Corporate values: Really useful or an aberration?

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Are you able to cite the values of your company or organization and, above all, explain what they mean for your behaviour towards colleagues, partners and customers?
In addition, have you reflected on the connection between your corporate values and your own personal values?

Many times, within a whole range of companies and organizations, I have been confronted with people who struggled to cite their company's values, or indeed their own personal values, and had not reflected on the impacts and behaviour that would make them real or appreciable.

Following on from my previous article, "Leadership assumes awareness of one's personal values", I would like to share my thoughts on corporate values and corporate culture.

Attractive posters, a few key words or fine slogans are pointless if the principles they define are not lived out, applied and monitored.

First of all: can an enterprise have values? My preferred answer is that only the individuals who make up an enterprise can have values and that, as a result of their decision-making and behaviour, certain overall principles are felt within and outside of the company. A culture is established.

This implies that everyone must be aware of their own values and that, within the company, the principles vital for the future must be spelled out and operational. Maxime Morand speaks of defining "reflexes" within the organization. I am talking here about translating these overall values/principles into observable, measurable patterns of **behaviour**.
For example, if a retail business wants its staff to be perceived as friendly, having defined "Friendliness" as one of its core values, it may ask checkout personnel to:

- look customers in the eye
- smile
- say "thank you" or "good morning" or "good afternoon"

You will say that authenticity is important and you can tell if employees are obliged to behave in this way. Yes, you are right, but this stage is essential and will have a medium and long-term impact if it is combined with three other factors:

1. Recruiting the right staff: this will mean ensuring that the recruitment process includes a conversation about candidates' personal values and the values of the company, and behaviour that will make these values evident to customers. **Staff need to align themselves with the company's values and be aware of what kind of behaviour is expected!**

2. Including in performance evaluations a section concerned with corporate values and, above all, the kinds of behaviour that make a positive contribution to the corporate culture. **Assess and reward**

behaviour that meets this criterion.

3. Insisting that company managers set a good **example**.
    This is the key factor, and you are in control of it.

"A corporate culture and corporate values cannot be taught, but must be experienced and seen to be lived out!"

If managers are really convinced of this and live out the company's values systematically and uncompromisingly, they will have a real impact and be really useful. This discipline will earn respect and will have a snowball effect: in time, values will become culture.

If my superiors don't do it, why should I? A waste of time, money and credibility. In other words, an aberration!

In the last months, I have met different CEOs of Swiss SMEs (employing between 80 and 400 people) who have impressed me by their convictions and values, and the culture they have established in their companies. You only need to listen to their staff and customers to feel this unity and the strength and commitment that strong values, if lived out, can generate.

So, over to you. Be consistent, coherent and exemplary!

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