

# ACCL

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## Acceptance

Life is tough - accept it!  
Then focus on creating your future.



## Commitment

Identify your values and then commit to them.



## Conscious Living

We live in a society, we cannot live our values any way we want.  
Be conscious of our values, and how best to live them  
- for the benefit of yourself AND others.

## Background

The Minessence Group has been working full time with people's and organisations' values since 1988. Thousands of people have gone through our Acceptance, Commitment, and Conscious Living (ACCL)<sup>1</sup> process, with spectacular results.

ACCL emphasises the importance of identifying, committing to, and consciously living one's values. Consciously living one's values involves asking, "how best, for me, having regard for others affected by my actions, should I live my values?"

We live in a society, therefore, we cannot live our values any way we want - there must be some constraints on how we live our values. Ideally the constraints to living our values shouldn't just come out of the "ether" – i.e. just because someone else says we should live a particular way doesn't mean we should follow their lead. We advocate that the source of constraints to living values should be *principles*.

In this document, the dimensions of ACCL are described and an example is given of how principles may be used to consciously guide our behaviour in living our values.

## The Dimensions of ACCL

We talk about dimensions of ACCL, rather than steps. The reason for this is that acceptance, commitment and conscious living become ongoing components of our life.

### ***Acceptance***

The reason the acceptance dimension of ACCL works so well is due to how the brain works: if we focus consciously on anything for an extended period the neural networks in the brain become more extensive and demanding of attention. It makes sense, therefore, to focus on where we want to go rather than on where we don't want to be. Lakoff<sup>2</sup> explains this brain phenomenon thus:

"Don't think of an elephant! Whatever you do, do not think of an elephant. [Lakoff has] never found a student who is able to do this. Every word, like *elephant*, evokes a *frame*, which can be an image or other kinds of knowledge: Elephants are large, have floppy ears and a trunk, are associated with circuses, and so on. The word is defined relative to that frame. When we negate a frame, we evoke the frame.

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<sup>1</sup> ACCL is an extension of ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy). ACT is the fifth wave of human psychology. The first wave was the Freudian movement, the second wave the humanist movement, the third wave cognitive movement, fourth wave the cognitive-behavioural (CBT) movement.

<sup>2</sup> Lakoff, G. 2006, *Don't Think of an Elephant! Know your values and frame the Debate*, Scribe Short Books, Melbourne, p. 1.

## Commitment

Values are our motivators/demotivators. If we feel pressure to live values very different from our own, imposed on us by others, it is a very de-motivating and energy draining experience. On the other hand, identifying, and then following our own values is an extremely energising and life enriching process.

The people of the Minesence Group have been working since 1988 to develop an effective process for identifying one's values. We have found the most effective technique to be, *requiring people to choose between sets value-laden statements* (each statement representing a different value). We find that through this approach, we are able to elicit people's unconsciously held values. It works because the values we hold (either consciously or unconsciously) lie behind all the choices we make in our lives. This values elicitation process is undertaken online at our website.<sup>3</sup>

## Conscious Living

At the personal level, happiness and sustainable success are directly related to how well we are able to control our conscious thoughts.<sup>4</sup> At the societal level, conscious living has the potential to create an ever improving society.

The relationship between values, ethics/morals, principles and values is described below using just one value, *trust*, as the example.

## Principle Centric Living

As stated earlier, because we live in a society, we cannot live our values any way we want! It is *important* that we are aware of how our actions may affect others. This section, *Principle Centric Living*, focuses on one aspect the *Conscious Living* dimension of ACCL, i.e. being consciously aware of the consequences of living our values in a particular way – the conscious awareness stems from our understanding of the principles that underpin our actions.

Before launching into an example, using just one value, *trust*, look at how principles relate to behavioural choices.

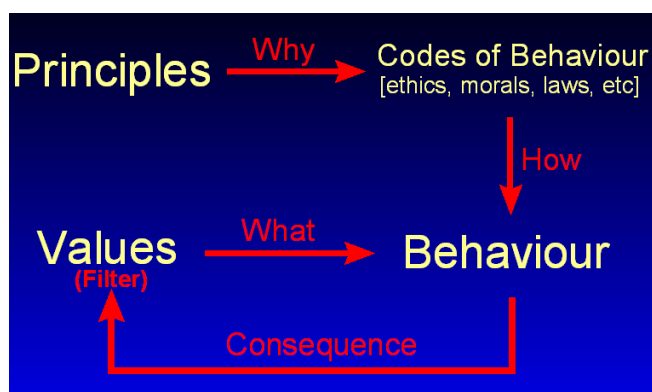


Figure 1 - The Relationship Between Values, Ethics & Principles

<sup>3</sup> There is a cost involved. This cost ranges from \$2 a person for students (they receive a one page listing of their top 5 values), through to \$365 for people participating in leadership programs (they receive a 70 page personalised workbook based on their values and reference texts).

<sup>4</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, M. 1992, *Flow: The Psychology of happiness*, Random House.

With reference to Figure 1. If we know what a person's priority values are, we will know in a broad sense what behaviours will be important to them. However, we cannot know specifically how they will behave in any specific situation. For example, if a person's highest priority value is research/knowledge/insight it would probably come as no surprise if you found the person in a laboratory somewhere doing medical research. However, you cannot know from their values alone whether or not they are likely to carry out harmful experiment with animals. This is where codes of behaviour (ethics, morals, laws, norms, etc.) come in. If we know the code of ethics guiding this medical researcher, we will know how he/she is supposed to behave in terms of conducting the research.

There are many ways in which we can live out any particular value. We live in a society, therefore, we cannot live our values any way we want. That's why ethics, morals, etc. exist. - as Mackie<sup>5</sup> says, "Even thieves have values, but they don't behave ethically." Johannesen<sup>6</sup> gives further examples to help distinguish between values and ethics:

Concepts such as material success, individualism, efficiency, thrift, freedom, courage, hard work, prudence, competition, patriotism, compromise, and punctuality all are value standards that have varying degrees of potency in contemporary American culture. But we probably would not view them primarily as ethical standards of right and wrong. Ethical judgments focus more precisely on degrees of rightness and wrongness in human behaviour. In condemning someone for being inefficient, conformist, extravagant, lazy, or late, we probably would not also claim they are unethical. However, standards such as honesty, truthfulness, fairness, and humaneness usually are used in making ethical judgments of rightness and wrongness in human behaviour.

Clearly our values influence what we determine as ethical; "however, values are our measures of importance, whereas ethics represent our judgments about right and wrong".<sup>7</sup> An easy way to remember the difference between values and ethics is to memorise the phrase: *Values motivate, ethics constrain*. The close relationship between importance and right and wrong is a powerful influence on our behaviour and how we evaluate the behaviour of others.

We've covered values and ethics, now where do principles fit in?

Principle is defined in Nuttall's Concise Standard Dictionary of the English Language as, "*n.* the source or origin of anything;...a general truth or law comprehending many subordinate ones;...*tenet* or doctrine; a settled law or rule of action;... *v.t.* to impress with any tenet; to establish firmly in the mind". Ideally, we formulate our codes of behaviour (the constraints on how we live our values) from sound principles - i.e. from our best knowledge and understanding of the "way things work". Based on an understanding of the principles that underpin an action, we know with a reasonable certainty what the outcome and consequence of the action will be.

There are two main benefits of taking a principle centric approach to guide human action: (1) knowing a set of principles concerning "the nature of things" enables us to make informed choices and judgments, as we know the likely outcomes of our actions, (2) knowing even a few principles helps us avoid information overload. On the latter point, Birch<sup>8</sup> says:

One way in which drowning in information is overcome is by the discovery of principles and theories that tie up a lot of information previously untied. Prior to Charles Darwin, biology was a mass of unrelated facts about

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<sup>5</sup> Mackie, J. 1977, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, Penguin, Harmondsworth.

<sup>6</sup> cited Shockley-Zalabak, P. 1999, *Fundamentals of Organisational Communication: Knowledge, Sensitivity, Skills, Values*, Longman: New York., p. 437

<sup>7</sup> Shockley-Zalabak, P. 1999, *Fundamentals of Organisational Communication: Knowledge, Sensitivity, Skills, Values*, Longman: New York., p. 438

<sup>8</sup> Birch, C. 1999, *Biology and the Riddle of Life*, University of New South Wales press, Sydney, p.48

nature. Darwin tied them together in a mere three principles of evolution: random genetic variation, struggle for existence, and natural selection. So we do not need to teach every detail that was taught to nineteenth century students.

Let's now look at a more specific example of how principles can guide how we live our values - and perhaps a value we may choose to place more priority on once we have a clearer understanding of its role in human interaction. The value chosen for this example is trust.

One dictionary tells us that trust, derived from the German word *Trost*, meaning "comfort", implies instinctive, unquestioning belief in and reliance upon something. It is very much like love, and its presence or absence can make a powerful difference in our lives. As trust ebbs, we are less open with each other, less interdependent, less interbeing - not into each other in deep and meaningful ways; we look for strategies in dealing with each other; we seek help from others; or we look for protection in rules, norms, contracts, and the law. My defences are raised by my fear that I do not or cannot trust you. The ebbing of trust and the growth of fear are the beginning of alienation, loneliness, and hostility. In a very real sense, we can say that trust level is the thermometer of individual and group health. With it, we function naturally and directly. Without it, we need constraints, supports, leaders, managers, teachers, interveners, and we surrender ourselves and our lives to them for guidance, management, and manipulation.

Until the late 1990s we had to rely on the experientially gained knowledge/wisdom of people such as the late Jack Gibb (1914 -1995) to guide us in effectively living the value trust. Now, new advances in neuroscience are discovering what is really going on when we trust people. Neuroeconomist, Paul Zak, has found that the hormone oxytocin influences trustworthiness. When we sense someone trusts us, the level of oxytocin in our body rises:

Oxytocin rises when someone trusts you, and facilitates trustworthiness. This finding shows that we trust others because it "seems" the right thing to do, activating social attachment mechanisms.<sup>9</sup>

Oxytocin is the hormone associated with the physiologic attachment mechanism that has evolved in mammals to ensure they care for their offspring. Oxytocin is released during orgasm, breast-feeding and childbirth:

For humans who are not breast feeding or giving birth, every time oxytocin spikes, besides when a stranger shows they trust you, is when you have sex. So at some level it's sexual reproduction that has enabled the growth of oxytocin - there's a bonding mechanism that's important in monogamous species which humans mainly are.<sup>10</sup>

The findings of neuroeconomists are causing other economists to rethink theories that have been based on the assumption that people act in pure self-interest. We now know that our brains are wired to guide us towards both socially and individually beneficial behaviour and that this motivation to cooperate happens on an unconscious level:

So somehow, this little simple brain chemical [oxytocin], is not only telling us what's good for society, be cooperative, trust other people, allowing us to live in big cities, it also tells you what's good for you as an individual.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Zak, P. 1993, 'Trust', *Capco Institute Journal of Financial Transformation*, Vol. 7, pp. 13-21, accessed at: <http://www.pauljzak.com/pdf/CAPCOTrust.pdf>, p.23

<sup>10</sup> Zak in Horstman, M. 2005, *Catalyst: Trust - ABC TV Science*, ABC Online, <http://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/s1481749.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Zak in Horstman, M. 2005

Through oxytocin being released when other people's actions unconsciously lead us to feel we can trust them, trust levels in a community become culturally determined. This is graphically illustrated in Figure 2 which shows the percentage of affirmative responses, by country, to the question "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted?"

This question seeks to capture "generalized trust", which is whether two randomly selected individuals can trust each other. The surveys were done in person in 1996 using the native language, and the questions correspond to impressions of the respondents' own countries. Strikingly, the data vary by an order of magnitude: while only 3% of those surveyed in Brazil and 5% in Peru say their compatriots are trustworthy, 65% of Norwegians and 60% of Swedes believe this to be so. The United States comes in at 36%, down from 50% in 1990; the U.K. has been holding steady at 44% for the past decade.<sup>12</sup>

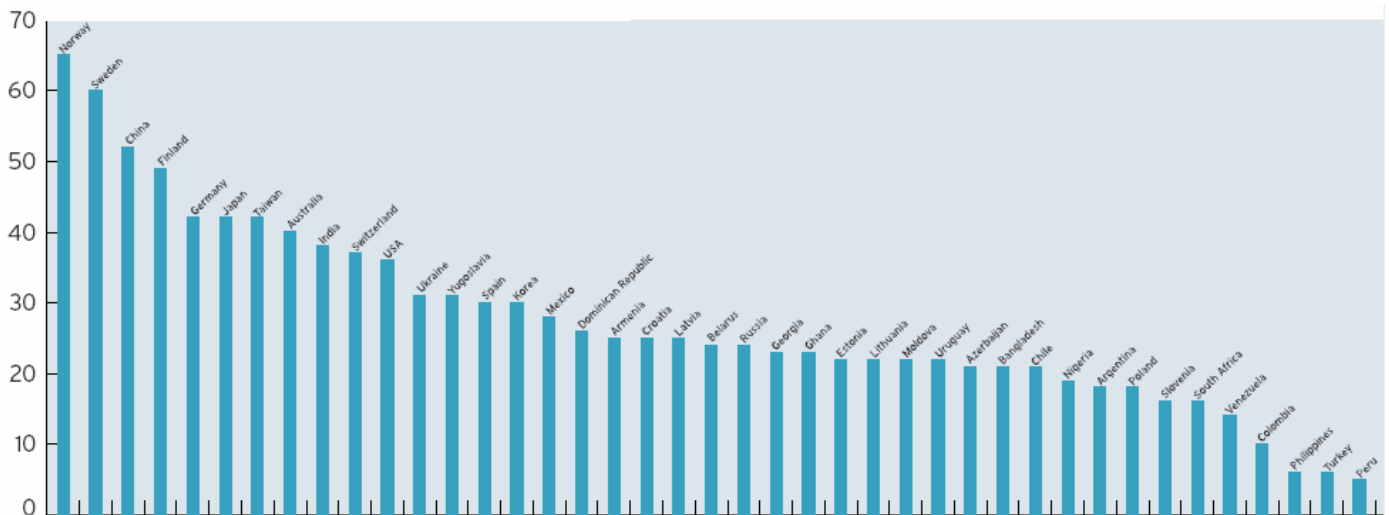


Figure 2 - Trust Level by Country

[Source: Zak, P. 1993, Trust, Capco Institute Journal of Financial Transformation, p.18 - used with permission]

Why should we be concerned about trust at the cultural level? Well it turns out that our that wealth is correlated to trust levels and there is a simple explanation for this. When trust levels are high, financial transaction costs are low and efficient - there's no need for elaborate contracts to protect the parties involved - "a simple handshake will suffice". Whereas, in low trust contexts, elaborate, inefficient means are necessary to protect parties, therefore, transaction costs are high:

Our analysis shows that a 15% increase in the proportion of people in a country who think others are trustworthy raises income per person by 1% per year for every year thereafter. For example, if trust in the U.S. increased from 36% to 51%, the average income for every man, woman, and child would rise by about U.S.\$400 per year thereafter due to the additional business investment and job creation. You can see that the impact of trust on living standards is quantitatively large: U.S.\$400 per year corresponds to an additional U.S.\$30,000 in lifetime income.

Our analysis also shows that if trust is sufficiently low (below 30% for the average country in [Figure 2]), then the investment rate will be so low that income will stagnate or even decline. Economists call this a "poverty trap", and we show that the primary reason for a poverty trap is ineffective legal structures that result in low levels of generalized trust, and therefore little investment. Further, the threshold level of trust necessary for positive economic growth is increasing in per capita income; that is, the poorer a country currently is, the more trust is required to generate sufficient investment to raise living standards. This makes the low-trust poverty

<sup>12</sup> Zak, P., p.19

trap difficult to escape from. These predictions of the model are strongly supported in the data, and illustrate the spectacular effect of trust on growth.<sup>13</sup>

If personal income rises 1% for every 15% increase in the proportion of people in the country who think others are trustworthy, the reverse must be true - a 15% reduction in trust suggests a 1% reduction in personal income - i.e. trust reduction equates to standard-of-living reduction. This raises some interesting government policy questions in respect of the so called "war on terror". If a government promulgates policy that encourages people to distrust strangers, the country's trust level, and hence its people's standard of living, must decrease!

The late Jack Gibb believed, "Trust begets trust; fear escalates fear":

When fear levels are high, relative to trust, individual and social processes are impaired. The life forces are mobilized defensively, rather than creatively. Consciousness is restricted. Perceptivity is reduced. Perspectives are narrowed. Feelings and emotions become disruptive and disabling. Thinking, problem solving, and action become unfocused, displaced, or dysfunctional. The processes of the mind-body become segmented and discordant. When fear levels are high enough individuals and the social systems become immobilized, psychotic, or destructive

We now have scientific evidence to support this belief and elevate it to a principle underpinning the trust process.

To summarise then, some guiding principles in relation to trust are:

- We become more trustworthy when we sense others trust us - in Gibb's words, "trust begets trust".
- The standard of living in a country is directly related to the degree to which people in the country trust each other.

In this Section the dynamic relationship between values, ethics/morals, principles and behaviour was explored. The value trust was then taken as an example to illustrate this dynamic relationship - specifically, how guiding principles can be developed to inform choices we make on how we live the value trust.

Understanding and internalising the principles that comprise "the nature of things" is perhaps the single most powerful determining factor in the shaping of the society in which we live. For civilisation to advance, it is vital that we maintain a continual dialogue around principles so those we internalise and institutionalise are up-to-date and are our current best shot at truth.

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<sup>13</sup> Zak, P., p.19-20

## ACCL – Concluding Comments

ACCL itself is based on the latest principles, as we understand them, to be discovered in relation to the workings of the human brain, what it means to be a human being, and how best to live a meaningful fulfilling life.

**Acceptance** – follows from an understanding that the more we focus on something the more it rules our life. So it's best to focus on where we want to be rather than ruminate on the past. The underlying maxim being: we manifest in our life that which we focus much of our thinking on.

**Commitment** – it's best to focus on living according to our priority values. Why? Because we are most successful and fulfilled when we do this. The reason is simple. (1) When we know what our priority values are, and commit to them *we are focused*. We have a clear meaning and purpose in life and we are efficient and effective in living because when focussed in this way, we are not easily distracted. (2) When we are living our own values we are highly motivated. Being forced to live another's values which are very different from our own, is demotivating, very energy draining, and stressful to say the least! We may even feel like we are someone else's slave! (3) We need certain skills and abilities to live any values. Because of point 2, we will have no trouble being motivated to gain the skills and abilities to live our own values effectively. Conversely, we will have little motivation to gain skills and abilities related to values of little importance to us.

Focussing on living our priority values means firstly finding out what they are. This is where the Minessence Group comes in. We have been working since 1988 to develop an efficient and effective process for determining one's priority values. We call this process, "taking an inventory" of your values, hence, the tool we provide for this process is called the AVI – 'A Values Inventory'.

**Conscious Living** - if we think the way we've always thought, we will make the same choices we've always made. What does this mean? It means that if we all stop being sheep, and just doing things a particular way because that's the way it's always being done, we can create a different future. The key to a better personal life and a better society is to consciously know what our priority values are, and to understand the principles which tell us the consequences of our actions, so we can consciously choose how we live our values.

### **Benefits of ACCL and Using the AVI**

- Defining one's values, and then living them, leads to higher states of well-being, lower levels of stress, higher productivity, better and faster decision making. People have reported saving hours each day through being more focused and motivated.
- When all people in an organisation use the AVI it creates a common language of values. This in turn leads to improved quality of communication and to higher levels of engagement. Also, a significant increase in morale can usually be expected and reductions in staff turnover of up to 30% have been reported.
- A feature of the AVI, that distinguishes it from all other values inventories, is that aspects of it can be co-created with client organisations to suit their specific culture and individual requirements. People are more motivated to use a technology when they have part of the team that created it.
- The AVI Questionnaire is accessible via the internet. Some reports, such as those used by schools, can be directly printed from the internet. Other reports, for example the leadership

report developed for the Australian Military, consists of a 70 page bound workbook. Each report is confidential, specific to each person, and based on their own unique values.

- Group reports/workbooks can be produced for couples, teams, groups, organisations, demographic groupings, etc. Values are the glue that binds, so being able to produce these reports facilitates the exploration of shared values leading to improved communication and better relationships.

## Suggested Reading

Books/Articles which specifically address use of the AVI (A Values Inventory) which we use to elicit peoples/organisations' values:

Carlopio, J., Andrewartha, G. & Armstrong, H. 2005, *Developing Manager Skills: A comprehensive guide for leaders*, Pearson Education, Australia. [a popular HR textbook used in universities of the calibre of The University of Queensland]

Colins, C. & Chippendale, P. 2002, *New Wisdom II: Values-based development*, Acorn Publications, Brisbane. [our own publication written as an academic text to provide evidence in support of the conceptual framework on which the AVI is based]

Henderson, M. 2003, *Finding True North: Discover your values, enrich your life*, HarperCollins, Auckland. [this book won the Ashton Wylie Charitable Trust, "Best Self-Help Book of the Year Award - 2004"]

Henderson, M. & Thompson, D. 2003, *Values at Work: The invisible threads between people, performance and profit*, HarperCollins, Auckland. [this book is becoming a standard reference for managers engaged in corporate values alignment programs]

Henderson, M., Thompson, D. & Henderson, S. 2006, *Leading through Values: Linking company culture to business strategy*, HarperCollins, Auckland.

Zuber-Skerritt, O. 2002, 'The concept of action learning' in *The Learning Organization*, Volume 9 Number 3 2002 pp. 114-124 [Professor Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, is recognised as a world leader in the field of Action Learning – Ortrun is also the editor of the prestigious journal, *The Learning Organization*, so when Ortrun recommends the AVI people listen.]

Texts referred to in this article:

Birch, C. 1999, *Biology and the Riddle of Life*, University of New South Wales press, Sydney.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. 1992, *Flow: The Psychology of happiness*, Random House.

Gibb, B., 1970, *Trust: A New View of Personal and Organizational Development*, Tutors Press, Los Angeles. (Reprinted in 1991 as: *Trust: A New Vision of Human Relationships for Business, Education, Family, and Personal Living*. Trust is now available for reading on the web at: <http://www.geocities.com/toritrust/trust.htm>).

Horstman, M. 2005, *Catalyst: Trust - ABC TV Science*, ABC Online, <http://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/s1481749.htm>

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