

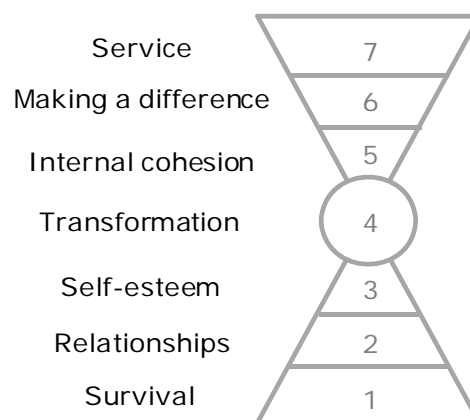
# The Seven Levels of Team Consciousness

By Richard Barrett

Teams grow and develop by mastering the seven levels of team consciousness. The seven groups of needs/motivations that are associated with the seven levels of team consciousness are described in the following paragraphs. This table should be read from the bottom, up.

The “lower” needs—levels 1 to 3—reflect the basic needs of the group: their physical need for survival, and their emotional needs for belonging and self-esteem. The focus of the fourth level is on adaptability, continuous learning and giving team members a voice.

The “higher” needs—levels 5 to 7—reflect the growth needs of the group: the need for individual team members to find meaning; the need to make a difference through the work the team does; and the need to be of service to their internal or external clients and the organisation as a whole.



Levels of Consciousness		Motivation
7	Service	<b>Ethical conduct, social responsibility, and long-term perspective:</b> Ensuring the work of the team meets appropriate ethical standards, supports the long-term vision of the organisation, and meets the organisation's social responsibility objectives.
6	Making a difference	<b>Strategic alliances and partnerships:</b> Cooperating with other teams in mutually beneficial alliances, while deepening the level of internal connectivity of the team by fostering coaching and mentoring, and focusing on employee fulfilment.
5	Internal cohesion	<b>Strong cohesive culture:</b> Enhancing the team's capacity for collective action by aligning team member motivations around a singular mission, and a shared set of values that build commitment and unleash the enthusiasm, creativity and passion of team members.
4	Transformation	<b>Adaptability and continuous learning:</b> Giving team members a voice in decision-making, and making them accountable and responsible for their own futures in an environment that supports personal growth.
3	Self-Esteem	<b>Team pride in performance:</b> Enhancing the abilities of the team by building, systems, processes, and structures that create order, encourage excellence and quality, and support professional growth.
2	Relationship	<b>Friendly team relationships:</b> Building harmonious relationships that create a sense of belonging and loyalty among team members, and caring for the needs of internal and external customers.
1	Survival	<b>Creating an appropriate physical environment:</b> Establishing satisfactory working conditions, availability of technology, and appropriate levels of funding. Caring for the health, safety, and well-being of employees.

Teams that focus exclusively on the satisfaction of their lower needs find it difficult to achieve and sustain high levels of performance. In general they are too internally focused and self-absorbed, or too rigid and bureaucratic to be at the top of their game. They are not adaptable, and do not empower employees. Consequently, there is little enthusiasm and commitment among team members. Working in such a team can be highly stressful, because the main focus of the team is on performance and results.

Teams that focus exclusively on the satisfaction of their growth needs lack the basic skills and capabilities necessary to operate effectively. They are ineffectual and impractical. They lack the systems and processes necessary for high performance. They are not grounded in the day-to-day practicalities of team management and are often ineffectual in matters of emotional and social intelligence.

The most successful teams are those that have mastered both their “deficiency” needs and their “growth” needs. They operate from full spectrum consciousness. They create a climate of trust, a focus on excellence, and can rapidly adapt and respond to changing situations. The seven levels of team consciousness are described in more detail below.

### **Full Spectrum Consciousness**

Full spectrum teams display all the positive attributes of the seven levels of team consciousness.

- They master survival consciousness by focusing on the financial stability and funding of the team, as well as the health and safety of employees.
- They master relationship consciousness by focusing on harmonious interpersonal relationships and good internal communications that engender team and customer loyalty.
- They master self-esteem consciousness by focusing on systems that enhance performance, results, quality, excellence, and best practices that engender team pride.
- They master transformation consciousness by empowering team members to contribute their ideas and giving them responsible freedom to innovate new ways of organising and learning.
- They master internal cohesion consciousness by developing a team mission and culture based on shared values that engenders a climate of trust.
- They master making a difference consciousness by coaching and mentoring team members so they can find fulfilment, and creating strong alliances and partnerships with customers and other parts of the organisation.
- They master service consciousness by upholding the organisation’s ethical standards, supporting the organisation in pursuing its vision, and focusing on the long-term sustainability of the organisation.

Each of the seven levels of organisational consciousness is described in more detail below.

#### **Level 1: Survival consciousness**

The first need for a team is a secure and appropriate level of funding. Without funding it will not have the equipment or the financial and human resources to fulfil its tasks. It is the job of the team leader to make sure the team has everything it needs to fulfil its mission. It is also the job of the team leader to steward the teams resources and manage the budget. When teams are not adequately resourced they quickly become ineffective. Efficiency and productivity fall, and team members become discouraged about how the team is being treated. Entropy rises and people in the team begin to complain.

#### **Level 2: Relationship consciousness**

The second need for a team is harmonious interpersonal relationships and good internal communications. Without good relationships between team members, and between team members and internal or external customers the team will be in effective. The critical issue at this level of consciousness is creating a sense of belonging and camaraderie in the team. Preconditions for belonging are open communication and mutual respect. Preconditions for camaraderie are friendliness and comradeship. When these are in place, loyalty and satisfaction among team members and the team's customers or clients will be high. The team should take time out for celebrations and rituals which support team togetherness.

#### **Level 3: Self-Esteem consciousness**

The third need for a team is to achieve high levels of performance and results that create a sense of team pride. Every team member needs to focus on quality, excellence and continuous improvement, with just enough systems and processes in place to support high performance and avoid time-consuming bureaucracy. The team should be continually researching and adopting best practices to enhance its productivity and professional approach. Each member of the team will need to have clear goals, and the team as a whole should have a well understood strategy for achieving its specified targets. Frequent monitoring of strategy, goals and targets will be essential to achieve team success.

#### **Level 4: Transformation consciousness**

The focus of the fourth level of team consciousness is on empowering team members to contribute their ideas to improve team performance—to innovate for continuous improvement. Each team member needs to be accountable for their own performance and the performance of the group. They need to take responsibility for their own

personal growth and development, and support each other in the growth and development of the team as a whole. For the team to grow and develop it needs to focus on continuous learning and staying lean and agile so that it can easily adapt to new situations and exploit new opportunities.

#### **Level 5: Internal cohesion consciousness**

At the fifth level of consciousness, the focus is on developing a shared sense of team mission and a shared set of team values that aligns with overall vision and values of the organisation and unleashes the commitment and enthusiasm of team members. The shared mission clarifies the focus of the team's actions and the shared values provide guidance on team decision-making. The behaviours associated with the team's values should relate directly to the work of team. Every team member should have a clear line of sight between the work they do each day and the mission of the team. Everyone needs to know how they make a difference through their work to the success of the team.

#### **Level 6: Making a difference consciousness**

Internally, the focus at the sixth level of team consciousness is on helping team members to find a sense of personal fulfilment from their work, and providing coaching and mentoring to support them in becoming all they can become. Externally, the focus should be on building strong collaborative partnerships with other teams in the organisation for mutual support. The team should also seek to build collaborative relationships with customers and the local community. The critical issue at this level of team consciousness is to assure the full and complete integration of the team into the organisation as a whole, and the integration with all relevant stakeholders.

#### **Level 7: Service consciousness**

At the seventh level of team consciousness, the focus of the team is on serving the needs of the organisation by adopting and integrating appropriate ethical standards; helping the organisation meet its social responsibilities; and, supporting the long-term vision of the organisation. Internally, the focus of the team will be on living up to its highest ideals through the exercise of compassion and humility. Externally, the focus will be on supporting the organisation in building a sustainable future for the society in which the organisation operates.