UNIVERSITY VALUES FOR TODAY:
CENTRAL EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES
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Values in Practice
The business case for institutional level values and the experience of Glasgow Caledonian University in its journey to define and embed them

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

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The context: Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU)
GCU is a modern public university based in Glasgow and is one of Scotland's largest universities with nearly 20,000 students and 1600 staff. It is led by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Pamela Gillies. In addition to its main site in Glasgow GCU has campuses in London and New York and awards degrees with its partners, the Caledonian College of Engineering in Oman and The Grameen Caledonian College of Nursing in Bangladesh.

The GCU Mission is "For the Common Good" and its current Chancellor is Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus.

The challenge: Building staff engagement
Staff engagement has been directly linked to the financial success, resilience and well-being of an organisation irrespective of its domain of operation or size. The concept of staff engagement is strongly linked to a shared understanding of values. In 2013 GCU took the decision to build on the high level of staff belief in its mission to redefine its core values and thereby reinvigorate staff engagement.

The process:
•   Ground up & inclusive
•   Focused on the positive – Appreciative Enquiry – what we already do well
•   Led by a senior academic with People Services support
•   Iterative and ongoing
•   Moving from centrally led to locally owned

Using our Values:
The current GCU Values of Integrity, Creativity, Responsibility and Confidence are headings for the characteristics that the staff and students of GCU feel define us as the University for the Common Good. Under each value heading are specific behaviours which we believe we should exhibit when we are working at our best either as an organisation, as a staff member or student or as a line manager or member of the Executive Board.

To be useful behaviour statements should:
•   Describe us at our very best
•   Be realistic (achievable) but aspirational
•   Encourage improvement in behaviour and performance

The Values and their associated behaviours provide a shared understanding of who we are as an organisation. They are useful to the staff-based processes of recruitment; induction; performance review; individual and team development and the wider organisational activities of strategic planning and decision making.

We are engaged in an ongoing process of ensuring that our existing staff and student based activities align with our values and that they are reflected in all of our policies and practices.

Results so far:
• Recent Staff Survey results indicate an increase in staff engagement (from 59% to 76%)
• Numbers attending values events have been consistently strong.
• Values now embedded into: staff processes of recruitment; induction; development & review processes; manager training; institutional Policy Review Process: and also into our student-facing Common Good Curriculum and the GCU Community Partnership agreement which describes the expected relationship between university and student.
• Undocumented uses of the values and behaviours materials reported regularly in activities as wide ranging as union-manager discussions to supporting student induction.

Conclusions:
There are enormous benefits to be gained from the identification of a set of institutional values that staff and students believe to be organisationally and personally relevant.

Values on their own are of limited value, to gain the maximum benefit from them they have to be embedded into the everyday behaviours of the staff and students and the practices and policies of the university.

Shared and embedded values:
• instill a sense of identity and purpose within organizations
• align and unify people
• promote employee attachment and ownership
• attract newcomers
• simplify & create consistency in decision making
• motivate staff and energize endeavors
• raise efficiency
• hearten client trust, loyalty, and forgiveness for mistakes
• build resilience to shocks
• and contribute to society at large (Serrat, 2010; Posner 2008)

Key considerations for practice
• Understand the value of values within the organisation
• Have strong strategic leadership and demonstration of commitment from the top
• Ensure participation and buy-in from students and staff at all levels
• Engage key stakeholders and especially People Managers in design and development
• Agree a consensus level
• Focus on the positive and on aspirational nature of behaviour statements
• Identify and celebrate exemplars of value based behaviour
• Use a well-respected academic to lead supported by a strong team
• Acknowledgement that this is an ongoing process
• Move towards individual and local ownership of values embedment process

REPORT

Table hosted by:
Caroline Parker, Glasgow Caledonian University, UK
Rapporteur:
Eva Egron-Polak, MCO Council

The following report combines the comments and discussion that took place in both sessions. Participants were highly varied with representatives from Kosovo, Mauritius, Egypt, Papua New Guinea, Hungary and Romania taking part. In both sessions, the first part was devoted to the presentation of the GCU values project by Caroline Parker, starting with the genesis of the project and its links to the university's mission, and underlying the role of the leadership - including that by the University's Chancellor, Muhammad Yunus.

Caroline stressed how part of the goal for the project was to increase staff engagement and mobilize a bottom-up process that focused on the positive aspects of the university. She took the participants through the different phases of the process that was put in place at GCU. First, she described the effort to identify the key values that could be used to define a university whose formal organizational Mission statement is 'For the Common Good". Second, she explained how simply identifying values was insufficient without also identifying how these values - the four that were eventually agreed upon - could be put into practice by staff and students. In another iterative process the specific behaviours that would exemplify the values adopted were agreed through discussion and consensus building process. The presentation of this unique case study included a brief set of examples that demonstrated how the GCU values have been embedded in various institutional policies and strategic decision making. These included the policies for the hiring and promotion of faculty and staff, management training programs and all policy review processes. Finally, for monitoring purposes, and in response to some of the participants' questions, Caroline also spoke about impact of this project, and indicated that a matrix of performance and impact indicators will need to be developed in the near future.

All of the participants in the discussion group were highly impressed with the project and its success and questioned Caroline about various aspects. Many highlighted some of the obstacles that would stand in the way in their institutions and in their cultural contexts but also indicated that it was an important initiative that they would like to see develop.

Some of the issues raised were:

How do you get started on such a project? And it was agreed that having a common challenge facing the institution can be a good catalyst.

How do you go from the concepts and wonderful words to actually 'owning' the values? One university representative talked about issuing T-shirts as a daily reminder of the key values. Caroline pointed out that it has to go beyond t-shirts and posters and into the fabric of the university through expected behaviours and to be seen to be reflected in all policies and processes if it is to be truly effective.

How do you overcome vast cultural differences within the university community? The discussion stressed the importance of breaking down barriers and perceptions through dialogue and the continuous showcasing of good examples.

Reporting bad behaviors was also mentioned by one participant, though the positive side of making individuals who live up to the university values known for positive reinforcement was stressed.

One university has used a questionnaire to identify values within the university as a follow-up to seeing the GCU project

Throughout the discussion, it was clear that all wished to learn from the GCU's valuable experience and took for granted that this kind of initiative would have a positive impact on the university. The whole discussion was about overcoming obstacles, finding ways to convince and rally people around the project as it was recognized it needed strong and long-term commitment from the leadership and from devoted personnel.

All participants appreciated this case study as it offered a very practical example of how one university tackled and successfully put in place an initiative that strengthened a commitment to a shared set of values in the university.