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Title: The Meaning of Environmental Values for Managers

Over and over the word ‘values’ keeps popping up in management, in the media, in politics – everywhere you turn. This national conversation is happening for one very simple reason – our social problems are challenging our values. As a new buzzword, ‘values’ is being heard more and more in discussions about environmental issues.

Indeed, environmental decision-making is ultimately influenced as much by values as by science and technology. At the root of corporate environmental management is a fundamental environmental ethic, of greater or lesser priority. This weight of this value affects how decisions are made. Scientific knowledge informs our decisions, to the extent that it can, but when there’s risk involved – or when tradeoffs must be made – the decision process necessitates choosing one value over another.

Though experts rarely acknowledge this, most environmental decisions are actually ethical dilemmas. In making environmental management decisions, understanding values can often pick up where technological expertise falls short. This discussion considers what environmental values mean, how to communicate them and how they can help environmental managers do their jobs and achieve better results.

Values in Corporate Culture

For business, the topic of values is alive and well. Though as a free society we tend to see personal values and ethics-such as religion-as private. Business readily identifies its own very specific set of values – customer service, teamwork, productivity, ROI, etc. All managers know the TQM mantra-to implement a good policy you first need a vision. Decision makers rely on core values to determine which goals and business decisions are appropriate. The TQM philosophy is a perfect example of business’s appreciation for value systems. A sense of commitment to values and goals becomes a locomotive that puts company programs into motion.

Although individual values can be as different as the people who hold them, the public also recognizes shared values and has begun to acknowledge the place for them in business and our private lives. A primary unifying value of the times is, without a doubt, the environment. The public is realizing that if we don’t name the environment as a shared value now, there’s not going to be much of it left to value in 20 years.

The Environment as a Core Value for Business

Public opinion aside, there has never been a better time to identify environment as a core company value. After all, environmental improvements are inevitability for business.

Environmental managers are needed precisely because environmental issues mean mounting pressure for their companies. According to EPA, companies spend \$155 billion, about 2.1 percent of GNP, complying with environmental regulations in 1992.

But making the environment a core value may mean making a shift in company mindset. Typically, the environment is addressed as a nuisance issue—seen as a political threat by today’s managers. When addressed and incorporated as a core value, the environment can become a measurement of a company’s well-being and carry as much weight as other closely held priorities. Most environmental managers care a great deal about the environment on a personal level. When surveyed, most employees share the sentiment.

How Viewing Environment as a Core Value Benefits Your Company

What then does it mean to talk about environmental values? And why would doing so be helpful? Making the environment a core value, for a person or business, means, in effect, bringing the topic to consciousness and deciding to manage matters in a *proactive* rather than in a *reactive* mode (see **Exhibit 1**).

Being value-driven means that a company, in large part, will make its decision as to product, packaging, distribution, market, voluntary environmental actions, and so on based clearly on its policies and established values. By pushing ahead of the social forces, and managing proactively, environmental managers can secure the best environmental record for their company.

Values are key to employee motivation and, ultimately, environmental responsibility. Typically, environmental performance is driven by *coercion* – from regulators, litigators, and angry stakeholders. The heavy hand plays the role of taskmaster, pushing business to take action. Sometimes *persuasion* is used by more progressive companies in the form of incentives, bonuses, and recognition in order to stimulate environmental action. But this too lacks a personal investment and needs constant external incentives. It also lacks the special quality, ‘self-motivation,’ we long for in the business world. Purely and simply, this kind of alignment with values creates a motivation that stimulates employees personally and promotes individual responsibility.

Following are some of the ways that incorporating the environment deep into a corporate culture can be beneficial. (see **Exhibit 1**).

PLACE EXHIBIT 1 – Continuum of Economic and Environmental Progress – HERE

Expanded Innovation and Productivity

Innovation and productivity are expanded and fortified when morale is high and company employees are environmentally ‘aware.’

When there is alignment between business and personal values, corporate morale, spirit, and environmental performance improve noticeably. An environmentally committed workforce has been shown in surveys to be more enthusiastic because they can relate to and participate in concrete activities that are meaningful. Many people possess very

strong environmental values as individual. Further, a workforce motivated by their own values is operating at maximum creativity, energy, and productivity.

Better Environmental Performance

The ability to introduce environmentally sound products and processes, comply with governmental regulation, anticipate future trends, compete in global markets, obtain public support, and adapt quickly to changing demands is a function of corporate mindset. This is influenced to a great extent by internal values.

Improved Bottom Line

Environmental concern can be used to increase competitive advantage. Increasing production and efficiency conservation, product recycling and other measures increase profits. Waste exchanges have enabled companies to turn costly emissions flows into sources of income. Lowered emissions and other environmental improvements often turn out to save a company money in the long run; less waste means less spent on supplies; and greater efficiency quickly translates into increased profits.

Better Handling of Volatile Environmental Controversies

Sometimes environmental debates are highly infused with emotion, particularly outrage, anger, hostility, and fear. Although there are no real 'values experts,' managers who have cultivated the ability to pinpoint and name competing values can handle these situations with greater effectiveness.

Stakeholders are often more concerned with behaviors and attitudes of business than they are about the scientific and technical aspects. In many cases, the challenges from the public center on a company's consistent commitment to an environmental ethic, and not on the scientific specifics the argument seems to focus on.

Adopting the environmental as a core values, for an individual or an institution, means more than just declaring it as a value. It means changing behavior. As simple as it sounds, words must be backed up by action. It is surprising how many companies overlook this fact.

The best way to uncover what's really at stake in environmental debates is to determine and acknowledge stakeholder values at the outset and operate on the presumption that all values are valid and deserve consideration. One way in which to ascertain this information is to survey or set up opportunities to directly ask people what their needs and values are concerning your company and the environment.

Enhanced Credibility and Trust

Trust is a prerequisite for good leadership and progress. CEOs and management must be trusted and seen as sincere by employees and other stakeholders if environmental efforts are to succeed. If a company's leaders consistently fail to follow through on commitments, they run the risk of permanently disillusioning their stakeholders.

The first step to building trust is talking openly about your environmental values. This can be done through existing company vehicles such as newsletters, common area displays, written policy statements, interpersonal communications, company literature, media dialogues, and community hearings or other gatherings. The idea must be brought to life through communications efforts.

By and large, we seem to lack a coherent language for discussing values openly. Thus, all too often companies tend to view the environmental debate as a hysterical nuisance, missing an opportunity to link with stakeholders in a way that can subsequently add to overall credibility.

More Employee Involvement in Community Relations

Employees are the best, most credible ambassadors for any company. The more a company does environmentally and the more employees understand their company's environmental values and goals, the more apt they are to becoming ambassadors that help sustain the company's external outreach policy. A professional spokesperson can convey issues successfully, but there are few sources more believable than a genuinely inspired, well-informed member of your own workforce. The reverse is also true: if a company suffers from a poor environmental record and employees are inactive and uninformed about the issue, their dissatisfaction can reflect badly on the company.

Caveat

By embracing the notion of environment as a value, a company spokesperson or manager is essentially making a statement about the company's ethics. Just as among individuals, a 'righteous' attitude can raise suspicion, so environmental hypocrisy gets little tolerance in society today. It may be worse than environmental neglect. Thus, the caveat is – if you say it, mean it. This is not to say that you must be perfect in your endeavors, but your track record needs to demonstrate consistent effort.

Remember, individuals aren't perfect, and neither are corporate institutions. But this fallibility should not prevent an organization from identifying and committing to values. Basically, as long as progress is being made, programs are duly in place, and mistakes are acknowledged openly, an environmental ethic is a fine flag to wave.

Conclusion

Over the long haul, institutionalizing environmental protection into our industries is going to cost someone, somewhere. Who should it be? Policy makers and politicians are tearing their hair out over this question, and its answer will depend on the weight we ultimately assign to competing values. The process won't be easy. The environment is probably loaded enough to cause a war, and at the same time there's probably no better opportunity for creativity, innovation, imagination, and progress. The impetus to find creative solutions must come from business. Declaring the environment as a core value is the first step.

