

3 Deeper values-based behaviour

A fundamental part of any norm are the values that guide how people behave. All the organisations we spoke to have taken time to define their organisational values to make clear how people are expected to behave.

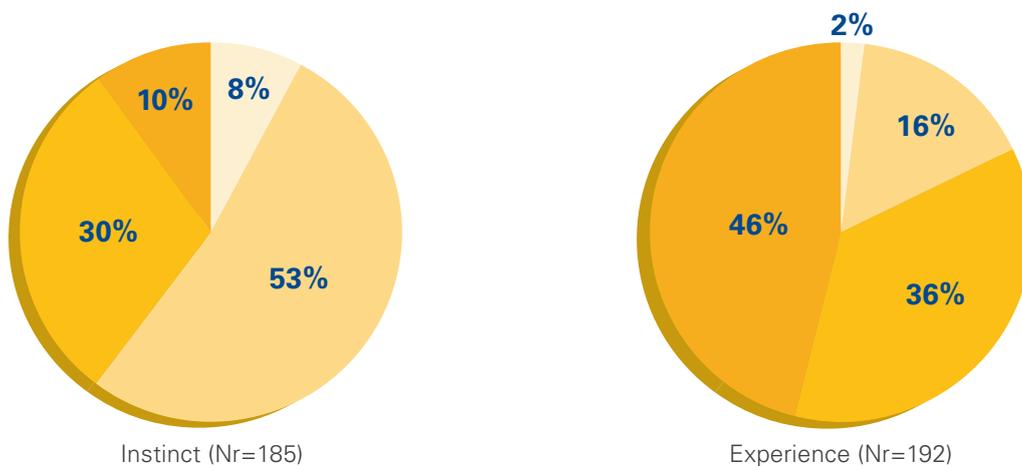
These values are really important to the way an organisation, and its staff, behave because they establish the tone for what constitutes acceptable behaviour, forcing exceptions to stick out.

It is interesting to note when developing values the extent to which people think their decisions are driven by instinct and experience. We found experience to be a strong factor, with almost half of respondents indicating it has more than some influence in their decision-making. Only a few decisions in the NHS seem to be based on instinct and most people felt uncomfortable relying on this. Nonetheless, people did tell us that their 'gut feeling' could sometimes be helpful in making the right decision.

Three key messages

- 1 Values are important for defining how people should behave and in supporting decisions that are made more on instinct than experience.
- 2 Most decision-making is based on experience, rather than instinct, but where instinct is used decision-makers feel less comfortable with how reliable it is.
- 3 For values to be established as a core part of the NHS, communicating and upholding those values need to be prioritised even when times get tough.

Please indicate, for a typical decision, what proportion of influence the following factors have?



No influence
 Little influence
 Some influence
 More than some influence

Many people seem to find comfort in having values defined across an organisation. On first glance, many of the values defined by different organisations appear broadly similar and relatively straightforward. Some reinforce the importance of putting patients and staff at the core of everything the organisation does, most commit to being respectful, caring and innovative. Nonetheless, the values that have been established, usually with staff and the public, are essential features for any organisation and there is no doubting that having values articulated in a clear and accessible way is a must in the NHS.

Communication is important so that staff are fully aware of the values established and how they are being delivered. A key factor in how values are received is the mindset of people receiving them. We did hear cynicism from some of the people we spoke to about values and scepticism that the values established were really being upheld. There is also a concern that values can often be demoted at times of crisis. Certainly the test for any set of values is how they are supported every day and whether people are held to account for behaviour against those values. Like in developing relationships, this culture shift relies on trust and takes time to develop.

The real challenge seems to be how to maintain momentum in the values once they are established. Some organisations are embedding their values within the recruitment process, to ensure the right values are upheld from the start. Other organisations are also exploring how to refresh their values to ensure they remain relevant, without appearing to undermine those already established.

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Our values are being developed by staff, but the message gets easily lost. The next step is the difficult bit – embedding the values in the way we work.

HR business partner

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