

Values in Recruitment

“Do values play any part in recruitment?” people ask me. My answer “Yes, absolutely”.

Adrian Furnham ((Professor of Psychology at University College London and Adjunct Professor of Management at the Norwegian School of Management) puts it like this

“Attitudes, beliefs and values do shape (predict) behaviour. They determine in part the sorts of jobs people seek and shun; those that they revel and rebel in; and those where they may be optimally productive or unproductive.” (2005)

What makes values in recruitment challenging to work with is that values are abstract concepts – ideas – that tend to sit in our sub conscious shaping and framing our decisions and determining our actions without us being aware of their influence. This is where in my experience the AVI as an instrument to make the abstract concrete really comes into its own.

Here are three examples of ways in which different reports from the AVI have been used in recruitment.

Seeking Resilience

An equalities initiative was looking for a new lead officer to take forward work on a particularly challenging aspect of inclusion. It is well proven that when someone is consciously connected with their priority personal values they suffer less from stress and have more internal resources upon which to draw to keep going when things are hard. Shortlisted candidates were asked to complete the AVI and receive personal feedback on their Foundation, Focus and Vision values in the form of a Values Map.

Feedback concentrated on enabling candidates to reflect upon their motivations for applying for the vacancy and what strategies they might employ to handle the (almost) inevitable knock backs they would receive if appointed.

Outcome: two of the seven shortlisted candidates withdrew before interview having decided this was not the right move for them at this time, the remaining five attended interview and pitched for the job with such passion that the interview panel reported never having seen such energy before.

Seeking Connection

A campaigning organisation was looking for a communicator that would be able to take their message to new audiences and win hearts and minds. It was important to the employer that whoever was appointed would be competent in constructing messages that honoured the core values of the organisation and could be delivered

with authenticity. To ensure that all shortlisted candidates had a common basic understanding of values underpinned by some insight into their own personal priority values the organisation commissioned a Top 10 values report for each person.

Feedback concentrated on enabling candidates to connect with their personal drivers and to appreciate where the alignment or “chime” fell for them between their priorities and the core values of the organisation they were hoping to join.

Outcome: all shortlisted candidates attended interview and all gave excellent presentations. Following interview unsuccessful candidates fed back to the organisation that they had really enjoyed the process, had learned a great deal from the values experience and were keen to apply for other vacancies with the organisation in the future.

Seeking Fit

A governing body was seeking to replace a Chief Executive Officer. There had been a clear breakdown in communication between the governors and the outgoing CEO – the two parties looked at the world in completely different ways – a situation the governors did not want to repeat. A long list of candidates was drawn up and everyone was asked to work through the AVI and received a World View Report which provided a summary of important beliefs that underpinned their priority values.

Feedback concentrated on stimulating candidates to explore the beliefs they held about the world and the place of their professional life within that world. Based upon this conversation the values specialist recommended a short list of individuals with a world view compatible with the governing body to the recruitment panel.

Outcome: the governors felt they had constructive and candid conversations with a range of individuals who shared not only their concerns and aspirations but also an ideology about how to approach the challenges ahead.

We all know that a poor selection decision costs money in terms of lost productivity, repetition of advertising and recruitment, and potential damage to reputation, I have seen the financial impact estimated to be anywhere between 25 and 300 % of annual salary .

Currently we have a market place where there are lots of people looking for work. Given that, surely any practice that enables a greater discernment between people with the skills, knowledge and a quick turn of phrase and the people with skills, knowledge and cultural compatibility has got to be worth some serious consideration.

“So what happens next with the values profiles generated?” I also find myself asked. “Are they handed over to the interview panel, to the successful candidates’ new manager, to the HR department to be filed for future reference?”

The answer is none of the above. In my opinion the AVI has most to offer candidate and potential employer when the candidate feels certain that only they and the external specialist will see the report and these are my main reasons:

- Suppose you want/need this new job really badly and the recruiters tell you they would like you to use an instrument to create a profile of your values that will be shared with the panel. You are told (correctly) that there are such things as good or bad values and the panel is not looking for a certain set of values (also true).

It is your intention do anything (as long as its’ legal) to try and get this job. How likely are you to work through the tool trying to figure out what you think the “right” answers are?

Consequence: at the very outset a risk of bias is introduced that threatens the integrity of the profile – you as recruiter will have no idea if the profile you are looking at is that of the candidate or of the candidates idea of the perfect candidate – everybody loses.

- For the majority of people that receive a report from the AVI it is the first time the abstract constructs that matter to them have ever been put into words and arranged into a priority order. Few people are left entirely untouched by this experience.

During the feedback discussion candidates are guided through understanding about the dynamic between beliefs and values and can discover assumptions about the world that have not been working out for them. With this new insight it is not unusual for people to literally “change” their minds.

Consequence: when you as recruiter or manager look at that persons profile you see a snapshot of their thinking at the point in time that they used the tool. You do not necessarily know what they are thinking now – if you draw conclusions based on who they were rather than who they are, your conclusions will be flawed.

- Values are abstract constructs – ideas about how, if all bets were off and it was entirely up to us, we would live our lives. Values are in a dynamic relationship with beliefs and real life experience, they are amenable to change and yet they can stay fixed – all depending upon the individual and their life.

There are descriptors for the 128 distinct human values in the AVI but these only outline the core of the idea they do not define what “Independence” or “Loyalty” means to me compared to what it might mean to you.

For example the same behaviour such as “I keep my promises” can be stimulated by a variety of values –

- Sharing/Listening/Trust “I keep promises because they trust me”
- Efficiency “I keep promises because then people reciprocate and we get more done without having to double check all the time”
- Congruence “I keep promises because I do what I say”

And you can get different behaviours from the same value for example Social Equilibrium might see one person

- stand up to a workplace bully “because they upset far too many people too often”
- yet another person might appease the same bully “I’m sure they don’t really mean it and if only we could all stop winding them up it would be like it was before”

So even if you or someone else has the candidates profile you can’t know what those descriptors mean to that person in practice and therefore what they are likely to do in any given situation.

And finally

If I have put you off thinking about using the AVI in recruitment, I hope it is because you have learned that values profiles perhaps will not fulfil the function you were hoping for.

If, however, you are seeking something that will enable candidates to connect with and then showcase the very best of themselves as individuals then the AVI is perfect.

To learn more or have a conversation about values in recruitment please do drop me a line jackie@magmaeffect.com.

Thank you.