In Search of Values – Reporting from Eight Norwegian Organizations

Einar Aadland

Abstract

The article is an empirical report of how eight Norwegian organizations comprehend and practice their values. Discussing the concept of value and relevant analytical perspectives, the article proposes an approach to the study of values in organizations. Values are studied as espoused core concepts and in-use practices. The concept of intentionality is discussed, informing the value apprehension in organizations. Utilizing six dimensions of organizational life: environment, structure, primary activity, maintenance, change, and management, the relative influence of values to core organizational functions are examined. The eight organizations invest substantial efforts in maintaining employee value motivation. Reflections on influences by Norwegian environmental norms, values significance in primary activity, in structural power relations, to capacities of change, and managerial role, are to a lesser degree executed.

Scandinavian organizations are increasingly engaging in explicating core values. These are given consideration as important tools in managerial activities, guiding organizational interests and behavior. However, this development raises several challenges. Values are general and diffuse concepts, being understood and interpreted in different ways. Individuals may act contrary to their ideals confronted with everyday challenges, and organizations may turn their attention away from core values confronted with acute needs. As one leader put it: "We have been busy with extensive restructuring, and our value attention has been correspondingly low." The complex interplay between words and work, or between intentions and results, is maybe the challenge to everyone taking values seriously, aiming at organizational agency.

In Scandinavia the interest of value approach to organizational development has focused mainly on the impact of moral values on organizational performance. In Denmark this perspective has been a major influence throughout the last 15 years. The idea of "ethical accounting" has been tried out in several organizations, and interest in value based leadership has produced a substantial amount of books and dissertations (Thyssen 1998, Petersen 1998, Dybdahl Jensen 1998, Bak 1996). Norway has experienced a major trend of large companies hoisting the flag of value based leadership throughout the last decade.

Our research has accordingly been devoted to study the impact and relevance of this interest. Research of value practices in daily life of organizations lacks at present agreement on methods and overarching perspectives. Thus, our project represents an exploration of methods and theoretical perspectives.

The challenge

Value based leadership may be defined as an effort to motivate and mobilize organizational agency based on desirable values, and to reveal and limit actions and decisions based on non-conscientious or undesirable values (Aadland2004).

The key question of the project was accordingly: How are values developed and practiced through words and deeds, and to what extent are reflections on values-in-use part of organizational practice within the selected organizations?

The study aimed at revealing formal and informal aspects of the practice of values within the participating organizations. The official and intended value profile was mapped by seeking information in basic documents. The informal and culturally expressed value profile was studied by interviewing leaders and employees, and to a certain extent observing organizational behavior in some areas, i.e. treating customers, the choreography and cultural pattern of meetings, introducing patients, etc.

A rewarding angle of incidence was tracing value implications of organizational stories, as they revealed opinions of good or bad, progress or stagnation, virtues or vices.

Methods

The project was assigned by HSH, The Federation of Norwegian Commercial and Service Enterprises, who wished to present a study of how some of their member institutions interpreted and practiced institutional values. The assignment was given to Diakonhjemmet University College in 2005 and carried out during the following year.

Being cut in the format of a comparative case study, the chosen approach was informed by methods of studying organizational cultures. The organizations were researched by teams consisting of two field workers in the course of one to three days. The approach was strictly qualitative, aiming at enhancement of "thick descriptions" of meaning. By means of appointed and spontaneous half structured interviews of single persons and focus groups, engaging leaders, employees, customers, patients, and other stakeholders, the emerging data material was considerable. In addition a substantial amount of observation reports was analyzed. More than a thousand pages of data material constitute the empirical basis of the analysis.

The choice of organizations to be studied was based on two principles. On the one hand the assigning organization

wished to make a study of best case organizations among their members, i.e. companies that had distinguished themselves in some ways related to value practices. On the other hand the study aimed at variety of organizational types. The studied institutions represented thereby a mixture, containing one cosmetic company, one school, one museum, two hospitals, one addiction clinic, one humanitarian organization, and one nursing home.

The analytical process was initiated by a joint discussion of the data material lasting for seven full days, engaging the six research co-workers. The discussions were explorative, being inspired by a grounded theory approach. The next step was carried out by the project leader, engaging in theoretical bracketing and further clarification of the analytical elements within the material.

Searching for values

Searching for values in organizations raises two obvious questions, firstly, of what to look for, and secondly of where to look for it.

Value, intentionality and action

A discussion of how values may be approached in organizational practice, as well as in research, calls for a clarification of the concept itself. Values are salient expressions of intentionality. Actions, on the other hand, are dependent upon distinctions of value to be apprehended. "In order to see something, we need concepts. Perception without conception is blind" (Weick 2006:1726). The concept of value allows perception of ways of making distinctions of worth. Organizations are intentional, valuing and acting social entities, placing value as a key concept within language to comprehend actual behaviour.

The concept of value has been presented as "the most striking fact about human life" (Korsgaard 1996), and as the core concept of human existence (Pirsig 1991). "Everybody that has experienced sitting on a hot oven knows intuitively what values are", states Pirsig in his philosophical novel "Lila, an inquiry into morals". Accordingly, the ability of valuing is the mark of humanity, indicating a greater importance than for example the ability of applying reason to enhance scientific progress. Thus, the primacy of values implies the primacy of dealing with questions of distribution, suppression, poverty, and environmental challenges. Within the organizational field the value issue raises – and partly answers – core questions of why, when, where and how on both grand and petty scales. These questions coincide with challenges dealt with in theories of ethics, which is why the field of ethics is increasingly engaged in the development of organizational theory. The concept of value is an expression of human intentionality, being enacted in forms of human behaviour.

Values are about valuing and evaluating. The term is applied to a wide range of matters, extending from formulations of pecuniary worth of items until expressions of ideal or moral worth of actions. This may be part of the reason why there is an unintentional multitude of value definitions. Still, values are expressions of worth, or likes and dislikes concerning things, persons, principles, attitudes, beliefs, theories, as well as practices. Values are expressed within language through the use of verbs like "want", "prefer", "hate", "despise". It is generally supposed that peoples' values show certain stability over time. Rocheach's (1973) definition of value is one of the most cited points of departure in value research. He states that a value is "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence." Another definition in the same line of thought is the view that "values are standards or criteria for choosing goals or guiding action and are relatively enduring and stable over time" (Dose 1997:220). A third definition states that a value is "a person's internalized belief about how he or she should or ought to behave" (Meglino & Ravlin 1998:354). Values as (internalized) beliefs or standards are open to the conscious mind as espoused values. This perspective regards value systems as patterns for behaviour.

In addition it is generally supposed that values may be inferred from actions. Individuals repeating a coherent evaluating reaction, exposed to similar situations may be described as expressing stable values. Values demonstrated through behaviour may be partially or wholly pre-conscious to the actor, and as such tacit and hidden to his or her mind. The naming of the value-in-use is to extract after an action is performed as an act of sensemaking (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005). The process of putting values-in-use into words denotes value systems as stable patterns of behaviour.

Hence, values may be approached in two ways – as espoused values and as values-in-use (Argyris & Schön 1978). Schein (1985) argues that once values are taken for granted through repetitious practice they turn into preconceived basic assumptions. Values-in-use and basic assumptions share the feature of being influential on actions, yet being hidden to the conscious mind. Accordingly, values may be studied along two tracks of investigation. On the one hand values are conscious verbal valuations expressed by groups or individuals. The study of values in this respect implies descriptions and measurements of peoples` self-expressed likes and dislikes, and/or moral convictions (Inglehart 1997, Meglino & Ravlin 1998). On the other hand, values are nonverbal valuations more or less unconsciously expressed through actions. Values of the latter kind are for others to interpret on behalf of the actor (Argyris & Schön 1978, Schein 1985, Weick 1995), or for the actor to interpret post factum. Studying values in this respect calls for a close attention to empirical patterns of behaviour, engaging hermeneutically inspired methods of interpretation to the material in order to bring forth sensible value "headlines" which most precisely catch the "mind of the action". Such methods may be weak in questions of validity and reliability but rich in in-depth understanding and self reflection through processes of sensemaking.

An organization may advertise punctuality as one of its most important values. However, observation of staff meetings reveals a pattern of undisciplined late arrivals and consequently delayed starting points of time. In a Norwegian hospital the value happiness was presented as one of three core values. Employees were not happy with this. As they said, how can we be happy facing cuts and downsizing? Examples like these imply a need for studying the organizational values along both tracks of investigation, since espoused values not only inspire desired behaviour but may be paired with tacit values-in-use resulting in surprising and non-predictive actions.

Another discussion focuses on whether values are preferences that are morally desirable expressions of ethical "oughtness", or if values are merely preferences (Dose 1997:224). The first position is held by researchers investigating issues partly stemming from Weber's view of Protestant work ethics as influential on the development of capitalism. The second position is held by researchers who define values as preferences for socially desirable modes of behaviour (Rocheach 1973, Meglino & Ravlin 1998:354). However, it is hard to establish clear boundaries separating moral values from preferences, since judgement of "right" and "wrong" are entangled with valuing of "pleasant" and "awful",

as for example in utilitarian and contractual theories.

Values are expressions of worth within language. But what kind of "reality" do they express in comparison to other "words"? Intentionality denotes a conceptual class in which the concept of value naturally belongs. Intentionality is defined as "aboutness", denoting the ability of the human mind to be focused (Dennett & Haugeland 1987). Something that is about something else is said to have intentionality. Intentionality is often called "the mark of the mental", expressing the human ability of having ideas, beliefs, desires, thoughts, hopes, fears, perceptions, dreams, hallucinations – and values. These "propositional attitudes" are mental states with intentionality (Jacob 2003:Ch.10). Jacob states a duality of the intentionality of the mental, and distinguishes between mind-to-world and world-to-mind directions of fit (ibid.). He cites Anscombe (1957:56), who exemplifies this with the case of a "shopping list". The list may either be used as instructions for purchasing the right items by a customer or it can be used as an inventory by a detective whose challenge is to draw a record of what the customer actually is buying. In the first case the shopping list should not be corrected in the light of the contents of the shopping bag. But in the latter case the fact of the grocery bag puts the blame on the customer, and the detective should adjust his list according to the facts of the bag. Thus intentionality is wider than mere intention. A shopping list is a list of conscious intentions, but the contents of the bag reveals a more comprehensive mental activity; of impulses, hidden desires, and temptations – which are expressions of the wider intentionality.

This duality of intentionality is parallel to the dual approach to the study of values. Values viewed as mind-to-world intentionality are expressed trough the numerous espoused value statements of organizations ("shopping lists"), and in the research aiming at precise descriptions and measurements of the effects of values and value congruence (Meglino & Ravlin 1998). Values in the shape of world-to-mind intentionality point to the description, interpretation and sensemaking of organizational behaviour. Values-in-use are to be deduced, or punctuated from a "list of features" of practices. Reflection on tacit values-in-use may inspire the organization to adjust its practice and its espoused values in order to be more in congruence with what they actually aspire to. This "reflexive interpretation" (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000) may inspire creativity as well as making the organization more trustworthy.

A crucial question is how the link between value and action functions. Behaviour may be defined as what happens when energy is consumed to produce motion in living organisms. Action is human behaviour expressing intention or meaning. Accordingly, organizational behaviour is human action, which are studied 1) either as a product of sets of contingencies (which may be altered), or 2) as expressions of internal motives, intentions and values. Since human behaviour at times seems to lack obvious conscious reason, the need for employing sensemaking efforts arises, in order to establish some order of meaning behind the pattern of action at hand. Thus, the latter endeavour infers meaning and intentionality as central to action, while the former approach underlines the interplay among contingent forces. In both cases, however, there is a general acceptance of the fact that value and action is mutually interrelated, but exact description of the interrelationship has yet to be presented.

The concept of value is more or less randomly touched upon within the applications of social constructionism or postmodern language theories to understand organizational behaviour. However, the way making of differences (Derrida 1978) constitutes our conceived world implies valuing as a key activity within "languaging". How meaning and value are established in organizations rely less on strategic planning and rational choice, than on what Weick calls "committed interpretation" (Weick 2001:14). Sense is built through social interaction, where more or less random action seeks justification, gets publicly accepted, and ends up as "the way" things should be understood and done. Since value is a core expression of what is considered sensible and worthy, there should be good reason to investigate organizational values following this perspective.

To summarize, values are constructs of worth, being espoused in language as goals, ideals and preferences, or extracted from actions trough processes of interpretive sensemaking. Values are expressions of intentionality and show a close, but not closed interrelationship with action.

Where to look

Organizational theory has developed a multitude of refined definitions and perspectives on core dimensions over the years. A major shift from internally focused theories to theories focused on the interplay between environment and organization was introduced by the open-system approach from the sixties (Katz & Kahn 1978, Scott 2003). Values are doubtlessly informed by social constructs from the surrounding environment in any organization. Emerging with equal importance to the study of values are social and power structures. Scott differentiates between normative, cultural-cognitive and behavioral structures, all of which in separate ways embrace the concept of values (2003). The normative structure is based on espoused values, while the two other categories may be described as saturated with values-in-use (Argyris & Schön 1978). Katz & Kahn (1978) describe five subsystems of organizational activity in their open systems approach. The subsystems of production, support, maintenance, adaption and management may serve as relevant categories for the analysis of values. The supportive subsystem focuses relations with the environment, and is thus included in our analysis of environmental influences on the organizations. In conjunction with this, our analytical categories for the study of values in the eight organizations are:

1.Environment
2.Structures
3.Primary activity
4.Maintenance
5.Change
6.Management

1.Environment is in short everything that surrounds an organization. Following the development introduced by open systems model, the environment is crucial to any research on organizations. Environmental units may be layered and specified in different categories in order to grasp the influence on organizations (Scott, 2003: 125ff). In our research, we have a special interest in how Norwegian social norms of behavior influence value profiles of the eight organizations, including what is called the Scandianavian leadership model.

2. Structures. Values are of vital importance to the understanding of organizational structures of all kinds. Norms, roles and attitudes are situated within value structures. Scott claims that within normative social structure, "values are the criteria employed in selecting goals of behavior; norms are the generalized rules governing behavior that specify, in particular, appropriate means for pursuing goals" (Scott, 2003:18). Within structures, values serve a dual function: to maintain and to renew. However

Figure 1. Core Values

	Religious	Moral	Community	Social	Personal	Change
Private school	Human dignity based on Christian understanding		Just distribution of resources, Multicultural openness	Solidarity Poverty reduction		
Museum			Inclusive		Pure	Inventive
Cosmetics firm		Against animal testing	Ecologically sound products	Support fair trade, Defend human rights	Support self-respect	
Addiction clinic	Love		Strong relations Proximity	Heterogeneity	Reliable Competent	
Humanitarian organization			Inclusive	Just	Glowing	Daring
Medical hospital			Service		Friendliness Respect	
Nursing home	Dignity Compassion Hope Faith		Community	Justice, Solidarity		
Psychiatric hospital for elderly			Cooperation		Holistic perspective Respect Engagement	

important, structural values are rarely focused and discussed, often serving as tacit groundings of power.

3. Primary activity is the cause of organizational existence. An organization is created with a task, an overarching goal that results in production activities. From the volunteer group's task of painting a wall, to the complex task of making cars, study environmental changes or treating patients – all needs processes of organizing."Organizations are commonly classified according to their main productive process" (Katz & Kahn 1978:52). A production plant produces, a store sells, a school educates, and a nursing home cares for elderly. An organization does not survive lack of demands for its products. If values are important to the organization, they should therefore be traced in the production process.

4. Maintenance is about trimming and adjusting the organization's capacities. A car is maintained by changing oil, coolant and spark plugs at certain intervals. The organization maintains its competence by recruiting skilled workers, educating them, giving responsibilities according to capacity and know-how. Buildings are maintained, and technologies are updated. Maintenance is much about developing a constructive and compelling culture. As patterns of value are key components in defining culture, the challenge of communicating values is a key perspective of value oriented organizations.

5. Capacity for change has grown in importance as society grow complex and processes accelerate. Political and ideological conditions change inevitably, official laws and regulations flourish, new generations think and act differently, and organizations must enact adjustments and changes simply to stay alive. Proactive agency demands originality, strategic skills and open-mindedness. Pure adjustment demands re-active competence, while real capacity for change is developed through watchful analytical reflection and experiments. Organizations today face a harsher competitive society where the principle "win or disappear" is employed at an accelerating pace. The value dimension is in this respect interesting – does increased focus on values enhance or deter capacity of change?

6. Management coordinates and adjusts the total organizational system.

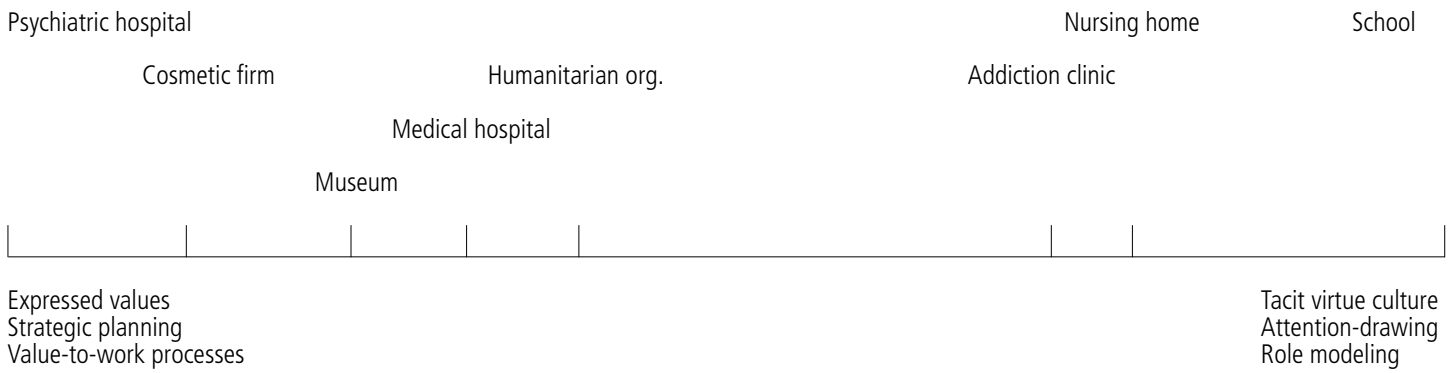
The analysis of the empirical material was directed towards ways organizational values were expressed in regard to the six dimensions of organizational life. If values were to be taken seriously in managing organizational activities, it would be crucial to have values surface within all of these analytical categories. But, in addition a discussion of the relative importance of the different analytical areas might be vital. It is presumably possible that core values being focused in one area would be counterproductive to another. For example, building a "strong culture" and firm organizational values in routines and traditions may endanger the capacity of change.

As an introduction to the eight organizations, we were met with a presentation of their established core values (Figure 1).

Environment

Norwegian society supports traditionally the value of humility. There is a strong social norm of holding a low profile with regards to own qualities. Expressions of self-centered satisfaction of own qualities are generally considered unacceptable. This complies with the sociological thesis that the Norwegian society is one of the more homogenous and egalitarian societies of the world. Being one of the protestant countries, Weber's classical description of religious devotion and hard labor, as well as Luther's "ora et labora" denotes influential ideals informing Norwegian sentiments. How does this social norm of the environment comply

Figure 2. Overview



with the idea of clarifying and expressing own values – a practice that may be regarded basically as an US import?

On the one hand, organizational leaders of our study were influenced by their social upbringing to be modest and humble – in private, but also on behalf of the organization. On the other hand, they were equally challenged by the competitive development within the organizational realm, demanding clear value profiles and compelling ethical engagements. There were interesting results of varying practices stemming from this more or less coveted dilemma. The organizations expressed this in different ways.

In most of the eight organizations values were considered as integrated and invisible. Values were positioned "within the walls", "in the athmosphere", or "in the spine" of the employees. All agreed upon an integrated value practice as the ideal goal of value work. But the means to this goal were differently envisioned. At one end of the scale, the view that values should be actively addressed was considered the central feature of organizational strategy. Accordingly, a conscious and substantial effort was done to implement value development processes, integrating value reflections as routine activity, and enhancing considerable processes of evaluating the factual value-in-practice output. This view is in alignment with central features of the philosophy of value based management. The most consequent proponent of this strategy was the psychiatric hospital for elderly, which had a six years practice of enacting ethical accounting.

The opposite end of the scale represents the view that values should preferably be kept tacit. Values are, as it was expressed by one leader, "prone to turn into external cosmetics if uttered too often". In this respect expressed values might represent a threat to real value practice. This view may be named "the tacit virtue culture", their representatives being more eager to integrate virtues and attitudes into practice, without utilizing strategic and value-into-words processes. The naming of organizational values is less important, as long as the basics of being a virtuous person are reckoned and transmitted through attention-drawing to exemplary behavior. The school was the most typical representative of this practice, exemplifying traditional social norms of Norwegian society in its organizational practice.

The rest of the organizations were found along a scale between the two end-points, representing different balances of covert and expressed value practice (Figure 2).

All of the organizations stressed the importance of organizational values as core standards of practice. "Values within the walls" may serve as a mutual goal, visualizing the aim of values being integrated, personal and natural expressions in practice by the organizational members.

But the different organizations showed great variety considering how values should be implemented and integrated. The school presented a conscious reflection of attention-drawing to virtuous behavior and efforts of role modeling. They were critical of "too much value speak". As opposed to this, the psychiatric hospital invested great efforts in planned discussions and reflections on values and ethics in hospital practices.

The danger of clear cut formulations of values and planned programs of implementation may be rigidity. The individual worker may miss the personal challenge and the freedom of making own reflections and choices may be threatened if the program is too strict. On the other hand, working out values through sensemaking processes may increase the ethical sensitivity and awareness of change potential (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005).

The danger of the tacit virtue cultural practice may be mystification. Interpretations of values at hand are left solely to the individual, and the benefits of collective reflections on values and worth are bypassed. Cultural basic assumptions are easily taken for granted (Schein 1985), and the tacit approach does not question these. However, the tacit virtue cultural approach escapes the threat of contradiction between words and work.

Another environmental influence is the Scandinavian leadership model, having gained attention through the last decades. The Scandinavian leadership model is marked by respect for the individual, and holistic, humanistic and value based approaches with a multiple stakeholder focus. It functions within flat and non-bureaucratic organizations with a high degree of devolved responsibility and accountability, and trust, care and concern as common values. In short, Scandinavian management has a flat and humanistic orientation, and coincides with the general value oriented interest of the region.

Structures

Values are generally considered as motives, preferences and intentions held by individuals. When core organizational values like "respect", competence", "creativity" are defined as collective ends, still most associations are directed to personal behavior. When a sufficient number of organizational members have integrated institutional values in their personal value hierarchy and act accordingly the fulfillment of value management is complete. This rather commonly expressed way of conceptualizing value based management is an offspring of the idea of organization as the sum of people working there. Values are mental entities, and as such tied to the realm of the person. Values are products of person(s) valuing.

This leads to the most commonly shared method of value studies: Interviewing organizational members on personal priorities and preferences.

But the context may regard the value situation differently. Values may be loaded into structures. Structures may have been developed by chance or by necessities. The expression "the humane slave owner" expresses positive value on the personal level, while the slavery system, which the person is part of, is condemnable on a structural level. Individuals may be pleasant, empathic and kind while organized activities, like slavery, may be repulsive. The slaves would experience the person as "less worse than others", but their main experience will be of the system as evil.

Structural values are created and maintained through systems of power. The power dimension is often obscured to the powerful, and consecutively the structural values are rarely discussed. The value implications of the organizational structure being hierarchical or flat, bureaucratic or democratic are important to the stakeholders, but often left out of consideration in internal value efforts. In everyday organizational behavior the structural values are far more difficult to catch than personal and humanitarian values. But to the patient it may be of great importance being left unattended for hours, being served cold and tasteless food, staying in a room with prison cell features. No single person is to blame, but the system, with its routines and priorities might be inhuman.

Talking about organizational values should thereby incorporate structural dimensions. The eight organizations of this study all have primary focus on increasing the welfare of clients, patients, and customers. Thus, the overarching visions of the school, the addiction clinic, the hospitals, the nursery home, and the museum are respectable and compelling. And the humanitarian organization is grounded on the idea of revealing violations of human rights and helping target groups. The cosmetic company is grounded on the idea of making profit through ethical business. Thus, being to a large degree focused on ideal ends, the organizations should be extremely cautious to enhance self-reflective structural criticism. This establishes one analytical dimension of the study. To which degree are the organizations exposing themselves to criticism from the outside, and how strong is the will to make changes accordingly?

At the nursing home a patient committee was established, overlooking patient's interests. The committee leader pointed at some structural changes at the nursing home, which he was highly critical of. "Some time ago the rooms were rebuilt, and afterwards functionally healthy patients were placed in rooms together with patients with dementia. This structural change did more to the quality of the patient's life than anything else." Another case was about rebuilding the doors with thresholds because of fire safety. To the patients this represented great difficulties in overcoming the new obstacles. The committee leader was rather outspoken, and was still tolerated by the management. But his comments did rarely lead to changes. As he put it: "Our voices are silenced on their way upwards through the system".

Still, the establishing of the committee and its critical activity represents a fresh example of how to deal with structural values.

Primary activity

Core activities are found in answers on questions like "why are we here?", "what is our basic mission?", "what is the single action that most precisely expresses our identity?" The answers clarify that management is a support function, like information, recruiting, budgeting, education, negotiations, etc. In the hospitals of our study the core activity was treatment, and the museum named it "preservation" and "communication". To the cosmetic firm the obvious activity was sale, and the humanitarian organization called it "revealing injustice" and "giving help and support".

However, it was not obvious that the values of each organization were reflected through the core activities. More commonly values are applied to personal behavior and cultural patterns. Still, all the eight organizations had in some way value references in their primary activities, even though to a lesser degree explicitly demonstrated. The cosmetic firm labeled their products with texts explaining the ethical "standing" of each product and practiced training of shop staff to give customers thorough information of basic values. Interviews with customers confirmed that values of the firm were communicated. Several customers based their choice of cosmetic products on the ethical profile of the firm. In addition, the firm claimed to have stopped selling sun tan products due to European regulations of required animal testing. This represented loss in income, but the implicit ethical manifestation was hoped to give long term market share.

The two hospitals and the addiction clinic showed a keen attention in proliferating their values in therapeutic and care situations. As several employees told us at the addiction clinic: "We work hard to convey to our clients that they are valuable as humans contrary to the message they have received from great society." The museum practiced their value "purity" as a headline for craftsmen's restoration work, having dismissed workers using plastics in rebuilding old Norwegian wooden houses. Their value "inventive" inspired a series of experimental exhibitions and contemporary documentations.

The selection of the eight organizations was done as a "best case" selection. The selection principle was confirmed by the way the core values were integrated in the primary activities of the organizations, being more aware and attentive of the importance of value integration in primary activities than the average organization.

Maintenance

The most common application of value based management is through HRM activity. Institutional values are instigated through the development of devoted employee culture, utilizing attention-drawing to virtuous attitudes and exemplary behavior. Thus, within the literature value based management regularly is presented as a HRM activity.

Employees are advocates and proponents of any organization. Hence, the HRM approach to values is central to the success of value proliferation efforts within organizations. The question remains, however, if HRM should be considered as the area of interest. We wish to maintain that a singular focusing on values within employee attitudes and engagement may result in a limitation of the possible impact of values in organizational work. This is not to undermine the importance of focusing employee awareness of values. The dimension of maintenance of employee awareness of values is a necessary and decisive prerequisite of organizational value development. Through HRM, in recruiting, education and everyday maintenance of ethical sensitivity the organization unfolds its activity in concordance with its basic values. Organizational stories may be a source of mapping symbols, virtues and values.

Figure 1 gives cues of how several values of the eight organizations may be classified as personal qualities. In addition, what

are classified as religious, community and social values were to a great extent upheld as personal qualities by organizational members. A common procedure of deciding core values was through democratic bottom-up negotiations. However, users of the services were systematically kept out of such procedures, leaving the vote to the internal members of the organizations.

The humanitarian organization had established a special HR-policy, focusing core values in personal practice."Our value based efforts are synonymous with the way we perform our work, that we encounter people with respect and recognition". This statement from one manager at the medical hospital covers a general attitude held by most of the organizations. A rather common practice was arranging personal seminaries once a year, focusing value work."When we return from these seminaries we all feel a bit exalted on behalf of both our values and our organizational community, we always try to make some"hallelujah" spirit. And if we do not, people turn a bit low."

Recruiting processes were regarded as important in maintaining value standards. At the addiction clinic a clear view on the importance of having the "right" attitude to human value was expressed. The medical hospital stated that personal selection was thorough and represented a substantial area of value efforts. This was followed up with rigorous programs of training newcomers: "No newcomer is allowed to practice alone for the first six weeks."

In several of the organizations we were presented with repeated presentations of the same organizational stories from widely different people. The stories served as common examples of cherished behavior, focusing how value practice should be executed.

Maintenance of employee value practice is a central and necessary feature of organizational value work to any organization. The eight organizations displayed an impressive effort and creativity in challenging and maintaining the value focus by their employees. Our impression was that this dimension was the most developed single area of value application efforts, being in conjunction with the view of HRM-work as the basic field of value attention.

Capacity of Change

Following the turn of the century a series of governmental reforms has been introduced to Norwegian society. The Health services reform, the Addiction policy reform, the Museum reform, and the Quality reform of higher education, to name a few – all have designed new conditions for official welfare activities. Through the nineties a focus on quality was maintained, utilizing concepts of quality development, TQM, and application of ISO standards. However, the recent development has to some extent substituted the concept of quality with the concept of value. "Quality" is an open and general concept offering scales of measurement of better or worse on what is done. "Value" enhances differences and character, demanding self reflections on worthwhile activities and end-states of existence (Rokeach 1973). The concept of value corresponds accordingly more accurately to a societal demand for differentiation and character. Quality stimulates the expression of "we are good", while values stimulate expression of"we are good at.."

Value instigating efforts within the eight organizations revealed a tendency to focus on employee culture and qualities of interrelations among staff, and between staff and patients, customers and clients. This is mainly inspired by the HRM maintenance dimension. To a lesser degree the value focus was directed to primary activities, structural perspectives of power distribution, and environmental impetus. This is actually an odd phenomenon, considering the influence of the shared environmental expectancy of differentiation and the urge to specialize in a competitive society.

Great value awareness in a "strong" culture may obstruct capacity of change

In their study of a number of successful US companies, Peters & Waterman (1982) denoted eight indicators of success – which made their book successively a success. The single most important factor was the establishing of shared values. The companies were characterized by clearly defined values and a conscious effort of core values throughout the culture, searching for maximum coherence between say and do. Several years later a research concluded that the same former successful companies had severe problems. The finding indicated that you need a strong back to survive success. It is difficult to make necessary changes when you are labeled one of the"best". To be selected best in business is like getting the kiss of death.

The eight organizations of our study were selected as "best cases" of value oriented organizations. Our natural interest was accordingly to investigate if this status influenced their capacity of change. Our findings might give material to discuss the possible dangers of value based management – if value reflection and value identity would represent a contraindicative threat to the capacity of change.

The overarching result of our investigation was that efforts of value based management represented forceful incentives of raising awareness and motivation – also in matters of change and innovation. However, there were clear indications of motivation wear and tear in the psychiatric hospital, having applied the value approach for several years. The organization had won two prices for great employee culture in the early nineties. Still, a certain fatigue was expressed by several staff members. The cause of this may be found in a rather stereotype value implementing procedure having developed over years. The procedure was repeated every year in a way that several employees characterized as more and more detached from their acute and contemporary challenges. In addition, the CEO had assigned the value work to one of his trusted senior leaders, a decision interpreted by staff members as a mark of values as less significant.

Value reflective activities are, due to the HRM influence, often placed in a realm different to organizational development. This was a view expressed by the CEO of the addiction clinic. He stated that the organization had been busy with great and necessary changes, and consequently had found little time to explore value significance.

The medical hospital expressed pride in their strong and value oriented culture. But several expressions of doubt seeped through. "We are focusing our own perfection in a way that prevents us from seeking renewal from the outside". This uneasiness was shared by leaders and employees. The hospital was floating fine on former economical and professional success, and admitted that the image of being on the top was hard to let go of, and that changes were consequently hard to encounter and envision.

The study affirmed that value reflection work may lead to strong and motivated organizations, however being challenged over time by the imprisoning dangers of success. The organizations that were aware of the threats of stagnation, or who were in an early face of value processes, did not suffer from this inevitable development. A counteractive move was displayed by the museum, having chosen the value"inventive", and by the humanitarian organization cherishing the value"daring". Featuring

values with a certain valor and inclination towards change may secure the necessary antidote to stagnation and self-sufficiency.

The role of management

Researching value profiles of the selected organizations would inevitably include searching for how management conceived of values, and how values were instigated. In opposition to managing by rules and objectives, value based management shares features with transformational leadership (Bass 1998), focusing on motivation, engagement and delegation of responsibilities.

Organizations are established with intentions of solving a problem, filling a gap, or making a difference. There are several recipes on how leaders may operate value interests. In general, the important factors include the enhancement of collective reflections on values, questioning routine behavior, interpretations of value messages contained in practices, and a keen awareness of alternative ways of coping.

At the psychiatric hospital top management introduced and effectuated a comprehensive program of value orientation, maintaining the efforts for a period of more than six years. A special challenge was how the CEO should include other leaders and staff in responsibilities of value work. Both the CEOs of the psychiatric hospital and the addiction clinic had at a time delegated responsibility of value programs to staff members. This was followed by a marked reduction in intensity and interest throughout the organizations, showing clear differences of engagement relative to the varying enthusiasm of division leaders. The CEO of the cosmetic firm claimed that she once made a planned pause in maintaining value attention to her staff, and was confronted with clear expectations from employees: "Aren't you going to talk about our values?" She was rather active at focusing values, expressing that "I brainwash my sales persons with our values".

Conclusion

The qualitative case study approach to eight Norwegian organizations was rewarding, pursuing both espoused core value practice and tacit values-in-use influences. The findings may be summarized in the following manner:

1.Environmental influences from great society were found in different practices of engaging in planned value implementing efforts. Some organizations made substantial efforts of introducing and maintaining value reflections, while others cherished ideals in the direction of humility and speechless virtue behavior.

2.Structural values were identified at some of the institutions, being present in routines and power structures. These were, however, rarely discussed and reflected upon, leaving this as a challenging area of further research.

3.Values in primary activity were cared for by some of the organizations, showing great concern for transmitting the value perspective all through the firms' basic activities. Others were less aware of this, placing their efforts within maintaining staff motivation.

4.The focus on maintenance and development of personal qualities, is the most integrated and applied perspective on value based management within the eight organizations of this study. However valuable, this is a rather limiting perspective. Value based management of the future is challenged to be more radical and thorough in its applications – at least if the competitive demand of differentiation accelerate. This will demand stronger focus on value reflection applied to environmental influences, structural orders of power, primary activities of the organization, as well as attention to the capacities of change.

5.Value work influences organizations' capacity of change. In several of the eight organizations the notion of having a "strong" and successful culture was counteractive to innovation and change. In others, value formulations of change as valuable in itself secured necessary commitment to creativity and innovation.

6.Management was found crucial to value integration and reflection. Where top management assigned value work to others, a decline in interest and motivation was apparent.

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Author

Einar Aadland
Associate Professor
E-mail: aadland@diakonhjemmet.no
Telephone: +47 924 67 414, +47 22 73 02 17
Address: Diakonhjemmet University College , P.O.Box 184 Vinderen, No-0319, Oslo, Norway

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