

# Systems Leadership Theory

## An introduction

Based on 60+ years of research, Systems Leadership Theory offers leaders an explicit and tested social theory to both understand and predict behaviour. Applying this integrated set of models and tools, leaders create conditions where people willingly give of their best.

## Underpinning Principles

### Clarity

Work, roles, authorities, and available resources are clear throughout the organisation.

### Simplicity

Systems enable the work to be done as simply as possible, and are easy to understand and operate.

### Meritocracy

People are appointed to roles based on their capability to do the work now and into the future.

### Mutuality

All parties gain from the working relationships.

## Understanding & organising the work

Systems Leadership Theory asks 2 deceptively simple questions: What is the work? and Whose work is it?

### What is the work?

The organisational structure describes how the purpose of the organisation will be achieved. It distributes work and decision-making authority amongst the team.

Once the work is identified, tasks supporting a single purpose are clustered into roles. Every role should have authority aligned to their accountability.

**Clarity is created by delineating the level of work complexity, the function, and the domain of work.**

### Whose work is it?

Finding people who are able to do the work requires an understanding of human capability. Different roles will require a different mix of the 5 elements of capability:



## Understanding & creating culture

Cultures are created when groups share mythologies. Mythologies are beliefs about whether behaviours are positive or negative according to 6 universal values: honesty, trust, courage, dignity, fairness, and love.

Cultures rate their observations of the world along these continua of universal values:

|             |   |               |
|-------------|---|---------------|
| Honest      | ↔ | Dishonest     |
| Trustworthy | ↔ | Untrustworthy |
| Courageous  | ↔ | Cowardly      |
| Dignifying  | ↔ | Undignifying  |
| Fair        | ↔ | Unfair        |
| Loving      | ↔ | Unloving      |

Leaders can actively shape the culture within their team by creating positive mythologies about behaviours that drive business performance. The team, in turn, is more likely to engage in behaviours they believe are valued positively.

When shaping the culture of their teams, leaders have three tools at their disposal:

