

✳ Click

A No Bull\$h!t paper
by Click.

COMPANY
VALUES

Retire your company values (and do this instead).

Why traditional company values are silly, what to create instead, and a three-step process to get started.

Contents.

Short on time? Here's a summary.	03
What's a No Bull\$h!t paper?	05
Part 1. Traditional company values are silly.	06
Part 2. We've been playing values out of position.	08
Part 3. Without their teammates, values are useless.	10
Part 4. We design Culture Blueprints by rapid prototyping.	12
You have two ways to get started.	14
Who are Click, anyway?	15
References.	17

Short on time? Here's a summary.

PART 1:

Traditional company values are silly.

It's common practice to create and articulate company values. The hope is that these values:

1. Provide a compass for critical decisions.
2. Guide talent or performance decisions.
3. Improve engagement and reputation.

But even the slightest critical examination shows they fail miserably on all three accounts. We believe we must retire company values in their traditional format.

PART 2:

We've been playing values out of position.

Retiring values altogether could be throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Values must take another format and play a different role in an organisation's blueprint. Instead of their current three goals, they can:

1. **Create a memorable organising framework.**
Values can provide a memorable organising framework for the behaviours that encode your cultural vision.
2. **Change language to change behaviours.**
Values can reinforce language that normalises and encourages the behaviours you want to see.
3. **Reinforce your brand and attract talent.**
If crafted well, values can attract attention and help you stand out from your competitors.

We must construct values to better fulfil these three roles.

PART 3:

Without teammates, values are useless.

Values (or some version of them) are the first level of a Culture Blueprint that collectively describes your organisation's cultural vision. This Blueprint must comprise three layers, with each layer serving a unique purpose and following different design principles:

1. Values, core beliefs, or guiding principles.

The one to three big-ticket items that fulfil the goals shared in Part 2. These must be unexpected, evocative, sticky, universally appropriate, and limited in number.

2. Critical behaviours.

Six to nine behaviours that you expect from everyone in your organisation. These may be stylistically similar to the first level, but will provide greater specificity and will also allow for flexibility across roles.

3. Multi-levelled competencies.

The precise behavioural expectations of people across levels. These guide talent decisions, share performance expectations, and enable ownership of personal development. They must be appropriate, specific, measurable, mutually exclusive, and mapped against reward bands.

PART 4:

Three-step rapid prototyping helps you do better.

Rapid prototyping is a technique widely used in product design. We can use this technique to create a Culture Blueprint since it allows us to improve quality, get the right input from the right people, and gain greater buy-in.

To apply rapid prototyping, you can follow a simple three-step process:

1. **Prepare.**
Form your team and conduct a kick-off session that sets you up for success.
2. **Prototype.**
Gather input to create an initial prototype of your top-line guiding principles and critical behaviours.
3. **Iterate.**
Conduct Walkaround Sessions to gather feedback, refine your prototype, add underpinning detail, and plan how to embed.

At the end of this process, you will have:

- A 'North Star' for future culture efforts.
- Buy-in from key stakeholders and people across your organisation.
- Agreed language to start shifting behavioural norms.
- Detailed criteria to enable fair talent decisions and give clarity on what's expected.
- An evocative articulation of your culture that attracts talent and reinforces your brand.

You have two options to get started.

If you have internal expertise or lack budget, you can do it alone using the step-by-step guide shared in Part 4. Alternatively, we can support you either through light-touch advisory support or creating your Culture Blueprint together.

Need help?



Speak to Matt.
(friendly chat, not a sales pitch)

What are Click's No Bull\$h!t papers?

The short answer?

Like a white paper, but more practical and provocative.

The longer answer?

Bull\$h!t is everywhere.

Especially when exploring abstract concepts like culture. It creates unhelpful noise where it's impossible to tell facts from fiction.

We wanted to cut through this noise. The answer? Our No Bull\$h*t papers.

We write our papers to be:



Pragmatic.

We outline actionable steps that make a genuine difference.



Scientific.

We share hard evidence on what really works.



Engaging.

We don't waffle or just repeat what everybody else says.

PART 1:

Traditional company values are silly.

History is littered with examples of activities that went unquestioned for many years. We studied the shape and size of people's brains to estimate their mental abilities. We assumed smoking was a healthy activity – some doctors even recommended it. Women wore corsets for their apparent health benefits.

You might think we've escaped mindless pseudoscience as common practice. But we haven't. In business, we perform many activities just because they're the done thing.

We believe company values fall into this camp.

According to a 2022 study by the University of Oxford, 86% of companies list their values publicly.¹ These values are an attempt to describe the organisation's culture, what they stand for, and what they expect.

Organisations hope values will achieve three goals.

The most common reasons to create values are to:

1. Provide a compass for critical decisions.

Organisations believe their leaders and people will use the company values to navigate tricky decisions in a way that's ethical and serves the company's strategy.

2. Guide talent or performance decisions.

Quite rightly, organisations want to hire, recognise, and reward people based on how they work and their impact on others. Values are an attempt to encode these standards.

3. Improve engagement and reputation.

Employees and customers increasingly seek organisations who support their own values.^{2, 3} Recognising this, organisations shout about their values and their ethical standards. They write them in the 'Who We Are' section of the website, in annual reports, and in marketing materials.

On face value, these three goals make sense. But they don't hold up to even the lightest of critical examination.

Values fail to achieve all three goals.

1. Do values provide a compass for critical decisions?

Decades of research have shown a gulf between our personal values and our behaviour.⁴ Company values are built on the implicit belief that people will follow the company's espoused values instead.

But when polled, HR managers estimate that less than half of their workforce even remember their company's values.⁵ And if we don't follow our personal values, why would the espoused company values be any different? This feels naïve, unscientific, and unrealistic.

It's also at odds with our lived experience. Let's get real, when was the last time you used your company's values to guide your decisions? It's incredibly rare.

2. Do values guide talent or performance decisions?

How would you assess a value like 'innovation' in an interview? Any Occupational Psychologist would tell you to break it into tangible behaviours. Abstract values can't guide talent decisions – only the tangible behaviours underneath them are fit-for-purpose.

Most businesses recognise this, so end up building a separate competency framework. Usually, this doesn't link to the values in any way so competes for people's attention. It creates a sense of expectation overload where people are left thinking, "Wait, what's important – the values or the competencies? And how do they link?"

3. Do values improve engagement and reputation?

The most common values in UK businesses are collaboration, integrity, excellence, customer service, and creativity.¹

If you joined a new business and you found out that these were the 5 values, what emotional response would it evoke?

Likely none at all – and that's the problem. Most of the time, values are vanilla in flavour. They're predictable, boring, and evoke no emotion whatsoever.

What about business reputation? Well, we've reached a point where almost all businesses espouse values.¹ Frankly, it doesn't matter what organisations say. We won't believe a business is values-led until they show it. They say, "Actions speak louder than words." And in the case of company values, this proverb is certainly true.

We must retire traditional company values.

Despite becoming common business practice, the verdict is clear: traditional values don't deliver what we want them to achieve.

However, we believe values could take another format and play a different role in an organisation's blueprint. In the next section, we explain the shift needed.

PART 2:

We've been playing values out of position.

The saying goes, "If you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it'll live its whole life believing that it's stupid." We believe this principle applies to company values. They've not achieved the goals we set out for them, but does that mean they're altogether useless? We don't believe so.

To take a footballing analogy, we've been playing values out of position. We've been playing them at left-back, when they should in fact be playing on the right wing (apologies to the non-football fans out there).

We believe values could fulfil three different goals, which we'll explore now.

GOAL 1:

Create a memorable organising framework.

Any behavioural scientist will tell you that any purposeful change requires us to first define our target behaviours. Businesses typically have a long shopping list of such behaviours. They want people to think critically, be inclusive, give feedback, and the list goes on.

Without values, you'll be left with a long, overwhelming list that can't be easily processed or understood. Values can provide a memorable organising framework for these behaviours. If crafted with care, they can be readily remembered as overarching guiding principles.

For example, one of our clients is a large Entertainments business. They've created a list of behaviours but all of them are oriented around one single guiding principle: "We're creators of positive energy." That's it. They've simplified their culture down to one single guiding principle, which can be easily recalled and described in critical moments (e.g., in interviews and when onboarding new talent).

GOAL 2:

Change language to change behaviours.

In 1988, the US launched a nationwide effort to reduce drink driving. This effort, known as the Harvard Alcohol Project, targeted language as a tool to shift culture. ⁶

Researchers sought to popularise a term used in Scandinavia since the 1920s: 'Designated Driver'. The team believed this would normalise the practice of having someone who wouldn't drink alcohol and would instead taxi others home. They partnered with Hollywood, who popularised the phrase 'Designated Driver' by weaving it into popular sitcoms and dramas.

The result? Over 6 years, 'Designated Driver' became a household phrase. Even better, 62% of Americans said they'd been a Designated Driver. And there was a 30% reduction in traffic fatalities.

Once you can ask who's the Designated Driver, it normalises the behaviour. This phrase embedded the behaviour in the culture by creating a norm.

We believe values can follow a similar process. We can hijack language by intentionally creating and sharing catchy statements that normalise the behaviours we want to see.

GOAL 3:**Reinforce your brand and attract talent.**

Let's imagine you were applying for a new job. You find two potential employers, who each share their values on their website. The values for the two organisations are as follows:

Option 1: Org Ltd.

- Care.
- Collaboration.
- Innovation.

Option 2: ACME Organisation.

- We pass the M4 test.
- We're Jack Johnsons.
- We're here to break scripts.

Whose values would draw you in?

If you're like most people, it'd be ACME. You'd likely want to know more about what these phrases mean. You'd probably get the sense that they care enough about 'culture' stuff to go beyond a set of predictable values.

Most culture practitioners will describe how values aren't just walls for a wall. This argument is valid. But when we recognise that values are still somewhat a communication tactic, we can craft them to purposefully reinforce the organisation's brand and stand out for talent.

We must redesign values to fulfil these three roles.

Dolly Parton once said, "Find out who you are and do it on purpose." This is what we believe we must do with values now. We must reconstruct values in a way that better fulfils these three new roles.

In Part 3, we explore how to do this...

PART 3:

Without teammates, values are useless.

Continuing the footballing metaphor, values need team-mates playing different roles to create a singular cultural aspiration that's both coherent and useful.

This cultural aspiration is collectively known as a Culture Blueprint. We believe this blueprint must have three levels, with each playing a different role and having a set of design principles.

Below, we share description, purpose, design principles and real examples for each level.

LEVEL 1:

Values, core beliefs, or guiding principles.

Description and purpose

These are the big-ticket items. The one to three most critical things that you want people to recall, if they remember nothing else. Frankly, it doesn't matter if you call this level values, core beliefs, or guiding principles. Regardless of their name, they should be constructed to achieve the goals articulated in Part 2:

1. Create a memorable organising framework.
2. Change language to change behaviours.
3. Reinforce your brand and attract talent.

Design principles

To achieve these goals, this first level must be:

- **Unexpected.** People won't even notice your values unless you grab their attention. The most basic way to do so is by breaking the pattern of predictable nouns like 'Integrity' or 'Collaboration'. Don't fall into this trap – be playful or provocative instead.

- **Evocative.** When you read your values, do they evoke emotions like pride or excitement? If not, it's a sign your values aren't doing their job. Keep iterating them until they make you truly feel something.
- **Sticky.** The proverb "A bird in hand is worth two in the bush" around 500 years old. Versions of this phrase exist in over 6 languages. It's stuck because it's simple and catchy. Your values should do the same.
- **Universally appropriate.** This top line must ring true to the greatest number of people in your organisation as possible.
- **Limited in number.** As hard as the prioritisation exercise may be, we suggest creating just one guiding principle or three values / guiding principles. Anything more won't be memorable.

Real examples

- "Under-promise and over-deliver."
- "Less push, more purpose."
- "Don't be a dick."

LEVEL 2:

Critical behaviours.

Description and purpose

The next level adds slightly more detail to your top-line behaviours by outlining 6-9 behaviours that you expect from everybody in your business. These behaviours should:

1. Outline everyday expectations at top level.
2. Change language to change behaviours.
3. Provide flexibility across contexts.

Design principles

- **Unexpected, evocative, and sticky.** Stylistically, behaviours could resemble the top-line guiding principles. They can still use unexpected, evocative and sticky language that grabs attention and easily catch on. However, this is less essential and your behaviours could be simple descriptions (e.g., teamwork, strategic thinking).
- **Universal yet flexible.** There's a key tension between universality and flexibility. The behaviours must be appropriate for all, yet allow for some degree of flexibility depending on the context. For example, you might select the most critical behaviours to assess for a particular role.

Real examples

- "Clear first, clever second."
- "Strategic thinking."
- "We before me."

LEVEL 3:

Multi-levelled competencies.

Description and purpose

Competency creation is the nerdy part of the process. The skillset is one of an Occupational Psychologist, whereas the previous levels may be easier for a marketing or comms expert. Competencies outline detailed expectations for each level of seniority, so you can:

1. **Guide talent decisions.** They must provide clear, measurable criteria that guides who you hire, promote, and reward.
2. **Provide clarity on what's expected.** Help people understand the behaviours they'll be assessed against.
3. **Enable ownership of personal development.** Help people easily understand how their behaviour must change in order to step up in level.

Design principles

- **Appropriate.** The competencies must accurately describe suitable expectations for the respective level and what (doesn't) change as you get increasingly senior.
- **Specific.** They must be precise, non-ambiguous behavioural statements that describe what's expected.
- **Measurable.** It must be possible to measure them, so they can be embedded into assessment and performance management processes.
- **Mutually exclusive.** This is important to avoid overemphasising or favouring particular behaviours.
- **Mapped against reward bands.** This is to ensure reward decisions can be based on the extent to which people are demonstrating your competencies.

Real examples

- "Ask for feedback from wide-ranging people after every key project or milestone."
- "Adapt what you say and how you say it, depending on who you're speaking to."
- "Provide practical or emotional support to others when they are struggling."

PART 4:

Three-step rapid prototyping helps you do better.

Rapid prototyping is a method originating from product design.⁷ In this method, you continually test and refine a product before sharing it more broadly. We can adapt this method to create a Culture Blueprint, as it helps us:

- 1. Improve quality.** Instead of starting from a blank piece of paper, you bring a prototype to stakeholders for refinement. This allows you to spend more time getting it perfect.
- 2. Get the right input.** You get top-down input to make sure you have the right high-level content and structure, but bottom-up input so it resonates and has the appropriate detail.
- 3. Gain greater buy-in.** Since stakeholders co-create a live version of the Culture Blueprint, instead of just answering generic questions about what they think is important.

Below, we share a three-step process for creating a Culture Blueprint using this method.

STEP 1:

Prepare.

Weeks 1-2.

We suggest forming a core team of 3-4 people, though this will vary depending on how many people you want to consult and the complexity of the competency framework. At the minimum, we suggest you have a:

- Sponsor (≈ 1 hour per week) to champion the project internally.
- Lead (≈ 3 days per week) to oversee the project and manage day-to-day activities.
- Support (≈ 1-2 days per week) to support scheduling and help analyse the data.

Once you have your team, hold a kick-off meeting to:

- Agree the goals, project plan, and ways of working.
- Familiarise yourselves the wider business context, strategy, and goals – the Culture Blueprint must serve this wider direction.
- Identify existing data that could inform the Culture Blueprint (e.g., engagement survey results).
- Pinpoint key stakeholders and decision makers.

STEP 2:

Prototype.

Weeks 3-6.

The second step aims to create a prototype of your Culture Blueprint, using desk research and input from your key stakeholders.

A. Gather desk research.

Gather existing data that could inform the Culture Blueprint, identified in Step 1. We also suggest conducting research on key competitors, scanning their websites, Glassdoor pages, and other publicly available information.

B. Deliver stakeholder workshops.

The next actions are to schedule, design, and deliver workshops with your most critical stakeholders. We suggest one to three workshops, depending on the complexity of your stakeholder web.

The purpose of this workshop is to gain input that helps you create your Culture Blueprint prototype. It will likely cover:

1. **Purpose.** What's the purpose of this project and the session today?
2. **Principles.** What does a good Culture Blueprint look like?
3. **Research.** What data and information do we have already?
4. **Content.** What do you think are the most critical guiding principles and behaviours?
5. **Packaging.** What type of structure and language is best for our Culture Blueprint?

C. Package the prototype.

The core team analyses the output from the desk research and these workshops to co-create the prototype of the Culture Blueprint.

This prototype includes the draft values and behaviours, without the multi-levelled competencies. The team package this prototype in a format that can be easily shared in Step 3.

STEP 3:

Iterate.

Weeks 7-12.

We can break this final step down into three main activities, described below.

1. Identify your co-creators.

With your prototype in hand, the next step is to gather input from the diverse voices in your business.

When deciding who to speak to, remember that sample representation trumps sample size. Gather a sample that represents the views of a cross-section of your organisation. We also suggest returning to your key stakeholders as they won't have seen the draft prototype. Then schedule 45 to 60 minute 'Walkaround Sessions', which may be 1-1 interviews or small group conversations.

2. Conduct Walkaround Sessions.

Walkaround Sessions are all about 'walking around' with your prototype. They help you get feedback on and refine your prototype, build out the multi-levelled competencies, and identify how best to embed.

The focus of each session should vary depending on the context. For example, if you were speaking to your Marketing Lead, you might place greater focus on the tone of the Culture Blueprint to ensure it fits your brand.

3. Adjust as you go.

Schedule regular time with your core working team to review the most recent findings from your Walkaround Sessions. For example, you might hold time at 4PM every Friday to review the feedback from the sessions held that week. You then use this feedback to edit the Culture Blueprint, so people in the next week's Walkaround Sessions see the latest version.

Continue this process until you've covered all key stakeholder groups and landed on a Culture Blueprint that's ready for sign off. Following this, you take it for graphic design and translation (if appropriate).

What will this process give you?

At the end of this process, you'll have:

- A Culture Blueprint that acts as your 'North Star' for future culture efforts.
- Buy-in for your cultural vision from key stakeholders and people in your company.
- New language that can create and shift behavioural norms.
- Detailed criteria to ensure fair talent decisions and give clarity on what's expected.
- An evocative articulation of your culture that attracts talent and reinforces your brand.

You have two options to get started.

OPTION 1:

You do it alone.

This is the best option if you have internal expertise or lack budget. By applying the guidelines and process shared in this No Bull\$h!t paper, you can create a better Culture Blueprint than most.

OPTION 2:

We create it together.

Many businesses find it useful to get external expertise or hands-on support. If this is you, we can either provide light-touch advisory support to keep you on the right track or we can co-create it together.

Need help?

Sure, let's chat. Just click the button below to speak with Matt, who can provide a free consultation.



Speak to Matt.

(friendly chat, not a sales pitch)

Who are Click, anyway?

OUR PROMISE:

Behaviour change to drive your bottom line.

We identify and drive the most critical behaviours for business success. The result? We turn people and culture development from a nice-to-have into a need-to-have.

These behaviours usually link to areas such as:

- Accountability
- Change
- Collaboration
- Customer service
- Leadership
- Innovation
- Inclusion
- Sales

OUR CLIENTS:

We help commercial HR leaders create tangible business impact.

Our clients are medium to large businesses across diverse sectors. We typically work with HR leaders but have also worked with wider business leaders.

Compared with traditional methods for people and culture development, we help HR leaders:

1. **Drive the bottom line.** We identify and shift the behaviours that drive the bottom line (and use data to prove our impact).
2. **Create greater impact.** We use our Frictionless Change method to create more impact for less time, money, and effort.
3. **Become trusted advisors.** We target and prove business impact, so HR are seen as trusted, commercial leaders.

OUR APPROACH:

We apply behavioural science to change what people do.

If you want to make a tangible impact, what matters most isn't how capable or engaged your people are. You need to change their behaviour.

We're a behavioural science consultancy who specialise in people and culture development. We help you:

1. Identify and target the behaviours that will have the greatest possible impact on the bottom line.
2. Shift these behaviours by selecting and designing the most impactful change intervention.
3. Prove your impact by tracking changes in behaviour and business outcomes over time.

OUR METHOD:

We use three methods to shift behaviour and culture.

1. **Behaviour Strategy.** We uncover current behaviour, identify the behaviours you need, and co-create a strategy to get from A to B.
2. **Behaviour Sprints.** We apply the behavioural science method to turn the most critical behaviours into organisational habits.
3. **Behaviour Sessions.** We deliver bespoke sessions and programmes that help people embed critical behaviours in their daily work.



Speak to Matt.
(friendly chat, not a sales pitch)

Our impact.

We've impacted over
259,000 people in
15 countries across
8 sectors

100% of our
clients recommend
working with us

96% of session
participants recommend
our sessions.



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"Click work at pace and deliver to a very high standard. They bring great expertise and have really helped us to create things that work for our complex, global organisation."

Adam Streeter

Head of Leadership and Culture, Primark

"Click showed an impressive understanding of our firm, its people, and its unique context. Their output has been a gamechanger. I highly recommend Click for their expertise, collaborative approach, and genuine commitment to excellence."

Nicola Elakel

Head of Talent & Leadership Development, BDO

"We've really enjoyed working with Click. We got such great feedback that we've been doing more work with them since. Massive shoutout and thanks to Click."

Linann Shaw

People and Culture Executive, DrDoctor

"FANTASTIC! And I really mean it... Practical, engaging, and truly thought-provoking."

Serkan Deveci

HR leader, Google

"We thoroughly enjoy working with Click. They dedicate time to understand our needs. They always receive positive feedback from our teams. They can work within short timeframes and provide valuable advice."

Amy Dicastiglione-Gray,

Head of People, Hollywood Bowl

"Love working with Click - credible, trustworthy and delivered above and beyond on every promise. They're incredibly passionate and knowledgeable and built a great partnership - I feel like they're now an extension of our team!"

Charlotte Richards

Development Lead, Primark

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