A kind culture is a resilient culture

By John Hendry OAM

A Resilient Culture is an inclusive culture, one that appreciates the fact that people do struggle with challenge and this struggle can limit motivation, engagement and application. The resilient culture recognises that "self-regard" is directly influenced by "social-regard", that other people matter.

Social-regard is the critical factor in how we regard ourselves and this social-regard is clearly posited in the "lived" culture, be it at home, at work, at school or at play. How others regard us determines directly our capacity to be resilient. A resilient culture establishes an enabling and supportive social-regard context that does promote people being vulnerable and taking a risk, trying positively by addressing the challenge presented without the fear of being diminished, critically judged by others in a status sense for making an error or for not managing the challenge as well as one should or as well as one may have been expected to do so.

A resilient culture encourages one to be vulnerable, to "have a go", to try something, to reach beyond "the safe", to explore and to experience the unknown. A resilient culture promotes all to understand that exploration into the known unknowns is OK as is the more interesting and more vulnerable world of the unknown unknowns. The resilient culture establishes hope and courage to present and to be actioned.

The status found in relationships is reflected in culture. How we are regarded establishes our status. Social status is really how we "regard' one another. Our "social status" does define us to ourselves and to others and directs our behaviour. Whenever we interact with others, or do something with or to another, we ultimately impact and this contributes to our status within the relationship we have with the other. Life is fully relational, and relationships involve a status component. Our regard for ourselves is positioned by how we

feel others regard us within each living context, each moment and then how they eventually regard us generally. This is about "worth". Are we valued, considered or worth, worthy? Are our contributions of value and valued? With being valued we gain confidence and courage and we develop a sense of hope. This promotes us to try.

The culture that "gives value" and gives, subsequently, courage and hope to try, is a resilient culture. A culture that "takes value", is critically judgmental and steals status, takes away the courage and hope to try. In this non-resilient culture vulnerability is avoided, for trying something new or something that one may find difficult and not manage well will critically impact negatively on our social status, our social-regard and subsequently our self-regard. Cultures do direct and are either resilient or not in how they react to "the trier".

The status and power structures of cultures define whether or not a culture is resilient. If power and status are defined by how mistake is managed, and mostly they are, then the management of mistake is critical to cultural resilience. Where vulnerability is high as a result of critical judgement by both those of higher status, and those of equal status (a peer), then resilience will be low. Only the brave "take on the system" and do so at their peril.

These non-resilient cultures are status protecting cultures where power is protected and even manipulated for personal gain. These cultures are highly competitive, and one is pitted against another. Safety (of status) is at risk. "Social threat" becomes a behaviour directing agent, either imposed extrinsically by an authority (or peer) or imposed intrinsically by oneself to safeguard existing status, social worth. These non-resilient, competitive cultures establish "status policing" strategies and techniques found in rewards, awards and punishments, and even "appraisal systems", that allow the powerful to remain in control. Surveillance is inherent in these cultures.

In resilient cultures power over others is not pursued or protected for all are encouraged to try things for failure here is valued for it directs discovery, promotes change and allows all to "have a crack" at something without the fear of losing status with either "the authority in power' or with peers. In these resilient culture's vulnerability is low and social threat does not determine or curtail action. These are cooperative and collaborative cultures, "leaning cultures", that value exploration, experimentation, new ideas and are excited about reaching into the known unknowns and even the unknown unknowns.

Motivation here is primed extrinsically and this stimulates and directs intrinsic motivation. Authority encourages "having a crack". Relationships are more open, transparent and supportive and are based upon "giving". Trust is given. Forgiveness is actioned, integrity found in respecting status and worth is pronounced and hope of course presents. Resilient cultures are compassionate. They value others and protect and promote status whenever possible. Others are looked after kindly. The systems in place to ensure the "real time resilience" aspects of these cultures create motivation upon giving meaning, of doing something for others, for something bigger than self, exists.

In contrast, the systems in place in non-resilient cultures, take rather than give status and worth, do not action forgiveness, do not exhibit integrity in reference to status and worth, are not transparent and operate entirely on the promotion of self. In non-resilient cultures existing power structures are preserved at any cost.

The reference to culture here refers to micro as well as macro cultures. A micro culture could be two people in a relationship, perhaps a family or a team, a class or club, a council or "management board", whereas a macro culture could be a school, an institution, an entire business, an organisation such as "the military", the Government, even associations and even nations. How cultures are structured in a resilience sense determines how we relate, how we live, how we grow and what is achieved and whether or not we have a sense of "common good". Resilient cultures live moment-to-moment upon adding meaning to the lives of all.

Resilient cultures are kind and promote the five elements critical to humane and constructive relationships that enable all to live meaningful and productive lives. These five defining elements are trust, forgiveness, integrity, hope and compassion. The resilient cultures present these foundations. The resilient culture is the way forward.

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