

'We will succeed in changing this world only if we can think and work together in new ways. We don't have to let go of what we believe, but we do need to be curious about what someone else believes.'

Margaret J Wheatley



Acting Your (St)Age

Speaking with a client recently about the very pressing challenges his organisation had not only survived through but, largely, thrived through, we were reminded that sometimes the good old theories are still good. In this case, theories around organisations having life cycles, with learning to be had in each stage, and different behaviours being effective during different stages. As Aldous Huxley says, 'experience isn't what happens to you, it's what you do with what happens to you.'

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD: Early stage organisations may be characterised by entrepreneurial founders, but these will fail if the company cannot grow beyond them for reasons including family, control, finance or capability. 'Dad always knows best.'

GROWING AND MATURING: Later in life, successful organisations can fail to see that their current structures, people, processes and culture can't support their needed trajectory. Or they see it but fail to act because their bureaucracy beats them. 'We're comfortable enough thanks, and there's no gain without pain.'

MID LIFE CRISIS (Teenage revisited): If they get through maturing and head for renewal, they can be so determined to keep or reincarnate the founding energy that they can't adopt necessary new processes, mistaking them for unnecessary old ones. They hate bureaucracy so pretend they don't have any, old wisdom is ditched and new wisdom ignored. 'It's good to feel the open road again'.

OLD AGE: If the crisis is survived, later years can allow the seeding of new futures! If the crisis is not survived then a decline can set in that shares some marked characteristics with the early stages - power is again in the hands of the few but now primarily inward facing. 'They won't get by me in a hurry'.

So, three questions for you:

- Is your organisation acting its (st)age?
- Is that a good idea?
- How do you know the answers to these two questions?

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