



Our People: Perceptions & Values

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The fundamental work of leadership is defined as being to create, maintain and improve a group of people so that they can achieve objectives and continue to do so over time.

To do this work effectively, leaders have to pay attention to the social process in their organisation. They need to: - Remember that we all make judgements all of the time - we can't help ourselves – and that the judgements we make (i.e. how we perceive the world) affect how we behave - Understand what holds a group of people together or causes it to fall apart.

If an organisation or a team is going to become a coherent group and work together successfully over time, the members of that organisation must trust one another, demonstrate courage in actions and decisions, treat each other with respect, fairness, dignity and love and be honest with each other. The behaviour of individuals, especially leaders in an organisation, and the systems or policies of an organisation will be judged against such values.

If my manager is careful about giving me work to do in a way that I can do it and if they tell me when I have worked well and reflect that in my annual work performance assessment, I will judge that manager to be a trustworthy leader who treats me with respect and dignity. If, however, when it comes to showing that recognition in giving me a pay rise, the company's pay system does not allow my manager to reward me next year with a few percent more than my colleague who has not worked quite so well, then I might view the pay system as dishonest. After all, I thought the pay in this organisation was meant to reward good performance not just give everyone the same.

As each individual judges such behaviour or systems, they are making assumptions about the motives and values behind what they see. The ratings will be the truth for those making them. They are not necessarily going to be universally true. However, the conclusions that individuals draw about those hidden motives will influence their behaviour in the future. If I decide that you are to be trusted I am going to take the risk of opening myself up to you much more than if I have concluded from what you have done in the past that you are dishonest and untrustworthy.

Over time these conclusions if backed up by further experiences in the same vein become those people's 'mythologies', the lens through which they view the world and which helps them know how to behave in a range of situations. They will begin to expect the same people or people like them always to behave like that. 'Managers are always going to be unfair to shop floor people' 'Nurses are always caring' 'The police are always racist', and so on.

We feel most comfortable with other people who share our mythologies, who see the world through similar lenses. Together with them we form 'cultures', groups who are likely to react in the same way because of the common way we interpret behaviour and systems. To understand how members of an organisation and the different cultures will rate changes in behaviour or systems is crucial to the implementation of change. If a leader has a good idea of how those affected by change will react, then the type of change can be adapted or, if the change is seen as essential, appropriate action can be taken to manage any hostile reaction foreseen.

It is part of a leader's work to know and understand the mythologies of those they are leading, both as individuals and as cultures. This will help them to predict what reaction there will be to decisions they take or systems they implement and operate.