

HV&LV: HIGH VALUES AND LOW VALUES

Values are the link between events and our basic emotions. They are converters which convert events into matters about which we can feel strongly. Values are the most important ingredient in civilization. It is by means of values that civilization turns selfish, greedy, aggressive, short-term behaviour into social cooperation which makes life better for everyone and cares for the weak. The astonishing power of values to reverse normal human feelings is shown by Christianity. Martyrs suffered pain and willingly gave up their lives for the greater glory of God. Suffering itself had a value. Enemies were to be loved. Compassion was to be shown to the poor. In all these cases the value system succeeded in converting one lot of emotions into another.

Me-values: ego, status, self-importance, achievement, survival pleasure, self-indulgence, etc.

Mates-values: being accepted by the group, belonging to the group, acting as a member of the group, accepting the values of the group, not letting the group down.

Moral-values: religious values, social custom, general observance of the law, upbringing values, general values of a particular culture (often regarded as absolute but varying much from culture to culture).

Mankind-values: (relatively new) ecology, pollution, concern with nuclear power, a general concern for the whole earth and mankind upon it, also human rights and a concern for basic human values that transcend cultures.

It is a useful attention-directing technique to attempt to divide the values occurring in any situation into 'High Values' and 'Low Values'. In general the high values are the ones which determine action and the low values are the ones which have to be taken into account. Imagine a cost squeeze in an industrial company. There is to be a reduction in staff. The head of one division is being pressured to get rid of an assistant who has been with him for fifteen years. What are the values involved? This could read as follows:

HV: fear that he, the division head, could lose his own job if he did not comply; fear of the company collapsing; fear that he would not get promotion; loyalty to his assistant; the ego need to be successful and to be seen to be successful.

LV: the awkwardness of sacking the man; fear of what people might say; dislike of his own boss; the cost of compensation; the effect on other workers.

The exercise is a difficult one. For example, in the above situation loyalty to his subordinate might have been classed as either a low or high value. It might be valued highly but in the work context would easily be over-ridden by other values, since 'efficiency' would be seen to be the value in that context.

In fact the exercise is based on the 'apple-sorting' story. A French farmer goes off to market in the morning. He asks his two sons to sort a huge pile of apples into big apples and small apples while he is gone. They work all day to do this, carefully assessing whether a particular apple is big or small. The farmer returns and mixes both piles of apples together again. The sons are furious at

having wasted their time. But the farmer points out that the real object of the exercise was to get 'full attention' paid to the apples that the **BAD** ones would be thrown out - as indeed they have been. The 'big versus small' discrimination requires much more careful scrutiny than just looking for the bad apples. So the HV and LV exercise is really an instruction to look very carefully at the values involved in any situation.

Teacher has forbidden the eating of sweets in class. A boy notices that his neighbour is eating sweets - should he sneak on him?

- What if there is a broken window and the boy knows the culprit?
- What if there has been a lot of stealing and the boy knows who the thief is?
- What if it is a police state and your neighbour is giving refuge to a dissident wanted by the police?
- What if there is hunger in the country and your neighbour is hoarding food?
- What if you are informing on a terrorist gang?
- What if you are a member of a gang and inform on them?
- What if you are a paid police informer?
- What if you secretly and anonymously tell tales on your friends to gossip columnists?

It is most interesting to see how, in a roomful of people, the process of 'sneaking or informing' becomes respectable at one moment and shameful at another. This is a very sensitive example of the clash of values. It is also a good example of the importance of context and hypocrisy. If we dislike another regime (probably justifiably) then any sort of sneaking in that regime is abhorrent. If it is our own society then there are times when informing is not only respectable but a social duty. Similarly we would not like the idea of people sneaking on their friends, especially if we are involved, but at the same time we enjoy reading the results of that sneaking. The situation is an interesting one because of the constant clash between me-values, mates-values and moral-values.

In each of the following situations, what would you regard as the High Value (HV) and the Low Value (LV)?

1. Taking on a new teacher.
2. Giving foreign aid to a poor country.
3. Choosing a career.
4. Choosing a site for a restaurant.
5. Laying off workers in a recession.
6. Choosing players for a team.

VALUE-LADEN WORDS

The very words 'sneak' and 'informer' carry a heavy negative value. A great number of the words we use have such values.

I would go so far as to say that more than three-quarters of our public thinking is no more than an attempt to drag in value-laden words as soon as we possibly can. And then to rest the argument on those words.

If you read the average newspaper editorial or listen to the average political speech you may find that it is no more than a thin net of rational argument supporting a heavy burden of value-laden words.

There are the 'goodie' words such as: moral debt, justice, honour, fair play, freedom, press freedom, consistency, human rights, sincere, direct, perceptive, etc.

Then there are the 'baddie' words, which are much more numerous: obstinate, stubborn, sly, cunning, clever, deceitful, well-meaning, misguided, egotist, manipulative, self-seeking, publicity seeking, popularizer, superficial, capitalist, socialist, small-minded, shifty etc. These are quite apart from the directly negative words like 'foolish' or 'incompetent' which are honest judgements. The danger is much more with the sneer words which slip by and yet carry their value with them. A good example is the phrase 'well-intentioned' which sounds positive but is used in a negative way.

The following passage is taken from a piece which describes the value of the charismatic movement to the development of Christianity:

'The openness of Christianity to development and growth has maintained a creative tension that keeps faith lively.'

The words 'openness', 'development', 'growth', 'creative' and 'lively' are all value-laden words with an upbeat effect.

In California I once had a discussion with a psychologist in which I was taking a provocative position by asserting that the whole post-Freudian emphasis on digging deeper to find the 'true self and the 'real cause of behaviour' might be going in the wrong direction. I was suggesting that perhaps it was the surface personality that mattered, the mask which a person constructed for himself or herself to wear to face the world. The interesting thing was that the discussion was almost impossible because all the words I used had an intrinsic negative value: surface, superficial, mask, constructed, veneer. All the words he used had an in-built positive value: true self, underlying nature, real self, deep truth, mainspring of action, and hidden causes. This is because we have assigned these values from within the Freudian idiom itself (so used are we to it).

Exactly the same thing happens if you try to discuss placing an employee in a position where he will not only be happy but will do his best work. All the words you use will end up sounding like 'manipulation' which, rightly, has a negative content. Even if you let the employee do his own choosing or even designing his own job the connotation is that you are doing it for your good, not his, and therefore it is manipulation.

It is frightening to see how many subjects cannot be discussed because the very words we need to use have been so contaminated with in-built values that whatever we say is pre-judged. If you try to explain something complex in a simple way you are a 'populariz-er', which is a most convenient, all-embracing sneer word.

As an exercise it is useful to go through a political speech or newspaper editorial (or even better newspaper letters) and circle with a marker all the value-laden words that are used. The end result surprises most people.

Amongst the value-laden words should also be mentioned those words which have the special value of sounding important and saying very little: 'concerned about', 'pay attention to this', 'have at heart', 'will look into', 'some progress'. They are mainly political words which are used to say a lot when no real promise or commitment can be made.

AWARENESS

The examination of values is an awareness exercise. It is a matter of becoming aware of the values that are inherent in a situation, the conflict of values, the values that are perceived by the people involved and the source of these values. Consider the values involved in the following situations: an inventor who designs a loom that is three times as fast as existing ones; an employee who knows that his boss takes bribes but also knows that the boss has a very high regard for the employee; public transport strikes; a doctor who charges very high fees for a life-saving operation; a government that abolishes patents on drugs within its borders; a politician who deserts his party and moves to a new party.

The most important exercise of all is the one suggested above: an examination of written, or spoken, material in order to pull out the value-laden words. It is surprising to see how much of what passes for thinking is no more than a skilful necklace of value-laden words.