

# Workplace values and ethics



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Organisational behaviour is a field of study that investigates the impact of individuals, groups, and structures have on behavior within the organization. These impacts work towards the understanding, explaining and ultimately improving the organization's effectiveness. In the modern workplace, there are many different trends that can affect the organization's behaviors as a whole or at the employee level. One of the many trends that we will be looking at in this essay is the importance and influence of workplace values and ethics, and how values management can help in an organization.

### Workplace Values

McShane and Travaglione (2007) stated " values represent stable, long-lasting beliefs about what is important in a variety of situations." They are a judgment of what is right or wrong, good or bad in different situations. Another definition stated by Clegg and Pitsis (2008) is " values are a person's or social group's consistent beliefs about something in which they have an emotional investment."

Both definitions have the same interpretations as values are guideline principles that affect a person's behavior and decisions when different situations arise. These principles are influenced as a result of socialization and interaction with surrounding people and environment an individual is in. Therefore, organizational values refer to important principles that guide the behavior of the organization and are communicated and rewarded (Laurie & James 2007).

### Importance of Values in Workplace

Workplace values are important as they create the company culture, define how we interact with other employees and the attitudes we adopt towards customers (Dawkins 2007, para. 1). There are a few reasons of why values have become a major trend that we must not overlook in an organization.

First reason is globalization. According to McShane and Travaglione, globalization has increased our awareness and sensitivity to differences in values across cultures and beliefs (2007). For example Japanese people tend to be more polite and indirect with their words where else Americans are more direct and straight forward and sometimes these might leave some bad impressions or misunderstandings in-between. As organizations rely on individuals to make decisions and take actions in the company, they face challenges in aligning people with diverse cultural values towards a set of goals.

Workplace values define how employees should behave and provide a standard approach for employees to adopt in their daily work life. As the modern workforces are more independent and educated, they resent the idea of ‘command-and-control’ supervisions. Values can help keep employee’s decisions and actions to be aligned with the corporate goals irrespective of their individual tasks and ranks (McShane & Travaglione 2007). Without values, decisions made may conflict with the corporate goals and in turn, employees may experience additional stress and feel dissatisfied at their workplace.

Another reason will be organization values are not only important to employees but also to customers (Dawkins 2007, para. 4). Customers tend to

choose to use the services of one company over another because of the ethical practices. Where ethics refer to the study of moral principles or values that determine whether actions are right or wrong and outcomes are good or bad (McShane & Travaglione, 2007).

The interviewee mentioned that “ Corporate values are images for the outsiders to see. Customers would like to see the company values as a choice for them.” This statement supports Dawkins’ findings of corporate values are important to customers. Based on my observation why the interviewee’s opinion is similar with the findings is because she felt that corporate values have an impact over the organizations ethical approaches towards business. Such organizations often benefit more in the long term from customer loyalty and good reputation.

For an example, her organization emphasized on integrity and harmony values. They value truthfulness and sincerity above all else while maintaining a harmonious relationship with their customers. This is important especially in a direct selling company as the company must gain trust and confidence from their customers so as to build a strong rapport. Customers must know what they are getting, and feel safe and have confidence with the products and service provided to them. With all these taken care of, customers will come back to the company and will tend to share their experiences with their surrounding friends and relatives. Customers will then become a ‘ live advertisement’ for the company, helping the company to promote their good quality service and products.

Influences of Values and Ethics in Organization

Values are influential when there is alignment or congruence between an individual's values and the values of others (Murray, Poole & Jones 2006). When employees believe their values are congruence with the organization values, they tend to display positive work attitudes, including job satisfaction, commitment and involvement (Meglino & Ravlin 1998), as well as perceptions of workplace ethics (Posner & Schmidt 1993), which can result in improved financial performance.

An example will be from Best World International. Dr Dora Hoan, the group CEO of Best World International Ltd, recognized employees as the organization greatest assets and shown by proposing a bonus to be paid to her staff at the end of each month if the company achieved a set target. “ It created a lot of enthusiasm. Everyone felt a belonging with the company and was inspired to do their best to meet the monthly goals,” mentioned Dr Hoan. (The Straits Times 18 July 2006, p. 17) This shows that employees felt their values are aligned with the organization’s values and thus results in this positive work attitude within the employees.

The interviewee also mentioned that she aims to develop a long term relationship with the company and she has great confidence in the company and willing to work hard for the company. This shows another example of values influential. In my opinion why she felt this way is because her company values align with her values. Her company emphasizes on harmony and community where they treat each other as one big family and she too is a family oriented person. This led her to be happy with the working environment that she is in and therefore stay loyal and committed to her company.

However if there is a conflict between corporate values and individual values, it may not only lead to the person leaving the work environment (Murray, Poole & Jones 2006), but also lead to negative impacts towards outside the organizations on how the outside world will look at that organization. It will be hard to gain trust and confidence from people once your reputation is bad.

An illustration of unethical behavior is the recent news of fake RMIT degrees. Integrity was not practice in this case for Mr Yap, the owner of Brookes Business School. An international student mentioned, “ How do you establish a basis of trust once this happens?” Another student said that he took up the course with Brookes to improve his career prospects but now he felt cheated (Sandra 2009).

### Values and Ethics Management in Workplace

Given the potential importance of how values can have an influence within and outside of the organization, it is necessary to explore different ways to develop and implement shared values and strengthen values congruence with the employees and the organization goals. Shared values allow employees to see their objectives as being congruent (Laurie & James 2007) and also to determine and regulate relationships between individuals and the organization, as well as reducing conflicts (Agle & Caldwell 1999).

One of the ways can be by giving employees trainings. It is important that enhanced training is consistently provided to the employees as enriching employees' minds not only allows them to input their resources learnt but also win hearts and motivate them to excel in their work (The Straits Times

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27 July 2009, p. 1). The interviewee agrees with this point as her company often gives their staff trainings and these trainings greatly influence the employees' minds and attitudes, and in turn they are highly motivated and driven towards their work. I feel that trainings not only motivate employees but also help in retaining and attracting staff. For example in a construction firm, safety trainings and measures are constantly provided to the staff. With good safety record in the company, people are more willingly to work for the company when they see safety value is congruence with them.

Managers create a corporate values system and design incentives to reinforce performance towards those established values. An example would be giving incentives for marksmen in SAF. With an incentive implemented, the NS men would be motivated to strive for a marksman. This shows clearly that the values of the organization and the NS men are met, in return causing a more productive and efficient environment. “ Values management is an important function of human resource management (Posner, Kouzes & Schmidt 1985) and leadership (Kouzes & Posner 1995; Trice and Beyer, 1991)”. Besides rewards system, other strategies like recruitment strategies also help the organization to function in a more shared values manner. HR should be aware and select employees that fit with the organization values.

Another method mentioned by the interviewee is appraisal. “ Organizational culture or values need to constantly change to accommodate the many diverse needs of its staff (Dawkins 2007, para. 8).” Her company has given regular appraisals to the staff twice a year with the Directors and managers. Through appraisal, management can get to understand and address their

staff concerns and needs as the purpose of appraisal is to allow all staff to give feedbacks on the company or on any other matters.

### Relevance to Singapore Context

Singapore depends greatly on export talents and Singapore workforce consists of many different races too. Lucas Chow, CEO of Mediacorp, mentioned, “ The most critical asset in any strong and successful company is the people” (<http://careers.mediacorp.com.sg/>). As we will be working often with people of different races and nationality, we need to understand that diverse values can lead to different behaviors and impacts. Knowledge of values not only helps managers to understand their own values tendencies but also towards other people of different races and nationality, such as customers and employees (Murray, Poole & Jones 2006). This in turn helps managers to adapt and alter their management practices to reduce conflicts while working with them and increase performance and business opportunities. Therefore it is important for Singaporeans to understand and recognize the importance of values management within organization.

### Individual Approach

From the findings that I've found, I understand that if my values are different from the organization, there will be a tendency which I might not be happy working there and will not stay for long in the company. Therefore it is important for me to know and understand my own values so that when I apply for jobs in a company next time, I can take note if there is any congruence of corporate values with mine. Besides this, I can be more



sensitive towards such diversity of values that exist in an organization and learn to adept and alter my ways of managing people.

### Conclusion

It can be concluded that values management is important within an organization as employees are the heart of the company. Which means, without employees working for the organization, the organization is just an empty shell. Values congruence between the employee and the corporate goals has a direct influence over the employees' actions, which can have a positive impact or negative impact on the organization depending on the values management and leadership within the company.