

Charting a Course for Utah's Future: A Summary of the Wirthlin Worldwide Values Research for Envision Utah

Introduction

Before Envision Utah could work to help preserve Utah's high quality of life for future generations, it had to define what residents value about living in the area. One of the biggest challenges in regional planning is developing and then building consensus around a regional vision and plan. Competing personalities, agendas and politics quickly begin to erode direction and momentum. A regional plan that is built upon the personal values of the people living in the region removes much of the personality and politics and provides critical legitimacy to the direction and priorities of the vision. It's not about doing what this person or that group wants; its about doing what the people value most.

In 1997, Envision Utah hired Wirthlin Worldwide (now known as "Harris Interactive") to identify the shared, core values Utahns associate with quality of life and growth issues. Despite the widely differing opinions on issues that confront the state, residents share a set of core values that bring us together.

The following are examples of values: self-esteem, personal satisfaction, sense of accomplishment, security, care for others, personal freedom and control, concern for future generations, belonging, trust, sharing with others, pride, love, preserve the earth, etc.

Wirthlin sought to translate this "values landscape" into a successful action and communications strategy for Envision Utah in a way that addresses public concerns, generates consensus among differing groups, and instills support and confidence in public leaders and projects.

Utilizing a specialized research methodology called VISTA (Values in Strategy Assessment), Wirthlin conducted a series of in-depth interviews to find out what residents value about living in Utah. Special care was taken to ensure an equal demographic representation regarding ethnic background, age, religious affiliation, income level, and length of residency within the state. Careful survey work validated this research.

The research objectives were to guide the public, community leaders, and policy makers in making better informed and coordinated decisions to protect, promote and preserve the overall public good. Specifically, the research sought to answer:

- What makes Utah great?
- What issues/challenges threaten Utah?
- What are the expectations for Utah's future and how do Utahns view growth?
- What role can Utah companies, organizations, and state and local governments play in protecting, promoting, and preserving Utah's values amidst growth and change?
- What are public priorities regarding key issues and concerns and what is the public perception of how well the issues are being handled?
- What tradeoffs are people willing to make to help make things better or prevent them from getting worse?
- What is the vision of the ideal place to live in Utah?

Wirthlin staff conducted 83 two-hour interviews around Envision Utah’s 10-county area of focus. These one-on-one “laddering interviews” explore in depth the thought patterns and associations people hold about a particular subject. The interview results are then coded and “mapped” to show the connection between rational “attributes” and emotional “values.” This mapping shows the components and drivers of human decision-making.

Attributes, Consequences and Values

People operate on three basic levels in translating and prioritizing messages and choices about products, organizations, ideas, and even life:

- Attributes – tangible qualities of a quality life in Utah;
- Functional Consequences (rational) – the functional benefits of life in Utah, such as, “Utah is a good place to raise children.”
- Psycho-Social Consequences (emotional) – emotional experiences derived from the functional benefits; how does the person feel about a given attribute?
- Personal Values – stable, enduring personal goals.

Wirthlin Worldwide believes that successful communication operates at all levels, making the organization or issue position personally and positively relevant to its stakeholders or supporters. It accomplishes this by linking together: 1) unique and ownable attributes; 2) positive consequences of those attributes; and 3) relevant personal values and emotions.

The fundamental premise of the Wirthlin communications strategy is that one **persuades by reason and motivates by emotion**, tapping into the emotional component of personal values. A communication strategy, then, should provide the rational “reason why” but also create a link to personal values and emotions, which are ultimately what motivate people.

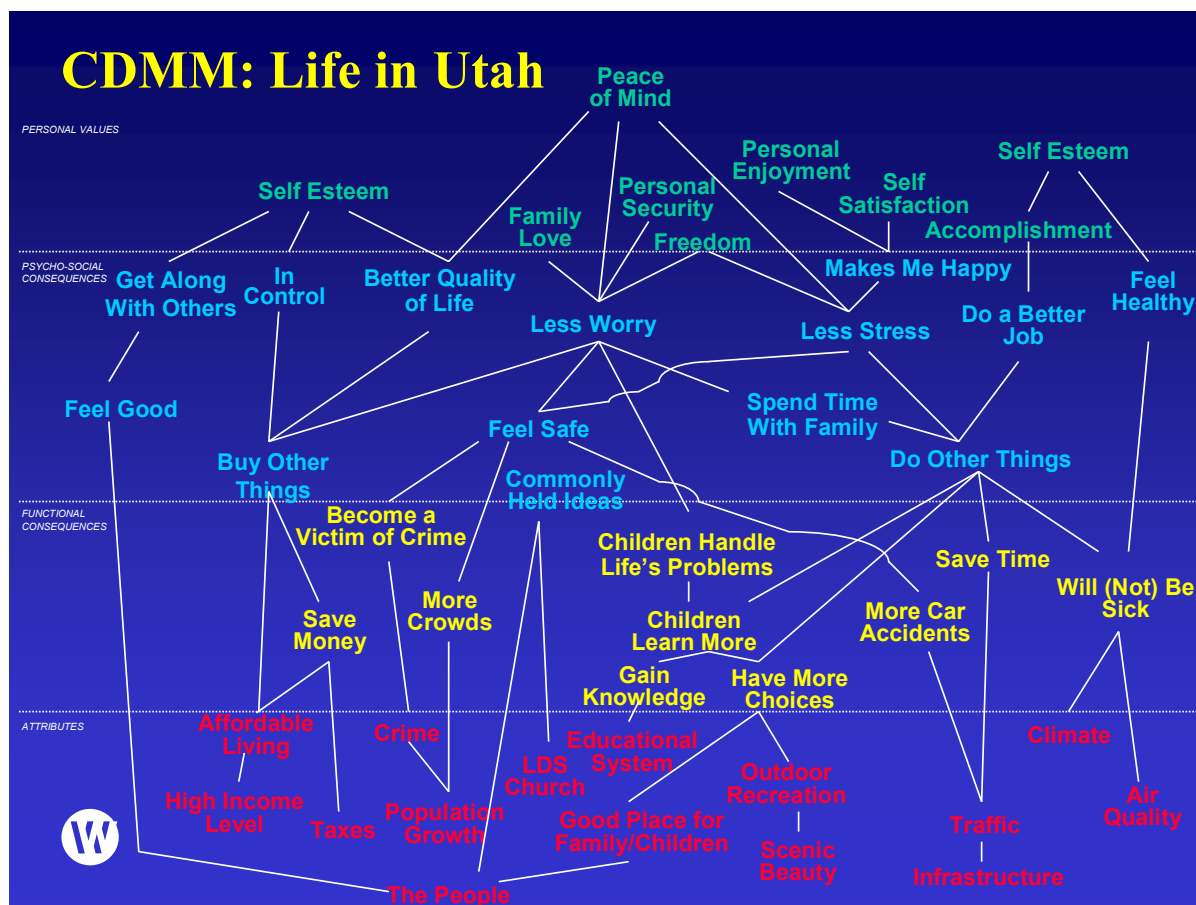
Our feeling about anything is influenced primarily by our personal values, and then, as we perceive, the psychological consequences and the functional consequences. This process is shown below in the “Decision-Making Structure.”

Stable, Enduring Personal Goals	Self
Emotional Experiences; Things that Are “About” People	Personal Values
Performance Features or Benefits of the Product; Things that Are “About” the Product	Psychological Consequences
Perceived Product Qualities; Things that Are “In” the Product	Functional Consequences
	Product Attributes
	Organization/Brand/Product

To better understand the Decision-Making Structure, we’ll use an example from the original “laddering interviews.” The original question begins at the bottom of the chart. As the person answers each question, the interviewer probes more deeply to eventually get to the person’s value behind her original answer. Laddering identifies each respondent’s pathways or evolutions of thought. Analysis of all ladders allowed Wirthlin to then map out the key decision-making structure.

Logic	Questions	Answers
Value	Why is it important for you to be more at ease?	“Security and Love as a Parent” (Family Love)
Personal Consequence	What is the benefit to you when you can raise your son in a safe environment?	“Less Worry – More at Ease” (Less Worry)
Functional Consequence	Why are the “friendlier people” important to you?	“Better Place to Raise Family” (Good Place for Family and Children)
Attribute	Why did you rate the quality of life in Utah so high?	“People Here Just Seem to be Friendlier” (The People)

This next chart shows the “laddering” process. The first responses people had are at the bottom (in the attributes section). Through probing questions, answers are provided that eventually work their way through functional consequences, personal consequences, and finally to the individual’s personal values.



As the chart shows, the key values of the residents of Utah are self-esteem, family love, peace of mind, personal security, freedom, personal enjoyment, self-satisfaction, and accomplishment. (Interviewers used content analysis to collapse responses into sets of similar phrases and meanings. In the laddering above, connections between elements were determined by the frequency that the lower level element led to the higher.)

There are both positive and negative ladders as shown in the example below:

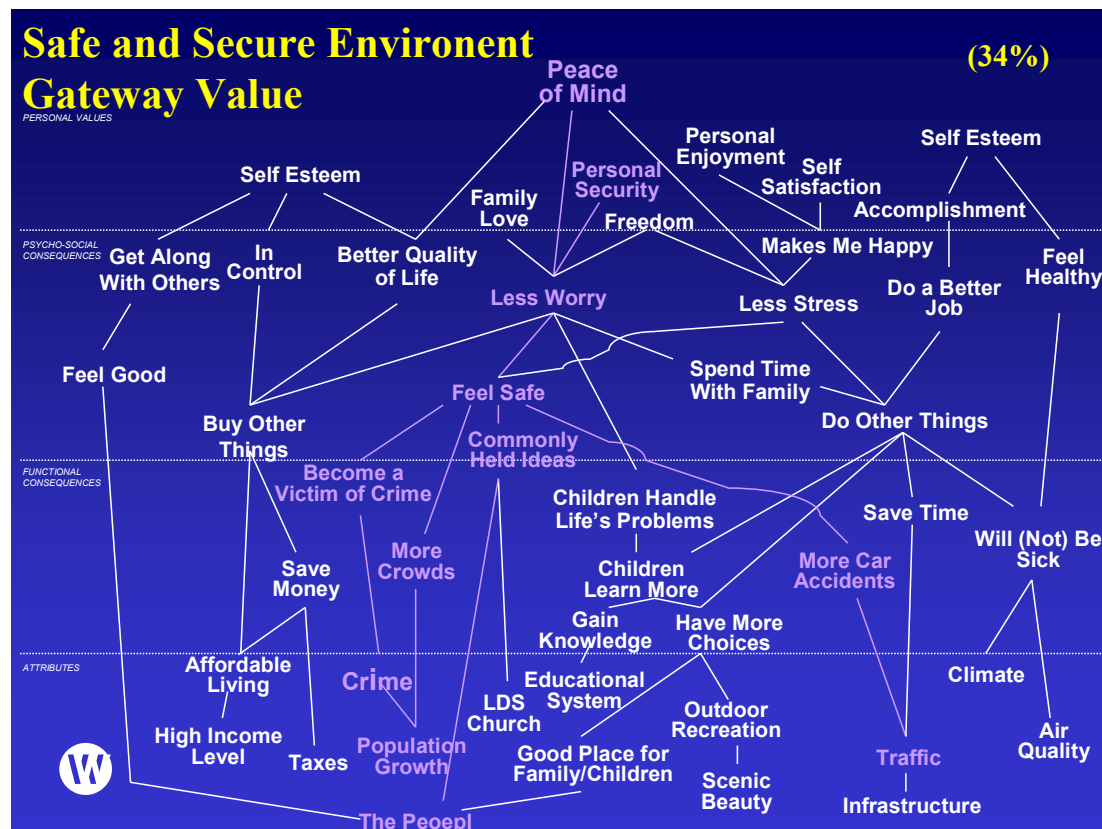
	Positive Ladder	Negative Ladder
Value	“Security and Love as a Parent”	“Sense of Accomplishment”
Personal Consequence	“Less Worry – More at Ease”	“Can’t Get More Things Done” or “Inefficient Use of Time”
Functional Consequence	“Better Place to Raise a Family”	“Bad Traffic – Lots of Cars”
Attribute	“Family Values People Have”	

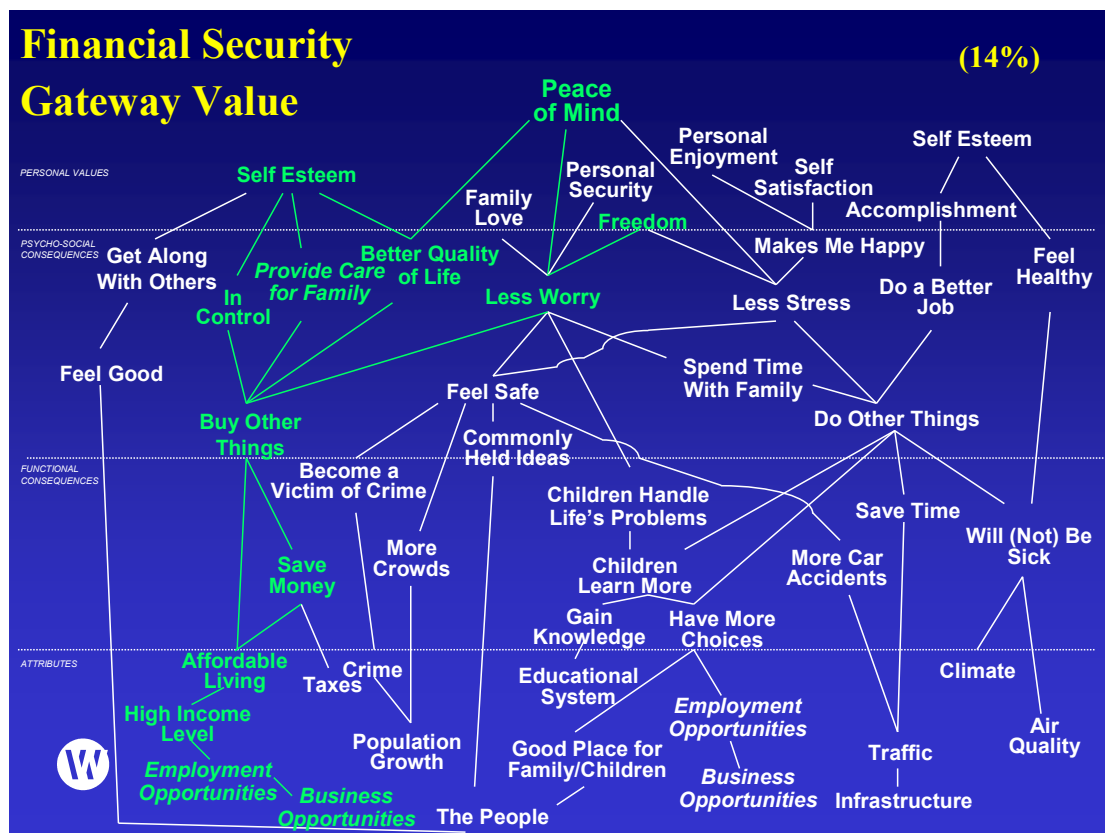
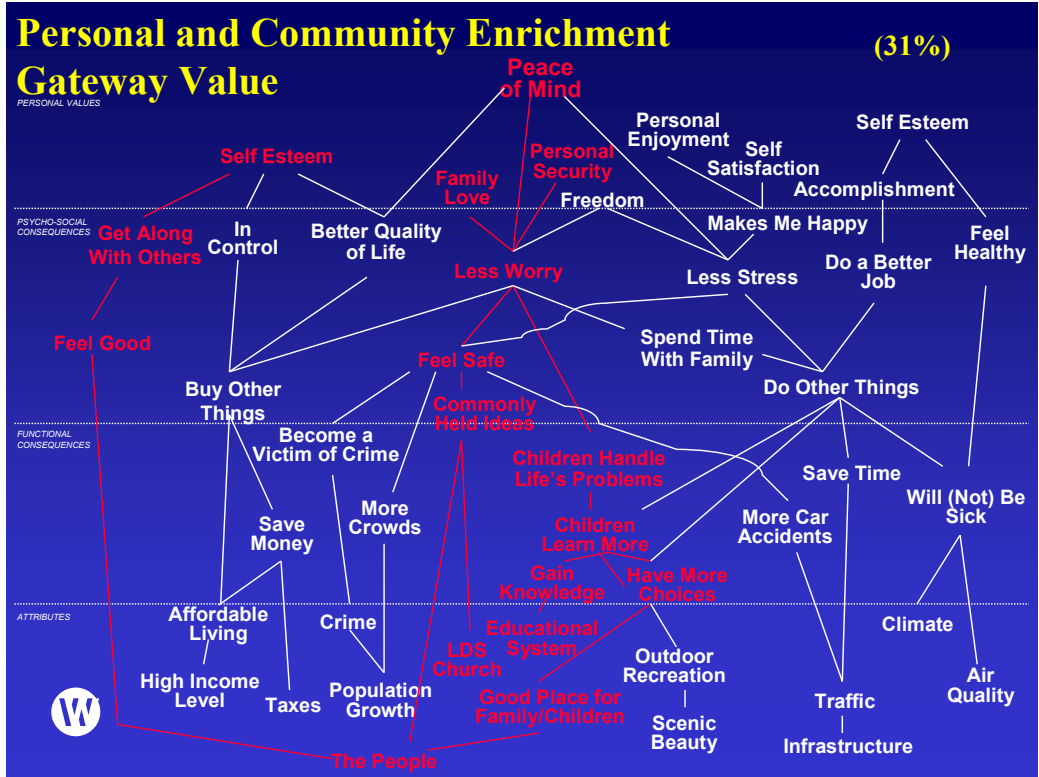
The value system along the Wasatch Front centers around a sense of peace or peace of mind, emanating from a feeling of safe haven based on living with people who prize and share a common sense of honesty, morality and ethics. **“Peace of Mind” dominates above all other value orientations.** This value is supported by a dedication to family and the desire to provide opportunities to help children handle life’s challenges.

The values research identified factors that brought together Utahns:

- Recognition that Utah is growing and will continue to grow;
- Recognition that ‘how much’ Utah should grow or ‘how’ growth should occur is a matter of debate; and
- A determination to shape and create our own future rather than have it be created for us.

The next four “laddering charts” looked at “Safe and Secure Environment,” “Personal and Community Enrichment,” “Personal Time and Opportunity,” and “Financial Security.”



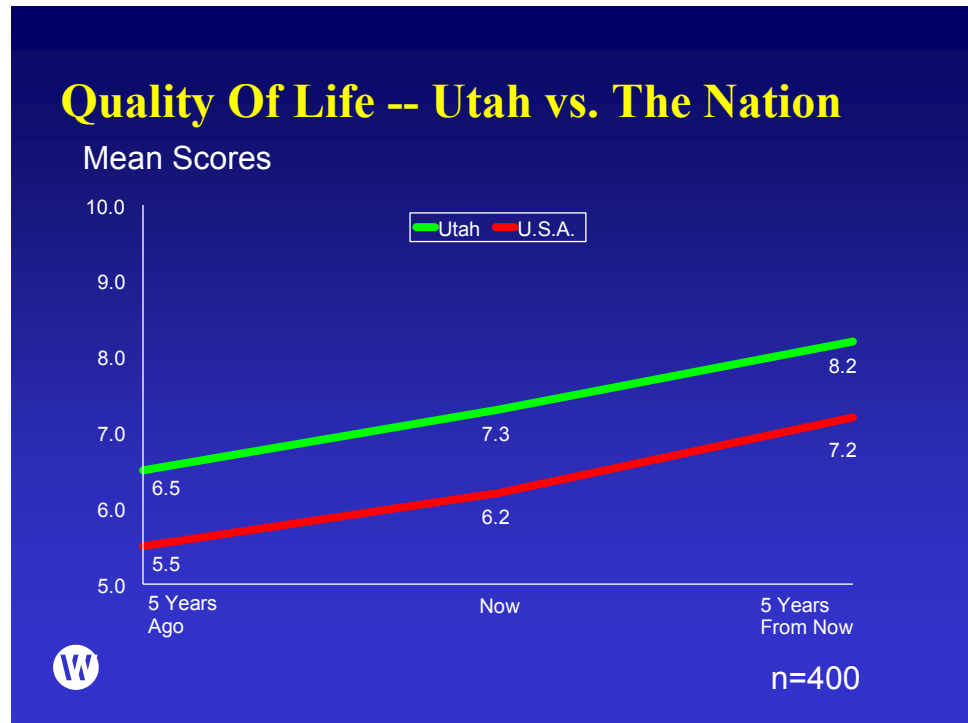


As these four laddering charts show, the ultimate values are all similar, regardless of whether one begins by asking about employment opportunities, personal enrichment, a secure environment, or the quality of life in Utah. Values are slow to change over time.

Summary of Survey Results

The following are some highlights of the survey results:

- Utahns on the Wasatch Front were personally quite satisfied with the current quality of life and very optimistic about the near-term possibilities.



- Wasatch Front residents recognize that growth brings with it a number of problems and challenges. Most believe, however, that future growth will make things better.
- New residents have a more positive view of growth than do longer-term residents.
- Nearly six in ten believe growth brings benefits and advantages to Utah and should be encouraged and fostered.
- When asked to identify the main cause of Utah's population growth, 82% mistakenly believed most of the growth comes from outsiders moving to Utah. Only 14% responded "new births in the state." (Approximately 74% of Utah's population growth is generated internally; that is, by the children and grandchildren of current residents.)

Applying the Values Research

Envision Utah applied information learned from the values research in advertising, marketing, presentations and strategies. It has influenced our communications with the public in many different formats.

Values research generates a large volume of information in the language that people use when they talk about an organization. This information is used to create a lexicon which can provide valuable insights as to how one must speak in order to communicate effectively to a larger audience.

The Wirthlin research also validated Envision Utah's underlying philosophy that the public should determine its own future. When asked, "Who can best deal with growth issues in Utah?," forty-two percent said "residents like you and me." Only 20 percent answered "state government," 18 percent said "local government," and 14 percent preferred "business as usual."

By catalyzing state and local government collaboration with community and business leaders, and then creating opportunities for local residents to play a major role in making decisions about Utah's future, Envision Utah fulfills its goal and responds to the public's desires. For example, we have held nearly 300 public workshops and open houses to gather input from residents; our quality growth demonstration projects always include representatives from the public and private sectors; and our educational forums are directed to both the private and public sectors.

A basic assumption of Envision Utah is that when people receive good information, they make good decisions. We actively seek input from the public. Our activities utilize grass-roots rather than top-down approaches.

Before Envision Utah began to craft its four scenarios on how the region could grow, it held 175 public meetings to gather the preferences of residents. The scenarios grew from the public input. We then advertised these scenarios in a newspaper inset in four daily newspapers and asked readers to study the scenario information and decide which set of choices and consequences they would prefer for the future of the region. Nearly 18,000 residents completed the survey on the growth scenarios.

Summary

By focusing on the shared, core values of residents, our scenarios and vision were relevant and our messages have resonated and endured for many years. We have been more successful in our activities because we seek to educate by reason and persuade by emotion; both are needed.

Values are the central guideposts for human decision making. Values make clear which issues have the greatest impact. Values tie residents to their communities and beckon future residents to the state. Values guide our attitudes, opinions, and, ultimately, our behavior. Values research was key to bringing Utahns with divergent perspectives to common ground.