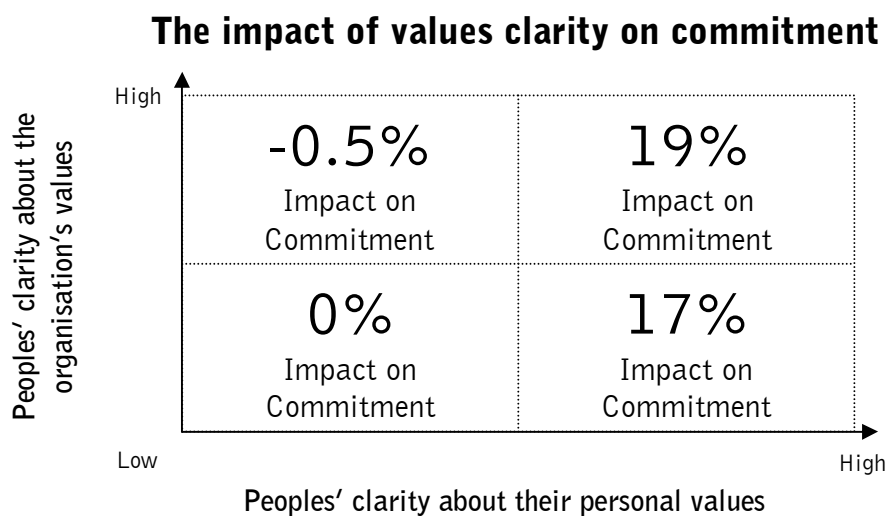


Values & Commitment

In their book on values-based leadership, *The Leadership Challenge*, authors James Kouzes and Barry Posner highlight their research into the relationship between personal and organisational values clarity and the impact on peoples' commitment to the organisation¹. The results of their research challenges the popular process many organisations adopt when working with values and clearly indicates the difference personal values clarity makes to peoples' levels of commitment.

The diagram below outlines the summary of their research. The vertical axis indicates the extent to which people report being clear about the organisation's values. The horizontal axis indicates the extent to which people report being clear about their personal values. The information gathered in reference to these two sets of values was in turn correlated with the extent to which people said they were committed to the organisation as measured on a scale of 1 (low) to 7 (high). The numbers shown in the four boxes indicate the level of commitment on the scale 1-7 that people have towards their organisations as this relates to their degree of values clarity both personally and for the organisation.



We can see rather unsurprisingly that the highest level of commitment (19%) is from the people who have the greatest clarity about both their personal values and the organisations values. However, perhaps what is surprising for many organisations is that the lowest level of commitment (-0.5%) is associated with the top left hand corner of the diagram where people having a high degree of clarity about the organisations values and yet a low degree of clarity about their personal values. How is this apparent paradox possible? How can people who are very clear about their own personal values, be more committed to their work than people who have greater clarity about their organisation's values?

The answer became obvious to us after listening to feedback from many of the 5,000 people who have experienced our True North programme to date. People consistently said that when they knew their own values and experienced their work place as being in alignment with their values, then they had a high level of commitment to their work, because they found their work to be meaningful. Our experiences of working with organisations on becoming values-based shows that many organisations have focused on having people understand the organisation's values and missed the need to have people clarify their personal values.

Over and over again we are asked for feedback on approaches organisations are taking with their values, and over and over again we see large amounts of time, energy and dollars being spent on word-smithing the organisations values: producing T-shirts, posters, coffee mugs, and mouse pads (to name a few of the items we have witnessed being manufactured) and distributing them to all employees, with no time spent on enabling people to clarify their values. Whilst producing such icons as T-shirts, posters and the like to remind people of the organisation's values is an important step to take, it is usually taken out of sequence and often in isolation.

Self-sustainable commitment comes from clarifying personal values. The True North programme, developed over the past five years, offers some of the simplest processes for enabling individuals to clarify their values and align themselves with their role. These processes, which can be found in the book *Finding True North: Discover Your Values, Enrich Your Life*, are being used by an increasing number of organisations as their preferred way of supporting their people to clarify their values.

One of our principles when working with individuals and organisations values is this;

“Peoples’ values will always dominate organisations’ values!”

It pays then to support people in organisations to clarify their own personal values and to then align them with both the organisation's values and their roles.



For more information on aligning values in your organisation contact Values AT Work.

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¹ Kouzes, J. and Posner, B. (2003) *The Leadership Challenge*. Third edition. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.