

## **“What if personal and organisational values are in conflict?”**

Sometimes we are conscious of value sets that don't fit easily between work and home. Sometimes it is a matter of working that through carefully to find a resolution. Mark Hope, writing as Director of External Relations at Shell UK Exploration and Production, was quoted in *By the Skin of our Teeth*, edited by Clive Morton. He made clear his view that you cannot have two different value sets, one for home and one for work. He reflected that you can, of course, behave differently at home compared to work if you choose, but if that means contravening your values in the workplace that's not good for you and, ultimately, not good for your employer either.

Sometimes the situation is more acute, and an individual feels strongly that their personal values and those of the organisation they are working for are in conflict. This could be a fundamental issue if, for example, somebody worked for a cigarette manufacturer and then decided that smoking was so damaging that they did not want to stay working in the industry. At a different level it could be that an individual working in local government finds him or herself working for politicians who are of a different political complexion. In this case, if such an individual sees as their prime value public service, then it is perfectly possible for them to work for political masters with a range of different persuasions.

Fundamental issues arise for people if a boss asks them:

- To do something that is illegal.
- To take forward action that is unethical (e.g. misrepresenting facts).
- To present a perspective in a very one-dimensional way that borders on the untrue.
- To delay decisions to such a point that it puts a customer or client in a very difficult situation.
- To take actions that are contrary to personal values.

If values are being stretched in a way that you find uncomfortable, then potential steps include:

- Talking with a senior manager explicitly about the issue against the background of the organisation's declared policies or values.
- Being explicit about where the boundary issues seem to lie.
- Talking with a colleague from another part of the organisation who might be able to provide a wider perspective.
- Talking with a friend outside the organisation who understands your value set.

The growing attention being given to business ethics enables individuals to examine the interrelation between their personal values and those of the organisation they work for in a more positive way than was perhaps the case a few years ago..."

**Extract from 'The Four V's of Leadership – Vision, Values, Value added, Vitality' by Peter Shaw (published by Capstone, 2006)**