Value Based Organizations

What are their main characteristics and values?
How can we sustain the model?

Compiled by Tools for Citizens Core and Co-Creators Teams June 2018

Preface:

This is not a manifesto. What we are presenting here is not the result of a movement coming together and deliberating on their shared values and principles. It is the attempt to grasp a phenomenon that we experience and care about and that we believe may be the seed of a powerful new social reality. The basic quality of what we call "Value Based Organizations" is that they are rooted in principles rather than rigid structures and that the process of organizing around these principles presents a model for positive transformation on the individual, community, and wider social level.

The seven aspects described here were collected in the context of developing civil society organizations and initiatives in Greece. The texture of the emerging material, however, rings true with experiences far beyond this context. We see pioneers in virtually every corner of the world exploring value based models of organizing and with it gaining consciousness that they are part of a transformation of a global scale. It is our aspiration to support this consciousness and to connect the dots of this incipient movement to jointly create a humane, just, and sustainable future.

In each of the following descriptions of the seven aspects of value based organizations, there are several bullet points. Each of these bullet point descriptions is a quote from a civil society actor. The many viewpoints that were collected along the co-creation process of tools with civil society actors in Greece provide a colorful mosaic of what it means to be a value based organization in this new social reality.

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1. Anthropocentric* Stance: Freedom to Create Your Life

The value based model is rooted in the idea of universal freedom - the autonomy and individual right of each person to develop their life according to their needs and desires.

- *"This model is based on freedom - something that existed in Ancient Greece and was abolished with Christianity."*

- *"There was the Aesthetics of Existence – each person saw their life as a work of art, which could be developed and shaped according to each individual's desire. It means a mode of freedom and the personal and cultural quest of each organization to find its own way and identity."*

- *"Autonomy, the ability to self-define, means to have the creativity to choose your own life and design your own actions."*

- *"This system is anthropocentric, meaning that humans have the right to existence and being-ness."*

- *"The basic value is Anthropos, but it also includes the stories and journeys of each human, and what each of us carries."*

* The term "Antropocentric" has a special meaning in the Greek philosophical context – this is not a statement about humans being the crown of creation.

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2. Social System Dynamics: Focus on Human Relations

A key dimension for understanding and developing value based organizations is the dynamic web of social relationships. The living systems perspective implies that each group, each organization, each community, and each society carries the insights and resources for positive development within them. Value based organizations are carried by a deep trust and confidence in human relationships. In focusing on adaptive relations within communities, rather than rigid structures, they are process driven and fluid, sometimes seeming to be local movements rather than classical organizations.

- *"Mechanistic versus living systems approach."*

- *"There is an interconnected web of relationships with all of life, and we are interdependent on each other"*

- *"It's about human relationships and focusing on human relationships."*

- *"A system of relationships is the only thing that can identify its challenges, create its solutions, and see where change can be made."*

3. Transformation: Seeds of a New World

The purpose of value based organizations arises from a transformative moment of crisis. The pioneers of these models thrive on the loving embrace of the unknown. Their mission often relates to the exploration of positive new practices and ideas, rather than a fight against the old established system. They don't expect the system to fix things and they don't want to be fixed by the system. Instead of quantitative metrics and numbers as goals and scaling up strategies, they focus on creating a sustainable process and qualitative outcome measures in frameworks of evaluative learning.

- *"There is potential in crisis if we can embrace this crisis."*

- *"This is a Toolbox to be used in times of flux, in times of movement, when we are transitioning between a known state and an unknown state. It can help us to acknowledge and navigate that transition."*

- *"Support collaboration and action in a time of not-knowing."*

- *"Two loop theory of change: We are not fighting the old, we are creating the new - activism based on exploring and pioneering the new. Assumption: the current situation is not working!"*

- *"Change always happens at the edge or on the periphery, when two systems meet."*

- *"At its base, I think that all this has to do with the love of the unknown. I think that the unknown brings out fear – to lean into a process where the goal is not super clear—this brings out fear. But here we do not look for specific solutions based on what other people are doing. This is not what we are here to do. The cause has become disconnected from the result. Opening up a process to find completely new, innovative solutions."*

- *"Activism, other than reacting to the old system, should also have a creative element, and this is what we are doing here: trying to create the new."*

- *"We go from focusing on the result to focusing on the process, and from quantity to quality. In this new system, not everything is measured through numbers. There are many tools with which you can measure your impact in more qualitative terms, and that also respect the beneficiaries."*

- *"This means having a balance between what is produced (output) that there is productivity and healthy competition/fair play, so we are more effective and better in quality."*

4. Dual Purpose: Connecting Self-Development & Social Development

Value based organizations are both platforms for social development and frameworks for self-development. They are built on the awareness that change begins within us and that our ability to engage in internal development enables us to hold processes in the world around us. They incorporate practices of action and reflection that explore the overlap of the individual and the collective level.

- *"Create a space for people to have conversations and understand how they need to change."*

- *"Connecting self-development and social development."*

- *"The dynamic between the individual and the collective and how each enriches the other."*

- *"The dance between the individual and the collective - make the connection between your inner purpose and the outer purpose (first change yourself)."*

- *"It's how much I hold outside of myself in relation to how much I can hold inside myself."*

- *"The base is that the members of all these cooperatives are on an inner quest and can take out and offer all the abilities and skills they have. Respect who I am and what I can offer. How can you develop and find your skills and your desires and your role within the team, so that this is also efficient and effective?"*

- *"It's how can we include more knowledge (knowledge of who you are, where you are coming from, and what your story is; it's not just knowledge from experience)."*

- *"Connect the macro environment with the micro environment. Let's look at what the ideal model of civil society is and look at the miniature civil society in each organization."*

- *"I participate in a cooperative – this is also a training. You grow your circles, or you make them smaller so they grow again. All this is a living thing, you provide the base and then it moves on its own because it is alive."*

- *"The process of embracing the unknown needs a frame, on both an individual and collective level. It needs time and space. It needs a collective with the sense that no one is extra, or superfluous, and no one is left over. Each one brings something equal, as long as we find the way for that to emerge."*

5. Radical Participation: Self-organizing in a DIY Approach

The value based approach is inclusive and fosters self-organization on all levels. Everyone is able and invited to contribute according to their possibilities and the means at hand. In this process, individual and collective aims are not regarded as contradictory: Commitment and responsibility are fuelled by both a common purpose within the community and individual passions. Participation has a low threshold: Differences (paid and volunteer engagement, core and peripheral roles, leadership and followership) are not barriers to contribution and recognition. Passion and responsibility are the basic principles of organizing.

- *"Everyone has knowledge that can be contributed."*
- *"Resources: there is already enough, and we already know what we need to know: it's not about experts telling us how to do things."*
- *"Pragmatic: take what you can use."*
- *"Self-organize around a purpose."*
- *"Passion and responsibility (Open Space principles)."*
- *"Participation, taking responsibility, role play."*
- *"If you are part of it, your voice should be heard - participating is a natural human capacity."*
- *"The participants in the actions are participants in the decision-making process."*
- *"We do not make the distinction between paid and unpaid work. People who participate. This is who we focus on: Employee participation includes those who work, paid or unpaid, whoever contributes in whatever way and from whichever position."*

6. Bottom Up Dynamics: Decentralization of Power

Value based organizations explore models of decision-making, communication, and workflow that minimize power imbalances. Their basic mode of deliberation is bottom up. Leadership roles are shared, task-based, and dynamic. Internal and external stakeholder interactions – including those with funders — are designed to be eye to eye to foster relationships, co-shaping and co-creation.

- *"If we look at leadership from the perspective of a role, for me it is a role like all the others. It evolves. Today someone will play this role. Tomorrow another person. The whole will safeguard this process."*
- *"Decentralization of power."*
- *"Political and financial rights are distributed to the bottom. For example, there are no big salary differences."*
- *"Small initiatives out there trying to change and improve - civil society coming from the bottom up."*
- *"Participation of employees in the decisions of an organization – collective decision-making."*
- *"The basic value of democracy in the political aspect."*
- *"Co-shaping, co-creation – this means that there is no minority or majority. By co-creating something, everyone becomes a participant of whatever decision, and therefore takes the responsibility that fits to them. The process of co-creation is very important. The result will bring ownership from all."*
- *"As much as we need the funders, they also need us. There are ways to break this power dynamic from one to the other."*
- *"Disentanglement from funders – developing new activities, products, to reach financial independence and create jobs."*

7. Collaboration: Moving Towards Collective Consciousness

The value based stance recognizes the potential and necessity of collaboration. In a system context that fosters competition and frames diversity as a problem, value based organizations strive to be rooted in solidarity and respect. They explore collective impact strategies and are open for learning opportunities in wider (trans-local) networks.

- *"Support to collaborate, so that we can act in times when we don't know how."*

- *"Collectively we are more intelligent."*

- *"Working with plurality, diversity, and even polarization."*

- *"Coexistence: I learn to respect the different, I learn to listen, I learn to leave out of my ego as to explore the 'Other.' In order for that to happen, I need to host myself."*

- *"Moving from competing against each other to competing alongside each other."*

- *"One of the most basic elements is about moving from competing against each other to competing alongside each other – how we coexist, and how we work with the individual and the collective."*

- *"Collective solidarity."*

- *"Local networks/communities and trans-local exchange-learning."*

8. Forward: What does it take?

It is evident that the value based model requires new ways of organizing and relating to one another and the world around us. It demands that we learn new skills of collaboration, develop new roles and practices of leadership, and share new frameworks of sense making. Essentially, it requires new structural arrangements, so that best practices can be pioneered and exchanged. Most importantly though, it demands trust in the process of transformation and an openness to the journey of self-development. Not everyone is ready or willing to go on this journey. Without being exclusive, value based organizations need to gather and involve people that share a passion and courage on their quest for deep transformation. From these communal platforms, they can then connect to other actors and reach out to effect impact in their wider social context.

- *"To move forward in this way requires training in this model."*

- *"It needs leadership skills."*

- *"Models/concepts as frameworks for sense-making in order to practice."*

- *"Different ways of organizing (organizational patterns)."*

- *"How do you ensure the participation of those who even in a supportive environment can find it difficult to share what they have?"*

- *"In an ideal world, the 'all together' affects us all. But we do not live in an ideal world. So, some will choose to not belong to a cooperative: they will choose another way. We need to keep in mind that some will stay, and some will leave."*