Developing Competence in Values for Value-based Leadership at NTPC

Uma Jain

ABSTRACT

This paper shares the design, process and outcomes of an intervention to develop the desired culture in a large public sector organization, National Thermal Power Corporation Ltd. (NTPC). The intervention involved a series of workshops with senior managers and identified champions focusing on personal and organizational value clarification to help the participants develop a values-based leadership and be a role model for the practice of values. The paper brings out that this experiential intervention focused on clarification rather than preaching of values is resulting in the managers discovering the alignment between their personal and organizational values and making commitment to work towards making a greater contribution to the organizational values which need strengthening.

> I firmly believe that any organization, in order to survive and achieve success must have a sound set of beliefs on which it premises all its policies and actions. Next, I believe that the most important single factor in corporate success is faithful adherence to those beliefs.
>
> Watson, Jr. *A Business and its Beliefs*, 1963.

THE COMMON SCENARIO

Watson wrote the above more than four decades ago but even today the process of identifying values and institutionalizing them receives low priority attention in most organizations. Research shows that successful organizations and leaders show clarity of values and practice them. Years of research at the Centre for Creative Leadership brought out personal values as one of the two main qualities for successful leaders (White and DeVries, 1990). In their research on the habits of successful companies, Collins and Porras (1994) find that companies with an enduring core ideology outperform the stock market and also that superior market performance is possible without making profit a primary value.

Many organizations, these days, are creating a statement of desired and stated values. However, the practices often fall short of the professed and desired values. The gap between stated, desired and practiced values is caused by lack of clarity and awareness of one's own values, value practices and the gap between the two, differing standards for self and others, decisions and choices being based on habits, expectations and fears rather than values, end values not supported by process values, unwillingness to take the risk and pay the price and several other reasons (Jain, 2002) resulting in a situation of disappointment and frustration as well as a sense of helplessness. This has become quite a widely prevailing phenomenon and a kind of vicious circle where individuals feel that they cannot practice the desired values because of the organisation and the organisation feels that it cannot practice the values because of the individuals. However, competence in practicing values is not normally taken up as an area of learning in most of the educational systems (Jain, 2004). Even when an attempt is made to address the issue, it normally ends in preaching or propagating values with insignificant outcomes or even negative reactions.

Competitive environment is putting a lot of pressure on the organisations to build a certain kind of culture. In response to this environmental imperative, the organisations are being pushed not only to identify values relevant to the current environment but also to work on bringing them really into practice.

THE NTPC INITIATIVE

National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), a well-known and large public sector organisation in the power sector, had gone through an elaborate exercise through an internal process of participation and consultation of identifying a set of core values around which they would like to build their culture to respond to the current environment. This was called COMIT consisting of the following values:

C: Customer Focus
O: Organisational Pride
M: Mutual Respect and Trust
I: Initiative and Speed
T: Total Quality.

As they moved along, they also set up task forces to identify the operating values, which will enable the organisation to actualize the core values. However, it was felt that for the actualization of core values, the organisation needs to prepare managers as champions and facilitators and a series of development programs for senior management were envisaged. At this stage, the author was invited as an external facilitator to work with their senior managers and also some identified managers as champions who will specially focus on strengthening the NTPC culture to prepare them for this role. Also, the managers in all regions of NTPC have been identified to participate in similar workshops so that they develop a values-based leadership style, act as a role model and support others in aligning to and practicing NTPC values. This paper gives the design, process and outcome of this intervention being carried out in NTPC to support and facilitate its process of building the desired culture and to prepare the organization to meet the challenges of the current environment.

These programs were aimed at helping the participants to develop clarity of their own values, the concept of values and value-related processes, their own practices and the gaps between the two. The programs also created the opportunity to examine the current practice of COMIT, the alignment between individual and organizational values and make action plans to strengthen the NTPC culture.

THE PROGRAMME DESIGN

These workshops were designed around certain basic assumptions and beliefs. The main ones are:

- Organisation's culture can be built in desired directions if individuals practice the values desired.
- There is a higher chance that the individuals will practice the values if they clarify the values.
- Values cannot be taught or preachced in the current world but they can be clarified and nurtured.
- Clarification of values at individual and organisational levels is expected to increase the possibility of getting closer to the values we hold.
- Self-awareness is a fundamental competence for leaders who want to facilitate culture building.
- People generally have values not particularly contrary to the desired values, it is the practices which fall short of the stated or professed values.
- Alignment of individual values develops through a conscious and self-chosen practice rather than preaching.

The models, which the author has developed for the development of individual and organizational competence in values, form the base for the learning events and agenda of the workshops (Annexure 1 and 2). Not all the aspects of the models, particularly the organizational competence model, get addressed in these workshops. However, an attempt is made to develop the Five C's of individual competence in values (clarity, courage, capability, congruence, changing) in the workshop as this is an individual focused intervention. This intervention was planned by the HR professionals to support the various other methods that they were using to enhance the practice of COMIT.

The workshops were conducted primarily through an experiential and participative methodology with reflecting, sharing, experimenting and conceptualizing as the main processes. Participants were encouraged to share as well as listen, be prepared for surprises, confront and support each other in learning, be a keen observer of the processes and focus on making a better future than validating the past. These workshops were intended to be value-free, i.e. not preaching or propagating any particular set of values (though with a possibility that values of all present in the group may impact each other). Essentially, these workshops were focused on value clarification rather than preaching, propagating or teaching. A broad design of a 3-day workshop is given in the Annexure 3.

The main segments of learning are:

- Exploring and clarifying personal values.
- Decision-making in groups and identifying values upheld.
- Concepts, overview of the values-related processes and patterns.
- Exploration on organisational values and alignment with individual values.
- Action plans for strengthening the values. Normally a few members of the top management and Director/ED HR are also present to explore these.

For identified champions, a 5-day program was held in which, in addition to the 3-day workshop agenda, some more aspects, viz., practicing the skills in conducting value clarification workshops, familiarity with various designs, clarifying and evolving the role and values for the champions, the dilemmas, and what they can do to strengthen the culture of NTPC were also included.

The journey into values through these 3–5 day workshops starts normally with setting the agenda, clarifying expectations, process of learning, assumptions, and so on. After that the participants go through a series of exercises to clarify what their own values are and later what values do they actually tend to practice individually in their work and life decisions as well as while working in groups.

LEARNINGS AND OUTCOMES

At various stages, they are encouraged to make a statement of their five values as it was emerging in their understanding at that time. In the various steps of individual value clarification, the participants move towards identifying the values that they really hold rather than an idealistic set of values of honesty, integrity, dedication, sincerity, etc., which they often state in the beginning. A comparative table of the most frequently mentioned values in the workshops held till now (about 70 participants) in the four stages is given here (Table 1).

Rank	Ist Stage	IInd Stage	IIIrd Stage	IVth Stage
1	Honesty 35	Inner harmony 35	Family happiness 33	Family happiness 21
2	Respect 23	Family happiness 30	Health 25	Health 15
3	Integrity 18	Health 30	Self confidence & Positive outlook 18	Inner harmony 12
4	Truthfulness 17	Achievement 23	Achievement 12	Honesty 11
5	Sincerity 16	Loyalty 20	Inner harmony 12	Self confidence 9

Values identified in the later stages are likely to be closer to what they actually practice as they are identified after considerable reflections, explorations and feedback generated from the various value clarification exercises.

At this stage, certain value concepts are discussed and an 8-step model for developing the values into fully functioning values is also discussed (Smith, 1977). The participants apply it to their values and identify where the gaps are.

The group decision-making exercises also bring out that while the desired values for groups and organisations are autonomy, freedom, risk-taking, empowerment, trust and support etc., the values they end up upholding in decisions are loyalty, conformity, cautiousness, self-sufficiency etc. This is very similar to the processes that have been found in many groups in earlier workshops in several other organisations and other mixed groups from various organizations also (Jain, 2002).

Also, they bring out the difference between the values and standards by which people judge others and the values they themselves keep as priority in action. The group decision-making exercises also create an opportunity for the participants to explore their behaviour in situations of differences of values. Participants also explore the sources of their values and their styles as leaders in influencing others' values. On the whole, process leads to the following main areas of learning:

1. Getting clearer about one's own values, priority amongst them and the gaps between stated, cherished and practiced values.
2. Clarification of the concept of values and a model for developing full values.
3. Respect for other people's values and being less judgmental and caught up with expectations from others.
4. Overall greater courage and a sense of being in-charge of one's own life. From changing others to changing self and greater willingness to pay the price for one's values.
5. Skills for consensus decision-making in groups with differing values amongst members and playing a facilitative and leadership role in helping people clarify values.
6. Value formation process and consequently one's own style of influencing others' values.
7. Awareness of the larger picture and beginning to see the connection between their own behaviour and the processes in groups, organizations and society. Also, sensitivity to the processes through which values get diluted in organizational and group situations.
8. Change from a paradigm of helplessness and incongruence to seeing values and their practice as a competence which can be developed.
9. Competence in developing shared organisational values, identifying mechanisms and processes for reducing incongruence between stated and practiced values.

This intervention also makes people move towards a more meaningful life, a significant corollary outcome in addition to the main purpose for initiating the intervention from the organisation's point of view.

As given in the schedule, each day at the end of the day, a feedback is taken from the group around certain questions which encourage the participants to share their learnings and experiences. Some of the statements of the participants from these feedbacks about their experiences and learning are:

- As I proceeded, what I thought were my values, were not the ones
- I can't deceive my conscience.
- There is gap between what I want to be and what I am today.
- Values should be practiced and not mere lofty ideals.
- Feedback through value-mails from participants has given an idea about my values I have shown during three days of the workshop.
- I tend to assume things which restrict my achievements. Learn to use opportunities.
- Learning to sacrifice something to achieve an important thing.

- Learning how to actualise values and how it will be useful. Usefulness of values to practical environment.
- Shift to value-based decisions.
- Organisation cannot survive in the long run if not based on values.
- Group exercise helped to think beyond our boundary. People have become better listeners progressively.
- Values can be imbibed and instilled.
- Yesterday at least started actualization of values.
- Practice, Practice, Practice, because Rome was not built in a day.
- I have started practicing my values from my home.
- We look for faults in others and rationalize our faults.
- How to be in a group and respect differences.
- Majority decision does not have to be always good. A facilitator has to be there in a team to encourage minority view.
- Lack of priorities leads to confused efforts, focus your attention on what is the most important.
- Collaborative excellence is easier than individual excellence.
- Change yourself – do not expect others to change.

EXPLORATION OF NTPC VALUES

Having clarified one's values and become more aware of the values-related processes, the significant task of exploring the current practice of NTPC's stated values COMIT and how to make improvements is done. The participants are divided into groups with the following questions to answer.

1. In your view, to what extent are the core values being practiced in NTPC. Please rate each COMIT value on a 5-point scale. Identify some aspects that are being practiced well and the aspects which need improvement.
2. What values do you think NTPC should hold and practice to accomplish its mission in the current environment? Is there a need to modify or add to the NTPC core values? Identify the process values required to actualise the COMIT.
3. Do you see any undesirable values being practiced in NTPC?

Each question was explored by two groups to get different opinions. Through the process of these group explorations, the participants stated their acceptance and commitment to the chosen core values of NTPC. They also rated the extent to which they saw the NTPC values as being practiced, the areas which are being done well and the aspects which need improvement. In the four such programs already held, the main thing which comes out is that while the managers feel that Organisational Pride and Total Quality are being practiced to a large extent, they have felt the need for strengthening the practice of Initiative and Speed, Mutual Respect and Trust and Customer Focus. They have also identified specific aspects through which the practice of these values can also be improved. Participants also did reflections in groups and identified some of the undesirable practices which they see and which hinder the practice of core values of the organization. From both of these explorations, the main areas of improvement fall into enhancing openness and transparency, learning attitude, participative and empowering leadership style, risk-taking, experimentation, sensitivity, empathy, and response time leading to a more achievement and excellence-oriented culture, with customer responsiveness, initiative and drive. It is evident from this data that in response to globalization and competitive forces how a large public sector is preparing its senior managers to facilitate significant changes in their ways of functioning and a more professional and progressive leadership style.

The practicing line managers identified as champions sometimes also felt inadequate regarding the performance of this role as it was something different from what they are used to and they felt a great

sense of responsibility to make it a success which had to be worked through. They worked out action plans to make it a realistic step-by-step process of contributing and involving others.

INDIVIDUAL VALUE ALIGNMENT AND ACTION PLANNING FOR ORGANISATION CULTURE BUILDING

After exploring the practice of organisational values, alignment between the participants' own values and the organisation's values is done. They reflect individually on the alignment of their values with the organisational values and how they can further support the organisational values. The typical guidelines and questions given for this exploration are as follows:

Please refer to your personal values (stage IV or the latest List). Reflect on their connections with NTPC organisational values.

- To what extent are your personal values aligned to and supportive of NTPC Values?
- What would you like to add/modify/reprioritise to contribute to the actualisation of COMIT?

It is interesting to note that though the participants had a diverse set of individual values stated quite differently from the organisational COMIT but when they reflected, they did not find a conflict between their values and the organizational values. They found most of their values positively connected and felt that they can practice them in a way so as to contribute to the organizational values.

The alignment analysis and action plans of a few participants are given below. The individual value and the organizational value/s to which it connects or contributes are juxtaposed. If the participant made any further action plans, these are also given at the end at the end of each individual's action plan.

Table 2

Individual Value	Organisational Value
Self-respect	Mutual respect & trust
Health	Initiative and speed
Inner harmony	Customer focus and Organisational pride
Order	
stability	

My values are already aligned except the last two values. Order and stability may have negative impact on initiative and speed. I have to underplay, reprioritise them for initiative and speed.

Individual Value	Organisational Value
Health	
Achievement	Speed
Creativity	Customer focus
Affection	Organisational pride
Inner harmony	Mutual respect

There is more thrust on initiative. Initiative can be added. Improve more interaction with internal and external customers, more work towards team spirit, more group meetings and listen to them and how they can speed up.

Individual Value	Organisational Value
Truthfulness and honesty Inner harmony Integrity Commitment Consideration, respect Supportive/participative	Organisational pride / exhibiting integrity Customer focus Mutual respect

I am able to align to company values. Initiative and Speed to be added--ready to offer support, proactive.   Total quality will be promoted with all the above. I would experiment with what I have learnt and share, help them identify their values, spread the message with a time-bound chart.

Individual Value	Organisational Value
Inner harmony (Transparency & honesty)	Mutual respect & trust, Helping others to improve
Responsibility	Organisational pride
Cooperation	Customer focus
Achievement	Customer focus
Loyalty	

Promptness, humility, caring, responsibility, sense of ownership and belongingness to be improved. As a corporate responsible citizen – I have to improve upon Initiative and speed. May have to add creativity, innovation, time consciousness. Total quality, system orientation, continuous learning, benchmarking and openness to be improved. We feel handsome and others are ugly.

Individual Value	Organisational Value
Cooperation	Customer focus, Mutual respect & trust,
Responsibility	Initiative and speed, Total quality
Caring and family	Mutual respect & trust,
Self respect	Organisational pride & Customer focus
Inner harmony	Indirectly contributes

Total overall, I am becoming more towards caring etc., and I need to add some achievement type of values and it will improve my contribution.

Individual Value	Organisational Value
Inner harmony	Organizational pride, Initiative & respect, total quality
Self esteem	Organisational pride
Empathy	Customer focus
Family happiness	Organisational pride. Company takes good care, so I am proud.
Health	

Take back learnings. Help others clarify values. Competency in value-based decision making. Time-bound action plans. Identifying gaps in subordinates' practices and help them.

The participants have planned to practice their own values with conscious focus on contributing to NTPC values. Some have planned to add some values and others to reprioritise their values to contribute more to the actualization of COMIT. Some of the other significant statements made by the participants in this connection are:

- Be a role model, clarify others' values, be passionate.
- Reinvent with people, their own core values and help them to practice
- Added empathy for customer focus. Value champion at my workplace and enhance the culture.
- Improve respect and trust, be happy and spread happiness. Make a presentation regarding the importance of the program which is interesting and helpful to people. I shall stress the importance and practice things that will improve the culture.
- Self-development is to be added. Demonstrating values. Take feedback from subordinates whether I am practicing.
- Initiative and speed – want to add this quality also, I want to improve.
- Develop the competency in values. I was not looking at values as a competence. Now, I shall consider it as a competence. I try to practice, and then motivate others, set as an example.
- Analyse our values incongruence, self-interest is taking over the group or organisation's Interest. They have to be prioritised. Risk-taking, adventure and strategic planning to be cultivated.
- Change – I would like to be the first and be the last snowflake for making the change.
- Family happiness will help in all the other values.

REFLECTIONS ON THE INTERVENTION

The process of the workshops is sometimes challenging, sometimes painful, (when people realize that they are not practicing their values) sometimes confusing but ultimately it leads to more clarity. Questions are also raised whether values can change at the stage of life in which they are and whether they can at all make a difference to the organizational culture. Sometimes it is also suggested that the programme should be conducted for their seniors or sometimes juniors. Some of the sharings of participants which show their experiences are:

- Self-nurturing – did not know my values.
- Inner feelings were stimulated.
- Anxiety about the exercises today.
- Hopeful, anxious.
- Lack of knowledge and skills to express ourselves.
- I want to be more in the session, we have just started (on the last day).
- Perplexed, how to make values really operative in actual condition – many odds and difficulties we will face.
- How to come out of my ill values.
- I am concerned about the reaction of my boss to my personal values
- Values are on the top of the mind.
- Feeling elated that last 4 days not thought of anything except values.
- Afraid – how to actualize.

An attempt is being made to cover a critical mass of people in senior management with the belief that if a significant section of senior management people understand the process and practice the values, it will help the culture to evolve in the organization on the whole. People will develop a common language, an understanding of the processes and hence support each other in bringing about change.

Some factors hindering the effectiveness of the interventions are:

1. Some of the people who attended the program were comparatively junior than the intended target group.
2. Last minute dropouts sometimes, making the number of participants less than planned.
3. Preoccupation with communicating about office work during the program on mobile or otherwise.

4. While a large percentage of people progressively developed a learning and exploring attitude, not all the participants learnt to the same extent.

The main learning in terms of leadership development for culture-building process which this intervention brings out is that the organisations do not need to change values but build awareness and develop conscious practice of the personal values connecting with organizational values while working in the organisation. Value-based leadership development for culture building is not about preaching but about giving the managers an opportunity to clarify and develop a commitment to a value-oriented way of life as opposed to habits, expectations and moving away from pain rather than seeking values.

It is not a quick fix intervention which gives how to do tools for conversion of individuals into organisational values but rather preparing the inner being of the individual who will find his/her ways of using the learning. The process is a simple step-by-step process and can be learnt by leaders/champions which they can learn to use in future.
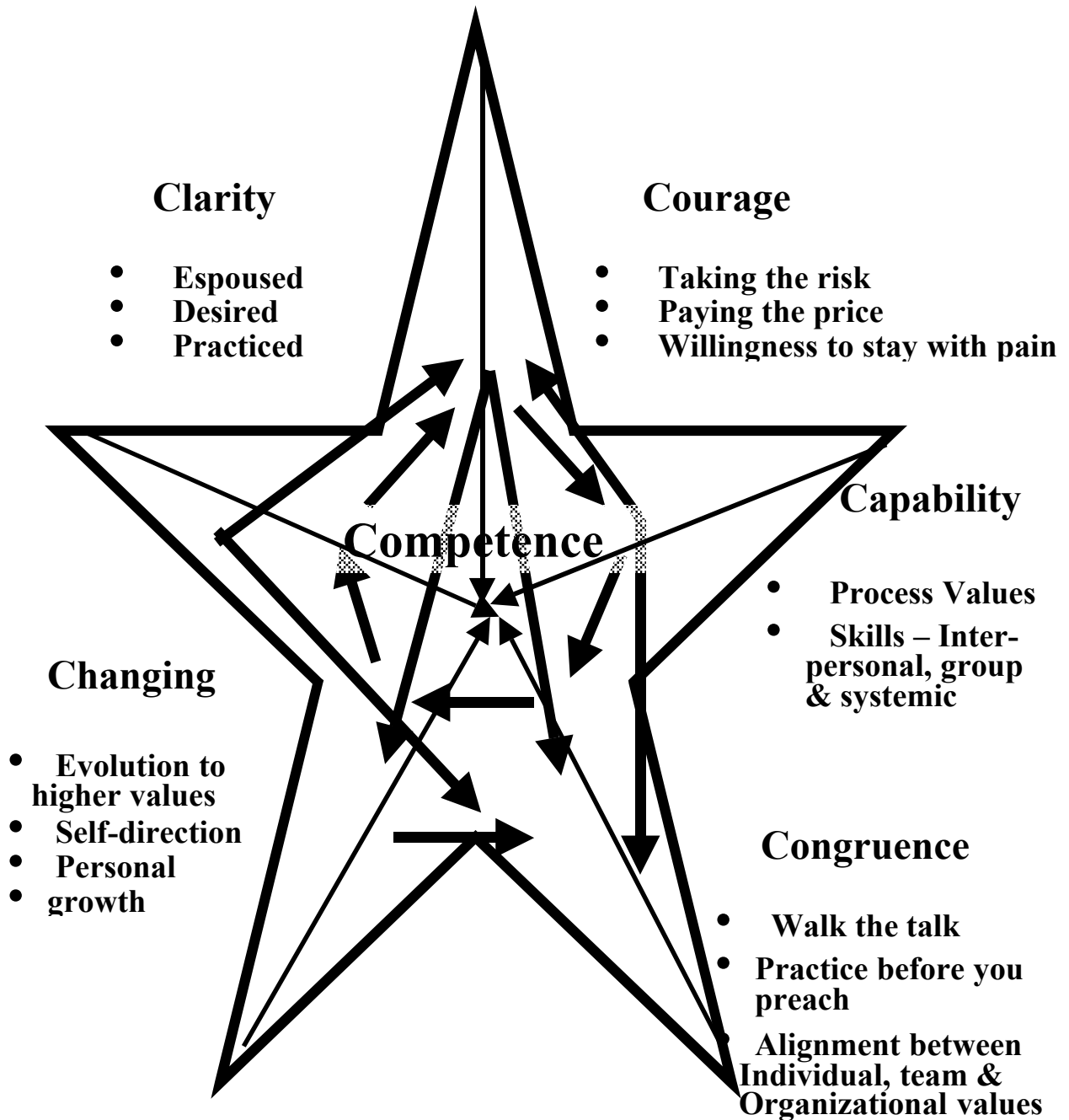
It is a change from the paradigm of helplessness and incongruence in which values are either seen as there or not there, and people see themselves as helpless victims to the leaders seeing their own role in making this reality happen. They begin to see values as a competence which can be developed and voluntarily and consciously commit to practice their values in alignment so as to contribute to the organisational values rather than unconsciously and without awareness of the value of their commitment. Values are brought into focus as a subject of learning rather than assumed to exist or not exist.

It is yet early to know how much this intervention has been able to enhance values-based leadership, practicing values as a role model or facilitating others. However, the experience and data of this intervention very clearly brings out how through a process of exploration, senior managers from a large public sector, with long years of service and strongly imbibed cultural patterns are realizing the need for change and voluntarily committing to make the change to meet the challenges of the changed scenario. This is an optimistc development both from the point of view of bringing about change in public sector as well as the HRD profession. Whether or not desired change will actually happen, we are yet to see and may need follow up and support from time to time and also HR systems and processes congruent with the same. However, the data generated in the interventions, the feedbacks till now and action plans of managers, give hope that it will.

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Clarity

- **Espoused**
- **Desired**
- **Practiced**

Courage

- **Taking the risk**
- **Paying the price**
- **Willingness to stay with pain**

Competence

Capability

- **Process Values**
- **Skills – Inter-personal, group & systemic**

Changing

- **Evolution to higher values**
- **Self-direction**
- **Personal**
- **growth**

Congruence

- **Walk the talk**
- **Practice before you preach**
- **Alignment between Individual, team & Organizational values**

Leadership Competence

Top Leadership Value Clarification
Value-based leadership practices.

Individual Competence

Individual Value Clarification
as wide as possible.
Inculcating/constructing
values.

Systems Competence

Design/review systems,
policies, rewards,
reinforcers in line with
values.

**Organizational
Competence**

Group Work Competence

Decision making in group, skill building
in facilitation as wide as possible.

**Action/Process
Competence**

Institutional processes to
evolve shared values &
disseminate with as much
participation as possible,
review & strengthen the
practice of values.

Reviewing/Research Competence

Assessment, Audit, Climate Surveys
periodically at individual, group and
organizational levels for congruence &
viability. Change, if required.

ANNEXURE 3: TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Day 1

Time	Content
09:30 – 11:00	Introductions, expectations sharing, Process of learning
11:00 – 11:55	Tea
11:15 – 11:30	Identifying my values: an exercise
11:30 – 12:15	Values – yours, mine & theirs
12:15 – 13:00	Pick up your choicest flowers from the value garden
13:00 – 13:45	Lunch
13:45 – 15:30	Buy your own value bouquet– An exercise
15:30 – 15:45	Tea
15:45 – 17:30	Reflections and conceptual discussion
17:30 – 18:00	Learnings of the Day, Feedback & Closing of the Day

Day 2

Time	Content
09:30 – 09:45	Feedback on Feedback, Agenda & schedule for the day
09:45 – 11:00	Eight-step model for values
11:00 – 11:15	Tea
11:15 – 13:00	Group decision-making learning events
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch
14:00 - 15:00	Group decision-making events…….contd.
15:00 – 15:45	Sources of values (External and Internal): Conceptual discussion and exercise
15:45 – 16:00	Tea
16:00 – 17:00	Sources of values…contd.
17:00 – 17:45	Decision-making exercise
17:45 – 18:00	Learnings of the Day, Feedback & Closing of the Day

Day 3

Time	Content
09:30 – 10:00	Raggedy start up, Value mails
10:00 – 10:15	Feedback and schedule
10:15 – 11.00	Assessing my values
11:00 – 11:15	Tea
11:15 – 13:00	Presentation on value processes
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch
14:00 – 15:30	Group explorations on NTPC values
15:30 – 15:45	Action Planning for alignment of Individual and organizational values
15:45 – 16:00	Tea

16:00 – 16:30	Action Planning………contd.
16:30 – 17:30	Dialogue with Sr. Management
17:30 – 18:00	Learnings of the Day, Feedback & Closing of the Day

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