



Integrity is What?

If someone were to ask you how important “integrity” is as a personal trait, in yourself and in others, the chances are you’d say “very”. If you happen to be an executive in an organisation, the chances are that you would rate integrity as one of the top three attributes that affect personal performance – the ability to deliver results. Integrity is one of those value-words - like courage, honour and loyalty – that we all use without explanation, as if everyone in the world understands the same things by them – but is that true?

This was the question posed by Les Higgins and Pat Dade, of Cultural Dynamics, and Dr Scott Lichtenstein, of Henley Management College, in a paper presented at the recent 10th International Corporate Governance and Board Leadership Conference held at Henley. They presented empirical results in support of their hypothesis that “*The meaning of Integrity varies depending on one’s dominant values*”. That paper is available from the conference organisers. What follows here is a précis of the evidence presented.

First, we need to take a quick look at the tools used to measure values and a little of the theory behind them. So, what are values? Perhaps the one of the best descriptions comes from Shalom Schwartz of the University of Jerusalem.

Values are beliefs that are tied inextricably to emotion – not objective, cold ideas – and, as such they operate largely subconsciously. They are a motivational construct – referring to desirable goals people strive to attain. They serve as standards and criteria for choices of all kinds. They are ordered by importance relative to one another.

That notion of a motivational construct is why values have always been associated with Abraham Maslow’s theory of motivation and, particularly, his Hierarchy of Needs. Cultural Dynamics has developed a method to classify people according to their “dominant” need level within Maslow’s hierarchy. This dominant need is the one that the person repeatedly and subconsciously returns to as a default. Maslow’s theory tells us that this dominant need might change slowly throughout the life but always in ways consistent with the hierarchy of needs. Three broad categories are recognised – Sustenance Driven (Physiological needs, Safety, Security and Belonging), Outer Directed or Esteem Driven (Esteem of Others, Self Esteem) and Inner Directed (Cognitive/Aesthetic and Self Actualisation). More information, and the test itself, is available on the Cultural Dynamics web-site at www.cultdyn.co.uk.

In order to be able to understand what it means, for instance, to be Sustenance Driven, Cultural Dynamics uses data collected from over 5000 individuals – the data analysed to yield measurements of over 70 psychological attributes for each individual. For the present purpose, they used a smaller data set, with fewer attributes but allowing greater brevity in reporting while maintaining sufficient clarity in discrimination.

They conducted an internet-based survey of 500 UK adults, aged 15 and over. (The sample was representative of sex, age and social grade). In this survey, respondents were asked to complete the Maslowian classification test along with a set of questions that form the Schwartz Portrait Values system. This is a set of 21 simple word “portraits” of people. The respondent is asked, for each portrait, “How similar is that person to you?” An example portrait is “*They believe that people should do what they are told. They think people should follow rules at all times, even when no-one is watching.*”

Armed with this information, it is possible to gauge a practical definition of “integrity” for each of the three Maslowian groups. It turns out clearly that each group has a *different* definition to the others. You can see below what Higgins, Dade and Lichtenstein came up with (remember their focus was the executive in the board room) and there’s enough information for you to draw your own conclusions about how it might shape up in the wider world. You might find it interesting to think about how each group would define, for example, loyalty, honour or courage.

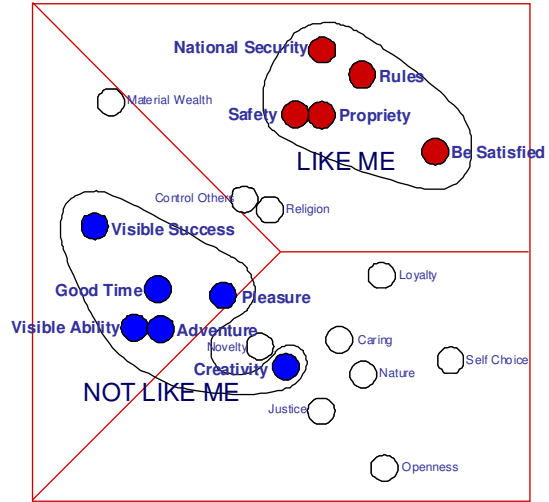


THE SUSTENANCE DRIVEN

Here's a set of statements that one might expect to hear from a "typical" Sustenance Driven:

I would **AGREE** that:

1. I think it's important NOT to ask for more than what I have. People should be satisfied with what they've got. (Be Satisfied)
2. I believe people should do what they are told. I follow rules at all times, even when no-one is watching. (Rules)
3. It's very important that my country be safe from both internal and external threats, and I'm concerned that social order should be protected. (National Security)
4. It's important that I always behave properly and avoid doing anything that others would say is wrong. (Propriety)
5. I think it's important to live in secure surroundings. I avoid anything that might endanger my safety. (Safety)



I would **DISAGREE** that:

6. It's important to do things that give me pleasure and I seek every chance I can to have fun. (Pleasure)
7. It's important to have a good time and I like to "spoil" myself. (Good Time)
8. I want an exciting life and I look for adventures and like to take risks. (Adventure)
9. It's important for me to think up new ideas and be creative. I like doing things my own original way. (Creativity)
10. I need to show my abilities. I want others to admire what I do. (Visible Ability)
11. It's important for me to be very successful and I like to impress others. (Visible Success)

What does this tell us about INTEGRITY, in the setting of the Boardroom, for the Sustenance Driven?

The keys are to be found in "Rules", "Propriety", "Safety", (not) "Adventure", (not) "Creativity" and (not) "Visible Success".

INTEGRITY is defined as doing the "right" thing, which is laid down in the rules, procedures and expectations of the company and (legal) society. Fiduciary Duty governs all other considerations in the Boardroom, barring raw survival. "Winning" is synonymous with not falling victim to the host of threats "out there". Taking risks in the interests of success is very much a last resort. Best practice is the order of the day. There is no natural bar to philanthropy, although there is also no natural incentive.

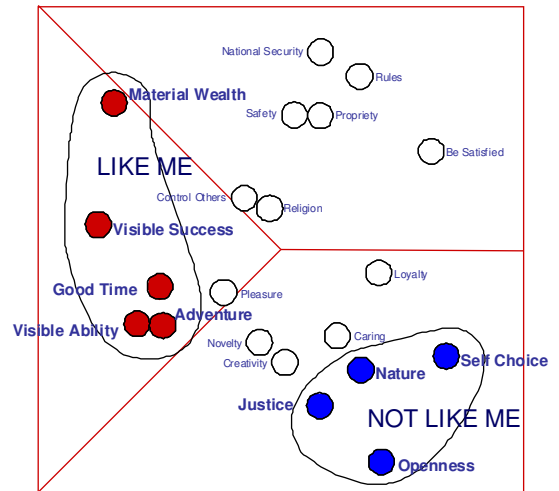


THE OUTER DIRECTED

Here's a set of statements that one might expect to hear from a "typical" Outer Directed:

I would **AGREE** that:

1. I think it's important for me to be rich – to have lots of money and expensive things. (Material Wealth)
2. I need to show my abilities. I want others to admire what I do. (Visible Ability)
3. It's important for me to be very successful and I like to impress others. (Visible Success)
4. I want an exciting life and I look for adventures and like to take risks. (Adventure)
5. It's important to have a good time and I like to "spoil" myself. (Good Time)



I would **DISAGREE** that:

6. I like to make my own decisions about what I do, and to be free to plan and choose my own activities. (Self Choice)
7. I think it's important that every person in the world is treated equally – that there should be justice for everybody, even people I don't know. (Justice)
8. It's important for me to listen to people who are different than me and, even if I disagree with them, I still want to understand them. (Openness)
9. I believe that we should care for nature and that it's important to look after the environment. (Nature)

What does this tell us about INTEGRITY, in the setting of the Boardroom, for the Outer Directed?

Everything here is key, but especially "Material Wealth", "Visible Ability" and "Visible Success".

INTEGRITY is defined as doing the "right" thing, which means whatever it takes to "win" in a world of winners and losers. Visibly winning is everything and, if that means taking risks, treading on a few toes, silencing opposition or messing up a bit of land, air or water for a generation or two, that's OK. Increasing "shareholder value" is the wrapper for this, and "value" means "money". There is no natural bar to playing by the rules, although there is also no natural incentive.

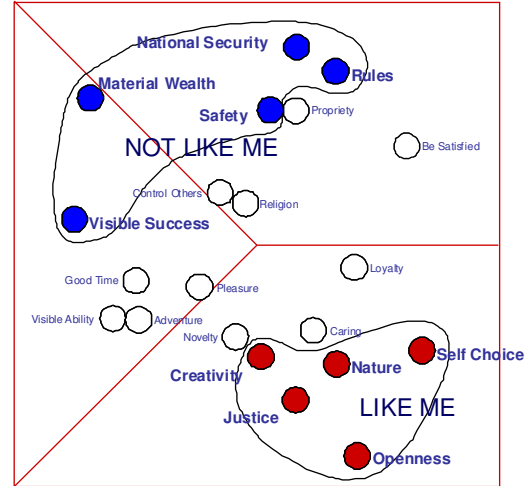


THE INNER DIRECTED

Here's a set of statements that one might expect to hear from a "typical" Inner Directed:

I would **AGREE** that:

1. I like to make my own decisions about what I do, and to be free to plan and choose my own activities. (Self Choice)
2. It's important for me to think up new ideas and be creative. I like doing things my own original way. (Creativity)
3. I think it's important that every person in the world is treated equally – that there should be justice for everybody, even people I don't know. (Justice)
4. It's important for me to listen to people who are different than me and, even if I disagree with them, I still want to understand them. (Openness)
5. I believe that we should care for nature and that it's important to look after the environment. (Nature)



I would **DISAGREE** that:

6. I believe people should do what they are told. I follow rules at all times, even when no-one is watching. (Rules)
7. I think it's important to live in secure surroundings. I avoid anything that might endanger my safety. (Safety)
8. It's very important that my country be safe from both internal and external threats, and I'm concerned that social order should be protected. (National Security)
9. I think it's important for me to be rich – to have lots of money and expensive things. (Material Wealth)
10. It's important for me to be very successful and I like to impress others. (Visible Success)

What does this tell us about INTEGRITY, in the setting of the Boardroom, for the Inner Directed?

The keys here are "Justice", "Openness", "Nature", "Self Choice", (not) "Rules", (not) "Material Wealth" and (not) "Visible Success".

INTEGRITY is defined as doing the "right" thing, which means whatever serves the immediate (primarily financial) need but at the same time creates (or, at least, does not close off) opportunities to serve future needs, of all kinds. Rules and regulations are a little bit bendable but only in the interests of the (philanthropic) "greater good". The key notion is that jaded term "stewardship" – we are all "just passing through" and, whether it be a company, society or the Earth itself, our principle job is to make sure it continues to benefit future generations. There's no natural bar to winning, nor to having a good time and getting a "buzz" out of what you're doing.

Les Higgins, October 2007

