provides an opportunity to create shared meaning through *dialogue* (Bohm 1996). These processes and authentic communication are crucial for the success of values surveys. The main opportunities for dialogue were: Management & Staff briefings about the project; Staff *Values Review* sessions; Management Team *Values and Vision* events; the follow up whole School staff meetings.

The survey results were used as a basis for discussion about core values with groups of staff at **Values Review Sessions**. These sessions were open to all School staff, even if they didn't complete the questionnaire. The aims of the sessions were to:

- Learn more about a values based way of working
- Identify the values that are important to each individual
- Review each individual's personal values profile
- Review the School Values Assessment
- Suggest important School Values for the future
- Identify current issues and opportunities
- Identify the next steps for the School

#### 2.5 Management Team Sessions

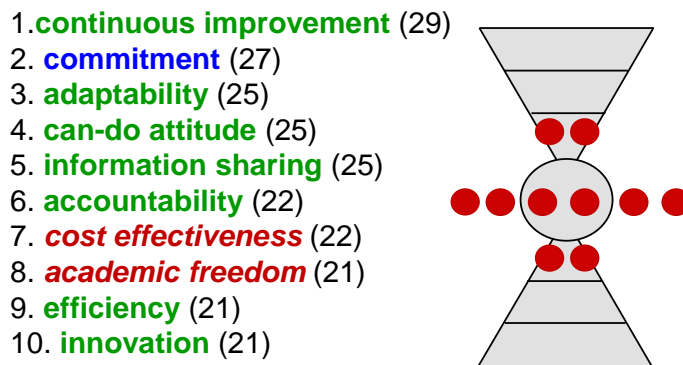
A summary of the results of the survey and staff values review sessions were presented to the management team in management review sessions, which also allowed managers to add their own values and views. Work was done to address issues raised by staff, to confirm the School's strengths, to review and develop draft values and vision. The outcomes were discussed with all staff at whole School meetings; in order to move towards new shared School values, vision, mission and plans.

### 3. Outcomes

#### 3.1 Desired Culture Values

The on-line survey revealed the pattern of Desired Culture Values presented in **figure 6** below:

Figure 6  
School Survey  
Desired Culture Values

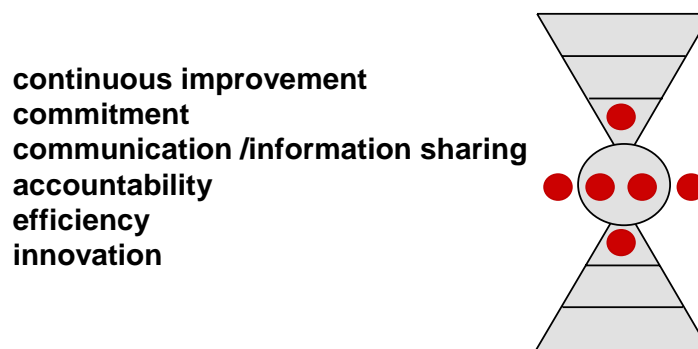


Blue = Personal value Red = Current culture Green = New values

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If adopted, the suggested new values will counter balance potentially limiting values in the current culture. When these survey results were combined with suggestions from Staff Values Review sessions a set of common Desired Culture Values emerged, as depicted in **figure 7** below:

Figure 7  
Common Desired Culture Values from  
School Survey & Staff Reviews



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There was also a degree of alignment between these Desired Values and values chosen by the Management Team. In the survey these 'Espoused Values' from a longer existing School Values statement were chosen: **continuous improvement; commitment; accountability; innovation** and *customer focus*. These provided further support for an emerging set of shared values.

The following set of core **School Values** were agreed, after discussion with staff and managers:

- Commitment
- Innovation
- Collaboration

- Communication
- Customer focus
- Continuous improvement
- Accountability
- Excellence.

All of these values seemed to be important to staff, so were included. Ideally about 5 values would be easier for staff to remember and for the School to communicate externally. A new School values statement has been communicated to staff and included in School documents:

“Our staff offer us strong *commitment*, are ready to *innovate*, and keen to *collaborate*. We are open in our *communication*, have a strong value of *customer focus* and are always striving for *continuous improvement*. We believe in *accountability* and in the pursuance of *excellence*.”

### 3.2 School Strengths & Issues

The on-line survey identified these **strengths** in the current School culture:

People who:

- are *committed*, dedicated and *reliable*
- have high standards of *honesty* and *fairness*
- want to *make a difference*
- work together in *co-operation*
- have *enthusiasm, humour and fun*
- want to *balance home/work*
- value *autonomy* and *responsibility*.

A School which:

- promotes enhanced knowledge through study and *research*
- is *customer focused*
- supports *autonomy* and the value of *academic freedom*
- manages within budgets and emphasises *cost effectiveness*.

The Staff Values sessions confirmed these and other strengths. In **summary**, key strengths are:

- Commitment of staff
- Enthusiasm and energy / can do attitude
- Customer focus
- Quality / continuous improvement
- Diversity of activities.

In addition, a set of **potentially limiting values** and issues were identified:

- Bureaucracy / information systems
- Communication systems
- Hierarchy
- Wasted time / energy / resources
- Longer term focus needed.

An **action plan** to address these issues will cover the following:

- Bureaucracy: simplify procedures; review information systems; use continuous improvement and staff enthusiasm for changes.
- Improve Information and Communication Systems: make more information publicly available; share information with staff including financial information.
- Create an Open Culture: encourage people to say how they feel; encourage open communication and responsibility.
- Engage staff in making changes: promote continuous improvement with a longer term focus; create a change orientated culture.

### 3.3 Balanced Needs Scorecard

The Balanced Needs Scorecard (Barrett 1998) assessment suggested a need to focus more on:

*Corporate Fitness*: improving the quality and efficiency of internal systems or process.

*Corporate Evolution*: creating new products / services or adapting products to changing markets.

Action to support continuous improvement, change and innovation will address these issues.

### 3.4 Mission

Work continues on developing a mission statement which relates to School Values and all aspects of School activities. The aim is to produce a mission statement which is memorable, short and yet represents what is important to the School, its staff, students and external bodies.

#### 4. Conclusions

The project helped to identify a set of core School Values shared by most staff and managers. It has also demonstrated to staff that their organisation cares about their views and values their contribution. Some changes in culture are beginning to be seen. Some staff are starting to ask how some activities relate to the core values. Others are also starting to question aspects of the information and communication systems and asking for improvements.

In summary, this values based approach to developing an inclusive culture within a university School has been productive. So we would recommend this approach to other universities.

#### 5. Acknowledgements

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