

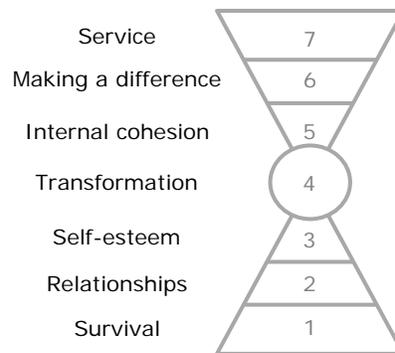


The Seven Levels of Consciousness- Religious/Spiritual Organisations

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 seven stages in the development and growth of the consciousness of an organisation are summarized in the following table, and described in detail in the following paragraphs. The model applies to all types of organisations—corporations, government departments, municipal agencies, religious institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGO), and educational establishments. The table describing the Seven Levels of Religious/Spiritual Consciousness should be read starting from bottom and working up.



| Levels of Consciousness | | Motivation |
|-------------------------|---------------------|--|
| 7 | Service | Service to Humanity: Working with other organisations in pursuit of societal objectives that enhance social justice, while deepening the level of humility, compassion and forgiveness inside the organisation. |
| 6 | Making a difference | Collaboration and Partnerships: Local community involvement and building alliances with other groups to support the local community. Providing spiritual guidance to help members realise their full potential while deepening the level of mutual care inside the organisation. . |
| 5 | Internal cohesion | Building Internal Community: Enhancing the organisation’s effectiveness by aligning member motivations around an inspiring vision and a shared set of values to create commitment and enthusiasm to the work of the organisation, and creating a climate of trust, openness, fairness and transparency. |
| 4 | Transformation | Continuous Renewal and Learning: Giving members a voice in decision-making while encouraging learning, innovation and knowledge sharing to support the spiritual growth and development of all members of the community. |
| 3 | Self-Esteem | Institutional Effectiveness: Creating a sense of pride in the organisation by establishing rules and regulations that create order and enhance the performance of the community through the use of best practices. Focus on the reduction of bureaucracy, hierarchy, confusion, complacency, and power. |
| 2 | Relationship | Harmonious Relationships: Building supportive relationships that create a sense of belonging and loyalty among members of the community. Focus on the reduction of blame, discrimination and internal competition. |
| 1 | Survival | Financial Stability: Ensuring appropriate levels of funding, and focusing on the growth of the community and the health and welfare of its members. Efforts to limit excessive control, caution and manipulation . |

Ultimately, no matter what type of organisation is under consideration, it is the stakeholders’ experience of the organisation, and the leaders’ ability to inspire them, that is a fundamental factor in determining the organisation’s level of success.

The “lower” needs, levels 1 to 3, focus on the basic needs of an organisation—the pursuit of financial stability, building member loyalty, and ensuring high standards of systems and practices. The emphasis at these lower levels is on the self-interest of the

organisation. Abraham Maslow referred to the needs of these three levels of consciousness as “deficiency” needs. An organisation gains no sense of lasting satisfaction from being able to meet these needs, but the leaders feel a sense of anxiety if these basic needs are not met.

The focus of the fourth level is transformation—a shift from fear-based, rigid, authoritarian hierarchies to more open, inclusive, adaptive systems of governance that empower members to operate with responsible freedom (accountability).

The “higher” needs, levels 5 to 7, focus on cultural cohesion and alignment, building mutually beneficial alliances and partnerships, long-term sustainability and social responsibility. Abraham Maslow referred to these as “growth” needs. When these needs are met they do not go away. They engender deeper levels of commitment and motivation.

Organisations that focus *exclusively* on the satisfaction of the lower needs are generally too internally focused and self-absorbed, or too rigid and bureaucratic to be the best they could be. They are unable to adapt to changing life conditions and expectations: they are not adaptable, and do not empower members. Consequently, there may be little enthusiasm among followers, and there is little innovation and creativity. These organisations are often ruled by fear. Members often feel frustrated.

Organisations that focus *exclusively* on the satisfaction of the higher needs lack the basic skills and capabilities necessary to operate effectively. They are ineffectual and impractical when it comes to financial matters. They are not member oriented, and fail to capitalise on best practices. They are simply not grounded in the reality of running an effective organisation. These characteristics are often found in non-governmental organisations and not-for-profit organisations.

The most successful organisations 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, have the ability to manage complexity, and can respond or rapidly adapt to all situations.

Full Spectrum Consciousness

Full spectrum religious and spiritual organisations display all the positive attributes of the Seven Levels of Organisational Consciousness.

- They master survival consciousness by focusing on financial stability and the well-being of its members.
- They master relationship consciousness by focusing on open communication, building loyalty and member satisfaction.

- They master self-esteem consciousness by focusing on high standards and best practices.
- They master transformation consciousness by focusing on adaptability, innovation, member participation, and continuous learning.
- They master internal cohesion consciousness by developing a culture based on shared values, and a shared vision that engenders an organisation-wide climate of trust.
- They master making a difference consciousness by creating strategic alliances and partnerships with other organisations and the local community, as well as developing mentoring and coaching for members.
- They master service consciousness by focusing on social responsibility, ethics, and keeping a long-term perspective on the organisation and its impact on future generations, as well as embracing compassion, humility and forgiveness.

At the present moment in time, there are very few full spectrum organisations. Whenever we do encounter them, they always have exemplary performance characteristics.

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

Level 1: Survival consciousness

The first need for an organisation is financial survival. Without access to a continuing stream of funds, organisations quickly perish. Every organisation needs to make financial stability a primary concern. A precondition for success at this level is a healthy focus on its monetary needs.

When groups become too entrenched in survival consciousness and have deep-seated insecurities about the future, they develop an unhealthy short-term focus on money and organisational growth. In such situations, this can preoccupy the minds of the leaders to the exclusion of all other factors. This leads to excessive control, caution, and a tendency to be risk-averse.

Groups that operate in this way are not interested in strategic alliances; being in control is more important. They see people as resources to be exploited. Organisations experience their deepest fears at this level of consciousness.

Level 2: Relationship consciousness

The second need for an organisation is harmonious interpersonal relationships and good internal communications. Without good relationships with members and employees, organisational survival is compromised.

The critical issue at this level of consciousness is to create a sense of loyalty and belonging among its people, and a sense of caring and connection between the organisation and its members. Preconditions for creating a sense of belonging are open communication, mutual respect and appreciation. Preconditions for caring are friendliness, responsiveness and listening. When these are in place, loyalty and satisfaction among members will be high. Tradition and rituals help cement these bonds.

Fears about belonging and lack of respect lead to fragmentation, dissension and disloyalty. When leaders meet behind closed doors, or fail to communicate openly, people suspect the worst. Cliques form and gossip becomes rife. When the leaders are more focused on their own success rather than the success of the organisation, 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 organisational consciousness is on performance. At this level of consciousness, the organisation is focused on becoming the best it can be through the adoption of best practices and a focus on high standards.

Level 3 organisations tend to be structured hierarchically for the purposes of central control. Top-down is the primary mode of decision-making. Steep hierarchies often serve no other purpose than to cater to leaders' needs for recognition, status, and self-esteem. To maintain central control, level 3 groups develop rules to regulate and bring order to all aspects of their organisation.

Groups that are predominantly focused at this level of consciousness can easily degenerate into power-based silos and/or rigid authoritarian bureaucracies. When this happens, failure or collapse will eventually occur unless the organisation can switch from being internally focused to externally focused, and become more adaptable.

Level 4: Transformation consciousness

The focus of the fourth level of organisational consciousness is on adaptability, member empowerment, and continuous learning. The critical issue at this level of consciousness is how to stimulate innovation so that the group can respond to changing life conditions and expectations. This requires the organisation to be agile, flexible and take risks.

To fully respond to the challenges of this level of consciousness the organisation must actively garner members' ideas and opinions. Everyone must feel that his or her voice is being heard. This requires leaders to admit they do not have all the answers and invite group participation. For many leaders this is a new role requiring new skills and

capabilities. That is why it is important to develop the emotional intelligence of leaders. They must be able to facilitate high performance in large groups of people who are looking for equality and responsible freedom.

One of the dangers at this level of consciousness is to become overly biased toward consensus. While some level of consensus is important, ultimately decisions must get made.

A precondition for success at this level of consciousness is encouraging all members to think and act like owners. More accountability is given to everyone and structures become less hierarchical. Cooperation is encouraged and more attention is given to personal development and relationship skills. Diversity is seen as a positive asset in exploring new ideas. This shift, which brings responsible freedom and equality to members, cannot fully achieve the desired results unless all people share the same sense of direction or purpose. This requires a shift to the fifth level of consciousness.

Level 5: Internal cohesion consciousness

The focus at the fifth level of organisational consciousness is on building cultural cohesion and developing a capacity for collective action. For this to happen, leaders 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 organisation and gives members 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 practices 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. Aligning members' personal sense of mission with the organisation's sense of vision will create a climate of commitment and enthusiasm across the organisation. Personal engagement and creativity increase as individuals align with their passion.

In level 5 organisations, failures become lessons, and practice becomes fun. The key to success at this level of consciousness is the establishment of a strong, positive, unique cultural identity that differentiates the organisation from others.

Level 6: Making a difference consciousness

The focus at the sixth level of organisational 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 members find personal fulfilment through their practice. Externally, the focus is on building mutually beneficial partnerships and alliances with other groups.

The critical issue at this level of consciousness is that members see the organisation is making a difference in the world, either through its involvement in the local community or its willingness to fight for causes that improve the well-being of humanity. Members must feel that the company cares about them and their future.

Companies operating at this level of consciousness go the extra mile to make sure they are being responsible citizens. They support and encourage members' activities in the local community and by setting up or charitable efforts.

The organisation supports members in becoming all they can become, in terms of their personal growth. Everyone supports everyone else.

A precondition for success at this level is developing leaders with a strong sense of empathy. Leaders must recognize that they must not only provide direction for the organisation, but they must also become the servants of its members. They must create an environment that supports people in aligning their sense of personal mission with the vision and mission of the group. At this level of consciousness leaders must become mentors thereby creating pools of talent for succession planning.

Level 7: Service consciousness

The focus at the seventh level of organisational 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 organisation is on building a climate of ethics, humility and compassion. Externally, the focus is on local, national or global activism in building a sustainable future for humanity and the planet.

The critical issue at this level of consciousness is developing a deep sense of social responsibility throughout the organisation. At this level of consciousness, organisations care about social justice and human rights. They care about ecology and the global environment.

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, organisations must embrace the highest ethical standards in all their interactions with members and the local community. They must always give consideration to the long-term impacts of their decisions and actions.