

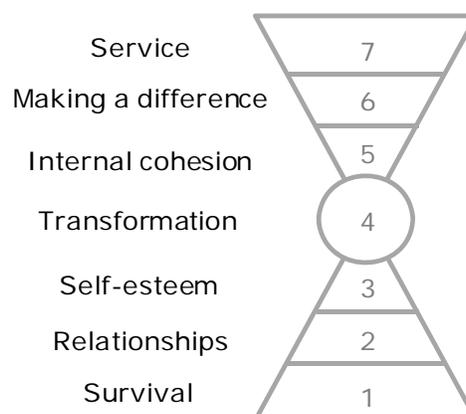
The Seven Levels of Non-Governmental (NGO) Consciousness

By Richard Barrett

All human group structures grow and develop in consciousness in seven well-defined stages. Each stage focuses on a particular existential need that is common to the human condition. These seven existential needs are the principal motivating forces in all human affairs.

The level of growth and development of consciousness in an NGO depends on the ability of the leaders to create a culture that enables the organisation to satisfy the needs of all stakeholders – employees, citizens, and society in general.

The seven stages in the development and growth of the consciousness of an NGO are summarised in the following table and described in detail in the subsequent paragraphs. The table describing the Seven Levels of NGO consciousness should be read starting from the bottom and working up.



Levels of Consciousness		Motivation	
7	Service	Future generations. Sustainability. Social justice. Human rights. Compassion, humility and forgiveness.	
6	Making a difference	Collaboration in strategic alliances and partnerships with other NGOs, business, and Government/Municipal Agencies. Employee fulfilment. Mentoring.	
5	Internal cohesion	Shared vision and shared values. Integrity, honesty, and trust. Fairness, openness and transparency. Passion, creativity, and commitment.	
4	Transformation	Adaptability, accountability, responsibility, empowerment, and continuous renewal and learning. Goals orientation. Personal growth and development.	
3	Self-esteem	Focus on systems, processes, quality, excellence, and professional growth. Continuous improvement.	Bureaucracy, hierarchy, silo-mentality, power and status seeking, Confusion, complacency, image, arrogance.
2	Relationship	Employee recognition. Friendship, open communication and listening.	Internal competition, manipulation and blame. Internal politics.
1	Survival	Financial stability. The health, safety and welfare of employees.	Excessive control and caution. Short-term focus.
		HEALTHY MOTIVATIONS	UNHEALTHY MOTIVATIONS

Full Spectrum Consciousness

Full spectrum NGOs display all the positive attributes of the Seven Levels of NGO Consciousness.

- They master survival consciousness by focusing on financial stability, and the health, and safety of employees.
- They master relationship consciousness by focusing on open communication, employee recognition, and the beneficiaries of their cause.

- They master self-esteem consciousness by focusing on performance, results, quality, excellence, and best practices.
- They master transformation consciousness by focusing on adaptability, innovation, employee empowerment, employee participation, and continuous learning.
- They master internal cohesion consciousness by developing a culture based on a shared vision and shared values that engender an organisation-wide climate of trust.
- They master making a difference consciousness by creating strategic alliances and partnerships with other NGOs as well as by developing mentoring, coaching and leadership development programs.
- They master service consciousness by focusing on future generations, sustainability, social justice, and human rights, as well as by embracing compassion, humility and forgiveness.

Each of the Seven Levels of NGO Consciousness is described in more detail below.

Level 1: Survival Consciousness

The first need for an NGO is adequate funding from public or private sources. Without a continuing stream of funds, NGOs are unable to address the causes they represent. A precondition for success at this level is a healthy focus on income and expenses. Because leaders of NGOs are very often dealing with grants or public funds they have to be seen as exemplary custodians of their financial resources. As a consequence, they tend to scrimp and save on office space, equipment and technology in general. This can lead to excessive control and micro-management. Organisations experience their deepest fears at this level of consciousness. The key to success at level 1 is strong finances, and a focus on employee health and safety.

Level 2: Relationship Consciousness

The second need for an NGO is harmonious interpersonal relationships and good internal communications. Without good relationships with employees, their ability to deliver on their cause may be compromised. The critical issue at this level of consciousness is to create a sense of loyalty and belonging among employees and a sense of caring and connection between the organisation and the beneficiaries of the cause. Preconditions for creating a sense of belonging are open communication, mutual respect and employee recognition. When the leaders are more focused on their own success rather than the success of the NGO, they begin to compete with each other. When leaders display territorial behaviours, blame, internal competition and information hoarding become rife, increasing the level of cultural entropy.

Level 3: Self-esteem Consciousness

The focus of the third level of NGO consciousness is on performance and measurement. It is about keeping a balanced and watchful eye on all the key operational indicators. At this level of consciousness, the NGO is focused on becoming the best it can be through the adoption of best practices and a focus on quality, productivity and efficiency. Systems and processes are strongly emphasised and strategies are developed to achieve desired results. The critical issue at this level of consciousness is to develop a culture of operational excellence. A precondition for continuous improvement is the encouragement and reward of excellence. Level 3 organisations tend to be structured hierarchically for the purposes of central control. Top-down is the primary mode of decision-making. NGOs that are predominantly focused at this level of consciousness can easily degenerate into power-based silos, rigid authoritarian bureaucracies and/or a group of internally competitive over-achievers. When this happens, the quality of delivery of their services will be sub-optimum.

Level 4: Transformation Consciousness

The focus of the fourth level of NGO consciousness is on adaptability, employee empowerment, and continuous learning. The critical issue at this level of consciousness is how to continually improve the services offered. To fully respond to the challenges of this level of consciousness, the NGO must actively garner employees' ideas and opinions. Everyone must feel that his or her voice is being heard. This requires managers and leaders to admit they do not have all the answers and invite employee participation. For many leaders and managers this is a new role requiring new skills. That is why it is important to develop the emotional intelligence of managers. They must be able to facilitate high performance in large groups of people who are looking for equality and responsible freedom. They want to be held accountable—not micro-managed and supervised every moment of every day. Teamwork is encouraged and more attention is given to personal development and relationship skills.

Level 5: Internal Cohesion Consciousness

The focus at the fifth level of NGO consciousness is on building cultural cohesion and developing a capacity for collective action. For this to happen, leaders and managers must set aside their personal agendas and work for the common good. The critical issue at this level of consciousness is developing a shared vision of the future and a shared set of values. The shared vision clarifies the intentions of the NGO and gives employees a unifying purpose and direction. The shared values provide guidance on decision-making. When the values are translated into behaviours, they provide a set of parameters that define the boundaries of responsible freedom. The values and behaviours must be reflected in all the processes and systems of the organisation, with appropriate consequences for those who are not willing to walk-the-talk. A

precondition for success at this level is to build a climate of trust. The prerequisites for trust are fairness, openness and competence. Aligning employees' personal sense of mission with the organisation's sense of vision will create a climate of commitment and enthusiasm at all levels of the organisation. Personal productivity and creativity increase as individuals align with their passion.

Level 6: Making a Difference Consciousness

The focus at the sixth level of NGO consciousness is on deepening the level of internal connectedness in the organisation and expanding the sense of external connectedness. Internally, the focus is on helping employees find personal fulfilment through their work. Externally, the focus is on building mutually beneficial partnerships and alliances with other NGOs, businesses, Government and Municipal agencies, and society in general. The critical issue at this level of consciousness is that employees and beneficiaries see the NGO is making a difference in their lives. NGOs operating at this level of consciousness go the extra mile to make sure they are delivering their services. At this level of consciousness, NGOs create an environment where employees can excel. The organisation supports employees in becoming all they can become, both in terms of their professional *and* their personal growth. A precondition for success at this level is developing leaders with a strong sense of empathy. Leaders must recognise that they must not only provide direction for the organisation, but they must also become the servants of those who work for them. They must create an environment that supports every employee in aligning their sense of personal mission with the vision and mission of the NGO.

Level 7: Service Consciousness

The focus at the seventh level of NGO consciousness is a continuation of the previous level – a further deepening of the internal connectedness, and a further expansion of external connectedness. Internally the focus of the NGO is on building a climate of ethics, humility and compassion. Externally, the focus is on connecting with businesses, Government and Municipal agencies, and other national or international NGOs to improve the delivery of services to the beneficiaries. A precondition for success at this level of consciousness is self-less service, displayed through a profound commitment to the common good and to the well-being of future generations. To be successful at level 7, NGOs must embrace the highest ethical standards in all their interactions with employees and every other agency with which they connect.