



THE
JUBILEE CENTRE
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

Insight Series

Organisational Philosophies: Mission, Vision and Values Statements

Introductory Thoughts

To be complimented by a follow-up Insight Series paper

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Organisational Philosophies; Mission, Vision & Values Statements

Introductory Thoughts

The Jubilee Centre for Character and Values is a pioneering interdisciplinary research centre focussing on character, virtues and values in the interest of human flourishing. The Centre is carrying out robust and innovative research on the importance of character and virtues which influence how we think and act in the particular situations that confront us and is a leading informant on policy and practice in this area. Through its extensive range of projects, working in partnership with schools and national professional bodies, the Centre contributes to a renewal of character and values in both individuals and societies.

A recent revival of the concepts of character and virtue has generated great interest across political parties and industry in the role of virtues in different aspects of life, including the moral development of young people, the sustaining of fruitful economies and the fostering of healthy democracies (Framework for Character Education, 2013). The role of virtues in general decision-making and behaviour is not only relevant to people and their lives, but also to business decisions. Organisations often state the values¹ which guide their behaviour and decisions; these values are likely to be made accessible to all interested parties in the form of a mission, vision or values statement. The Centre is therefore interested in the values organisations identify in mission, vision and values statements as being crucial to their conduct and the service they offer. This paper presents introductory thoughts on the values statements adopted by largely UK-based organisations, some international, across a range of industries with a particular focus on the differences in approaches to mission, vision and values statements, the role such statements play in public relations and the impact of the linguistic content.

Mission, vision and values statements are widely viewed as being an integral part of organisations of all types and sizes across all sectors (Darbi, 2012). In defining mission, vision and values statements, scholars offer definitions in rather broad terms, attempting to encompass the varying components of, and key reasons for, organisations implementing them.

Kaplan, Norton and Barrows (2008) differentiate clearly between a mission, vision and values; the mission being a short statement defining the “fundamental purpose of the organisation”; the vision

¹ *It is important to note here that many organisations refer to strengths and competences as ‘values’. For the purpose of continuity in this paper, all strengths and competences related to organisations will be referred to using the term ‘values’, although it is accepted that in some cases a more appropriate definition could be applied.*

being the aspirational goal of the organisation with a time frame attached; and the values being the underlying principles of the organisation's "behaviour, character and culture". Offering a different stance on the organisational mission, Campbell and Yeung (1991, in Desmidt and Prinzie, 2009) suggest it describes "purpose, strategy, values and behavioural standards" and represents an organisation's "image and character"; with many using mission statements to "define their reason for existence" (Sufi and Lyons, 2003). An organisational mission can help key stakeholders understand the organisation in its entirety by offering clarity on its operational workings and behavioural conduct (Hill and Levenhagen 1995, in Desmidt and Prinzie, 2009).

From this initial exploration, the three statements, 'mission', 'vision' and 'values', do not seem to be adopted in any standardised way. Some organisations use all three separately, some use just one of the three and some opt for an entirely different format with tailored terminology to effectively present the same notion. A term, adopted throughout this paper, which arguably describes all three components and what they ultimately refer to, is 'organisational philosophy'.

The widespread diversity apparent from a brief encounter with various organisational philosophies is reflected in the literature with Darbi (2012) highlighting the variety; some are extensive and cover different dimensions of the organisation, whilst others remain tapered to particular, sometimes singular, areas. It is important to appreciate the disparate needs and functions of different organisations and industries; Sufi and Lyons (2003) took this into consideration and focussed on one particular industry, hospitality, developing findings and subsequent guidance tailored to that industry (in Darbi, 2012).

During their study of the hospitality industry, Sufi and Lyons (2003) found that the length of statements ranged from the longest at 365 words to the shortest at just two words; "pleasing people". The latter presents an interesting example of a very vague statement being used to encompass the organisation's entire philosophy. Although very short and non-descriptive this statement is particularly relevant to the essence of hospitality and focusses on the overarching aim of this industry - to satisfy people. It is also important to note that the statement does not identify the organisation's adopted values; one can derive from the objective 'pleasing people' that the values that guide the behaviour are consistent with achieving this ultimate goal. Similarly, the use of the noun 'people' does not distinguish between customers, employees or stakeholders; therefore the statement is applicable to all interested parties.

This demonstrates the importance, for any organisation, of establishing and maintaining prosperous relationships with stakeholders, employees and customers; something which is often largely reliant on a philosophy. Byars and Neil (1987) note that relationships with "employees, customers,

shareholders, suppliers, government and the public at large” are shaped by the values, beliefs and behavioural standards outlined by the organisation. Without a coherent philosophy, these relationships would be based on unreliable and potentially flawed interpretations of the organisation’s conduct (1987). One could argue that this is perhaps more significant today due to the impact of widespread access to public opinion through outlets such as customer reviews and social media; some organisations rely on their philosophy to provide the public with a defining statement regarding their conduct.

The need for an organisational philosophy is closely related to, if not the same as, the need for a marketing strategy or redirection and often, an intelligently formed, vague philosophy is not a coincidence; it is a marketing strategy. The distinction between a marketing slogan and a philosophy is so blurred that when marketing experts refer to marketing tools, they are in effect referring to an organisation’s mission, vision and values. Statements formed initially as a marketing tool can easily be adopted as an overall philosophy (Dao, 2006). With the language and format tailored to fulfil both purposes, a consistent marketing message, much the same as a consistent philosophy, can focus the efforts of the organisation on the core purpose and simultaneously communicate this to the outside world; the “public nature of the slogan can make it the most powerful mission statement of all” (Dao, 2006).

Energy suppliers, an industry currently under close scrutiny from the public and media, demonstrate the use of a philosophy to address reputation and prioritise sending a key message to external stakeholders. Taking [Npower](#) and [British Gas \(Centrica\)](#) as examples, both organisations mention ‘reputation’ specifically and include details on how values and beliefs are applied in practice. Npower recognises that its reputation for the way in which it goes about business is as critical as its financial success and therefore sets out “Critical Behaviours” implemented to guide its conduct. British Gas, similarly, aims to protect and improve its reputation through the employment of “Business Principles” which represent the way it goes about business. Although both emphasise reputation in the early stages of their philosophy, British Gas offers a much more lengthy statement which covers additional key issues that might be considered fundamental to that reputation: for example, operating within laws and regulations; openness and transparency; health, safety and security; environmental impact; and the importance of communities.

In some instances, addressing reputation by revising the philosophy of an organisation can prove necessary in the face of adversity. For example, [Tesco](#) released new pledges via the media in response to the [horse meat scandal in 2013](#) where it set new objectives for product testing and transparent labelling (BBC, 2013). The new objectives are featured on the website under the title ‘[Our Responsibility and Our Promise](#)’ and are still available to view today. Similarly, [Barclays](#)

addressed the public in [February 2013](#) following the Libor crisis, which attracted vast media attention, to set out a new purpose and values for the bank to adhere to; the intention was to “ensure that there will be no return to the old way of doing things” (Jenkins, 2013). Such examples of organisations revising, or issuing entirely new philosophies, in wake of a crisis reaffirm the relationship between philosophies and marketing – such statements can restore an organisation’s reputation when in a state of dispute.

In the formation of a philosophy for any purpose, language is a powerful tool. Charitable organisations, for example, use emotive language and ideologies in their philosophies, making them distinctive from those that are largely profit-oriented and customer satisfaction obsessive. For example, [Barnardo’s](#), committed to caring for young and vulnerable children, includes in its values “working with hope”, “encouraging people to fulfil their potential” and “respecting the unique worth of every person”. The use of positive language such as “hope”, “potential” and “worth” reflects the charity’s aim to support young people and play a part in transforming their lives. [Sense](#), a charity supporting deafblind people, has devised “‘I’ statements” as part of its values; for example “I will listen to others” and “I will be honest and open”. The use of the first person pronoun ‘I’ individualises each employee who is guided by these statements in their everyday roles, adding to the overall effectiveness. Similar to Barnardo’s, Sense uses positive, emotive language, for example, when referring to recognising people’s “worth”; as well as with the “‘I’ statement” “I will find things to celebrate”, where it pledges to recognise all achievements as worthy of celebration. The language used reflects the core purpose of these organisations; caring for people.

Looking at profit-oriented organisations on the other hand, the use of superlative adjectives such as ‘best’, ‘highest’ and ‘most’ gives an impression of self-confidence in the organisation’s ability, position and conduct. Competition is increasingly important and striving to surpass the opposition is essential for becoming ‘the best’. Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman found that the philosophies belonging to outstanding companies included the “belief in being the best” (Byars and Neil, 1987). A philosophy should set an organisation apart from competitors through the identification of their fundamental principles (Hussey 1998, Mintzberg and Quinn 1996, in Darbi 2012). This is still relevant today and competitiveness is adopted largely by UK supermarkets, where competitive prices can be the deciding factor in customers choosing and continuing to shop there. For example: [Sainsbury’s](#) refers to an ambition to be “the most trusted retailer”; [Iceland](#) commits to selling products that are better quality with equivalent or lower pricing than its competitors; and [Waitrose](#) centres its philosophy around “what makes us different”.

When considering values and guiding principles however, the *practical application* of competitiveness is important; the organisation’s definition of what it means to be the best dictates

the behaviour guided by competitiveness. An organisation might define being the best as making the highest profit, achieving greater customer satisfaction, or conducting day to day business in the most virtuous way; competitiveness goes hand in hand with the organisation's understanding of being the best.

Striving to be the best can be relevant in any industry, with few exceptions. NHS Trusts in the West Midlands provide an interesting array of mission, vision and values statements with two standing out as distinctive at first glance. The [Royal Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Foundation Trust](http://www.roh.nhs.uk/hospital-info/trust-values) summarises its strategy for 2013-2016 in a bright and colourful poster with three key sections: vision, values and objectives which set out how the vision can be achieved (Figure 1). The ideal of being the best is included here in the simple, effective and concise vision to provide the “best care by the best people in the best hospital”; the inclusion of a time frame to achieve the vision by 2016 introduces a sense of realism and honesty – the Trust is not claiming to be the best right now but wants to strive to be the best in the future. The use of a poster to display the philosophy of an organisation is an innovative way to integrate the values into the work environment.



Figure 1: <http://www.roh.nhs.uk/hospital-info/trust-values>

Displaying its philosophy in this way enables the Trust to communicate its values and conduct to all important groups. This communication is essential as a crucial element of the service provided by NHS Trusts is the pressure to satisfy the needs and expectations of patients' relatives, in addition to patients and employees. The requirement to satisfy all three groups, and for all parties to trust in the values that guide the organisation's behaviour, may mean that NHS Trusts are more motivated to produce values statements which stand up to scrutiny and to ensure these values are implemented in their day to day practice.

The [Heart of England NHS Trust](http://www.heartofengland.nhs.uk) approaches its philosophy differently, encompassing all elements under the title "Priorities and Corporate Strategy" (Figure 2). Following a list of the Trust's priorities, a triangular hierarchy diagram illustrates the Trust's strategy in order of priority with the patient at the top, followed by the vision, the mission and the Trust's key value – "openness". A focus on the community demonstrates further the importance of customers trusting in the organisation; for example the vision "to provide services that inspire confidence, trust and pride within the communities we serve". The diagram successfully presents what the Trust is all about, although perhaps lacks sufficient detail regarding how it incorporates its priorities and key value into day to day functions.



Figure 2: <http://www.heartofengland.nhs.uk/trust-values/>

The Heart of England NHS Trust's strategy only identifies one value - "openness". This seems to be an unusual practice as many organisations adopt a handful of values, including; *openness, respect, honesty, trust, integrity, innovation, accountability, responsibility, quality, commitment, consistency, compassion, courageous*. Some different values can also be found; *dynamism (referring to adaptation to change in markets), to be international, aspirational, recognition (of people's contribution and worth) and passion*.

An observation drawn from this broad exploration of organisational philosophies is that there is huge variety in the values and types of values identified as being crucial to the conduct of, and service offered by, an organisation. Many of the values presented are directly and solely related to customer satisfaction, financial success or service quality; for example: *consistency, to be international, competitiveness and quality*. However, some values identified can be defined as *moral character virtues*, for example, *honesty, compassion and courage* (Framework for Character Education, 2013). These are the morally grounded virtues that guide our responses to situations we come across, and for an organisation, can help facilitate virtuous decisions and conduct. *Honesty* appeared frequently across the statements explored for the purposes of this paper; organisations such as Sense, [The Co-Operative](#) and the [Queen Elizabeth Hospital Trust](#) identified *honesty* as fundamental in guiding their behaviour. *Creativity* is an example of a *performance character virtue* that enables us to apply our character habits in practice (Framework for Character Education, 2013). Organisations such as [Standard Chartered Bank](#) and the [BBC](#) adopt *creativity* in their philosophy. The Jubilee Centre for Character and Values is particularly interested in the values that foreground virtue-based goals and the benefits these bring to the individual and society. The huge potential for further exploration in this broad subject area offers the opportunity to explore in more depth the place of such virtues in organisational philosophies.

As an introductory piece this paper offers an insight into the values identified by large well-known organisations and the way these are presented through mission, vision and values statements. The conduct of an organisation is held in high regard by all stakeholders, often shining the light on the values identified as guiding its behaviour. Subsequent to this, increasing importance is being placed on mission, vision and values statements, especially in the face of adversity and public scrutiny. The marketing power of a philosophy can be highly influential in dictating its content, with some organisations looking to instil trust in their customers and some wanting to address their reputation more widely. As pressures from the media, public opinion and competitors become more prominent in the running of a successful organisation the emphasis on organisational philosophies will inevitably increase. In highlighting the range of content of organisational philosophies, as well as the

differences in approaches organisations might adopt, this paper indicates the scope for further exploration in this area, and in particular, with relation to the work of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Values.

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