

Climate Coaching

Developing eco-centric leadership



Why is leading your organisation's response to the climate crisis so daunting? What practical actions can you implement? And how can you take environmental responsibility to influence and create change in your personal and professional life?

What kind of world are we living in?

Post-Covid, the UK faces an enormous challenge to rebuild the economy, tackle social inequality and face into the climate crisis – the so-called Green Recovery. It is clear there is a deeper reality of interconnectedness between these three agendas. Climate change represents an absolute limit on economic growth. And it is no accident that food poverty, Black Lives Matter and gender identity are finally making their way into mainstream consciousness. The way communities demonstrated self-restraint, kindness and mutual regard during Lockdown shows people want to come together and that they recognise each other as humans with equal rights.

“We won't go back to normal because normal was the problem.”

In March 2020, this slogan was projected on the side of a building in Santiago, Chile. Yes, this past year has been weird and challenging, but perhaps in the future we'll look back at 2019 as being the strange year because we will have let go of the old ways of living our lives and how we work?

Imagine this brave new world and ask yourself:

- How do we keep what we really want to keep?
- What can we let go of without making matters worse?
- How can we restore communities and the economy *and at the same time* protect the planet?

Traditional (egocentric) leadership is the problem.

This brave new world needs a different kind of leadership.

Traditional *egocentric* leadership inherently assumes man as authoritarian boss of the world. Egocentric leadership is at the root of our environmental crisis. Each year, we outstrip the resources our planet can regenerate in a single year. The day this happens is called Earth Overshoot Day. In 2020, that day was Saturday, August 22. If everyone on the planet consumed resources they way we do in the UK, this year's Earth Overshoot Day would be Sunday, May 16.

The journey from egocentric to eco-centric leadership is daunting. Some of you will not have yet started that journey. Some will be on it already and some will be on it and may well be struggling with it. Facing into the climate challenge makes people anxious; leaders who are usually confident can easily get overwhelmed with self-doubt and feelings of hopelessness.

Eco-centric leadership requires bravery to realise you can't boss the future. You have to use your *influence* to shape the outcomes we all need.

Three things eco-centric leaders do

As a leader in your organisation, you are jointly leading a system, pushing and pulling three main levers – strategy, business processes and people – to achieve your business objectives. You have several stakeholders: shareholders and/or a governing board, customers and suppliers and business partners.

And that doesn't change when you are tackling climate issues, it's just that you have an additional stakeholder: the planet.

You must therefore adopt a wider lens that has empathy for every systemic element in Planet Earth's story; thinking that extends to more than your local market or community, the UK or even global trade. It extends to 'more than the human world'.

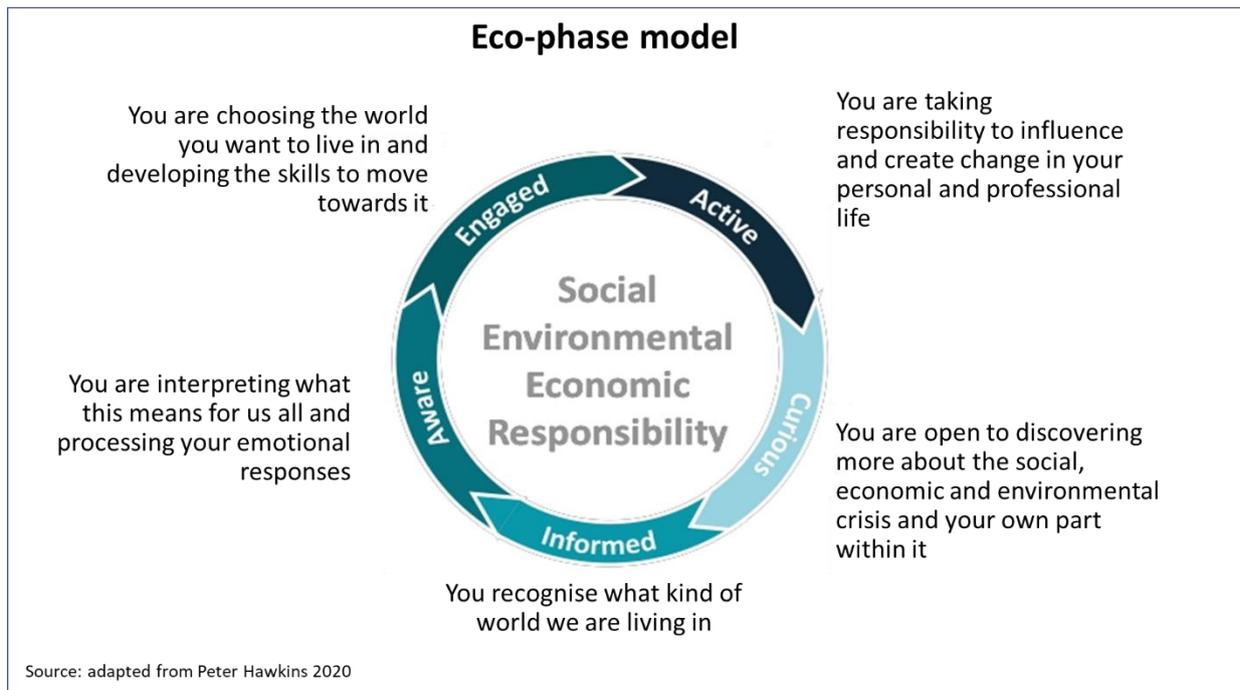
There are some very practical things you can do that signal a shift in mindset to this larger systemic thinking.

1. On strategy, put the environment as your top priority.
2. On Business processes, recognise the planet as your stakeholder by establishing an ethical pledge that underlies all decision-making.
3. On People and Culture, educate your workforce and build the skills and behaviours needed to deliver eco-friendly services.

Leading by example

Those are three very practical things you can do. However, leading on climate is different because to have credibility leaders must lead by example in their personal and professional life.

Here is a five-stage journey, originally proposed by Professor Peter Hawkins of Henley Business School. I have adapted it with permission.



Stage 1: Eco-curious

Imagine you are back in the office getting on with your job, and there is a fire in the building. What would you do?

Now remember the catastrophic wildfires in California in 2020 and answer the question again.

Our 'building' is already on fire.

Your journey starts with being open and curious about the world we are living in. Why are dramatic, unthinkable events cascading across the news headlines every day? Pay attention.

Stage 2: Eco-informed

By paying attention and following your curiosity, you become more informed. We all necessarily became preoccupied with the response to the Covid pandemic. This changed the way we live and the way we work to deliver business as usual. It is fair to say that longer-term business strategies have had to be put on hold to some extent in the 12 months from March 2020.

Do you remember the environmental benefits that were achieved during Lockdown – from reduced air pollution to seeing wildlife on our city streets? This demonstrates the planet can recover if we give it a chance.

Stage 3: Eco-aware

Then we must process our emotional response to all the information out there. Deciding to choose a different future for ourselves and for our planet is the point where you move from denial to taking responsibility.

Stage 4: Eco-engaged

I invite you once more to imagine the world you want to live in and ask yourself: How do we keep what we really want to keep? What can we let go of without making matters worse? How can we restore communities and the local economy *and at the same time* protect the planet?

Stage 5: Eco-active

Ten years from now, I don't want to look back at my life and work and wonder what all the leaders I work with and I were doing when average global temperatures increased by three degrees each year. Now is the time to choose to be on the right side of history.

The UK needs people to step up into climate leadership roles in their organisations. Your sector needs eco-centric leaders who have defined their purpose in life and integrated it into their work.

The post-pandemic world needs people like you to take responsibility to influence and create change in how we do business.

If not you, then who? If not now, when?

To be ready to lead in the post-pandemic brave new world, you will need support to adapt - psychologically, emotionally and practically - throughout your journey.

I'm biased towards the usefulness of having a coach. That said, the evidence shows your chances of succeeding on any sort of journey that crosses your personal and professional life will be 30% - 50% higher if you get yourself a coach. A coach partners you on your journey as you develop your influence and build your confidence towards eco-centric leadership.

It's good to talk. I'd love to hear more about your experiences of how these issues play out for you and chat with you about what you can do to move towards eco-centric leadership.

You can book a meeting for a no-obligation chat here: <https://linktr.ee/JeremyJLewis>

Jeremy is an EMCC accredited coach at the senior practitioner level and is a member of the Climate Coaching Alliance.

