

Aligning Employee Development With Organizational Objectives: A Case for Value-Based Training

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***Abstract.** Training and development is often visualized as a means to facilitate learning of job-related behaviors in order to improve performance. The focus of training has traditionally been on teaching facts, modifying attitudes and behaviors, and developing skills. Value systems, which form the basis, as it were, of affective and behavioral domains, have been almost totally ignored. Values, which form part of the cognitive domain, are at the core of our personality, influencing the choices we make, the people we trust, the appeals we respond to, and the way we invest our time and energy (Posner & Schmidt, 1992). It is time that we started giving values their due importance within the function of training. Value-based training is the key to a greater fit between employee and the organization.*

Human personality consists of three distinct domains or components—behavioral, affective and cognitive (Rokeach, 1968). The behavioral domain consists of actually perceivable behaviors of human beings. Training on how to treat a skin burn more quickly would primarily address the behavioral domain, since the focus is on modifying certain sets of behaviors. The affective domain is the seat of the mind. It consists of feelings, emotions and attitudes. A training program to develop a positive attitude and orient a person towards a new technology being introduced would primarily focus on the affective domain.

Cognitive Domain

The cognitive domain is the seat of the intellect. It is that component of the human being that thinks, reasons and evaluates. It is also referred to as the rational part of a person because it evaluates the relationship between ends and means, which is the essence of rationality. Beliefs form part of the cognitive domain. Beliefs could be broadly classified into three major groups—descriptive or existential beliefs, those capable of being true or false (for example, the belief that the earth revolves around the sun); evaluative beliefs, wherein the object of belief is judged to be good or bad (for example, the belief that a particular employee is a good person); and prescriptive or proscriptive (prohibitive) beliefs, wherein some means or end of action is judged to be desirable or undesirable (Rokeach, 1968). A value is a belief of the third kind, a prescriptive or proscriptive belief.

Training is traditionally seen as a means to facilitate learning of job-related behaviors in order to improve performance. The focus has been on teaching facts, modifying attitudes and behaviors, and developing skills. The emphasis of training has generally been more on the behavioral and affective domains than on the cognitive domain, probably because of the relative ease of directly influencing attitudes and human behavior. Even when training targeted some aspects of the cognitive domain, it was only on existential and evaluative beliefs. Values have been fairly ignored by training programs, most probably because values in general are relatively more difficult to influence or modify.

Values play an important role in understanding and predicting the affective and behavioral components of human beings. Since human being is essentially endowed with the power of cognition or comprehension, the cognitive domain serves as the base, as it were, on which the huge structure of affects and behaviors is built. Values are the results of cognitive processes that take place in human beings. Values are both a powerful explanation of and influence on human behavior. Hence it is necessary that the emphasis of training should shift away from attitudes and behaviors to values. Value-based training is the key to excellence in organizations.

Values

Rokeach (1973) defined a value as “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence” (page 5). A belief concerning a desirable mode of conduct was called an instrumental value and a belief concerning a desirable end-state of existence was called a terminal value. If a person values *freedom* as an end-state of existence, it means that he or she believes that freedom is preferable to slavery. Similarly, if a person values *responsible* as a mode of conduct, it means that he or she believes that being responsible is preferable to being irresponsible.

A value differs from an attitude in that a value refers to a single belief of a very specific kind, while an attitude refers to an organization of several beliefs around a specific object or situation. A value is a standard but an attitude is not. Evaluations of numerous attitude objects and situations may be based upon a relatively small number of values serving as standards. For example, a Likert scale for measuring organizational commitment consists of a representative sample of beliefs all of which concern the same object or situation. When summed, it provides a single index of a person’s favorable or unfavorable attitude towards the organization. Thus a value transcends objects and situations whereas an attitude is focused on some specific object or situation. Individuals have as many values as they have learned beliefs concerning desirable modes of conduct and end-states of existence, and as many attitudes as direct or indirect encounters they have had with specific objects and situations (Rokeach, 1968). A given attitude held by different persons need not be in the service of the same value or the same subset of values. For example, an unfavorable attitude toward religion may serve one person’s value for being *independent* and another person’s value for being *honest* (Rokeach, 1973).

While values are significantly different from attitudes, there is only a subtle conceptual difference between values and traits. Some authors do not even distinguish between values and traits. Chatman and Barsade (1995) treated the personality characteristic of cooperativeness as a construct that could be compared to the emphasis placed on different values by different organizations. Rokeach (1973) distinguished between values and traits based on phenomenological standpoint. A person’s character is seen by an outsider—someone other than that person—as a

cluster of traits that are fixed and unchangeable, while the same is reformulated from within as a system of values. A person identified by others from the outside as an authoritarian can also be identified from the inside as one who places relatively high values on being *obedient*, *clean* and *polite* and relatively low values on being *broadminded*, *intellectual* and *imaginative*. According to Rokeach, a major advantage gained in thinking about someone as a system of values rather than as a cluster of traits is that it becomes possible to conceive of that person undergoing change as a result of changes in social conditions.

Value Systems

Values can be looked upon as being hierarchical in nature, leading to the idea of a value system. Rokeach (1973) defined a value system as “an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-states of existence along a continuum of relative importance” (page 5). A set of rank-ordered values is called a value system. This approach uses an ipsative (rank-order) design by measuring each value at the expense of the others. For example, a value system in which *ambitious* is ranked above *honest* would indicate that the person believes that being ambitious is more important than being honest. The cognitive structure consists of highly interrelated and ordered pattern of the gamut of values, and so it is only the value system which contains almost all social values that can do justice to the job of explaining affective and behavioral outcomes.

Social values are phenomena that are usually highly socially desirable and, as such, tend to be strongly endorsed by all individuals. All individuals might value *happiness*; they might believe that happiness is preferable to misery as an end-state of existence. Simply recording the different things human beings value may not mean much, for that might not convey anything special about a particular individual; several individuals might have the same set of values. The relative importance of the different values—or the value systems—might however differ. The relative importance of each value varies across individuals. That a person values *happiness* does not say much that is unique about that person, for most human beings value happiness. What matters is how much a person values happiness in comparison with the other things that he or she values. If one knows that a person values *happiness* more than *self-respect*, one is able to have a more accurate idea of that person. It is only the ipsative (rank-ordering) measurement model that can capture the unique value configuration of an individual (Ravlin & Meglino, 1987). The structural organization of value system reflects the degree to which giving high priority simultaneously to different values is motivationally and practically feasible or contradictory (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987).

Predicting attitudes and behaviors that are based on a choice among values—such as, whether to be *obedient* at the cost of being *honest*—is very difficult if a number of values are measured independently of each other. The cognitive structure of a human being is so complex that it is almost impossible to draw valid inferences without noting the relative importance of the values of an individual. Values are heavily intertwined and therefore measuring values separately and independently of one another using non-ipsative design cannot meaningfully explain attitudes and behaviors. An ordered organization of values as measured by the ipsative design can help explain affect and behavior in a more meaningful way.

Non-ipsative models might measure the combined importance of the full array of values held, or the total importance of values to an individual. However, even if all the measured values are more intensely held by one person than another, still the influence of values on affect and behavior could

be the same for both individuals if the relative importance of the values happens to be the same. Two persons who value *pleasure* more than *salvation* would put in efforts to achieve pleasure at the cost of salvation, even though both pleasure and salvation are valued much more intensely by one of them than the other. So, what is important is not the total strength of values, but the relative strength of each value in comparison with each other. It is not the values by themselves that matter, but it is the hierarchical value system that matters.

Rokeach's Value Survey

Rokeach's (1973) Value Survey is the most commonly used instrument that is capable of accommodating all possible social values (Sikula & Costa, 1994). The Survey uses an ipsative (rank order) design and has two lists of values arranged alphabetically—the first list consisting of 18 terminal values and the second list consisting of 18 instrumental values. The 18 terminal values are A comfortable life, An exciting life, A sense of accomplishment, A world at peace, A world of beauty, Equality, Family security, Freedom, Happiness, Inner harmony, Mature love, National security, Pleasure, Salvation, Self-respect, Social recognition, True friendship, Wisdom. The 18 instrumental values are Ambitious, Broadminded, Capable, Cheerful, Clean, Courageous, Forgiving, Helpful, Honest, Imaginative, Independent, Intellectual, Logical, Loving, Obedient, Polite, Responsible, Self-controlled.

Rokeach (1973) ended up with these two reasonably comprehensive lists of values after several years of research. Each value is presented along with a brief definition in parenthesis and respondents are asked to arrange the values in each set in order of importance to and as guiding principles in their life. A person's values are organized in a hierarchy from most important as a guiding principle to least important, thereby forming that person's value system.

The Value Survey (Rokeach, 1973) is projective by nature and all the values are socially desirable ones; but no significant relationship has been found between the tendency to respond in a socially desirable manner and rankings of the Value Survey under standard instructions. Value system stability and the reliability of single values were tested and found to be satisfactory (Rokeach). Schwartz and Bilsky (1990) did a survey based on Rokeach's 36-value English version, which lent evidence for the universality of elements of a theory of the content and structure of human values. Shopping selections (Homer & Kahle, 1988), and weight losses (Schwartz & Inbar-Saban, 1988) were predicted by the importance ratings of values.

Value Systems and Behavior

Values form the very core of personality, and they influence the choices people make, the appeals they respond to, and the way they invest their time and energy (Posner & Schmidt, 1992). Several studies have demonstrated empirically how values affect personal and organizational effectiveness (Meglino, Ravlin & Adkins, 1989; O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991). The results of Posner and Schmidt's study highlighted the importance of understanding values, because values make a difference in terms of how people feel about themselves and about their work and organization. Values also influence the future course of action; what people carry into the unpredictable future is their values. Perceptual organization plays a role in linking values to choice behavior (Ravlin & Meglino, 1987). Values influence the selection and interpretation of external stimuli, and thus impact one's perceptual process.

Values are the most abstract of the social cognitions, and hence they serve as prototypes from which attitudes and behaviors are manufactured. Cognitions, and therefore values, also guide individuals about which situations to enter and about what they should do in those situations. Within a given situation, the influence flows from abstract values to midrange attitudes to specific behaviors. This sequence is called value-attitude-behavior hierarchy (Homer & Kahle, 1988).

Value system could be seen as an explanation for particular affective and behavioral outcomes, for it forms the cognitive structure that supports the affective and behavioral domains (Williams, 1979). Values occupy a more central position than attitudes within one's personality makeup, and they are therefore determinants of attitudes as well as behavior (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach & Grube, 1984; Rokeach, 1973). In specific situations, only a subset of values is made active, those that are seen as relevant to the salient alternative actions. For example, valuing *equality* might favor donating to charity and oppose purchasing a luxury item, whereas valuing *a comfortable life* might have the reverse influence. Not all activated values have equally strong impacts on behavior. The strength of impact depends on importance of the value in the person's hierarchy. The choice of a behavior alternative is guided by the interplay of the influences of the activated values. It is the relative importance for a person of the values favorable to and opposed to a behavior that guides action (Schwartz & Inbar-Saban, 1988).

There are two major reasons why an organization would be interested in influencing the value systems of its members. The first reason is to modify certain work behaviors, which can be done through changing the value systems. The second reason is to bring the value systems of its members in line with its own value system, resulting in greater value system congruence between individuals and the organization.

Value System Congruence

Schneider (1987) proposed that individuals may be attracted to organizations they perceive as having values similar to their own. In addition, organizations attempt to select recruits who are likely to share their values (Chatman, 1991). The objectives of such practices are an expressive appeal to values and beliefs of prospective members and their assessment (Wiener, 1988). The value system congruence between individuals and the organization affects a wide variety of attitudes and behaviors in the organizational context such as overall satisfaction with the organization (Feather, 1979) and actual turnover (Chatman).

Organizations do consciously and unconsciously try to cause greater value system congruence between individuals and themselves. Recruitment, selection, training and socialization are appropriately designed to ensure better value system congruence. A major function of the selection process is to select individuals who have value systems that are compatible with the organization's value system. Value system congruence is also directly related to the process of socialization in organizations. Organizational socialization is the process through which a newcomer comes to understand the norms and values of an organization, and learns the behaviors and attitudes necessary for assuming roles in the organization. Training has a major role to play in causing and sustaining value system congruence between individuals and the organization.

Organizational values exist when the members of an organization share values (Wiener, 1988). Chatman and Jehn (1994) suggested that almost every organization has some core or pivotal values concerning organization-related behaviors and state-of-affairs that are shared across the entire organization. The values of an organization provide a broad and generalized justification both for

appropriate behaviors of members and for the activities and functions of the system (Enz, 1988). Organizational value systems could be placed on a continuum from weak, in which key values are not broadly and intensely shared by members, to strong, in which they are. It is possible to measure the strength of an organizational value system. Even though all members of an organization may not have the same values, a majority of active members would agree on them (Wiener).

Value system congruence between an individual and the organization could be defined as the extent of agreement between the person's value system and the organization's value system. While organizational values are defined as the values shared by the members, it is possible that every member of the organization does not share all those values to the same extent. Thus value congruence is the extent to which a specific member of an organization agrees with commonly shared values of all the members of the organization.

Value congruence could be conceptualized in two distinct ways—perceived value congruence, and latent value congruence (Enz, 1988). The first approach treats value congruence as a purely perceptual construct that captures the espoused, recognized, explicitly stated, and socially defined levels of consensus defined by departments and executives. This is called perceived value congruence; this assumes that values are conscious and explicitly articulated to serve normative or moral functions.

Using this conceptualization, Posner (1992) found that perceived value congruence was directly related to positive work attitudes. Values of individuals and organization were not separately measured and then compared; but the perceived agreement between the two was directly surveyed. Value congruence was assessed along three dimensions: clarity, consensus and intensity. Clarity indicated the extent to which the respondents understood what the organization's core values meant. Consensus was measured by getting the individuals' responses about each of the organization's core values to the statement: "There is a great deal of agreement among people at my level of the organization about what this core value represents." Intensity referred to the individual's emotional attachment to, support for, and feeling about the importance of the value (Posner).

The second conceptualization of value congruence provides for the values of individuals and the organization to be separately obtained and then compared to get the consensus between the two. This less direct method measures the latent value congruence. This does not require the groups or individuals to speculate on similarity, but rather allows for the possibility of a lack of awareness of the similarity. This captures the underlying, unrecognized, but similar values of the organization and its members.

Implicit in discussing value congruence is a logic of person-organization fit fundamentally drawn from an interactional psychology perspective in which aspects of both individual and situation combine to influence a focal individual's response to a given situation (Chatman, 1989). Empirical results have typically supported the hypothesis that congruence between individuals' personalities and the demands of their occupations are associated with a positive affect (O'Reilly et al., 1991). Since values are a fundamental and enduring aspect of both organizations and people, value congruence is a good measure of the fit between a specific individual and the organization.

Posner (1992) found that perceived value congruence was directly related to positive work attitudes. Congruence of values between an organization and its members indicates overall happiness and satisfaction of members with the organization (Feather, 1979). O'Reilly et al. (1991) found that person-organization fit predicts job satisfaction a year after fit was measured. It has also been

significantly correlated with employee performance, commitment, intention to remain with the organization, and actual turnover (Chatman, 1991).

The pervasiveness and importance of values in organizations are fundamentally linked to the psychological process of identity formation in which individuals appear to seek a social identity that provides meaning and connectedness (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Socialization is the process through which an individual comes to understand the norms and values of an organization; this process starts at the point of entry into the organization and continues thereafter. The impact of socialization would thus be greater on one who has been with an organization for a longer time. The longer the time since one's entry into an organization, the greater the chances are of getting one's value system attuned to the value system of the organization.

The extent to which the value systems of followers are similar to the value systems of the organization is a central theme in a number of areas of organizational research and practice. One reason for this broad applicability is that values are relatively enduring constructs that describe characteristics of individuals as well as organizations (Chatman, 1989). Thus the comparisons of value systems can apply to a wide variety of individual and organizational phenomena, at both affective and behavioral levels.

Changing Value Systems

One of the primary objectives of training should be to change the value systems of individuals so that the congruence between their and the organization's value system increases. Studies have demonstrated that the relative importance of different values to a person can be changed (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz & Inbar-Saban, 1988). Values are enduring beliefs, and therefore are very difficult to change. One who values *obedience* is unlikely to start believing that it is preferable to be disobedient than be obedient. Value systems, however, can be changed with relatively greater ease. Change in value system requires rearrangement of the relative importance given to various values. For example, one who values *pleasure* more than *self-respect* could be convinced over a period of time that *self-respect* is more important than *pleasure*.

The method of value self-confrontation can be used to change people's behavior by changing their value systems. This method has been applied successfully to influence such behaviors as contributing money to social welfare programs, and supporting anti-pollution measures. Schwartz and Inbar-Saban (1988) demonstrated that people's behavior can be changed by changing the value priorities underlying that behavior. Using an experimental manipulation, they found that an increase in the relative importance of *wisdom* over *happiness* (both terminal values) resulted in significant amount of weight loss.

The first step in value self-confrontation is to get people to become aware of their value systems. Learning that there is a contradiction between one's value priorities and one's ideal self-conception as a moral or competent person gives rise to self-dissatisfaction with one's value rankings. The ideal self-conception is based on the value system of a positive reference group. In order to reduce self-dissatisfaction, people change their value systems and their value-related attitudes and behaviors. They try to make these elements more consistent with the self-conceptions as moral and competent persons that they have learned to prefer (Schwartz & Inbar-Saban, 1988).

Conclusion

Training programs need to give less emphasis on teaching methods and skills, and a greater focus on the value systems of individuals. Changing value systems of individuals could help in increasing value system congruence between the individual and the organization. It could also help modify work behaviors where needed. Changing the value systems would of course require efforts that are not confined to classrooms. Much more intensive socializing and interactive actions will be needed, since value-based training focuses on the whole person rather than just on disseminating conceptual knowledge or imparting some skills.

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