

# Values and beliefs

**Mike Munro Turner**



Our values fundamentally affect the beliefs and mind-sets we hold. Mike Munro Turner clarifies the importance of values in our lives.

## What are values?

Values describe, and provide a means of talking about, what is important to us. They are ideals we hold that give significance and meaning to our lives and hence they underpin our beliefs, influencing the decisions we make, the actions we take, and the life we lead. Understanding values helps us to understand how we create our own reality and gives us insight into the personal realities of others.

## Values priorities

Values exist and have meaning only within a web of other values, not in isolation. For example, if I say that honesty is important to me, then you might expect that I will always tell the truth. But, in fact, knowing that honesty is important to me will give you little idea as to whether I will always tell the truth unless you know the priority I place on honesty relative to my other values. If I place a higher priority on being liked than on honesty, then I may not give

you honest feedback if I fear doing so would alienate you.

This is an example with just two values. The situation gets much more complex when our top 10 or 20 values are in play. It also means that people with shared values, but with different value priorities, may behave in radically different ways. Thus, in working with an individual or an organisation, it is not enough to know what their values are – you must also explore their value priorities. And, if you want to help that individual or organisation change, then the best strategy is to help them re-prioritise their most important values, not for them to prioritise their less-important values more highly.

One aspect of leading an integrated, successful and fulfilled life is to have chosen a life in which our high-priority values are not in conflict on a frequent basis. Despite this, paradoxically it is those times when our highest priority values are in conflict, and

we are forced to choose between two ideals in which we deeply believe, that are often the defining moments of our lives. Such situations lead us to reflect deeply on what is really important to us, and give us a particular clarity about where our priorities lie. It is in these moments that our character develops.

## Beliefs, values, experience and world views

The only reality we can know is the one that consists of the constructs we have created. Values, beliefs and experiences are all constructs – values are constructs that we hold as important; beliefs are constructs that we hold to be true; and experiences are constructs about reality. The way in which we see and experience the world – our world view – depends on how we interpret the outer world of nature, things and people, and also on our level of consciousness, which in turn depends on our value priorities.



## important to you?

A progression of world views is shown in the framework I've compiled in Table 1. Since each world view leads to a particular way of perceiving and experiencing the world, having a particular world view has a profound impact on almost every aspect of our lives.

The table shows examples of leadership styles and reactions to change which correspond to each of the world views. The first two stages reflect a level of development where we look to authority outside ourselves as the source of our growth and development. Between the second and third stages, there comes a major shift in our attitude towards ourselves, the way we view ourselves and our relationship to the world – as we start to develop our inner authority and take fuller responsibility for our lives.

Most of us are somewhere in the middle of the table, thinking of the world either as a problem or a project. This is where we focus our attention and energy much of the time. At some times – for example, at particularly difficult or stressful times

– we view the world as a more hostile place and are more connected to the foundational values and world views located towards the left of the table. At other times, we visit the right side where our visions and hopes for the future are.

When we shift our predominant world view, it can be very challenging personally. We find old certainties fading, activities losing their meaning and relationships being outgrown. What is going on is often not clear, and it may feel as if our life is breaking down. Mapping someone's values and world view - helping them see the transition they are engaged in – and supporting them in developing the skills to underpin the new reality into which they are emerging, is a key role for coaches and mentors.

One way of distinguishing performance coaching from transformational coaching is that performance coaching aims to help

people be more effective at operating within their current world view, whilst transformational coaching

helps people make the transition from one world view to another.

### Useful frameworks and tools

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is one widely known framework which describes different levels of consciousness and the corresponding world views. Spiral Dynamics (Beck and Cowan 1996)<sup>1</sup> maps in detail the different world views we can hold. There are a number of world-view maps and associated value-priority questionnaires which explicitly relate specific values to particular world views (for

example, [www.KnowandRelate.com](http://www.KnowandRelate.com) and [www.LJMap.com](http://www.LJMap.com)).

### Value systems

Our predominant world view is determined by where the majority of our priority values are. When it comes to exploring individual values, one straightforward approach is to ask someone about their value priorities and create a ranked list. However, values are complex. In particular they vary as to whether they:

- require more or less skill to embody;
- are end or means values;
- are foundation, focus or future values.

### Values and skills

To live by our values is not just a matter of being clear about what our value priorities are.

To be able to express our values in our lives, we need to develop the skills to behave according to our values. Thus the shift to a more inclusive world view involves not just

	1 Surviving	2 Belonging	3 Self-initiating	4 Interdepending
<b>World view</b>	The world is a hostile place where I must struggle for survival	The world is a problem with which I must cope and where I seek to belong	The world is a project in which I want to participate	The world is a global society for which we must care
<b>Example values</b>	Self-preservation Safety	Self-worth Competition	Self-actualisation Independence	Truth/wisdom Convivial tools
<b>Skills necessary to embody the values</b>	Instrumental – the blend of intelligence and manual dexterity that enables us to be competent	Emotional – the ability to act with understanding and generosity to others	Imaginal – the capacity to be creative about our choices and actions	Systemic – the capacity to see all the parts of a system as they relate to the whole
<b>Leadership and management style</b>	Autocratic Top-down use of power	Complex hierarchy Bureaucratic systems	Collaborative leadership Intergroup emphasis	Interdevelopmental leadership Global
<b>How organisational change is perceived</b>	As a threat to my survival	As a threat to my status or success	As an opportunity to be embraced	As a means to make the world a better place
<b>Locus of authority</b>	External		Internal	
<b>Value type</b>	Foundation	Focus		Future

Table 1: Values and world views

the movement to a new level of consciousness, but also the development of specific skills. And the further to the right the shift is, the more complex the skills that need to be developed are.

### End and means values

When working with values, it is important to distinguish end values and means values.

End values are the ultimate outcomes we value. Means values are the ways in which we can realise the end values. People who are clear about their end values are more likely to feel fulfilled. If you rarely feel fulfilled, it may be that the values you are treating as ends in themselves are actually means values. You can distinguish an end value by asking yourself what is important about a particular value. If the answer is another value, then it was a means value; if the answer

is 'Well, it just is', then you have found one of your end values.

### Foundation, focus and future values

It is also important to distinguish between foundation, focus and future values:

- **Foundation values.** These are the values we need in place to have a solid foundation to our lives. If our foundation values are threatened or if we are stressed, satisfying these values will demand most of our energy, pulling us away from our focus and future values. Some people who are habitually very stressed may live out much of their lives in this area.
- **Focus values.** These are those value priorities in our lives that describe our present world view, our criteria for decision making, our attitude toward relation-

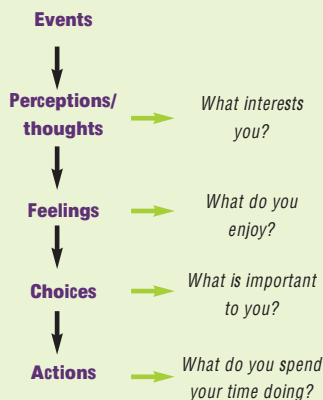
ships, and the focus of most of our energy. We therefore tend to be more aware of our focus values than we are of our foundation or future values.

- **Future values.** These represent what is important to us about the future we are moving into. Because they are not yet fully developed, but at the same time are important to us, they motivate us to grow and develop – pulling us into the future every moment of our lives.

All three value areas are essential if we are to grow and develop in a healthy way. As we continue to develop, values which were once our future values may become focus values as we put more energy into them and develop the skills to actualise them. If this process continues, they eventually become integrated into who we are and how we lead our lives, and become part of our foundation.

### Questions for eliciting values

We relate to the world through the lens of our values priorities, which affects what we notice, think, feel, choose and do. This provides us with a series of questions that we can use to elicit key focus values quickly.



### The value of values

Knowing what our values priorities are – and understanding how they affect our world view, beliefs and actions – has a wide range of benefits:

- When we practise, actualise or embody our priority values, we experience our lives as meaningful, significant and important.
- Values help us understand why we believe what we believe – and, if we wish, to change it.
- Shared values are the basis of relationship – the better we understand our own and others' values, the more likely we are to have meaningful and fulfilling relationships.
- If we value something, we will go after it – we will be motivated by it. Thus, if we understand our values, we also know what motivates us.
- Knowing our own values makes us more tolerant of others'

## It is important to distinguish end values and means values

values – and of them as people – and so leads us to appreciate diversity.

- Being aware of our values helps us answer some of the big coaching questions such as 'Who am I?' and 'What is the difference I want to make?'
- Discerning our future values enables us to act more intentionally and move smoothly into future phases of our lives.
- Knowing our foundation values helps us deal better with difficulty and stress and return to equilibrium more quickly.
- Teams that are unaware of their value priorities will tend to operate at the lowest common denominator world view; self-aware teams can operate at the highest common denominator world view.

### Values shift

Over the last few centuries, there have been a succession of major values shifts as society has moved from being largely agrarian, through industrialisation, to today's increasingly knowledge-based economy. This shift has not been even across the world, but, with globalisation in all its forms (commercial, informational, terrorist and so on), it has affected most people on the planet. Now, at the start of the 21st century, we find ourselves facing a set of global social and environmental challenges. Dealing with challenges of this scale and complexity demands that we place a high priority on values of a similar scope and complexity (values such as ecological balance, global justice, human rights and convivial technology), and that we shift to a world view which sees the planet as a global society of which we are all a part and for which we must care (the right-hand side of Table 1). We can perhaps start by exploring our own values in order to answer the question 'What is it that the world of tomorrow needs that I can uniquely offer?'

#### Reference

1 Don Beck and Christopher Cowan, *Spiral Dynamics*, Blackwell, 1996.

#### Further reading

Richard Barrett, *Liberating the Corporate Soul*, Butterworth Heinemann, 1998.

Clare Collins and Paul Chippendale, *New Wisdom II - Values-based Development*, Acorn, 1995.

Stephen Covey and A Roger Merrill, *First Things First*, Simon & Schuster, 1994.

Brian Hall, *Values Shift: a Guide to Personal and Organizational Transformation*, Salesian Press, 1994.

**Mike Munro Turner** is a leading executive coach and mentor. He has over 10 years' experience of improving individual and organisational performance through working with senior executives to increase their leadership effectiveness, improve their personal and business performance and accelerate the achievement of the organisation's vision. He also works with the Centre for Creative Leadership in Brussels on their leadership development programmes and is on the faculty of the School of Coaching, where he trains coaches. As 'Mike the Mentor', he publishes a newsletter on mentoring and coaching.

- Telephone: +44 (0) 1684 893380
- E-mail: [mike@mikethementor.co.uk](mailto:mike@mikethementor.co.uk)
- Website: [www.mikethementor.co.uk](http://www.mikethementor.co.uk)