



Ethos and Spirit – the golden thread

We know that leadership, organisational culture and the ability to respond to change are key to the success of any organisation. What binds them together is the overarching ethos, sometimes known as the spirit of an organisation; the golden thread that is in some ways impossible to define, yet permeates all levels.

Compassion, achievement, authenticity and integrity may be some of the descriptors used for the positive aspects; the can do/will do, the sense of purpose, commitment and passion that empowers and engages individuals.

The negative aspects can be equally powerful, at worst creating a culture of despondency, a them and us scenario, where learned helplessness prevails and individuals abdicate personal responsibility for both their own performance and the standards and values shown by others.

This ethos or spirit determines both the culture (and consequential level of engagement) and the ability of the organisation to flex and respond to change. It is espoused and driven by the leadership at all levels and is itself driven by the stage of their ego development as adults.

Culture

Culture describes “the way things work around here,” while engagement describes “how people feel about the way things work around here.” Deloitte 2016

Change

“Managers can be a catalyst for successful change – if you prepare them and hold them accountable in their role. Nearly every company provides formal training in these skills, but only one out of four companies report that their training is effective. The best companies invest in effective training so that managers can support employees, demonstrating the courage to hear and share tough feedback during times of change” Towers Watson 2013/2014

So, if the way we lead and are led can create the culture of an organisation and can be either a catalyst or a blocker for change; how do we ensure that our leaders create the ethos and culture we desire and are equipped to lead through change? It requires a step change in our thinking.

This step change is articulated in the research linking leadership to the work on adult stages of development conducted by the likes of Robert Keegan and Bob Anderson (and as articulated by Steven Covey).

“At The Leadership Circle, we work with a model of stages of leadership. This model has three distinct stages which we call Reactive, Creative and Integral.



*I've pulled this primarily from the work of Robert Kegan at Harvard University, a foremost researcher on stage-of-development, as did Steven Covey. Covey describes this in his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, in which he talks about stages of ego development as they relate to leadership: dependent, independent, and interdependent. Bob Anderson*

Our framework is basically the same. Effective leadership is beyond the Reactive stage....it has developed to least stage two in this three-stage model, what we call the Creative level of development."

It is based on a premise that we operate from a need to problem solve, to label and name something
The research seems to show that this thinking pattern is fear based and comes from a fundamental desire to **predict and control**.

The shift in thinking is to more creative, heart based, conscious leadership that articulates the characteristics of a positive ethos. This leadership is based on the concept of **sense and respond**; rather than a dogmatic problem solving approach there is an outcome focused, iterative way of leading that is more suited to uncertainty and ambiguity.

"The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence; it is to act with yesterday's logic"
- Peter Drucker

So, in summary:

- a step change in our thinking away from a fear based reactive approach releases our inherent potential to lead with integrity, authority and passion
- this creates a pervading positive and supportive ethos
- The ethos manifests in a culture with a shared vision; accepting personal responsibility and leading with compassion and commitment
- The ethos and culture create an environment that perceives change as a natural (and essential) stage of development and transition as the organisation evolves and flexes to meet changing needs