

Values – what is important to us?

Values define what is important to us in the way that we work with others. They are useful as a means of establishing a common understanding of what is important to people in an organisation, and can help to establish and regulate acceptable behaviours.

Values should not be a list of nice words, but are meant to be used as a reminder of the kinds of behaviour that team members expect of each other. They tend to be more effectively applied if everyone is involved in their production.

This is important! (A case study on team values)

The Finance Team of a large manufacturing company comprised two sections – one dealing with invoicing and the other with purchasing. There were six finance officers in each team, one Purchasing Team Supervisor, one Invoicing Team Supervisor, one Finance Manager. The Finance Manager reported to the Head of Finance who also had responsibility for Procurement, Contracts, Buildings Maintenance, and Resources Teams

The Finance Team had undergone re-structuring, including some redundancies and their manager was new to post. The previous manager had been a difficult authoritarian and there had been conflict between Purchasing and Invoicing Supervisors. This had filtered down through the teams. Morale was generally low within teams, and performance was below what was expected with an unacceptable level of mistakes and regularly missed deadlines. Workloads for both teams fluctuated so that one team might be busy whilst the other was slack.

The Finance Manager, having taken some time to appraise the situation and to talk to individuals in both teams, decided to break down barriers between the teams and introduce more flexible cross-team working so that support could be provided when needed and pressure reduced on both teams. She initiated regular whole team meetings and encouraged informal communication. She worked with the two supervisors to resolve their conflict, and organised an off-site team-building event to improve understanding and develop co-operation between teams. An important feature of the team-building event was a session on establishing team values.

The team was asked to identify the things that were important to them in working together as a team. They worked in small groups and came up with over twenty things. In plenary discussions this was reduced to the following list of eight team values:

- Honesty
- Openness
- Giving and receiving support
- Co-operation
- Communication
- Respect
- Trust
- Appreciation

These were printed out and pasted on the office walls, and they were re-visited and discussed periodically in performance review meetings. The values became a means of uniting the team because rather than having them imposed upon them they had agreed them as guiding principles on which to work together. They became comfortable enough in working with each other to remind themselves of any values that seemed to be slipping.

Questions

Do you have a set of defined values?

Do you think they are or could be useful? How?

Who should produce these?