

## Values

### Key Points:

- Values represent what a company believes in and stands for.
- There is no right set of values. While common values can often be seen across different organizations, each organization's values are unique to it.
- Regardless of what the stated or prescribed values of an organization may be, it's the behavior of the leaders and the employees in aggregate that truly reflect what the organization values in reality.

### Main Thoughts:

Simply put, an organization's values are what it stands for. Every organization has a set of values, regardless of whether they are written or not. The managers and employees in an organization establish a culture in large part based upon the attitudes and behaviors they value (thus the name values). Of the three commonly grouped concepts of mission, vision and values, values are by far the most long-lasting. In fact, they tend to be changeless, often times being identified when the organization is founded or at a critical point early in its lifecycle. What's important about values is not that they be written so much as the organization widely understands what they are and why they're important to success.

*Developing Versus Discovering Values.* The most common misconception about values is that they are created by a deliberate process. In organizations where values don't exist, managers will often meet, discuss what they believe their values are and then document what they agreed upon. The output of this effort is indeed a list of stated values; however, these stated values are not always consistent with what the organization's actual values are. This is because in reality values are *discovered* not created. Any group of people who have been working together for even a short period of time have developed a common working approach based upon what each of them values as an individual. But they cannot always clearly articulate what those values are. Even in those instances when they are able to express their values, it's not uncommon for people to communicate how they *believe* they behave as opposed to how they *actually* behave as a group. This is where the inconsistency between designed and discovered values resides—in how organizations view themselves versus how they conduct themselves.

*Discovering Values.* The best way then to unearth values is through a value assessment. While this process may sound sterile, it is actually an engaging and enlightening process for senior managers. A cross section of employees throughout the organization can meet and be asked to list what they think the organizations values are. Most organizations values number from three to five. This starter list can then be turned into a survey instrument that can be given to the entire organization. In it, employees are asked to assess their affinity with each of the values listed. Further, they can be asked if there are other values not present on the original list. For those values where they felt the strongest association, they can be asked to provide descriptions of how employees in the organization 'live the values,' thereby providing context for each value in organizational life. The findings from the survey should be reviewed by senior leaders and from those findings, the values—and associated examples of how they are enacted—should be identified.

**As an Example:**

The following are examples of values from some of the world's best known brands. Wal-Mart and Johnson & Johnson both have videos to elaborate on their values. For the links see the *For More Information* section below.

The Coca Cola Company

- Leadership: The courage to shape a better future
- Collaboration: Leverage collective genius
- Integrity: Be real
- Passion: Committed in heart and mind
- Diversity: As inclusive as our brands
- Quality: What we do, we do well

Whole Foods

- Selling the Highest Quality Natural and Organic Products Available
- Satisfying and Delighting Our Customers
- Supporting Team Member Happiness and Excellence
- Creating Wealth Through Profits & Growth
- Caring about our Communities & Our Environment
- Creating ongoing win-win partnerships with our suppliers
- Promoting the health of our stakeholders through healthy eating education

Wal-Mart

- Respect for the Individual
- Service to our Customers
- Striving for Excellence

Johnson & Johnson (from their Credo)

- Responsibility to Customer
- Responsibility to Employees
- Responsibility to Communities
- Responsibility to Stockholders

**Editorial**

If the recent downturn has shown nothing else, it is that values matter in organizations. As it says in the Johnson & Johnson video referenced below, the J&J Credo is the 'company's compass'. This is intended to be the case with all organizations' values; they represent the true north for the people working inside the organization. When an organization's values are misaligned with the beliefs of their customers, their employees or their communities, indeed the organization will eventually veer off course. It doesn't matter what's listed on a statement of values posted at the headquarters; it's how people behave that matters. Values are supposed to keep organizations on course by helping them be true to themselves and their most sacred beliefs. Most organizations would be wise to spend more time and energy understanding those genuine beliefs and treating their entire stakeholders' community consistently with them.

**For More Information See:**

Web

[http://www.thecocacola.com/ourcompany/mission\\_vision\\_values.html](http://www.thecocacola.com/ourcompany/mission_vision_values.html)

<http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/company/corevalues.php>

<http://www.jnj.com/connect/about-jnj/jnj-credo/>

<http://walmartstores.com/AboutUs/321.aspx>

Magazines & Journals

Harvard Business Review: Collins, J. and Porras, J., *Building Your Company's Vision*, Harvard Business Review, September-October 1996.

Books

Collins, J. and Porras, J., *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, Harper Business, 1994.