

I love trees and I love woodlands. Every time I walk through an ancient forest or woodland, I get a rich multisensory experience that brings an immediate sense of calm and peace. The trees, the colours, the textures the birdsong the woodland flora and flowers are really incredible.

But up until fairly recently I did not realise that all this magic wouldn't be possible without the fungal network that lives beneath the forest floor.

These fungi connect with one another, and just up with other tree roots and plant roots, to form an incredible mesh that links everything together forming this tight web. Using that network what they do is they move water, nutrients and even chemical signals between tree to tree and tree to plants and keep the whole ecosystem going.

What is also interesting is that they regulate the health of the ecosystem using this network. For example, if there are some trees or group of trees who are running short of water or nutrients, then using this network they can draw water from areas within the woodland or other trees with excess, to those that need it. So this kind of collaborative working keeps the health of the woodland stable and it is able to flourish.

I have been trying to use this model to see how it compares with our own working environment and organisations. If we were to think of the organisation as an ecosystem, then the nature of the experience of living, working and using that organisation would depend on the type and strength of the connections that take place behind the scenes.

In other words, whereas the connections in the woodland tend to be collaborative, cooperative and mutually beneficial; if we have organisations where the nature of the connections are weak, superficial, divisive, competitive and self-interested, then that will reflect on the culture of the organisation which will result in an organisation of fear, instability and that will reflect on the performance of the organisation, and the type of care that we can give to our patients.

So, I have been trying to use the lessons from the woodland into my own practice. I try to shift the focus from being driven by visions, strategies and targets, to actually working on building meaningful relationships and connections with the people at work and also outside of work. That has taken a lot of effort to try and get around that concept, and to try to put it into practice. It meant that I had to leave behind some of my biases, drop some of

the barriers down, prejudices and past narratives, and try to make space and time to actively listen to people. Not to just hear their words, but their stories and to share in their thoughts and emotions; and some of the systemic barriers to making those relationships possible. For example, trying to bring myself to work, and not my titles or my job roles.

Because when you compare with the woodland fungi, as much as this organism is huge and covers several hundreds of metres, you cannot unpick and say where the head and the tail is. You cannot discern which part is the leader and which is the follower, as they can all be leaders and followers at the same time because they are all working together for the common good. That is a powerful principle to apply in our own working environments.

Yes, it's not always easy, and sometimes I walk into work and there is crisis after crisis after crisis and workload pressures and so on and so forth. But what I try to do in those times is to step back and keep that image of the ancient woodland in mind. Because even in the woodland they face extreme threats such as storms, temperature differences and disease. Despite all of that happening, but despite this what the fungi keep doing is just connecting, supporting and sustaining. They keep doing that over and over again. That approach has helped them become one of the most successful organisms on this planet and also one of the most resilient ones.

So the bottom line is that : when you focus on working on those relationships and building strong connections, both within your group and also reaching out to other groups and working collaboratively, what I have come to find is that I have a good day at work, my team also seem to have a better day at work and the work gets done in a much better way as well.

So if we just look after each other, then the bigger things look after themselves.

Thank you for listening.

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