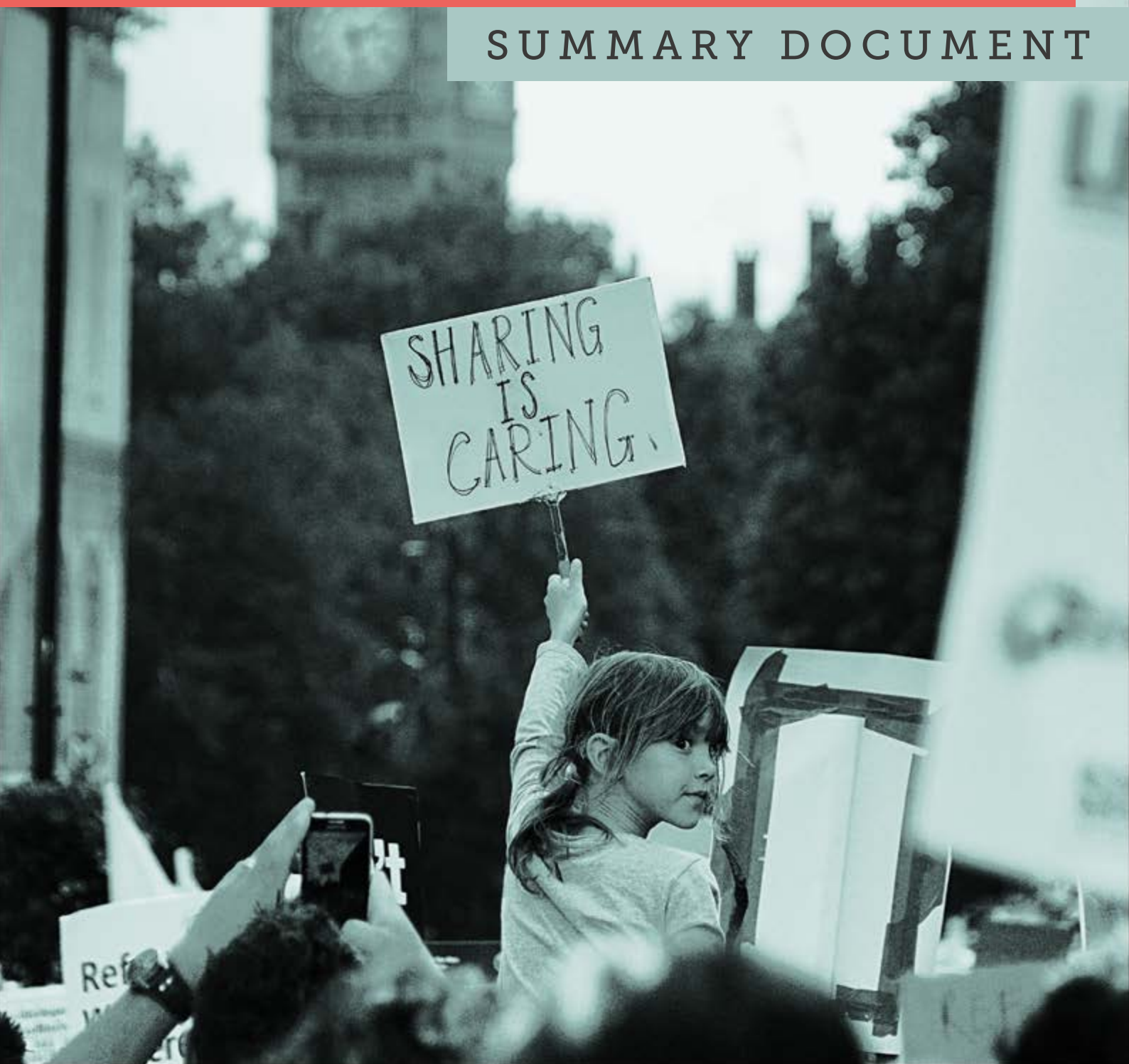


PERCEPTIONS MATTER

The Common Cause UK Values Survey

SUMMARY DOCUMENT



ABOUT COMMON CAUSE FOUNDATION

We are a not-for-profit organisation catalysing action on the values that underpin positive social and environmental change. We act as thinkers, coaches, communicators, learners, participants, convenors and doers.

WWF-UK provided initial funding to set up Common Cause Foundation as an independent organisation in 2015. The Foundation emerged from a long-standing project to understand values in order to inspire action on environmental and social causes. We have a proven track record in providing tools and solutions to help engage values to inspire positive social and environmental change.

To see the full report, head to:

www.commoncausefoundation.org

info@commoncausefoundation.org

SUMMARY

The far-reaching challenges currently confronting UK society – from climate change and biodiversity loss to inequality and poverty – can seem insurmountable. Our political and social systems seem incapable of taking the leadership decisions necessary to bring about transformational change.

While the reasons for this are myriad, we believe that engaging our common values is critical to help create an alternative, more sustainable path.

Common Cause Foundation contacted a thousand people across Britain and asked them what they valued in life. We looked at groups of compassionate values like ‘helpfulness’, ‘equality’ and ‘protection of nature’ and selfish values such as ‘wealth’, ‘public image’ and ‘success’. Our results are striking:

- 74% of respondents place greater importance on compassionate values than selfish values. We find this to be the case irrespective of age, gender, region, or political persuasion. We can be confident that this result doesn't arise from respondents seeking to cast themselves in a better light by downplaying the importance they attach to selfish values. We were able to test for such bias.
- 77% of respondents believe that their fellow citizens hold selfish values to be more important, and compassionate values to be less important, than is actually the case.
- People who hold this inaccurate belief about *other people's* values feel significantly less positive about getting involved – joining meetings, voting, volunteering. These people also report greater social alienation. They report feeling less responsible for their communities, and they are less likely to feel that they fit in with wider society – relative to citizens who hold more accurate perceptions of a typical British person's values.

These results lead us to pose a crucially important question: *Why is it that such a large majority of people believe their fellow citizens hold selfish values to be more important, and compassionate values to be less important, than is actually the case?*

One explanation is that people are repeatedly told by institutions (for example, the media, politicians, and even schools and universities) that most other people are out for themselves. The impression conveyed is that most people are more concerned about acquiring stuff, making the money to acquire stuff, cultivating their public image, and becoming influential than is actually the case.

Our survey supports this explanation. We asked people what values they felt were encouraged by some key types of institution – arts and culture, schools and universities, the media, government and business. Worryingly, people believe that each of these institutions discourage compassionate values, and encourage selfish values, relative to the importance that they attach to these values themselves. For example, people believe that schools and universities encourage values of wealth, image and ambition more than people themselves hold these values to be important. The more strongly people believe that these key types of institution encourage these selfish values, the more strongly they believe that these values also characterise a typical fellow citizen.

The good news is that this situation can be changed. Such change could be key to building public concern about today's social and environmental challenges, fostering widespread public engagement on these challenges, and reducing people's feelings of apathy and alienation.

There are many ways in which institutions can strengthen compassionate values in society, through their engagement with their members and the public. Values are implicit in the policies and practices that an institution adopts; in the ways that

employees are managed and decisions reached; and in the physical environment provided for members of staff, customers or visitors. These areas of activity can be developed in ways that not only activate those compassionate values, but strengthen them for the long term, too.

In this report we highlight three things that organisations and individuals can do immediately:

- **Promote compassionate values through role models**
- **Convey a more accurate perception of others' values**
- **Challenge assumptions about the values that most people hold to be important**

Promoting compassionate values through role models. Role models play an important part in everyone's lives. People may be in direct personal contact with important role models – their teachers or managers, for example. But role models are also known indirectly – as leaders in government, business leaders, people portrayed in advertisements, and celebrities promoted by the media. People are sensitive to the values held by those they respect – and research finds that the values conveyed by respected figures influence the values of others. Those in positions of influence should examine the values that they demonstrate through the way they conduct their work. Better still, they can foster public debate about values by speaking openly about the compassionate values that motivate them. Members of staff in organisations that help to elevate people to the position of role models (the media or advertising agencies, for example) play a very important role in promoting particular values in UK society. These members of staff should ask questions of one another: Does our influence bring responsibilities? If so, how do we want, collectively, to respond to these? What are the values projected by the people whose public profile we help to create and sustain? Are these values that are helpful to society?

Conveying a more accurate perception of others' values. Simply conveying accurate information about the values of others will help to correct widespread misconceptions. Value surveys can help here. They are easy to run and analyse, and the results generate public interest. Such surveys should become a standard tool used by businesses (engaging their customers or employees), educational establishments (surveying students, pupils or members of staff), media organisations (through online resources), museums (supporting visitors in exploring their own values and those of typical fellow citizens), or civil society organisations (surveying their supporters or people concerned about a particular cause).

Challenging assumptions about the values that most people hold to be important. Any organisation makes assumptions about what motivates its employees, customers, pupils, students, voters, viewers, readers, listeners or visitors. A university admissions department, for example, may assume that most prospective students are primarily motivated by pursuing highly-paid jobs. Such assumptions affect the experience that people have in interacting with the organisation, and the values that these interactions encourage. Organisations often assume that people are best motivated by appeals to their financial interests, cultivation of their public image, or their desire for power and influence. This is often not the case. Moreover, working on this assumption will tend to lead organisations to weaken people's compassionate values and strengthen their selfish values. Members of staff in any organisation should ask of themselves: What are our assumptions about what matters most to the people with whom we interact? Are these accurate? What are the wider social implications of relying on these assumptions?

