

Values-driven leadership

Values-driven leadership can maximise the potential of an entire organisation.



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Governance expert Tesse Akpeki elaborates on the advantages of a values-driven approach and explains how it can be achieved

Values-driven leadership occurs when leaders are driven by values that shape their mindset and inform their decisions and actions. Values articulate what the organisation cares about, shape culture and are the building blocks for appropriate conduct, mindsets and behaviour.

Benefits of values-driven leadership

Where boards are led by their values, they are clearer about what is expected of them. Service quality improves and the organisation achieves at a higher standard. Those connected to the organisation feel the difference values make as they walk through the door. It comes through in what they hear, how they feel and the difference the work of the organisation makes.

- The organisation achieves mission impact and delivers its mission with skill, care and commitment.
- A values framework encourages engagement and connection. It delivers meaning, fulfilment and motivation within the organisation and with the world outside – beneficiaries, members and funders.
- Against the backdrop of values, trustees set boundaries firmly and test what can be accomplished and what can't. Values help leaders to develop a framework to address challenges and seize opportunities in a way that is likely to yield results.
- People in the organisation take responsibility for their contributions, are held accountable and act accountably, while also able to face setbacks. The growth mindset allows trustees and the executive to devote more attention to learning from their mistakes without being obsessed or paralysed by them.
- Values enable the organisation to pursue change thoughtfully.
- Embracing diversity as a value supports the organisation to delight in difference and to be thoughtful and deliberate in how it can be truly inclusive, accepting and open.
- The trustees are more confident in taking manageable and informed risks and adopting good ideas that result in innovation and creativity.
- Board members and staff are recruited in line with the organisation's values. Succession planning attracts leaders with a mindset that shapes the future of the organisation. Staff and volunteer surveys include questions that provide evidence of how the values are working.
- The organisation is better able to handle rivalries that obstruct effectiveness. Trustees and staff identify issues that sabotage working relationships and avoid practices that can result in a toxic culture.
- The organisation retains talent, as staff find validation in values that matter most to them. Trustees, staff and volunteers connect with their commitment and passion to make a difference. These find expression through the values adopted by the organisation. As values are reinforced there is renewed and enhanced energy to fulfilling the mission of the organisation.
- As challenges mount, leaders are mindful of the impact of their work and how it impacts on others. They intentionally determine behaviours that serve them well and avoid inappropriate and spirit crushing behaviours such as bullying and harassment.
- Values could be a heartbeat for openness, accountability, support, respect, fairness, teamwork, integrity, courage, honesty and excellence. As a platform, values foster an environment and create conditions where people feel safe, appreciated, validated, inspired, energised, motivated, free to contribute and able to express their commitment.
- Ongoing work implements and embeds the values, making the organisations a unique place to be
- Values-based leadership distributes accountability throughout the board and is built into board culture and activities.

Bringing values to life

Developing values entails going through a mindful process. Values are chosen from a range of alternatives with an understanding of how they are important for the wellbeing and success of the organisation. Insight comes from the process of developing the values and equipping staff, trustees and volunteers to bring the values to life.

- Ensure strategic intentions and the strategic framework are aligned with the values.
- Implement transparency of process for appointments for board positions and hiring.
- Clarify expectations. Codes of conduct are extremely helpful.
- Incorporate a culture of positive dissent in the board room. Welcome candour and a culture of curiosity and inquiry. Be open and honest. Value the input of every member of the team.
- Evaluate performance and the impact of values.
- Put in place processes and procedures that are properly executed.
- Ensure that people are treated fairly, equitably and ethically.
- Allow people struggling with a dysfunctional culture to speak up and encourage them to do so.
- Say thank you and show appreciation.
- Invest in relationships – keep positive relationship bank accounts. Make more deposits with fewer withdrawals so the account reflects a positive balance. Build trust and keep promises.
- Integrate a values and behaviours audit as part of the governance assessment. Identify what the culture allows or does not allow to happen.
- Embrace tasks/activities within role descriptions and person specifications.
- Build resilience continually.
- Connect and make the best use of resources. Support ongoing mentoring, training, professional development and quality assurance.

- Recognise that requests for guidance are not expressions of weakness. Employees should share uncertainty with their leaders and ask for help. This encourages a spirit of learning.
- Identify alignments. When people are in conflict they focus on their differences. Instead emphasise your common purpose. What are you trying to achieve. What is your shared goal or purpose?

A meaningful value system links to commitment, engagement, participation, connection, reflection, renewal, a sense of belonging and meaning. It is more than having a values statement, it is what really matters lived out across the organisation.

Questions for discussion

How can we create an organisational culture that maximises the potential of the organisation?

What is our shared purpose or goal?

How can we engage people in ways that value their knowledge, experience and contribution?

How can we engage in conversations based on collaboration and partnership?