

Values & principles

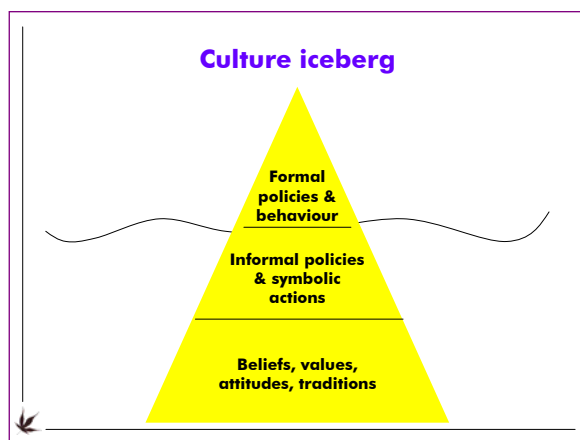
Introduction

Broadly speaking, values are the inherent beliefs held by individuals; culture describes the behaviour of a group of like-minded people. Different nations, or different groups of people, or different societies, are likely to have different values; often people with similar values will group together. Values include ethical and moral values, political and religious values, social and aesthetic values, etc.

The people who work in a business or NGO will all have individual values – but the organisation will develop a culture, usually predicated on the values on the leaders, and which provide guidance for the way that all the staff should behave. Ideally, the staff's shared values and the culture will be mutually reinforcing.

Edgar Shein argues¹ that there are three levels of culture:

- What you see: the way people dress or the way the office is arranged or the formal processes;
- What the organisation says about its values and beliefs: reflected in its purpose and philosophies; and
- Basic underlying beliefs: what people really think, which can be difficult to discern, but are key to explaining why people and organisations behave in a particular way.

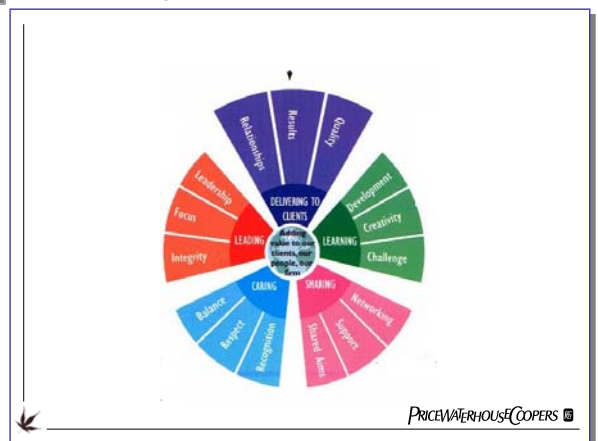


These levels can be thought of as a culture iceberg, where what you see is only a small part of the total, with most of it below water and therefore hidden from view.

Widely shared values are likely to lead to harmony. The most successful

organisations are those where the staff share similar values and moral principles since these guide individual and corporate behaviour, and where those values reinforce the organisation's purpose.

Some businesses go to considerable effort to set out their value, perhaps by writing a 'values statement' which they then pin on the wall to remind themselves of what they believe, or by preparing a graphic illustration such as PricewaterhouseCooper's 'value wheel'. It is important, however, not to try to cover



¹ Edgar Schein, "Organisational culture & leadership", Jossey Bass, 1992

everything but rather the four or five values that are fundamental to the organisation.

Personal values can evolve over time, but generally values like integrity and respect are deeply held; asking people to work in an environment where there is conflict between their personal values and the culture is ultimately likely to lead to dissonance.

Values imply that people have choices – and the choices that they make will be guided by their values. Shared values are likely to lead to mutual trust and to consistent decision making. If everyone in the business believes everyone will take the 'right' decision in a given set of circumstances, then there is less need for hierarchical control and more scope to encourage personal responsibility and initiative. This will result not only in a stronger focus on achieving the organisation's goals but also in a more motivated workforce.