WORKSHOPSKILL · FACILITATION KIT

The Values Sort — Facilitator Run Sheet

Folder: `the-values-sort` · Category: self-assessment · 1–8 people · 20 min · offline + online · print props · tool pack

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20	1–8	print props
MINUTES	PEOPLE	SETTING

The Values Sort — Facilitator Guide

You can name “nice” values all day; you only find out what you actually value when you’re forced to choose. Sort a deck of value cards into Core / Important / Not mine — with a hard cap of five on Core — then check one real recent decision against your five and close one gap. A value that costs nothing isn’t yours.

How this differs from `the-advantage-compass`: The Advantage Compass asks where to *deploy* — strengths crossed against vision, audited through your calendar. The Values Sort asks what you’d actually *pay for*: the cap of five makes every kept value cost something, and the decision test checks whether your recent behavior spent them. Run the compass to find direction; run this sort to find the line you keep crossing when direction is already known.

Objectives

By the end of the activity, participants will have:

1. Sorted a deck of value cards into **Core (max five) / Important / Not mine** and felt the cost of each cut.
2. Cut Core to exactly five — and read the flinch: relief meant it wasn’t yours, pain meant it was.
3. Checked one real recent decision against the five, named the value it quietly traded away, and committed one dated change to close that gap.

When to use this activity

- Before a decision with no obvious right answer — offer A vs B, take the promotion or keep the craft — where “what matters most” is doing silent work and has never been written down.
- A team that quotes the same values deck but keeps making different trade-offs; sorting alone and comparing the Core fives shows where the friction actually lives.
- An annual or quarterly personal check-in: last year’s five, this year’s five, and the gap card tell you what moved without a diary.

Setup

Clock: twenty minutes end to end. The cut-to-five minute (4–8) is the engine — do not borrow time from it.

Space: a table or shared board with room for three piles; five marked slots for Core.

Materials per person:

Item	Source
3 × zone cards — Core · Important · Not mine	`the-values-sort-prop-cards.pdf`
1 × “The test” card	`the-values-sort-prop-cards.pdf`
1 × value card deck (starter set)	`the-values-sort-prop-cards.pdf` — the printed values
2–3 × blank cards	`the-values-sort-prop-cards.pdf` — for values the deck is missing, and for the dated gap change
A pen	the five get written; the gap card gets dated

Grouping: 1–8 people. It works solo at a desk or as a peer group each running their own sort — nobody sees anyone else’s piles until the compare.

Roles: everyone sorts their own deck; you hold the cap at five, demand a real recent decision, and keep “Not mine” honest rather than polite.

How to run it

Time	Phase	Facilitator does	Participants do
0–4	Sort	Deal the deck. “Core, Important, or Not mine. Core is capped at five — you’ll have to cut. ’Not mine’ is a real answer, not a failure.”	Place every value card into one of three piles
4–8	Cut to five	Watch for the flinch and name it: “each cut that stings is information.”	Cut Core down to exactly five; write the five
8–14	The test	Hand the test card. “One real decision from the last month. Not the one where everyone got what they wanted.”	Lay the decision beside the five; find where it aligned and where it quietly traded one away
14–20	Close a gap	Demand the date on the change card.	Name one change — more of a value kept cutting, or one upcoming decision made differently — write it, date it

Then run the debrief — see `the-values-sort-debrief.md`.

The card

The zone cards define the three legal piles and the cap — the printed five slots on the Core card are what make the cut real; without a hard limit, everything stays “important” and nothing is yours. The value deck is a starter set precisely because the blank cards matter: the values that decide your life are usually the ones no printed deck contains. The test card exists to keep the exercise from ending as a poster — a value untested against a real decision is a wish in a nicer font.

Failure modes

1. **Can’t cut to five.** The pain of the cut is the finding — five is the point, not a suggestion. Rescue: force it anyway; make them say each removal out loud.
2. **Every value feels “important.”** The sort is running too comfortably. Rescue: move more into “Not mine” until Core gets uncomfortable; comfort means nobody is choosing yet.
3. **A Core value is there because it sounds good.** Rescue: “what has this value cost you in the last quarter?” — if nothing, move it out of Core.
4. **The test decision has no tension.** A decision where everyone got what they wanted isn’t a test of what you value. Rescue: pick a harder, more recent one — the one you avoided is usually the right card.

Variations

- **Career crossroads:** run the test against the actual choice in front of you (offer A vs B), not a past one.
- **Team alignment:** everyone sorts alone, then compare Core fives; the disagreements are where the friction lives.
- **Annual check-in:** keep last year’s five and the gap card; re-sort and see what moved.

- **Online:** the three piles are three board columns and the cap is enforced by a counter; the compare round happens with screens shared only at the end.

Facilitation notes

- Core is capped at five. A value that costs nothing isn't a value; the cap is what makes you pay.
- The test must be a real, recent decision — not a hypothetical, not the one where everyone got what they wanted.
- If a value you cut to reach five made you wince, that wince is the gap to close — say so out loud when it happens; the room needs permission to grieve a card.

Put it on the wall

Print `the-values-sort-activity-poster.pdf` to keep the two rules — "Core is capped at five" and "the test must be a real decision" — visible through the whole sort.

Props in this folder

- `the-values-sort-prop-cards.pdf` — poker-spec print sheet (63.5 × 88.9 mm, bleed and cut guides): three zone cards, the test card, the starter value deck, blank cards, branded backs
- `the-values-sort-guide.md` — this run sheet
- `the-values-sort-debrief.md` — the debrief questions and the failure modes of the debrief
- `the-values-sort-run-sheet.pdf` — the print edition: this run sheet + the debrief, bound as one A4 document with bookmarks
- `the-values-sort-activity-poster.pdf` — the whole tool on one wall sheet: the run, the two rules, the watch-outs
- `the-values-sort-start-here.md` — one page, thirty seconds, then print and go
- `SKILL.md` — machine-readable manifest for AI agents
- `*-Letter.pdf` — US Letter editions of the print documents

Agent version

Every file in this folder has a stable public URL — an AI agent can fetch the deck, the debrief and this run sheet with three curl commands (see `SKILL.md`). The paper version needs nothing but a table, three piles and a cap that doesn't move.

The Values Sort — Debrief

> A value earns its place by what it costs, not how it sounds — the debrief is where the five get audited against the life you actually ran.
>
> Use with `the-values-sort-guide.md`. The gap card at minute 14 is the compressed version; this sheet is the full one.

How to run this debrief

- Keep the Core five and the gap card face up on the table. The whole debrief is about the distance between those two objects and the tested decision.

- Ask about the cuts before the keeps. What left the pile tells you more than what stayed.
- Refuse the poster moment. Nobody leaves with a list of five; they leave with five, one tested decision, and one dated change.

Read the five

- Which value did you fight hardest to keep in Core? What was it costing you to hold it?
- Which value did you cut — and did the cut sting, or did you feel relief? Relief means it was never really yours.
- Is there a value you put in Core because it sounds good, not because you'd pay for it? Move it.
- What's a value that isn't on the deck at all but belongs in your five? Write it on a blank.

The seven debrief questions

1. The honored and the traded.

"The decision you picked — which of your five did it honor, and which did it quietly trade away?"

→ Targets: the first real reading; values show up in behavior, not in banners.

2. Conscious or collateral.

"Was that trade conscious, or did it happen while you weren't looking?"

→ Targets: the difference between a choice and an accident; both are legitimate findings, only one is honest.

3. Same decision, tomorrow.

"If you made the same decision again tomorrow, would you make the same trade? Why or why not?"

→ Targets: whether the value ordering is load-bearing or just retrospective narration.

4. The avoided decision.

"Is there a decision you avoided picking because it would expose the gap? That's the one to test."

→ Targets: the decision you didn't bring is usually the one the five already know about.

5. The one change.

"What is the one change — more of a value you kept cutting, or one upcoming decision made differently?"

→ Targets: subtraction beats addition; one concrete change is testable, a resolution isn't.

6. The proof.

"When will you know you've actually made it, not just decided to?"

→ Targets: the dated check on the gap card; "decided to" is the failure mode nobody notices.

7. The price of the almost-cut.

"What does it cost you to keep the value you almost cut?"

→ Targets: naming the price converts the five from a preference list into a commitment — and if nothing, question its place in Core.

Failure modes of the debrief

Failure mode	Why it happens	The rescue
Can’t cut to five	The pain of the cut is being avoided	Force it anyway — five is the point, not a suggestion; the flinch is the finding.
Every value feels “important”	The sort ran too comfortably	Move more into “Not mine” until Core gets uncomfortable; comfort means nobody is choosing.
The test decision has no tension	The safe, everyone-won story was picked	Choose a harder, more recent one; the avoided decision is the right card.