

## Your Hidden "Owner's Manual": A Whole Brain® Approach to Values

### CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- > Personal values are the often hidden force behind the decisions we make. They frequently serve as our primary motivators and sources of inspiration, yet most people aren't aware of their most important personal values.
- > As we work with others, it is important to differentiate between an individual's preferences and their values. Since both are of equal importance and impact, both need to be understood.
- > Along with understanding your preferences, a useful exercise to help you better understand your own personal values is a values clarification process.

### Thinking Preferences and the Whole Brain Model as They Relate to Values

Values and thinking preferences are not the same thing, but both are rooted in our brain and develop over the course of our lives. As you reflect on your values while you read this chapter, it will be useful for you to consider your thinking preferences too.

Each quadrant of the Whole Brain Model describes thinking preference clusters that we each have access to, with implications for how we might define the importance of values:

**The A Quadrant:** The Analyzer. Logical thinking, analysis of facts, numbers processing. May think of values as emerging logically from one's upbringing and experience, which factor into decisions when appropriate.

**The B Quadrant:** The Organizer. Planning approaches, organizing facts, detailed review. May consider values as a personal guidebook, so to speak, with rules that should be held in high regard and consistently honored.

**The C Quadrant:** The Personalizer. Interpersonal, intuitive, expressive. Often consider values to be a core part of their emotional fabric and an important part of the emotional and social context that we live in.

**The D Quadrant:** The Strategizer. Imaginative, big-picture thinking, conceptualizing. May regard values somewhat more philosophically, with an interest in the ideas they may represent and how those intersect with other aspects of their intellectual lives.

Your preferences make up your your personal thinking system, comprised of your four different thinking "selves." All of these four thinking selves are available to you, yet if you're like most of us, you probably prefer some of these selves over others. Like a sports team, you have some of the selves in play more frequently, while others sit on the bench. (For more background on thinking preferences, how your preferences develop and change, and the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument® [HBDI®] assessment, which profiles a person's thinking preferences across the four quadrants of the Whole Brain Model, please see Chapters 1-4, or visit [www.wholebrainbusinessbook.com](http://www.wholebrainbusinessbook.com))

Your values develop much like your preferences over the course of your life, and they're rooted in the brain in memory. As such, they may be less obvious to you or others than thinking preferences, yet they will show up as an unconscious compass when you encounter different challenges and situations, and when you need to make a decision.

"I will never be late for an appointment—ever!"

I was surprised at Don's emphatic declaration as we discussed the upcoming client meeting. Although I had just met him, the behavioral clues I'd noticed were in tight alignment with his HBDI Profile: pure business, analytical, and very numbers driven, combined with long-term, strategic, big picture orientation and a nice laid-back style with his clients. His least preferred was the detailed B quadrant, and we had discussed how this sometimes got in the

way of his ability to be as focused as he needed to be in his consulting work. When I asked why arriving on time for appointments was so important, he quickly replied, “It’s about respect. Respect for people. I grew up in a family where being late meant you were disrespectful—of others, of their time. It’s a core personal value for me, and I pride myself on it!”

As Don’s story illustrates, preferences and values are two different things. At first glance, Don’s behavior could have appeared to be in contradiction with his preferences. In fact, although different, values represent another layer of who we are, what is most important to us, and how we show up, one that often stems from a long-held belief established early in life. As you apply Whole Brain Thinking, keep in mind that values can also help explain some of the behaviors you experience that may seem out of alignment with your own perspective or who you perceive another person to be.

Manny Elkind,<sup>1</sup> President and Owner, Mindtech, Inc., and a long-time friend, colleague, and HBDI Practitioner, focuses on values-based leadership and its connection to our thinking preferences. Here’s how he describes values:

A young couple was having difficulty in their relationship. When one of them was sick, that person would accuse the other of not loving him or her and not caring. So I asked the wife: “What does your husband need to do or say to you that would get you to believe that he cares for you and loves you?”

She said he should bring her the food she needs, take care of the house responsibilities, and keep her company. When I asked the husband what the wife should do, he said she should bring him food, take care of the house responsibilities, and leave him quietly by himself.

As a result of his own preferred way of being treated, when she was sick, he was lovingly staying away from his wife, which made her think that he didn’t love her. When he was sick, she was often in the room talking to him, which made him think she didn’t love him because she wouldn’t give him the quiet space he needed. In effect, they each had different sets of criteria or evidence that determined when love is present.

This is very common and happens with other values like integrity and respect as well. Think of how often you or others behave in ways you think are respectful, yet other people take it as being disrespectful or insulting. For example, have you ever paid someone a compliment and they interpreted it as an insult of some sort?

Thinking style diversity and values diversity can be perceived as sources of conflict. But it’s often not the differences in that diversity that cause conflict—it’s the negative beliefs and attitudes about the differences. Those differences are often complementary and when synthesized, can be sources of creative insight. We each have different

values that represent our unique brain structures, genetics, and life experiences. It's as if we code our human experience and deepest desires in different ways and call them values. But when you look at what's underneath, the evidence for those values, there's common ground that binds us together as human beings. When people in an organization discover what that common ground is, they can agree: "This is what we want the work environment to be. This is how we want to operate with each other, because if we do that, we have the greatest opportunity of getting our own most important values satisfied."

Manny defines personal values as "standards or principles that describe what is most worthwhile to you, personally." They have a major influence on your thinking, feelings, behaviors, and the results you get. As mentioned earlier, I have always believed that our values are embedded deep in our brains and memory, as we have developed them over the course of our lives. Years ago I had a conversation with my 13-year-old grandson who had met with Manny and discussed and diagnosed his values with him. When I asked him what his number one value was, he immediately replied "Freedom—freedom to pursue my ideas and ideals." I remember thinking at the time that perhaps this was a 13-year-old's view of the world, and that this value might change. Well, it has not. Fifteen years later he's pursued a career in the start-up community, perceiving the cultures of start-ups to be reaffirming of his need for freedom. And if, after joining a company, he discovers the culture is not in alignment with his sense of purpose, he immediately starts looking for a job elsewhere. His values have served as a guidepost as he has made career decisions along that entrepreneurial path.

Once you understand your mental preferences, an understanding of your personal values can provide important insight and help explain why you may be different from some people who have similar thinking preferences to yours, especially in terms of what motivates you at an unconscious level.

What are your personal values? It may not be something you think about very often, but values are often our prime motivator and source of inspiration. The process of discovering what you value most can help you develop a deeper understanding of what it takes for you to be inspired. That, in turn, can lead to new ideas about how you can motivate and inspire others as well.

But like the couple in Manny's story, it's not just about understanding values that are different from yours. It may be that you and another person have different ideas about what the same values "look like." Paired with an understanding of values, Whole Brain Thinking gives you the flexibility to shift your thinking so you can truly understand the perspectives of others first and, ultimately, find common ground.

In business, our personal values also greatly influence our decision-making process. Since, as I believe, our values are held in memory, we tend to rely on our values when deciding what direction to take, and this often happens at an unconscious level if we have not taken the time to clarify our personal values. For example, let's say you're faced with a decision at work that might favor you but, in the process, could also negatively impact others: are you more interested in preserving your career potential or in keeping others from being negatively affected?

### George's Dilemma

A manager's values represent an important dimension of their style. Thinking primarily about values in the context of business brings to mind the strong hierarchical nature of an individual's value system.

Let's look at George, a senior manager who is in the finance function, as an example. A CPA with an MBA, George works for a big Fortune 500 company. He got his B.A. from Harvard and his MBA from Wharton. He is married and has two children.

George is a senior member of the finance team and he reports directly to the CFO. He is called into the boss's office one day and learns that he is being considered for an important overseas post: manager of the Singapore office, a major foreign assignment. This is a general operations position, out of the finance function. He would have legal, finance, sales, marketing, and human resource managers reporting to him.

His two children are in high school. One is a senior and the other a sophomore, and they are both looking forward to college. The senior has already chosen his university, while the sophomore is actively researching different schools. George's wife is very active in community affairs and heads the docent program at the local art museum. She is in the last semester of her Master of Fine Arts degree and has plans to open an art gallery in town with a friend.

As he hears his boss describe this new job opportunity, George's mind begins to diagnose and categorize the consequences of such a promotion. The career implications are enormous. He would be moving into a highly-visible general management position, which could lead to candidacy for the London

"Leaders have the greatest responsibility. Without the compass of absolute values, what instrument do they have to guide others?"

—Keshavan Nair

office or perhaps vice presidency of the international division. Considering the globalization of the company, that could lead to strong candidacy for a future CEO opening. Wow!

Then his mind flashes to his wife and family. This move would upset Mary. She would have to give up a ten-year involvement with the museum, her gallery dream, and maybe her MFA degree, step away from all her friends, and give up the house they just renovated. Could she do that?

And, oh my God, the kids! John would have to leave home anyway, and with a little adjustment he could stay with Uncle Bill until college starts. But Peter is only a sophomore. He would have to come to Singapore and go to private school. Would he survive the culture change?

In the midst of these thoughts, it suddenly dawns on George that, with this move, he would be leaving his lifetime career function. He has spent over 20 years climbing the career ladder in the finance function and has established credentials, not only within the company, but also within the CPA fraternity. All his key relationships have been developed in the field of finance. To make such a move would require him to distance himself from and possibly even sever the career ties that he has built up throughout his career. Could he do that?

His 25th reunion at Harvard is six months away, and he is on the reunion committee. As a matter of fact, he has just completed his personal write-up for the reunion book, in which, ironically, he extols the virtues of sticking to one's career path in a world where change is so omnipresent.

As these personal issues flash across his mind, he is hearing his boss say that there will be an immediate 10 percent salary increase plus an overseas supplement of 7 percent, a housing allowance of 25 percent, and the use of a company Mercedes. What to do? George is so excited he has trouble adding up the benefits. This is too good to be true. He never even imagined that such a job would open up for him.

His mind flips back and forth between the issues: Peter, Mary, Harvard, the value of his house, the security of his function, his lifetime career path, the culture change. What would happen if he didn't succeed? Would they be stranded in Singapore? Suppose John flunked out of college or got into trouble? What about Peter? Were the money and opportunity worth the risks?

He hears the boss saying, "I hate to lose you in the finance function, but this is a job that needs your experience, and the CEO is high on you as the prime candidate. We know you have a lot of issues to resolve to undertake such an assignment, but time is of the essence, and we'd like you to make a decision in two weeks. While we want you to accept this job, George, we are aware that

"New occasions  
teach new duties."

— James Russell Lowell

there may be good reasons why you choose not to. Your present job is secure. You're going to have to figure out what's important to you. Now, why don't you just take the afternoon off and talk this over with your family? And call me if you have any questions. I know you well enough to know that you will make the right decision."

As George considered this position, his values suddenly became important: what did he care about most? Since his values are located in his memory, some of them would be very deep and not often at the forefront of his thinking. He was already beginning to realize that he hadn't really known what they were and what was most important until now that they were being tested. For example, as George considered leaving, he realized his commitment to his local church was third or fourth in his hierarchy of values—he hadn't even thought of that in his earlier consideration. As he tried ranking them in his mind, so many questions came to the surface: Was Mary's gallery career down to fifth place and her museum job at eighth? A bunch of things like his commitment to recruit for Wharton dropped way down the list. What was number one? Was it the exciting job? The money? The new career path? Was it Mary? Was it Peter? He kept revising the list, and the more he thought, the more new items of importance injected themselves into his already crowded hierarchy of values. Subconsciously George was asking himself what was really important. How do I make a decision? Who am I and what do I stand for? What are my values? What is really important to me?

"The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them; that's the essence of inhumanity."

—George Bernard Shaw

### A Value Clarification Exercise

The value clarification exercise that George found helpful in thinking through his career decision can be found on the following pages.

1.	George, consider first what is most important in life for you. Stop here and note down five or six items. <i>wife, home, church, children, neighbors, wife's gallery, finance function, community, children's schooling, country, personal career</i>
2a.	Now, George, arrange your items of importance in a ranked list. It can be helpful to write each one on a Post-It® Note so you can move them around as you rank.  1. <i>Wife</i> 2. <i>Children</i> 3. <i>Home</i> 4. <i>Children's schooling</i> 5. <i>Wife's gallery</i> 6. <i>Finance function</i> 7. <i>Church</i> 8. <i>Country</i> 9. <i>Personal career</i> 10. <i>Neighbors</i> 11. <i>Community</i>
2b.	Stop for a minute and review your ranked list. Does it check out? If not, rearrange as necessary. <i>No! here is my revised list:</i>  1. <i>Wife</i> 2. <i>Children</i> 3. <i>Children's schooling</i> 4. <i>Home</i> 5. <i>Wife's gallery</i> 6. <i>Finance function</i> 7. <i>Church</i> 8. <i>Country</i> 9. <i>Personal career</i> 10. <i>Neighbors</i> 11. <i>Community</i>
3.	Now select the most important item on your list and explore in some depth why this item is number 1. Write down five or six reasons why you have put this item in first place. Again, stop and give this request a few minutes' thought. <i>Why my wife is number 1 on my list. Mary is number 1 because:</i>  <i>She is my life partner.</i> <i>She helped put me through graduate school.</i> <i>She is the mother of my children.</i> <i>She is really the CEO of the family.</i> <i>She is my connection to my church and community.</i>

FIGURE 27-1 Values clarification exercise (part 1)



- Mary is the love of my life and an equal partner in my non-work life. I would be lost without her.

- My children, John and Peter, could share first place with my wife. My children are my future. Their school situations are of special concern.*

The common theme is clearly my wife and children—my family—and having said that, I must include the number-1 issues involving wife and children. These are:

*My words say it all. My decision is made, and I am comfortable with my choice. I believe my family will support my decision.*

**FIGURE 27-2** Values clarification exercise (part 2)

Now that you've seen an example of the process, it's your turn. Answer the questions below to clarify your own values. Remember, values can have both personal and professional contexts.

### Put It to Work:

Manny Elkind defines values as *standards, principles, feelings, or inner states that guide our behavior*. His examples include:

- Efficiency – This value is more concrete and measurable.
- Accomplishment – This can also be concrete. In addition, many aspects can be qualitative or somewhat abstract, like improved morale.
- Feeling good – Any kind of feeling is abstract.
- Inner peace – This is an inner state and very abstract.

Values can also be phrases like “making a difference” or “doing the best I can.”

**1. Identifying what's important:** Think back to an important accomplishment, whether personal or professional, that you achieved sometime during the last few years. Specifically, think about the best moments of that accomplishment for you. Then respond to the following questions:

- What is most important about that accomplishment to you personally? Write down your response, ideally using only one word if possible.
- What *else* is important to you personally about that accomplishment? Write down your response.
- Finally, respond to that last question three more times so that you have a list of five responses. Just before you answer this same question each time, step back into that experience as if you are really there again, and respond.

If time allows, identify other deeply satisfying experiences, and repeat the process to complete your list.

**2. Ranking what's important:**

- Now arrange your items of importance in a ranked list. It can be helpful to write each one on a sticky note so that you can move them around as you rank.

- As you rank them, compare them against each other by asking yourself: if I could only pick one of these two, which one would I say is really most indicative of me?
  - Stop for a minute and review your ranked list. Does it check out? If not, rearrange as necessary and capture the revised list.
- 3. Understanding why number 1 is most important to you:** Now select the most important item on your list and explore in some depth why this item is number 1. Write down five or six reasons why you have put this item in first place. Again, stop and give this request a few minutes' thought.
  - 4. Understanding the reason for your choice:** Now select the top supporting reason you have written down in step 3 and explore why this is the most important supporting reason for your choice. Note down a few additional reasons why you selected this item as the most important reason. (Take your time. If this is the first time you have explored your values, what you discover could be an important learning experience for you.)
  - 5. Taking it further down the list:** Consider repeating steps 2-4 on the basis of the second-most important item on your values list.
  - 6. Finding the common theme:** Go back and take a look at your answers. Review your set of number 1 and number 2 items and the supporting reasons for their selection. Does a common theme emerge? When you feel ready, write a short statement using these references to describe your most important values. Take a few minutes to think this through and write it down. If the first try doesn't satisfy you, try again until it feels right.
  - 7. Reflecting on what you value:** Find a favorite place where you will feel comfortable reading your statement out loud to yourself several times. How does it sound? How do you feel about what you have written and said? Think about it. Do these final words come close to expressing what is most important in your life? If they do, you are fortunate. You have come to an important understanding of yourself.

I offer this exercise to you with my thanks and acknowledgement to Manny Elkind as a take-away tool that you can use to clarify your own values or give it to family or friends. It works well with couples, families, or teams.

## The Interrelationship of Values and Thinking Preferences

As you explore your values, now also consider how they interrelate with your thinking preferences. In George's case, his strong A and B quadrant preferences (see Figure 27-3) might have led others in his family or his colleagues to think that his career would weigh more heavily in his decision-making process than his wife and children. As you can see from the above, the opposite was true. George's preferences for quantitative, logical, and analytical thinking, combined with his preferences for structure and detail, were more obvious to his colleagues than the deeper family-related values that strongly influenced his decision-making process. In fact, both were important and also complementary.

As he looked at the decision he faced, he relied on his understanding of each to find his way to the best decision. George used his natural logic to do the analysis of his values and enjoyed having a process he could use to help make this decision. Consider how your thinking preferences and values have affected your most important decisions. Have you favored one over the other? How did that impact how you felt about the outcome? Ideally, you want to consider both, especially for major life decisions.

As you look for ways to improve your effectiveness in working with others, remember that an understanding of values may help explain differences in perspective that may provide further context, in addition to thinking preferences.

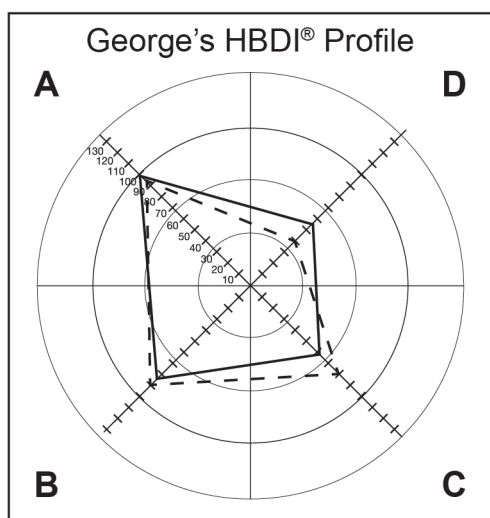


FIGURE 27-3 George's HBDI® profile

Lack of alignment between a situation, thinking preference, and/or values can make collaboration and decision making a challenge and may represent an unarticulated obstacle to moving forward. As with thinking preferences, an openness and curiosity about another person’s values can provide the basis of a clarifying dialogue that can create meaningful context for making progress.

When you find yourself struggling with a personal decision that seems to have competing dynamics that “just don’t feel right,” take a moment to explore the thinking preferences and values associated with that decision. For most people, a company decision that is out of alignment with one’s personal values can be very unsettling and may even lead to a decision to leave the organization. In other situations, differences can be the basis for a greater breadth of understanding and a source of new thinking.

The first essential step is to understand your core values, then to articulate what they really mean to you. In Chapter 15, I described situations where company values were better clarified using the HBDI pro-forma profile. This exercise provides needed clarity by showing the “mentality” of the language used. Company value statements are very often created by committee and then reduced down to a few very general words (innovation, trust, et al) that are ultimately defined quite differently by each individual in the organization due to their differences in thinking preferences. For example, for a person with strong A-quadrant preferences, trust would mean something like: “To really trust someone, I need to know I am dealing with a person who ‘knows their stuff’ and has the right expertise.” A strong B-quadrant preference might define it this way: “Reliability and coming through as planned are essential for me to feel trust.” For a person with strong C-quadrant preferences, it would be more like: “I need to feel good about the person, to sense that they are authentic and that they value and understand my point of view.” While the strong D-quadrant preference might say: “In order to trust someone, I need to have the freedom to be myself and feel that my uniqueness adds value.”

When you have clearly defined and very specifically described, behaviorally, what you mean by your company values, then everyone in the organization can understand the desired intention, respond accordingly, and be held accountable, irrespective of individual preferences. Without such specificity, values too often will only receive lip service, which, as described in Chapter 15, will ultimately lead to distrust, disillusionment, and disengagement.

At our company, we have adopted and clarified our values, which are distributed and displayed across the four-quadrant Whole Brain Model. The first is to “Eat our own cooking: endeavor to apply a Whole Brain approach in all that we do.” By providing very specific behavioral examples, these values are clearly understood by all.

## SO WHAT?

---

- > Each person has a hierarchy of values developed during their life experience located primarily in long-term memory.
- > An understanding of mental diversity and values diversity, when synthesized, can be a source of creative insight rather than a source of conflict. While it may appear that our thinking preferences and values are somewhat different or sending mixed signals, once we understand them, we can use those differences to our advantage.
- > Whole Brain Thinking allows us the thinking flexibility to understand how values inspire us and how we can inspire others based on their values.
- > It is easier to make critical decisions more wisely after you have assessed your personal values, tested them against a specific decision, and then rank-ordered them on the basis of real-time priority.
- > Companies that clearly articulate their values will better enable all in the organization to understand and align with them, irrespective of their thinking preferences.

## Notes

1. M. Elkind, Mindtech, Inc., <http://www.mindtech3.com/home/home.html>.