Harley-Davidson Values, the Experience

P. Jason Marino

Marquette University
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by

P. Jason Marino, B.S., P.E.

A Professional Project Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,

Marquette University,

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of Master of Science

Milwaukee, WI

May 2011
ABSTRACT
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P. Jason Marino
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This study explored the extent to which the stated corporate values are enacted by leaders at Harley-Davidson Motor Company. The participants were chosen by a criterion based sampling method. The criterion used included the researcher’s personal subjective perceptions of the participant, tenure within the company, and level within the company.

The study provided insight into employee perceptions related to leadership’s engagement with the values. It also provided insights into the relative engagement levels between immediate supervisors and higher level supervisors based on the stated corporate values. All of the participants had both positive and negative perceptions of leadership at all levels. Leaders engaged best with the values “tell the truth”. In general, neither leadership level was perceived to be inspirational relative to the values. The most compelling conclusion that was drawn from this study is that employees do not generally regard leadership as “completely” engaged with the Motor Company values.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

P. Jason Marino

This study has been a year long journey toward my Master’s degree. There have been many contributors to the content of the study. I would like to thank the eight Harley-Davidson coworkers that willingly participated in the interview process and shared their professional insights with me. I would like to thank Cheryl Coan for her solid advice as the literature review came together and Dr. Eileen Sherman for her tireless motivation and editing as I developed the rest of the study. I am also very grateful to the Marquette faculty that led the courses that have shaped my awareness of the concept of leadership.

There have also been others that supported me without directly contributing to the content of the study. I’d like to thank my wife Cheryl for carrying my end of the familial duties as I dedicated hours of my time to the study. Finally, I’d like to thank my kids, Cecilia and Nicolas, for their enthusiastic interruptions of my work. Their distractions were welcome and where they fell short in helping me focus, they made up for it by reminding me of what is really important.
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Purpose of the Inquiry

Research Question and Goal of the Study

The purpose of this heuristic study is to describe the extent to which the values are experienced and internalized by employees at Harley-Davidson Motor Company (Motor Company). The Motor Company values are posted prominently in every conference room. These values are a cornerstone of the company’s culture. These values influence the entire organization from leader-follower interactions to productivity at the individual level.

The most effective way for values to be transferred is from corporate leadership through supervisory staff to working level employees. This transference is best achieved through example. For this reason, this study focused on the extent to which Harley-Davidson leadership and thus subordinates are engaged with the values.

For the purposes of this study, the employees were defined as people with two or more years of Harley-Davidson experience at the project or senior project engineer level. This ensured that all of the subjects of the study were immersed in the company culture and had significant experience with leadership. The values are defined by five statements that are posted throughout the company. They are presented below:

1. Tell the truth
2. Be fair
3. Keep your promises
4. Respect the individual
5. Encourage intellectual curiosity

At Harley-Davidson, the Motor Company's goals and employees' career goals are achieved by living these five values. This is a stated corporate tenet.
Currently, the Motor Company is in the process of trying to come to grips with a number of employee morale issues. Based on the company’s beliefs regarding the values it is possible that some of these issues could be rooted in failures in actually “living” these values at a time when it is of utmost importance to the employees and future success of the Motor Company. This led to a strong interest in conducting this study not only for the researcher personally, but for the Motor Company as well.
Review of the Literature

Corporate values are often explicitly designed lists utilized to engage employees in desired behaviors that align with strategic business goals. The literature reviewed in preparation for this study presents corporate values within the context of corporate culture and strategy. Organizational culture from selected studies was also explored as a basis for this research with regard to the role of explicitly stated values within corporations. The role of corporate culture and values on corporate performance is also explored through research and case studies of product development organizations. The roles, influences, and implications of this research include:

1. The role of corporate culture.
2. The role of corporate leaders in the development of corporate values.
3. The influence of leader behavior on corporate values.
4. The role of corporate values in product development organizations.
5. The influence of corporate values on corporate success.
6. The implications of employee perceptions on employee behavior.

The review of the literature will focus on these six areas relating to corporate values. This will provide a foundation for answering the following research questions: “Are leaders engaged with Harley-Davidson’s stated corporate values” and “Do Harley-Davidson leaders inspire employees to follow the values?”

The Role of Corporate Culture

Organizational culture is defined in terms of “core values, behavioral norms, artifacts, and behavioral patterns, which govern the ways in which people in an organization interact with each other and invest energy in their jobs and the organization at large” (Van Muijen, Koopman,
“Corporate” culture is a term used when discussing organizational culture within corporations. Corporate culture has been a topic of academic study for over 40 years.

Corporate culture encompasses both the implicit and explicit company rules that govern behavior at the individual and team level. Company paradigms and rules are loosely bounded by formal declarations of corporate vision, mission statements, values, ethics, and organizational structure. The collective interpretation of these declarations and the influence that they have on the daily functions of individuals conducting business provides tangible evidence of the role of corporate culture and subsequent values in company success.

Daniel Levi (2001) relates organizational culture to a set of mutually held values, beliefs and norms. He identifies three levels of culture that begin with visible artifacts such as “symbols, rituals, artifacts, and stories that display the culture to members and outsiders (Levi, 2001, p. 253). The second level, or “strategic culture”, consists of the implicit and explicit stated mission statements, conduct codes, and understood behavioral requirements that define the interactions between individuals and teams across organizations and hierarchies. The third level “consists of the ideologies, values, and underlying beliefs of the organization” (Levi, 2001, p. 254). It is at this level that basic assumptions relating to the core motivations of a company’s employees define the paradigm of leadership. These paradigms shape the decisions that guide organizations.

The Role of Corporate Leaders in the Development of Corporate Values Systems

Corporate leaders play a central role in the establishment of corporate culture and the development and management of corporate values systems. Ginsberg and Miller (1992) define the CEO’s role as that of architect and the primary person in charge of conformance to the values
Leaders also shape the evolution of culture within organizations. George, Sleeth, & Siders, (1999) discuss the leader’s role of intervention in the dynamic processes of cultural change. Their conceptual model for the leader’s responsibilities is presented as a continuous balance between the corporate values and reacting changes in member behavior. Accordingly, they conclude that in order to “succeed in the communication and transfer of culture, leaders continually reinforce the key components of the desired culture by their behaviors and by how they structure the organization” (p. 557).

The review of the literature also explored the concept of “values management”. This is the process through which the values system is utilized as a strategic tool to attain corporate objectives. Paarlberg & Perry, (2007) analyzed the mechanisms through which top leaders and middle managers are able to manage employee values systems. Their analysis suggests “organizations can not influence employee behavior by communicating “the values of the organization,” as articulated by top leadership through formal presentations or the distribution of laminated cards” (p. 405). Instead they describe values management as a socialization process. They describe performance management, expectation management, and incentive systems as structured processes that provide opportunities for managers to “articulate values and signify which employee values are important to the organization’s mission” (p. 405).

The Influence of Leader Behavior on Corporate Values

The literature discussed in the previous two sections provides a depiction of the role of leaders in the development of formalized values systems, the tools that leaders use to shape and
influence employee behaviors, and the implications of corporate values within corporate culture in general. The ownership of corporate value system development is a recognized duty of senior leadership. It is explicitly identifiable in the documented value systems that most modern corporations present to their employees. Many companies, such as Corning (Graham and Shuldiner, 2002) publicize value systems externally as well. The development of corporate values systems is one of three value system related roles that were identified within the literature.

Leaders at every level are also responsible for espousing the values through direct interaction with employees. “When management spends time defining, discussing, and acknowledging the corporate values, the behaviors and expectations of staff become clear and consistent” (Gordon, 2008, p. 50). Paarlberg and Perry (2007) describe the varying values related responsibilities of leaders within the corporate leadership hierarchy. Top executive leaders shape the company strategy and organizational structure. “Middle managers play key roles as “integrators”, connecting organization strategy to employees’ functional values that derive from societal, cultural, and religious experience” (Paarlberg and Perry, p. 396). Gordon (2008) and Paarlberg and Perry (2007) conclude that leaders have explicit responsibilities related to communicating values systems and connecting them to company strategies. While these explicit responsibilities can be considered overt and measurable aspects of leadership behavior, there are more subjectively observable aspects of leadership behavior that researchers have also identified as a leadership responsibility.

Finally, corporate leaders have the responsibility of setting an example through self-actions. “If there is incongruence between what an organization says it believes in and its actual behavior, then a cynicism gap is created and trust between the organization and its members drops” (Levi, 2005, p. 263). “The leader’s faithfulness to the core values and beliefs that make
up the desired culture of the organization elevates the group’s trust in the leader, the organization, and the leader’s vision of the culture” (George, Sleeth, and Siders, 1999, p. 557). This research describes a model in which leader behavior is the critical element in value dissemination.

Lee Ozley and Richard Teerlink (2000) directly discuss the ramifications to the incongruence that Levi (2005) and Sleeth et al. (1999) describe as a core leadership responsibility. They state that “when an organization picks up signals of ambivalence-or, worse, a gap between asserted belief and behavior- there is little chance of sustainable progress” (p. 257). Leadership has to do more than support the company values. Leaders need to “live” the values every day. The values also have to be shared across the entire leadership team. In order to entrench the values within an organization, the leadership group requires a “congruent” values system.

**The Role of Corporate Values in Product Development Organizations**

The development of new products is an activity that many corporations engage in by organizing specific people with special talents within the corporation with product development as the primary function. The activities that occur within these “product development organizations” is usually led by scientists and engineers. The common staffing model used by many product development organizations within corporations is a model that has led to research specifically designed to focus on the unique ways in which cultural aspects such as values systems can influence these organizations. Peter Merrill (2008) studied the link between corporate values and innovation in product development organizations. He explored the various contextual influences of corporate culture and values as they define cultural identities that facilitate the execution of specific tasks.
According to Merrill (2008), corporate culture influences innovation in a product development organization by providing a context for communication, collaboration, and team membership. Merrill (2008) describes the ideal innovation environment as one that manages two similar but separate cultural identities. The identities of the two cultures are necessarily separate because of the nature of the work that occurs during the phases of product development.

Merrill (2008) presents these cultural differences as necessary and responsive to product development methodologies that consist of multiple project phases. These phases begin with an ideation phase and progress toward the final development of products. According to Merrill, the early phases of innovation and product development are best served by a culture emphasizing freedom of thought. Merrill (2008) concludes that the final stages of product development are best served by a culture with a bias for action (p. 125). Attempting to separate the required cultural environments into separate organizations creates impediments to innovation down the length of the innovation chain. Merrill’s identification of two separate but necessary cultures was presented as an argument against a single unified culture in product development. Rather than creating a single culture he believed that it was important to foster these separate cultures and “transition the culture between each stage of the process” (Merrill, 2008, p. 125).

The culture of an organization “is a mix of behaviors and beliefs that have made things work…in the past” (Merrill, 2008, p. 111). Merrill states that behaviors are based on values. He lists seven values (p. 111) that can impact innovation:

1. Exploration
2. Interaction
3. Observation and note-taking
4. Collaboration
5. Experimenting
6. Embracing failure
7. Recognition of behavior

Merrill (2008) proposes that these specific values are a required part of the innovation process for most organizations to be successful (p. 111). He does not attempt to connect these values to the explicit value statements that companies develop for their internal use. He presents these values within the context of cultural necessities required for success in innovative organizations.

Corning Incorporated has a history of innovation spanning over a century. Graham and Shuldiner (2002), Merrill (2008), and DiStefano, Lane, and Maznevski (2006) all utilize Corning’s innovation process as a model for investigating the success of product development organizations. Higgins and Mcallaster (2002) observed that there are two cultural values recognized by managers as critical to the success of the company. First, scientists are the core of innovation. The second cultural value is that “even though the company and its scientists are dedicated to creating the future, the future that is created has to be realizable within the company’s profit framework” (Higgins and Mcallaster, 2002, p. 74). This second cultural value is in direct alignment with Graham’s and Shuldiner’s (2002) assertion that Corning’s strategic innovation imperative was to ensure that all parts of the company are tasked with ensuring that the outputs of R&D can be turned into profitable products.

These cultural values are supported by the corporate values. Corning formalized “seven shared values as a way of framing the hard strategic choices that had to follow” (Graham and Shuldiner, 2002, p. 398). Among them, innovation is explicitly listed as a formally declared corporate value. The value is characterized as responsible for both the long-term success of the
company and the current structures of the organizations that compose the company. These corporate values are in alignment with performing as a market leader within all of the segments within which Corning competes.

**The Influence of Corporate Values on Corporate Success**

Research has correlated corporate performance with multiple cultural factors. Kaplan and Norton (2006) connect optimal corporate performance to the alignment of culture with corporate strategy. Peter Merrill (2008) and Daniel Levy (2001) discuss the impact of culture on the success of companies’ innovations. Filson and Lewis (2000), in a case study of a product development organization, cite that the ability of the company to reduce product development cycle times is directly connected to the ability and willingness to embrace cultural change. Filson and Lewis (2000) conclude that cross-departmental involvement across the product development cycle, connection to product strategy, and improved communication mechanisms are key aspects of culture (p. 156). Accordingly, within the case study, reducing time to market means changing these aspects of culture. These researchers all agree that specific aspects of corporate culture can play a pivotal role in the performance of product development organizations.

The review of the literature included specific references to the importance of values systems among the cultural mechanisms that influence success. Robert Haas, CEO of Levi Strauss and Company, states that “a company’s values: what it stands for, and what its people believe in are crucial to its competitive success” (Howard, 1990, p. 134). This statement supports the premise that values are an important part of corporate success. Several articles were identified including Graham and Shuldiner’s (2002) exploration of the Corning innovation environment and Paarlberg and Perry’s (2007) study for the Department of Defense, which
explored this premise through research on topics that focused specifically on the connections between organizational values systems and their affect on employees.

Paarlberg and Perry (2007) described the connection between performance and corporate values systems. They explored the importance of congruence between individual and organizational values in developing positive work attitudes. Positive work attitudes were then connected to company performance. This connection to performance and the identification of the mechanism through which the connection occurs created the foundation for identifying values that may not be in alignment with increased performance and corporate success. Values include such things as risk aversion and an emphasis on conventionality in a rapidly changing environment.

While the importance of values congruence is clear it is also clear that corporate values must be aligned with strategic goals for a business to be successful. This was the core message of Gordon (2007) when she wrote that “…organizations with a corporate culture comprising a compelling vision, values aligned to all employees and a strong leadership brand can achieve higher profitability than organizations without” (p. 50). Gordon presents values alignment as a necessary ingredient for corporate success.

**The Implications of Employee Perceptions of Leader Behavior**

Employee perceptions of leader behavior are a reflection of their engagement with the value system. According to George, Sleeth, and Siders (1999) the internalization of corporate culture “and its inherent values” occurs at the individual level. They connect the internalization of corporate culture directly to the perceived vision of corporate leadership. “Over time successful experiences lead members to accept and internalize beliefs and values they base on the leader’s vision” (George et al., 1999, p. 551).
Paarlberg & Perry, (2007) portray a somewhat different model that explores the relationships between individual values and strategic values. The authors’ suggest that the effectiveness of managers is determined in part by the ability to “interpret organizational values in terms of individual functional values and work unit routines” (p. 400). The authors also interpret strategic goals at the individual level and connect individuals to organizational support goals. Among employees, values systems “must be congruent to ensure that the efforts of employees won’t be tugged and pulled in contradictory directions” (Ozley and Teerlink, 2000, p. 257). This connection of individuals to organizational support goals, taken in the aggregate, aligns groups and organizations with the visions of executive level management.

The review of the literature draws from various aspects of “organizational” culture and provides a foundation from which “corporate” culture can be understood. This exploration is essential to understanding the context in which an evaluation of the interactions between employees and leaders within corporate values systems would be considered. Because this research project is conducted in a product development organization, the literature was reviewed as a body of research that combined corporate values with a product development environment.

The literature reviewed the significance of corporate culture and values system management. Corporate culture is an umbrella term that is used to describe relationships between leaders and their subordinates, interactions among peers, behavioral norms within organizations, and types of employee conflict. However as the research shows, while corporate culture is a generic descriptor for many facets of the corporate environment it is also a key component in the success of corporations.

Corporate values systems are one of the tools that management utilizes to shape both corporate culture and direction. Effectively designed values systems are aligned with company
goals and unify employees and groups around these goals. Management employs values systems by explicitly stating them, espousing them, and enacting them. This literature review prepares the researcher and the reader for an exploration of leadership enactment of a corporate values system within a product development organization.
Methods

Introduction to the Methodology

I will use the heuristic method to explore the topic of this study. The heuristic method of qualitative research, first utilized by Moustakas (1961) in *Loneliness*, is a vehicle for the systematic exploration of the human experience. Moustakas (1990) presented the method in his book, *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications*, after completing several projects in which he refined it.

The heuristic method is appropriate in many cases in which a phenomenology would be first considered. The researcher had been immersed in the culture that he was about to study. This provided several obstacles to the objectivity that is an important part of a phenomenology. It was impossible for the researcher to completely detach himself from his personal experience as he explored the topic of the project. The heuristic method provided the researcher with an opportunity to focus on a process of self-exploration and growth that would leverage and enhance these personal experiences while enriching the project.

Moustakas (1990) described the experience as follows:

“What appears, what shows itself as itself, casts a light that enables one to come to know more fully what something is and means. In such a process not only is knowledge extended but the self of the researcher is illuminated” (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 10-11).

This process enables the researcher to incorporate personal experiences into the research project. Where the phenomenology utilizes an observer that is trying to suppress the effects of his personal experience, the heuristic approach depends on the observer’s experience with the topic and demands that not only is the observer applying his unique and relevant experience, but also that he is interacting and growing personally within the project.
Selection of the Methodology Used

The selection of the topic of this research project was the culmination of several semesters of study during the researcher’s studies to obtain a Master of Leadership degree. Over the course of these studies the researcher’s interest consistently gravitated toward aspects of corporate culture that interacts with organizational relationships and behaviors. The interest in these topics and the desire to explore something narrow enough to control the scope of the project and relevant to this Motor Company led to the decision to focus this final project on corporate value statements.

The most obvious path for an engineer, would have been to conduct a quantitative analysis with conclusions based on statistical methods and correlated variables. This study highlights a different path. It was determined that more would be gained from a qualitative project that explored the ability to synthesize concepts that are less quantitatively defined. It was also concluded that discussions related to a qualitative analysis of the company values had the potential to yield rich insights into the role of these stated values of the Motor Company.

The heuristic method provided an avenue for the exploration of values within a corporate environment; Harley Davidson. This study focuses on the link between corporate values, corporate culture and performance. Consequently, the successful implementation of the heuristic method for this study is expected to provide a unique experience that will be beneficial to both the company and the researcher’s professional growth.

This project has been an exploration of the unique experience that the researcher found himself in for the last ten years. The experience is not one that the researcher expected to be able to divest himself of during either the data collection or analysis phases of this project. There is an experiential attachment to the focus of inquiry that makes him as interested in the project
journey as he is in the findings and conclusions. Both of these facets of attachment are conducive to conducting a heuristic study. This attachment and self-immersion in the project environment enhanced this research from start to finish.

**Design and Methodological Choices**

The exploration of the project using the heuristic method began with a period of “indwelling” during which the researcher spent time attempting to understand unique feelings as they intersected with the subject. The “indwelling” period was intended to help the researcher increase understanding of the subject until “fundamental insight” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 24) was achieved.

During the “indwelling” period the researcher was committed to the focusing process that is an essential part of the heuristic method. This process facilitates the development of a receptive mindset. It also helps to build an awareness of the observer’s personal experiences and the ways in which these experiences shaped the understanding of the subject. “Focusing enables one to see something as it is and to make whatever shifts are necessary to remove clutter and make contact with necessary awareness and insights into one’s experiences” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 25).

Indwelling and focusing led to the construction of an internal frame of reference that was necessary to create an atmosphere of openness and trust that would enable an empathetic connection with the participant that encouraged “expression, elucidation, and disclosure of the experience being investigated” (Moustakas 1990, p. 47). During the indwelling process the researcher was able to develop a perspective that would be less critical of opinions that varied from self. Specifically, preconceived ideas related to the values and leadership engagement in
this corporation were identified. Therefore, it was important that the researcher be able to become more receptive to hearing perspectives that might be in opposition these ideas.

**Sampling Criterion**

The selection of the heuristic method aided the employee selection process that was used to identify the candidates that would constitute a representative cross section of the population. To select the employees, the researcher considered both previous interactions with them as well as observations related to their interactions across the company. This was necessary to evaluate the overall experiences of the participants within the company as they were perceived by the researcher. This enabled a sampling strategy in which the candidate’s status as engineers with specific skills and organizational experiences was considered. With this goal in mind a criterion based sampling method was used. Creswell (2007) considers this an effective sampling method “when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon being studied” (p. 128). Four basic criteria were used to select the sample.

The first criterion was based on personal subjective perceptions of the participant on whether previous professional interactions with the researcher were positive. It was determined to be likely that the most unbiased assessments of leadership engagement with the values would come from interviews with employees that experienced neutral or somewhat positive experiences with the researcher. The influence of these previous interactions was considered to be important because of the researcher’s role as a leader within the company. The participant’s willingness to comment on peers would be influenced by the level of trust that they had developed during the work experiences between researcher and employee (participant). If either the participant or the researcher had negative perceptions of each other at either a personal or professional level the potential for open trusting dialogue might be reduced.
Determination of the quality of these interactions was based on two things. The first was the subjective interpretations of the researcher’s recollections related to work experiences with the participant. The second was the researcher’s subjective interpretations of ongoing intermittent professional interactions with the participant. The evaluation of these interactions was based upon the researcher’s personal perceptions and recollections related to the candidates.

In cases in which personal friendship or animosity with the interviewer were perceived by the researcher the candidates were excluded. Avoiding overly positive perceptions related to the participants was just as important as avoiding extremely negative perceptions. In short, employees at the extremes of personal perception regarding previous interactions were discarded from the potential participant list. This was not a practice advocated within the heuristic method however, it was concluded that the exclusion of candidates due to perceived extreme negative interactions with the interviewer should be offset by the exclusion of those on the positive extreme. Failure to balance these exclusions prior to the initiation of the interviewing process was expected to lead to bias within the results.

The second criterion in sample selection was that the participants needed to have a minimum number of two years of service within the company. The company has been referred to by experienced insiders as a relationship based work environment. This was first explained to the researcher in 2001 by a chief engineer within the organization being studied. During the researcher’s first few months at the company the chief engineer indicated that it would most likely take a year to grasp how this type of culture would function. This is a part of what employees consider to be a unique culture that exists within the company. Many of the researcher’s peers that came from outside companies have observed that the cultural adjustment period is in the order of one to two years.
Jablin (2001) studied the process of organizational assimilation and developed a model that described the socialization of new employees in corporate organizations. “Jablin noted that many organizations arbitrarily designate the newcomer-member transition to end after the member has been with the organization between three and six months, (Myers and Oetzel, 2003, p. 440). Myers and Oetzel describe this member assimilation period as insufficient because it ignores both varying rates of assimilation in individuals as well as the facts that the rate of assimilation varies across different aspects of organizational life. Distefano, Lane, and Maznevski (2006) studied expatriate acculturation processes and determined that, for the extreme case of acclimating to a foreign country, expatriated employees adjust performance levels back to normal or above average in three to nine months.

All research compiled would have supported a decision to require a minimum of one year of service for all interview candidates. The general observations of peers within the company resulted in doubling this period of time and requiring a minimum of two years of service. The researcher considered this to be more than adequate to assure the level of cultural assimilation necessary to develop opinions related to leadership engagement with the values. The resulting population was of sufficient size to provide a large selection of candidates.

The third criterion in sample selection was that the participants needed to be project or senior project engineers. Commonality of experience between the researcher and the group being studied was a key component of the decision to use the heuristic method. The researcher’s experiences would have the most relevance when applied to discussions with this group. Utilization of this method would make the researcher’s internal frame of reference an asset leading to richer discussion rather than a liability leading to bias.
These engineering levels also interact regularly with leadership at multiple levels and should have exposure to leadership in multiple departments. There are many engineers at these levels within the company. This made obtaining a significant sample set a relatively straightforward task.

The final criterion in sample selection stipulated that the samples had to come from different departments within the company. It was strongly desired that the anonymity of the participants that were to be interviewed be protected. Selecting a relatively small number of participants from any one engineering department within the product development organization would limit inferences to the organization as a whole and make inferences related to specific departments difficult. This would reduce the possibility of drawing undue attention to any one department. There are four large engineering organizations within the Product Development Center. A minimum of one individual and no more than three individuals were selected from any single organization. Discussing the measures taken to protect the anonymity of the candidates was planned as part of the trust building exercise that was expected to increase the atmosphere of trust and empathy that was desired for this effort.

The final sample included eight participants that were interspersed throughout all of engineering. The size of the sample within each of the represented organizations was small. The complete sample was sufficiently small to ensure success in locating and acquiring research participants yet large enough to support immersion in the data and the synthesis of an accurate picture of the experience.

**Data Collection**

The data collection phase of this project began with the formulation of the interview questions. The questions were derived directly from the stated values of the Motor Company.
These values are the cornerstone of the internal corporate image and are placed on walls throughout most conference rooms as well as other strategic locations within the corporation. The question ordering determined based on the order that the values are presented. Each of the questions was structured in the exact same way with a request for a description of the extent to which leaders within the company follow the values. The interview closed with a discussion related to the extent to which the participants felt that leadership inspired them to follow the values. The Harley-Davidson corporate values are presented once again below:

1. Tell the truth
2. Be fair
3. Keep your promises
4. Respect the individual
5. Encourage intellectual curiosity

A total of eight interviews were conducted for this project. The interviews began in a standardized open-ended format in which the primary questions were laid out as outlined above. These primary questions were carefully worded so that they would serve as a guide that would assist in keeping the interview in alignment with the topic of the research.

A set of primary questions were utilized as guideposts to focus the interviews on specific value statements. Within the guideposts of the primary questions, the interview followed the format of the informal conversational interview that is “most clearly consistent with the rhythm and flow of heuristic exploration and search for meaning” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 47). The structure of the interview resulted in a dialogue that was free to unfold naturally and spontaneously. This natural evolution of conversation is a characteristic of the heuristic method. The interview questions followed the same order as the values. They are presented below:
1) To what extent do you feel that your immediate supervisors tell the truth?
   i) Let’s talk about this.
   ii) Do you feel that leadership levels above your immediate supervisors enact this value to the same extent?
   iii) Let’s talk about this.

1. To what extent do you feel that your immediate supervisors are fair?
   i) Let’s talk about this.
   ii) Do you feel that leadership levels above your immediate supervisors enact this value to the same extent?
   iii) Let’s talk about this.

2. To what extent do you feel that your immediate supervisors keep their promises?
   i) Let’s talk about this.
   ii) Do you feel that leadership levels above your immediate supervisors enact this value to the same extent?
   iii) Let’s talk about this.

3. To what extent do you feel that your immediate supervisors respect the individual?
   i) Let’s talk about this.
   ii) Do you feel that leadership levels above your immediate supervisors enact this value to the same extent?
   iii) Let’s talk about this.

4. To what extent do you feel that your immediate supervisors encourage intellectual curiosity?
   i) Let’s talk about this.
   ii) Do you feel that leadership levels above your immediate supervisors enact this value to the same extent?
   iii) Let’s talk about this.

5. To what extent do you feel that your immediate supervisors inspire you to follow the values?
   i) Let’s talk about this.

6. To what extent do you feel that supervisors above your immediate supervisors inspire you to follow the values?
   i) Let’s talk about this.
The interviews were conducted in conference rooms with the doors shut. The interviews were scheduled for one hour on Tuesday through Thursday between 10am and 3pm. If additional time was required a second interview was scheduled.

The selection of the heuristic method allowed the researcher to utilize personal experience in the discussion of leadership engagement with the values. The questions that were posed encouraged a personal dialog that explored the responses of the participants. The researcher’s tacit knowledge of the subject of this project facilitated an intuitive grasp of the content of the interviews during the exploration of participant’s responses. This intuitive understanding of the interview subjects, without the “intervening steps of knowledge and reasoning” (Moustakas, p. 23), enabled fluid conversation and thorough exploration. Evaluation of the researcher’s inner experiences and personal paradigm was not an impediment to the process; it was an asset to the exploration of the subject matter.

**Contextual Descriptions**

A total of eight different conference rooms were used for the eight interviews. The interview rooms were all located at the Product Development Center and seated eight to twelve people. The chairs were comfortable and the rooms quiet. Two of the rooms had plaques with the values on the wall. These plaques were in plain view of each of the participants. Three of the rooms did not have plaques on the walls. Several of the participants with interviews in these rooms observed that the plaques were absent during the interviews. In conversation it was speculated that it was due to repainting efforts that have occurred within most of the conference rooms.

Each of the interviews was scheduled for one hour. The timing of the interviews varied. The shortest interview lasted approximately 25 minutes. The longest interview lasted 35
minutes. All of the interviews were conducted between 10am and 3pm on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday. None of the interviews were interrupted.

Each of the interviews began with an outline of the purpose of the project. Commitments were made relative to the confidentiality of the participant responses and their anonymity within the process. The participants were then asked if they had any questions prior to beginning recording and the formal interview. Three of the participants took this opportunity to request further clarification of the scope and audience for the paper relative to whether the primary audience was internal to the engineering organization or academic. The researcher then requested final approval to begin the interview and record it.
Inquiry Results

Data Analysis

Interviews were digitally recorded and downloaded to the researcher’s personal computer. The data analysis began with the assignment of pseudonyms to each of the eight participants. This would be the primary mechanism used to maintain confidentiality of the participants within the study. The selected pseudonyms were all male. This was intended to protect the identities of female participants within the predominantly male population. The recordings were then transcribed by the researcher.

Each of the transcribed interviews was then read two times prior to beginning the data analysis process. The reading exercise enhanced the overall perspective of the researcher by immersing him in the entire data set over a short period of time. This was done in preparation for the development of a coding scheme. The transcription of the interviews and utilization of a coding scheme fit within the defined structure of the heuristic method. According to Moustakas, (1990) “organizing and analyzing heuristic data during the immersion and incubation process may take many forms” (p. 49).

Development of the coding scheme was focused on highlighting key statements that captured the essence of the participant’s answers. Coding schemes, as discussed by Brott and Meyers (1999), are commonly used in research to name and categorize recurring themes with the intention of developing models that can be used to describe causes, effects, and interactions within data sets. The final coding scheme was applicable to all eight interviews. Consistent coding among the transcribed interviews created categories that enabled structuring of the data in tabular form.
The final coding scheme began with an initial 2 digit prescript that provided a clear indication of the topic of the question. There were six prescripts each aligned with an interview question. The first five had values ranging from “V1” through “V5”. This represented each of the five questions related to the five Motor Company values. A final prescript “FQ” was included to represent the final question which dealt with the degree to which leadership was inspirational regarding the values. For example, coded data relating to the value be fair included the prescript “V2”. Coded data for questions related to supervisory inspiration began with the prescript “FQ”.

The third digit in the code consisted of an “I” or a “U”. This represented the level of the supervisor referred to in the participant’s responses. An “I” indicated that the respondent was referring to their immediate supervisor. A “U” indicated that the participant was referring to higher level leaders.

The fourth digit of the code consisted of a numerical value ranging from 1 to 3. These numbers were intended to represent the degree to which the participant felt the supervisory group under discussion practiced the specific value under discussion. A “1” indicated that a participant stated that a supervisor did not properly practice that value. A “2” indicated that a supervisor sometimes practiced the value. A “2” indicated that a supervisor practiced that value in certain types of situations only. A “3” indicated that the leader always practiced the value.

The fifth and final digit of the code consisted of a “B”, “S”, or a “W”. This final digit was only used as a marker to capture whether higher level leadership was observed to be “better”, the “same”, or “worse” than the immediate supervisor. This fifth code digit was not used for all of the interviews because the participants did not always provide a relative comparison. The application of the coding scheme left a series of codes in the left margin of
each of the transcribed interviews. For example, a code of “V4U3S” in the margin of an interview indicated that upper level supervisors “U”, always “3”, practiced the value encourage intellectual curiosity “V4”.

In the event that an unique comment or observation was made during the interview response a special notation was made next to the code. This notation consisted of a “VC” superscripted at the end of the five digit code from the previous paragraph. This represented a circumstance in which a valuable comment or observation was made during the discussion. The comment was then referenced in the right hand margin with a two to three word descriptor keyed to the unique phrase. For example, if the code “V1I1VC” was entered, it would indicate that the participant made a valuable comment relating to immediate supervisors failing to properly engage in the value tell the truth.

**Data Quality Checks**

Member checks were performed both during and after the interviews. During the interviews these checks were in the form of requests for deeper explanations that were accompanied, in some cases, by a rephrasing of the answer with a request to approve the interpretation. For example, at one point in the exploration of fairness the researcher responded to the participant’s answer by asking: “So to try and paraphrase that, at levels above your immediate supervisor, sometimes they’re making decisions based on information that might not be as accurate as you have the ability to ensure your current supervisor has.” This was intended to establish not just the validity of the answer within the mind of the participant but also to establish the connection of the answer to the question within the interpretation of the researcher.

After the interviews these member checks consisted of a request for feedback on the data and conclusion sections of the paper. For example, the tentative findings were delivered to the
participants with a request for an evaluation of my interpretation of their perspective. This created the opportunity for fine tuning if any of the participants had felt that their thoughts were captured incorrectly.

After the development of both the results and conclusions sections a peer review was performed. A colleague was selected from the researcher’s peer group within the graduate leadership degree program to read the researcher’s work and provide feedback on the coherency of the overall project as well as additional insights into the project. The peer review strengthened the internal validity of the study by providing a final check on the connections that the researcher made. The selected reader is also a Motor Company employee and should be well versed in the values as well as a working knowledge of the company culture. This should provide a firm basis for insights and lessons learned related to the project.

**Descriptive Results**

The topic of research led to an easily understood interview structure. The values are covered rigorously during employee orientation. They are posted in many of the conference rooms throughout the Product Development Center. The question order selected for the interviews matched the order in which the values are communicated and displayed. The Motor Company values are presented below.

1. Tell the truth
2. Be fair
3. Keep your promises
4. Respect the individual
5. Encourage intellectual curiosity
Common understanding of the values led to a natural flow of the interview and thus a richer conversation. Reserving the room allowed a closed door interview which ensured a degree of privacy that made open conversation easier. Each of the participants was briefed at least one week in advance regarding the project by a direct personal introduction and discussion. This was then followed by a phone call one day prior to scheduling the interview.

The topic of confidentiality was discussed both prior to scheduling the conference room for the interview and at the beginning of the interview itself. The ability to make the participants trust that their answers to interview questions would remain confidential was considered essential to the success of the study. While I believe that there was a strong element of trust there was an undertone of concern that responses could be career limiting in some of the interviews. To reduce the potential influence of trust issues within the interview it was made clear to each of the participants, prior to beginning the interview, that they should not participate if they did not believe that their answers would remain confidential. None of them chose to withdraw.

Ten minutes prior to the interview the file for the research project was removed from the researcher’s locked desk drawer. Copies of the confidentiality agreement and the interview question sheet were removed. The interview questions were evaluated and previous interviews were contemplated with the intention of ensuring consistency. The final check was a verification of the meeting location on the researcher’s schedule.

All of the participants maintained a very high level of professionalism throughout the interviews. There were very few negative personal assessments of leaders at either of the leadership levels under discussion. The professional tone of the interviews occurred within the context of participants doing their best to provide both credible and helpful answers.
Analysis of the Data

The common structure of the interviews and the direct alignment of the questions with the well documented value system created an order and cadence to the interviews that was predictable by the participants. The inclusion of questions related to both immediate and senior level leaders in leadership positions enabled rich discussion in which the participants’ were able to expound on observations related to their immediate supervisors by consistently comparing them to higher level leaders. This also enabled connections to specific leadership levels which were expected to make the investigations conclusions more actionable.

The common structure of each of the interviews and the repetitive structure of the questions enabled a table structure that is repeated throughout the analysis. The general observations of the participants’ are represented by a direct quotation. These quotations are aligned in a single column with each of the participant’s assigned pseudonyms in the adjacent column. The perceptions that employees have of their immediate supervisor’s engagement with the value “tell the truth” are presented in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Representative Comment for Immediate Supervisors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>I’m pretty confident its 100 percent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>….and I don’t think that I’ve ever, on the backhand of a conversation, found out that there wasn’t truth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>I’ve had a few instances where they didn’t tell me something that might be useful, which might be lying by omission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>I work with that individual to the point that I’d know if he’d lie to me, and he wouldn’t. He’s very honest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>I feel like my direct supervisors tell the truth often….the reason I say often is because sometimes we don’t know the whole answer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Will
He tells us the truth but I think he holds back information.

James
I think they do their best to tell us the truth on what they can tell us, when they can
tell us, as early as they can tell us.

Mike
In think in general they are telling the truth. Now whether they want to go above
that and let you know the whole picture that’s another thing.

The variation in both the literal content of the perceptions as well as the styles of the
various responses serves to highlight both variation among the participants and their unique
situations within the company. Among the participants there is general agreement that
immediate supervisors adhere to the “tell the truth” value. The perceptions that employees have
of the engagement of higher level leaders with the value “tell the truth” are presented in Table 2
below.

Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Representative Comment for Higher Level Supervisors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>And I don’t believe that things they say are dishonest. I think they simply limit their information more as they’re supposed to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>I don’t feel like I’ve ever been in a meeting or conversation where it was purposely untruthful for really any purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>…especially over the last two years there have been some pretty hard meetings to go to and I never felt like my immediate supervisor’s higher ups were trying to hide things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>My supervisor’s supervisor is pretty honest. Very straightforward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>I think sometimes they may even have a hard time getting the truth themselves so it’s the person that’s making a tough decision with bad information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wil</td>
<td>…he says what people want to hear, not necessarily what’s truth and he will spin anything to get his point across.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I think they leave out what they have to, but I think that they do try to share what they can. I think that leadership in this company are telling the truth. Unfortunately, I think sometimes when they tell you they don’t know they really don’t know...[laughing] and that’s the dangerous part.

The participant’s perceptions of higher level leaders, with the exception of Will’s experiences, also indicate a consistent belief that these leaders adhere to the value “tell the truth”. A common theme was observed with both the immediate and higher level supervisors. This theme consisted of a propensity to credit leadership at both levels with owning a responsibility to keep some things confidential. This responsibility was apparent in the observation made by James when he concluded that “they leave out what they have to”. A second theme was observed which was apparent in the interviews of Mark, Will, and Mike. This theme consisted of a withholding of information that Mark referred to as potentially “lying by omission”. The perceptions that employees have of their immediate supervisor’s engagement with the value “Be fair” are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Representative Comment for Immediate Supervisors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>I can count on one hand the number of times I’ve walked away from dealing with my immediate supervisor thinking they’re not fair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>I would say they are really fair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>I felt like my immediate supervisor didn’t pay any attention to what I was saying, just took for granted that the other person was looking at it right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>He puts everybody on a level playing field, lets you prove yourself, which is good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>I think the unfair ones are the ones that don’t really understand what’s going on.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wil

...he has perceived favorites and he will, for example on a certain persons project somebody asks a question, he’ll back them up right away. You can see it.

James

When he thinks that they deserve something, he does push for them, whether they’ve asked for it or not.

Mike

Actually, I would say there’s a majority of them where they don’t really communicate down to their employee and let them know what they are expecting, what fairness is and I think they should be doing that more.

Here, there is variation among the participant’s experiences. Four of the participants observed high levels of value demonstration by leaders at both levels. Chris and Mike allude to general unfair practices by leaders that don’t properly understand what’s going on and not properly communicating expectations. Mark and Will provide direct examples of what they perceive to be their immediate supervisors showing preferential treatment to others. The perceptions that employees have of the engagement of higher level leaders with the value “be fair” are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4.

Question: To what extent do you feel that leadership levels above your immediate supervisors are fair?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Representative Comment for Higher Level Supervisors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>The depth of what they work on is so much bigger, they don’t have as much time to work with each one in depth you know. Fairness is fine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>We were kind of in a position in the company that seemed like people were getting promotions based on time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>The people running the department have been fair to me over the years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>They are influenced by what those peers are hearing, which may or may not be true.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>But on a higher level there’s not a great strategy in place to execute and I think that’s unfair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wil</td>
<td>They are probably less fair because they have their favorites and its one hundred percent obvious who the favorites are.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Six of the eight participants made references to two types of unfair practices by higher level leaders. Again, as with immediate supervisors, there were perceptions that people had either been favored based on a relationship or time in service with the company. Similar to perceptions made during discussion of the value “tell the truth”, there were perceptions that withholding information was occurring and this was believed to be unfair. This was clearly stated by Mike when he said that information not being shared creates a sense that leadership is not being fair. The perceptions that employees have of their immediate supervisor’s engagement with the value “keep your promises” are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Representative Comment for Immediate Supervisors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>The only instances, and I can’t even think of an example, is where something is said and it really isn’t followed through on and they have a reason and it’s usually legitimate…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>They keep their promises pretty well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>I made a commitment I can’t follow through on because my superior, who I checked with, didn’t think it through before agreeing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>I think people want to do everything for everyone and that’s just the culture and so they aren’t honest with themselves and they might come off as not being honest to the person they committed something to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Well, my immediate supervisors, I feel that they do a very good job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>…he’s gotten upset that people haven’t shown up to the meetings, so he enacts this everybody needs to participate in this and the next week, he doesn’t show up.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Will and Mike both provided direct examples of their immediate supervisors failing to keep promises. The other six participants either had very few experiences with their supervisors failing to keep promises or gave examples that showed an acceptance of the reason for the failure. Chris referred to an unwillingness to make promises and Tom introduced the concept of “legitimate” reasons for failing to keep their promises. This acceptance of failure to deliver on promises carried through as a theme with higher level leaders as well. There is a recurring positive theme in the perceptions of immediate supervisors respect for this value. The perceptions that employees have of the engagement of higher level leaders with the value “keep your promises” are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Representative Comment for Higher Level Supervisors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>There have been times when a senior leader will say something and do something else, and come back months later, at a town hall or something, or you get emails that have a different message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>The higher up you go, the decisions are based more and more on some things that are out of your control like the economy and things like that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>They’ve actually checked the budget before giving me a thumbs up or not. I would say better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>To the best of their ability but when you start making decisions based on more individuals input, the slower the delivery on that decision, promise, or whatever. Less control.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The participants presented a similar perception of higher level leaders. A theme of not making promises at all was again observed, this time by Chris. Higher level leaders were referred to as having less control over their promises than immediate supervisors by both Sam and Paul. The perceptions that employees have of their immediate supervisor’s engagement with the value “respect the individual” are presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7.

Table: To what extent do you feel that your immediate supervisors respect the individual?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Representative Comment for Immediate Supervisors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>I’ve never seen a case where they didn’t respect the individual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>I think they respect the individual to the level of their performance, if that makes sense….I think there’s definitely respect for people’s emotions and feelings along the way too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>There have been meetings where my immediate supervisor will cut me off when I’m trying to run a meeting. That’s about it personally that I’ve run into.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>My immediate supervisor respects all individuals very well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>I can’t think of any situation where any of my supervisors have disrespected anybody or caused a problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wil</td>
<td>The only thing that bugs me is he’s kind of condescending in meetings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You can see that he holds back more and doesn’t get into a conversation where he could get into trouble and say something that he shouldn’t.

Respecting the individual in terms of the work that they do...they show the utmost respect for that. Respecting the individual in terms of their desire for a career path and all that other stuff, I don’t think there is much attention paid towards that.

The responses relative to immediate supervisors consistently indicated adherence to the respect value. Perceived behavioral transgressions such as Mark’s reference being cut-off in meetings and Will’s reference to being condescended to in meetings were examples that contradicted the values. The understanding of the meaning of this value may have been less common within the participants. The value was most commonly discussed as an assessment of behavior during personal and professional interactions. However, Mike connected the respect value to being properly rewarded for achievements. This reward connection was well thought out and was used to describe the lack of respect felt as a result of not receiving a promotion that Mike felt that he had earned. Mike actually identified the behavioral aspect and described it as the lowest form of respect. The perceptions that employees have of the engagement of higher level leaders with the value “respect the individual” are presented in Table 8 below.

Table 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Representative Comment for Higher Level Supervisors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>I would say all the time. It’s not like they’re ever holding that back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>I think they’ve gotten to that level because they understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>The interactions that I’ve had in those situations have been much more consistently respectful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>I think something we do pretty well around here is respecting people and their inputs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Five of the eight participants provided direct support for higher level leadership’s engagement with the value “respect the individual”. There are some negative perceptions within two responses relative to higher level leader’s adherence to the “respect the individual value”. James references poor social interactions as an indicator of a lack of respect and Will has a very negative personal assessment that is leveled at the higher level leader. Mike refers to a growing disconnect that leaders exhibit as they “step” their way higher in their career. The perceptions that employees have of their immediate supervisor’s engagement with the value “encourage intellectual curiosity” are presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Representative Comment for Immediate Supervisors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>I would say all the time. It’s not like they’re ever holding that back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>I don’t think anybody around here has any problem with you being curious or investigating something that’s new as long as it is helpful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>I’ve been encouraged to take training that’s not necessarily relevant to my current position but would be to my career.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>I think my immediate supervisor definitely encourages it and again that goes back to that individual and their own ways of thinking.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I’ve been able to progress in different technologies and take on extra projects, opportunities, and call and continue to learn.

...last year I wanted to take “specific training edited” and I was told, did you go to “specific rally edited”. I went yeah and he said then you can’t go to that training.

This cross functional garbage that they’re throwing at us, okay I’m supposed to learn. Actually other people are supposed to learn some things from other people, but it is not because they want to encourage intellectual curiosity. It is because they’re covering their butts for the next RIF.

Opinions might differ and everything but they encourage that. There is no doubt that they encourage that.

This value elicited positive responses from six of the eight participants. There were two negative responses. Will referred to a specific case where his supervisor connected training to rallies and used participation in a rally to justify denial of training. James had an overall negative assessment of intellectual curiosity through a connection to cross training for the purposes of laying people off (RIF). The perceptions that employees have of the engagement of higher level leaders with the value “Encourage Intellectual Curiosity” are presented in Table 10 below.

Table 10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Representative Comment for Higher Level Supervisors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>I would say all the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>They kind of give their subordinates, which are our managers, the ability to do it right? I don’t see how they could be less so than the manager right?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>For the most part. I haven’t had as much interaction with the people. They’ve ultimately given the thumbs up to the training sessions I was talking about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>On that one I am going to say probably less. Not so much on my supervisor’s supervisor, but on other supervisors because some of them are being told do it the same way you’ve always done it even though that might not be the best way.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The participant responses were generally positive with respect to higher level leaders for the “encourage intellectual curiosity value. The three participants that identified a negative gap between higher level leaders and their immediate supervisors contributed it to a lack of explicit support or communication. There were no examples of intellectual curiosity being denied. The discussion points were related to support for this value not being perceived by the participant. The perceptions that employees have regarding the ability of immediate supervisors to inspire them to follow the values are presented in Table 11 below.

Table 11.

Question: To what extent do you feel that your immediate supervisors inspire you to follow the values?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Representative Comment for Immediate Supervisors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>It’s not like we review them all the time or even on any kind of regular basis. But they don’t do anything or say anything to not encourage you to follow them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>As long as they are truthful and fair then I think that’s inspiration enough. I say it’s fine. Since they’re doing it, I should be inspired to do it too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>The values jive pretty well with how I’ve tried to live my life in general. I don’t know that I’ve ever felt particularly encouraged by my supervisors to follow the values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>I think overall my supervisors pretty much follow the values and all the past ones I have been fortunate to have have been pretty good supervisors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There was only one example, presented by Mike, of immediate supervisors explicitly referencing the values for the purposes of connecting employees action related decisions to the values. Mike directly connected it to his supervisor failing to follow the values. A common theme emerged as almost all of the participants connected “inspiration” to “enacting” the values. The perceptions that employees have regarding the ability of higher level leaders to inspire them to follow the values are presented in Table 12 below.

Table 12.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Representative Comment for Higher Level Supervisors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>I would say probably to a lesser extent because I am more removed from them you know?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>I don’t think there’s anything that they could do much more than what they’re doing now. What else are you going to do but be a good example?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>I’ve never had a real case to see the people above my immediate supervisors going against the values. That hasn’t necessarily been inspirational. It’s nice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>The higher ranks you bring in dollars. You bring other things into play and to keep the company in business they make decisions that might make you question the values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Not that they are trying to do that, but I just don’t think it is a goal of theirs to be inspirational in that area.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Only two of the eight participants had positive responses to this question. The answers ranged from Will’s “he leads by a bad example” to Sam’s “I don’t think there is much more (that you could do) than what they’re doing now.” The range of answers to this concluding question served as a final illustration of the variation observed in the perceptions of the participants for all of the questions.

**The Interpretation of the Data**

The sample of data obtained through this research presents a broad view of leadership’s engagement with the Motor Company values. It would be easy to attempt to draw conclusions from the individual depictions of the subjects of this study. However, care must be taken when synthesizing the data to turn the depictions of the individuals into a composite depiction of the experience (Moustakas, 1990).

The interpretation of the data began with a qualitative assessment of the participant’s responses to each of the questions related to the values. Each of the responses were categorized into one of three categories. Responses with very little indication of value engagement were categorized as “not at all”. Responses with occasional value engagement were categorized as “sometimes”. Responses in which participants observed high levels of engagement were categorized as “always”. A description of the categorized responses for the individuals as they relate to immediate supervisors is presented in Table 13 below.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wil</td>
<td>I think he leads by a bad example because he truly is out for himself and it’s totally obvious. Why should you follow in those footsteps?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jam</td>
<td>So they don’t inspire me, you know, to follow the values because I don’t feel like they’re making smart decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Now I’ve never been with executives behind closed doors so I don’t know how they behave but from my interactions with them I would say that they definitely practice them better than my immediate supervisor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13.
Composite Responses to Questions Regarding Immediate Supervisor Engagement with the Values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Tell the Truth</th>
<th>Be Fair</th>
<th>Keep Promises</th>
<th>Respect</th>
<th>Curiosity</th>
<th>Inspirational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Mostly</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Immediate supervisor engagement with the value “Tell the Truth” was generally positive. Four of the participants perceived that their supervisors were always engaged with the values. None of the participants that were categorized as “sometimes” observed that their immediate supervisors were lying to them. Rather, they described examples of information withholding or omission that they felt was untruthful. Mark directly referred to this as “lying by omission”.

Engagement with the value “Be Fair” was less positive. Only three of the participants observed that their immediate supervisors were always fair. The remaining responses were weighted toward disengagement with the values with three of the participants describing supervisors that they did not observe to be fair at all. Observed examples of unfairness included two examples of favoritism and an observation that expectations were unclear. Chris’s response was categorized as “sometimes”. Chris made a general observation that supervisors that were considered unfair were usually unfair because they were unaware of the facts that would enable fair decisions.

Engagement with the value “Keep Your Promises” was slightly worse than the results of the “Be Fair” question with only two participants observing that their immediate supervisors always kept their promises. Examples of failure to keep promises were consistently linked to the
making and keeping of commitments. Examples of this included failure to show up at meetings and the withdrawing of support for the commitments of others. James’ observation that his supervisor doesn’t make a lot of commitments was the single example of this at the immediate supervisor level. This theme emerged again with Chris during discussion of higher level leaders.

Immediate supervisor engagement with the value “Respect the Individual” was generally positive. Five of the participants perceived that their supervisors were always engaged with the values. None of the participants that were categorized as “sometimes” observed that their immediate supervisors were lying to them. Two of the “sometimes” responses consisted of discussions related to meeting behavior. Will felt that his supervisor was sometimes condescending in meetings and Mark described his supervisor cutting him off in meetings that he was running. Mike was unique in articulating a connection between respect and reward. He felt that the type of behavioral respect that was generally understood was superficial. To Mike, respect should be expressed through reward and promotion.

Participant’s responses to questions relating to the value “Encourage Intellectual Curiosity” were either positive or negative with no “sometimes” responses at the immediate supervisor level. Six of the eight participants felt that this value was followed. Only two respondents felt that this value was not followed. Will described a circumstance in which he was denied a training request. James focused his answer on a negative assessment of information sharing among coworkers. He connected this assessment to leadership’s desire to encourage cross functional knowledge sharing so that it could reduce the risk of knowledge loss during personnel reductions.

Assessments of immediate supervisor’s success in inspiring the values were negative. Only two of the participants felt that their supervisors inspired them to follow the values. They
directly connected inspiration to demonstration of the values. Six of the participants described their immediate supervisors as uninspiring. The negative bias to the tone of the responses could be connected to ambiguity related to what should be considered inspirational. Where two of the participants felt that demonstration of the values was sufficient to be considered inspirational others concluded that being inspirational was something more than that. Specifically, James connected a perceived lack of inspiration to a lack of direct encouragement.

The interpretation of the data relating to the engagement of higher level leaders follows the pattern that was used for immediate supervisors. The order of discussion follows the order of the values. The interpretation builds on the immediate supervisor analysis by presenting, where possible, relative comparisons across leadership levels. Composite responses for questions related to higher level leader engagement with the values is presented in Table 14 below.

Table 14.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Tell the Truth</th>
<th>Be Fair</th>
<th>Keep Promises</th>
<th>Respect</th>
<th>Curiosity</th>
<th>Inspirational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Higher level supervisor engagement with the value “Tell the Truth” was slightly more positive than was observed with immediate supervisors. Six of the participants perceived that their supervisors were always engaged with the values. This was two more than participants observed for immediate supervisors. Two participants believed that higher level leaders were
likely to either be unaware of information that would help them communicate or be in the
possession of bad information that would cause them to say things that were in error.

Engagement with the value “Be Fair” was similar between supervisory levels with three
of the eight participants feeling that higher level leaders were always fair. Different issues
related to fairness were cited for the two leadership groups. Immediate supervisors were more
likely to be perceived as directly unfair in their dealings with the participants.

Engagement with the value “Keep Your Promises” was similar between supervisory
levels. Only two of the eight participants observed that their immediate supervisors always kept
their promises. Assessments of higher level leader’s failures were more likely to contain
eamples of things out of their control. Examples of this included the difficulty of achieving
deliveries when working with large numbers of people and changing economic conditions.

Higher level leader engagement results for the value “Respect the Individual” shifted to a
more polarized set of views. None of the participant’s observations were characterized as
“sometimes” for discussions relating to this value. Higher level leaders were either categorized
as always engaged with this value or not engaged. The three participants that felt higher level
supervisors did not respect the individual described issues with a common theme. Higher level
leaders were somehow disconnected from the individual. These perceived disconnects included
self-interest, failure to acknowledge subordinates in passing, and being generally unaware of the
talents of individuals at lower levels.

Higher level leaders were considered less likely to encourage intellectual curiosity than
immediate supervisors. The number of “always” responses went from six to four as participants
considered higher level supervisors. The common theme expressed by Chris and Will was that
higher level leaders did not acknowledge this value. Chris observed that higher level leaders do
not communicate any support for taking courses and James referred to the same issues as “never ever a conversation that’s had.”

Assessments of higher leader’s success in inspiring the values were similar to the assessments of immediate level supervisors. Five of the eight participants observed that they were not inspired by higher level leaders. Only one of the participants felt that higher level leaders always inspired them to follow the values. Five of the participants described their immediate supervisors as uninspiring. While the overall tone was negative there was a general theme present in the responses that suggested that the participants were aware that they had limited exposure to the behaviors of higher level leaders. This lack of exposure was observed to be connected to a lack of knowledge related to higher level leadership engagement with this value.

The participants in the study were fairly open in their willingness to discuss leadership engagement with the values. However, as the questions delved into leadership successes and failures, a growing awareness of the confidentiality requirement lead to questions about whether we should be discussing individual leaders or keeping the conversation general in nature. This supports an observation that the responses may have been shaded to varying degrees by each of the participants as they struggled with their trust in me, the interviewer, and with their own engagement with the values.
Conclusions

This study was focused on an exploration of participant’s engagement with stated company values among participant’s immediate supervisors and higher level leaders. The results of the study identified areas of strength and weakness for values engagement among leaders at all levels as well as the relative performance of two supervisory groups within their engagement levels. The summation of the results provides insights into the corporate culture within one organization supporting one of America’s most well known brands.

One of the most positive conclusions within the study was related to leadership at all levels and their engagement with the value “tell the truth.” The participants overwhelmingly felt that the two leadership levels identified worked hard to fulfill this value. They regularly attributed small breakdowns in information fidelity to leaders being unaware of the correct answers or being misinformed. The theme of lying by omission was presented by several participants within this question and others. Knowledge withheld without proper cause was identified as having negative repercussions to participant experiences within the contexts of both truth and fairness.

Assessments of the value “be fair” was generally positive for both immediate and higher level supervisors. Interestingly, the expectations for the two leadership levels began to diverge as participants connected their immediate supervisors to issues that directly impacted their own experiences. Higher level leaders were somewhat insulated from this direct connection and the discussions highlighted this difference during the discussions. Expounding on this, where immediate supervisors were held directly accountable for both their fairness and promises to the participants, higher level leader’s failures were attributed to the participants observations related to someone else or something that was out of the higher level supervisor’s control.
The value “keep your promises” received a slightly lower overall assessment among participants with nearly equal performance across both leadership levels. Discussions during the interviews reflected participant’s acceptance of the gaps identified for both immediate supervisors and higher level leaders. Leaders were credited with being careful not to make promises. Assessments contained identification of legitimate reasons to fail to keep a promise. Failures among higher level leaders were more likely to be attributed to things that were out of their control.

Participant’s observations related to higher level leaders’ engagement with the value “respect the individual” were unanticipated. The difference in tone between the levels was not noticed by the researcher until the data codification and analysis was complete. The participant’s opinions appeared to be polarized. The positive or ambivalent experiences observed with immediate supervisors transitioned into a mix of either positive or negative responses for higher level supervisors. On reflection, the researcher attributed this to the heightened response that a lack of respect experienced from higher level supervisors could cause.

Immediate supervisor’s performance in engaging in the company value, “encourage intellectual curiosity”, stood out among all of the values. Immediate supervisors were credited with approving learning opportunities. It was interesting that this positive performance was not matched among higher level leaders. During the interviews the decreased level of engagement was attributed to observations by participants that they could not recall hearing support or denial of anything related to the topic.

The final topic of this study related to the ability of supervisors to inspire the participants to follow the values. The conclusion that neither level inspires them to follow the values was clearly supported by the data. Conversation related to this topic was rich with a common belief
expressed among the participants that in order to inspire others leaders needed to be demonstrating the values. While several acknowledged that leaders at both levels demonstrated many of the values few felt that they were inspired. The general consensus among the participants can be summed up by a single observation. Leadership in the product development organization did not engage in the values to a level any higher than the participants themselves.

The connection between optimal corporate performance and the alignment between corporate culture and strategy was observed by Kaplan and Norton (2006). The role that corporate values systems play in establishing and defining corporate culture was explored in the review of the literature. The primary mechanism through which leaders can strengthen corporate values systems lies in their “faithfulness to the core values and beliefs that make up the desired culture of the organization” (George, Sleeth, and Siders, 1999, p. 557). From these concepts it follows that it is the connection between leader behavior, corporate culture, and corporate performance that makes the study of leadership engagement with the values relevant to the Motor Company.

An observation could be made that all of the participants had both positive and negative perceptions of leadership at all levels. The results and conclusions are based on qualitative assessments of a single slice of the product development organization. Perhaps the most interesting observation arose from the fact that all of the participants had “some” negative perceptions of leadership engagement with the values. Thus, the most compelling conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that employees do not generally regard leadership as “completely” engaged with the Motor Company values.

The varying reactions of the participants to questions relating to leadership’s engagement with the values provide compelling support for the conclusion that the corporate strategy and
culture were not completely aligned at the time of this study. Economic uncertainty and market expectations of profitability demand that the gap between stated corporate strategies and leadership behaviors be closed. It is important that leaders at all levels understand the impact of their behaviors on the corporate strategy and vision. Increasing their consistency in elucidating the values and their connection to everyday situations can increase awareness of their relevance. Following the values, especially when it is not easy, has the ability to inspire.

Limitations of the Study

A unique attribute of the heuristic method is worth discussing here. The researcher in an heuristic study makes no attempt to distance himself from the topic of study. Instead, the indwelling process utilized in preparation for interviews focuses on recognizing preconception. The potential for bias is clear and worth mentioning. While the researcher worked to apply the research principles and processes correctly it is possible that his inexperience allowed some personal bias to present itself in the results.

It is also important to note that this study was conducted within the confines of a single large organization. While the participants came from multiple departments within the organization, the study was performed with a relatively small sample set over a short period of time. It can not be generalized across the Motor Company as a whole. Including a broader range of employees with a significantly larger sample set would improve the sample selection process and provide greater confidence that the results reflect the perceptions of the entire organization. This still would not enable a generalization across the entire company because of the cultural differences between different corporate entities.
Implications for Future Research

The methods used in this study provide a good template for future research. Any organization within the Motor Company could find value within a study like this. An interesting avenue of investigation would be to extend this study across multiple sub-organizations within the company. Future evaluations of engagement with the company values could be compared against the benchmark provided by this study. This would enable the identification of areas of weakness and could be a useful tool in the development of cultural improvement plans.

This research is focused on a narrow topic within the broader context of company culture. It provides insights into leadership behaviors that are relevant to understanding the dynamic environment that currently exists in the product development organization that was studied. It provides a mirror for those looking at changing leadership behaviors. It also gives the reader anecdotal evidence that directly relates to both employees and their supervisors. These insights can aid in the prediction and implementation of change for the future.
References


