

“What are Contemporary Core British Values”



“Transforming Leaders define public values that embrace the supreme and enduring principles of a people” Burns 2003. *Transforming Leadership*.

Introduction

I recently asked some of the groups I follow on LinkedIn to consider British Values (“list five words that describe the essence of ‘Britishness’”). The results are described and discussed below, they capture some values, principles, ideals, and characteristics¹ of ‘Britishness’ as perceived by the sample population. The sample population were Director level individuals and leadership practitioners. The exercise has as much scientific validity and statistical significance as your average TV diet supplement ad, however, I hope it, and the discussion it generates, prove to be thought provoking.

Background

As Burns suggests above, values are vitally important. Derived from our beliefs, they shape our attitudes and behaviours and directly shape our performance in life. Values reside largely in our subconscious, ‘*software of the mind*’²; formed in our early years, based on the actions of significant people and subsequently by momentous events and role model leaders. Values transcend situation, but vary in their emphasis and influence, depending upon the environment in which we find ourselves. For example, **Fair Play** and **Courage** are both reported as important, but when we find ourselves in difficult situations, courage will often (not always) be **more** ‘active’ than fair play.

Organisational values underpin the culture of an organisation, ‘*The way things are done around here*’. They are not, however, always aligned with our personal values, providing the leader with challenges in motivating followers, which is where the ability to inspire comes into its own.

¹ Here is not the place to enter an academic debate about what is and what is not a value, so for simplicity’s sake I have grouped all these under the generic term ‘value’ i.e. *something that I hold to be important*.

² Hofstede

Values are abstract ideals rather than distinct behaviours, we aspire to values based behaviour, because it means that we are acting in a way congruent to our beliefs. However, values can be conflicting and it is often a case of ‘satisficing’³ value achievement to meet the realities of life. How we live up to our values has a direct influence on how we feel, so if we lack the courage to take a difficult decision, or we are forced to compromise, we will feel bad no matter how fairly we have played, and as a result, we will not perform to our full potential.

“Values are sources of strength because they give people the power to take action...” Jaffe & Scott. *Values: The Organisation’s Cultural Bedrock*

The Results

I have adapted the responses to reflect the prefix ‘**As British citizens we value:**’. The table below shows the top 5 responses with column 1 reflecting the ‘value’. Column 2 reflected the total number who gave this answer as a percentage of the sample population and column 3 reflecting the Mean ‘importance’ on a scale of 1-5. For example 56% of the survey population believed that **Honesty** was valued by the British and the mean score was 3.9 out of a maximum of 5 indicates how important Honesty was in relation to other values. Therefore, a majority of people thought Honesty was a very important value.

	<u>Value</u>	<u>% Response</u>	<u>Importance</u>
1	Honesty	56	3.9
2	Fair Play	46	4.0
3	Respect	44	2.7
4	Humour	32	2.3
5	Tolerance	28	2.9

“Values role modelled by leadership represent “behavioural Integrity”, a mismatch displays hypocrisy”

Method

Participants suggested 83 ‘values’, from a survey population of over 50 responders. It was interesting, but not surprising, to see how role/career/walk of life influenced responses. For example, health care professionals chose words like empathy, dignity and compassion. Military leaders responded with words like determination, duty and patriotism. However, these role based ‘values’ were not common across the responses and therefore I have excluded those that occurred in less than 10% of total responses. I have taken core ‘values’ to be those that were common in greater than 10% of responses. There are some clear trends in terms of what we perceive to be important. The remaining ‘values’, ie those not in the top five, but which were recognised by at least 10% of the survey population are listed below:

³ Balancing satisfaction and Sacrifice i.e. compromise.

	<u>Value</u>	<u>% Response</u>	<u>Importance</u>
6	Resilience	28	2.6
7	Loyalty	22	3.5
8	Humility	16	2.9
9	Courage	16	2.8
10	Community	16	2.8
11	Pride	16	2.6
12	Tenaciousness	16	2.4
13	Politeness	14	3.4
14	Justice	12	3.8
15	Eccentricity	10	2.0
16	Inventiveness	10	2.4

Discussion

Clearly the results are not exclusively 'British' values, they are, however values that the British hold to be important. The 'value set' (frequency and importance) outlined above, if accurate, reflects our cultural beliefs and therefore we might assume that we would aspire to act in a way that matches as closely as possible these ideals i.e. values-based.

The majority of people who took part in the survey perceived Honesty, Fair Play and Respect to be a very important part of being British. Humour and Tolerance also attracted strong support; however, they were not rated quite as important as Honesty, Fair Play and Respect. The remaining 'values' are perhaps not surprising in either their frequency or importance.

What does attract the eye however is the absence of **Achievement, Freedom, Power, Competition, Challenge, Risk, Tradition** and **Diversity**, all of which are characteristics of successful organisational cultures. Is it perhaps that we are just too nice? In an unfair World, are we too wrapped up in the need to be fair and egalitarian? Have we lost the desire to compete and be 'Great'?

Interesting also that **Safety** and **Security** are absent. Is this a reflection of our risk-averse society where risk has been largely eradicated and therefore does not feature in our thinking? How will our children deal with life's challenges if they are over protected?

Where are 'British Values' that politicians constantly refer to written down?

Summary

Values are important to us. British values define us as British passport holders. Taking ownership of shared values is important if we aspire to perform to the highest standards as a multicultural society. A lack of clarity in terms of our values leads to cognitive and emotional dissonance, which in turn reduces our ability to perform and destroys unity – United Kingdom?

If you feel a certain resonance in the 'values' shared above, then ask yourself: how well do you role model them? How effectively embedded are these 'values' in your workplace or even at home? Take the time to conduct 'Performance Profiling' individually and across the team. You will find that it provides an excellent return in investment and will clarify areas for improvement. Ultimately,

these values will be lost unless we reinforce them through our own behaviour, our own values-based leadership.

Share this article if you believe in Britain.

Tim Cain MBE

<http://www.timcainleadership.co.uk>

The logo for Tim Cain Leadership. The name 'Tim Cain' is written in a black, cursive script font. Below it, the word 'LEADERSHIP' is written in a bold, red, uppercase, sans-serif font.