Ethics, Etiquette and Purpose of Life: In Search of the Coevolution's Missing Link in the Strategic Field

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Abstract

The world needs better human beings to be a better place to live. However, to reach a better world depends on the development of the organizational etiquette, the ethics, and individuals with a clear purpose of life. The coevolution means that all the stakeholders involved in different levels may have the possibility to influence, positively or negatively, in the process. This paper aims to develop an integral framework connecting different aspects of internal and external environment and the topics of ethics, etiquette and strategy. The integrative framework is an attempt to work on a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that concerns the individual, the company and society. Thus, a primal objective of the executive should reconcile the person progress with the delivery of results. The competitive world is not a source of more cheats and injustices, but a motivation for more ethics actions and construction of better social etiquettes that will help to the coevolution of different stakeholders and, in the end, all the society will be better, little by little, through a continuous process of development

Keywords: Ethics, Etiquette, Purpose of life, Organizational strategy, Coevolution, Performance.

Contents

1. Introduction

A competitive world can be a source of challenges, mainly when the economic crises knock the doors and the stockholders urge for more profits and better measurements. If we accept that a competitive environment is a world full of cheats and the human relationship is only a tiny detail that disrupt good deals, so there is no escape in this vicious circle. However, in this article we argue that it is possible to think and act with etiquette and ethics and to be strategically valid for the firm, because the collaborators in different areas and organizations are human beings and the feelings and emotions are involved in the human relationships. Due to it, a strategy based on the coevolution of the people with respect each person's purpose of life and personal values can be a source of sustainable relationships over the time. Even though the word strategy is related to competition and zero-sum game, it is possible to think strategy as a way to construct, deliberately or not, paths for the overall progress. For overall progress, we are preoccupied with the collective of people instead of a minority. This way, the word stakeholder can be used. A stakeholder-based view is more ample than a stockholder-based view and it can be more interesting for the development of the social etiquette and the ethics. The aim of this essay is to propose an integrative framework for the ethics, etiquette and strategy. The framework is an attempt to work on a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that concerns the individual, the company and society. Besides, the question of time is another important factor relevant for the development of the stakeholders. For example, the adaptability of the person over the time is a way to analysis the progress.

Thus, a primal objective of the executive should reconcile the person progress with the delivery of results. The competitive world is not a source of more cheats and injustices, aggression and abuses, but a motivation for more ethics actions and construction of better social etiquettes. Would not be ethics a way to perform better as a human being? Would not be etiquette a way to perform better as a social being? Should not the purpose of life related to some sort of ethics and etiquette to construct a better place to live? Should be kindness prohibited in the organization, because kindness costs time or should be kindness be encouraged? We argue that kindness and other human behaviors should be treated as an important element for the construction of the organization, mainly in times of crises and a highly competitive environment.

The organization is a collective of people with a common and at the same time, different objectives. Thus, the firm strategy is an important element of the union and collective action with the involvement of different areas of the organization to face the challenges of the environmental changes. Because of it, the question of adaptability is a condition *sine qua non* for the survival of the organization over the time.

2. Organizational Strategy

For both the economist Friedrich Hayek and the organizational theorist Chester Barnard the main organizational problem lies in the adaptability (Williamson, 2005). For Hayek, the adaptation is more related to the "wonder of the price system", while for Barnard, the adaptation depends on the coordination of internal factors, and the importance of communication, cooperation and the direction given by the company's purposes. Thus, Lewin *et al.* (1999) remind us that the problem of adaptation is an important issue for organizational and strategy theorists. According to Burnes (1996) organizations are not successful just because of their ability to predict and formulate strategies, but mainly for their ability to constantly realign with the environment. Within the adaptation issue, it is necessary to comply with the strategic context, as well as their processes and content. This tripartition (context, content, and process) has its origin in the works by Pettigrew (1998) and it has been considered legitimate in the strategic field, and being a holistic environment to research business strategies, including the timing issues (past, present and future) (Rasche, 2007).

The strategic context is directly connected to the external environment, as well as the need for the organization's adjustment (Rasche, 2007). As for processes, the author refers to the "primacy of thought and reason", i.e., the strategic formulation/formation of the processes; whereas, for content, the completeness of the rules and organizational resources in relation to the products offered, and the markets served. In addition, Lewin *et al.* (1999) note that the adaptation between the company and the environment occurs through the sharing of changes in the different environments. According to Esser *et al.* (1996) the environment can be operationalized through the distinction of four levels: meta, macro, meso and micro levels (Figure 1).

Figure-1. The organization and its environments
Source: Esser *et al.* (1996)

The meta level would be the country's, region's ability *(cluster,* for example) to create conditions for the players to be able to consistently mobilize their actions effectively (Esser *et al.*, 1996; Meyer-Stamer, 2005). According to Meyer-Stamer (2005):

> First, there is one issue where the players in a given society may succeed or fail in creating a favorable environment for private companies. As government's players whether or not

they actually interact? How do they agree on the overview of where the economy is headed? Do the key actors in a society share the basic guidelines on private enterprise, on the relative importance of the market control mechanisms, on the international trade guidelines (open or closed economy)? This is called the Meta-analysis level, because it leads us to a level beyond the macroeconomic factors.

In turn, the company's macro-environment consists of contextual elements such as economics, politics, ecology, technology, culture, and by trends that change over time. The elements of the macro-environment are not stable; therefore, they are constantly changing. However, the perception of such changes is often not an easy task, unlike the lower levels: the meso and the micro. The meso level is the field of specific policies, and business promotion instruments for both public and private companies (Meyer-Stamer, 2005). The meso level is superior to the industrial structure and the meso level contains the instruments for the development of particular policies to particular industrial sectors. Thus, the industrial clusters are directed related with the meso level. On the other hand, the prefix micro means small and is also known as the operating environment or task environment. The micro-environment is composed of other organizations and individuals who may directly or indirectly affect the company's performance. The micro-environment has a direct and almost immediate influence in the organization and it is composed to the customers, the consumers, suppliers, competitors, government, media, labor unions, creditors, and partners. Returning to a classical definition of what is an organization, it can be defined as a group of people working towards common goals and accumulating value in the production process, aiming at economic growth (Hall, 1984). Therefore, it follows that the organization is composed of people and that the elements belonging to the micro-environment are also composed by people. That is, the customers and the consumers' base are fashioned by people. Suppliers are people too. Our competitors are also formed by people. The government is made up of people. So is the media, unions, creditors and the partners are people with shared goals. Therefore, we can summarize the organization and micro-environment in the following manner (Figure 2):
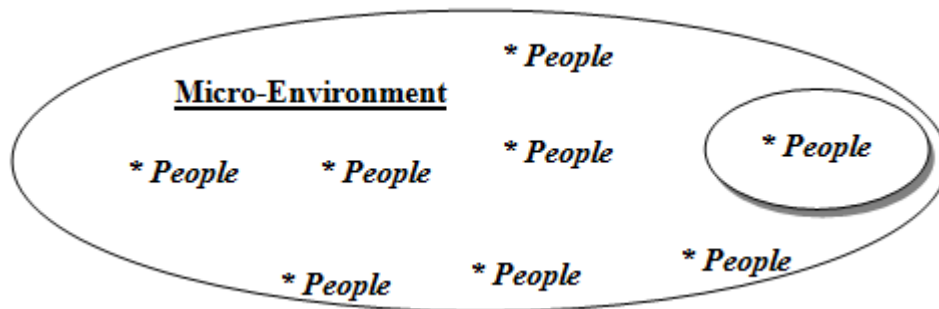

Figure-2. People in the organization and in the micro-environment
Source: Own ellaboration

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In another words, the company and the micro-environment are formed by stakeholders, i.e., people who are interested, or who can influence, either positively or negatively, the company. Relationships with stakeholders may be critical to the success of the organization. However, for the proper use of resources, and the company's adaptation to its environment, especially in the micro-environment, it is necessary for the people to work with synergy. It is important to emphasize the concept of synergy to the question of ethics and etiquette. According to Ansoff (1979) the synergy can be defined as an "effect can produce a return of the combined company's resources, higher than the sum of its parts." The interaction between stakeholders and the company's resources provide opportunities for synergies to occur involving all in the chain, and they may benefit or be harmed according to the degree of integration and the existing mutual support (Tantalo and Priem, 2014).

Thus, adopting the scale indicated by Esser *et al.* (1996) it is possible to establish different levels in each nod, corresponding to different combinations between the subjects and their respected characteristics. Complementary, Anunciação (2014) propones five levels: personal ethics, professional ethics, organizational ethics, economic ethics and societal ethics.
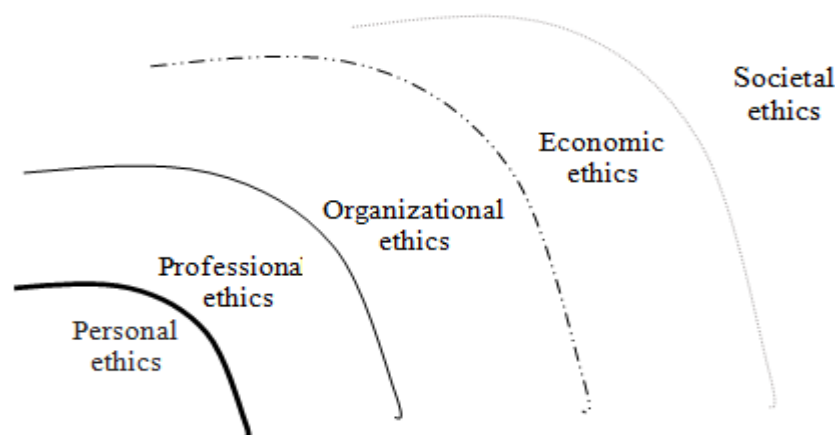

Figure-3. Different ethical dimensions
Source: Anunciação (2014)

Because the phenomenon of strategy and the intra and inter-relationship are *multilevelness*, the organizational etiquette appears as important "glue" to provide conditions to keep and development the relationships over the time.

3. Etiquette

In Portuguese, the word etiquette has a double meaning. It can mean both the set of rules and regulations on social occasions, first in the court's formalities, and as a brand, the label that identifies the product's manufacturer. It is common to relate "label clothing" with designer clothing, brand, prestige and often related to higher prices. For many people a good label is the one that is remembered by the consumer. Despite the double meaning of the word, both are related and reinforce each other. That is, a company with good social conduct usually has a good employer "reputation" and vice versa. However, more than the question of the reputation and the label, we are interested in the business etiquette as practices and routines that respect and value not only the welfare of their employees, but also enable a work environment by promoting the moral and inhibiting egotistic and opportunistic actions. As the old adage: the opportunity makes the thief. A moralized environment prevents and it doesn't allow that an unethical person takes advantage or behaves in a harmful manner toward others (Treviño and Nelson, 2007). If an ethical person in a corrupt environment tends to be marginalized; conversely, a person with ethical failings in a moralized environment tends to feel the pressure to follow the dominant pattern. Conduct codes are important, despite the prescription's insufficiency to solve behavior problems within and outside the company (Parker, 1998; Treviño and Nelson, 2007). Thus, it is important to distinguish the difference between justice and fairness as proposed by Goldman and Cropanzano (2015) "Justice should be defined as adherence to rules of conduct, whereas fairness should be defined as individuals' moral evaluations of this conduct". Besides, it is the will and the individual character with the institutionalization of appropriate practices and motivators for the good. The leader as a role model plays an important factor for the booster of the individual development. According to Hannah *et al.* (2014) "'Leadership' is therefore a qualifying term for certain forms of influence: positive and socially acceptable forms. […] it is our opinion that leaders' credibility, and subsequent ability to influence, will be diminished unless their actions are deemed socially acceptable". Besides, "leaders serve as boundary spanners" (Mumford and Fried, 2014). Another point is the ability to reach and align the organization's values with the values and principles of the individual. According to Kaptein (2008) clarity, congruency, feasibility, supportability, transparency, discussability and sanctionability are examples of values that compose an ethical organizational culture. The institutionalization and promotion of the moral not only cause the individual to work in an ethical manner, and reduce the opportunism, but it also promotes the moral polishing of individuals with ethical lapses in their trainings. It is assumed that not all are equal ethically, there are people who are in more advanced stages of development while others are still awakening these qualities. According to Morin (2007): "some individuals are more selfish, others are more altruistic; generally, to a certain extent, each one wavers between selfishness and altruism". Due to it, people present different levels of moral self or think differently whom they are and how they act (Jennings *et al.*, 2015). Meanwhile, everyone deserves respect, the opportunity to act with consideration regarding the welfare of others and that all may reach the advanced platforms of development. If the institution is not capable of developing the individual's ethics, it needs to at least ensure environmental conditions, with possibilities for the individual development. Rohden (2007) observes that, albeit imperfect, we are fully perfectible. Thus, ethics is an individual quality that can be learned and perfected, same as the thinking ability and the creativity. Finally, it is the practice of improvements where ethics can be a source of motivation and a destination, too.

4. Ethics

Ethics is not only the ability to act with virtue, but it is also a cognitive process of thinking, feeling, the correct behavior awareness, the aptitude to recognize and know what to do. According to Takala (2006) the ethics present an altruistic component; consequently, when included in the organizational environment provides a better quality of working life. Thus, the well-known Retaliation Law "eye for eye, tooth for a tooth" is left in the background and the ability to engage in activities of cooperation and reciprocity improve their relationship with the individuals. As shown in Figure 1 the ability to cooperate extrapolates beyond the boundaries of the organization itself and it influences the firm´s competitive position and adaptation (Figure 2). However, it involves the acceptance that there are other goals to be pursued by the company beyond profit. One alternative goal can be the trust (Gustafsson, 1998) and the perception of fairness (Masterson *et al.*, 2000; Hollensbe *et al.*, 2008) among the key players, which may reduce transaction costs (Williamson, 2005). Solidarity (Morin, 2007) integrity (Treviño and Nelson, 2007) or even the long-term survival are example of another alternative goals (Estola, 1998). In addition, more than a fad and organizational rhetoric (Parker, 1998) ethics in organizations are a practical necessity. The firm survival is a long term game. However, the organizations are fertile ground for conflicts of interest, labor issues, human rights and consumer protection, discrimination, power, abuse, injustice, stress, occupational diseases (Sonnentag, 2001; Treviño and Nelson, 2007; Harris *et al.*, 2011). More than revolutionize what does not work on the outside, one must learn to police oneself and seek self-perfection since the altruistic program is hindered by selfishness (Morin, 2007). Thus, according to Goswamy *et al.* (2007) "nothing but, the consciousness must be experienced in order to be truly understood". More than a business project and the importance of organizational climate (Parker, 2003) ethics is a personal project, each one seeking their own improvement and progress, as such, the company becomes a real laboratory of practices, influences, resiliencies and attempts. So, ethics is not a rhetorical prescription of morality, but the element of leverage of mankind's superior condition created by the individual, and supervised by his conscience. In another words ethics seeks to transcend the ego and superficiality interests for an intimate reform, deep, of what really counts for the self and its condition, is neither to moralize, nor to reproach, but for getting help by helping others. It is the voluntary choice to be a good person, and turning his life into a journey that resembles a work of art (Rohden, 2007). Moreover, both the "ethical footprints" and the "ecological footprint" register the beauty of the being's journey in the world. This journey should be related to the purpose of life.

5. Purpose of Life

The purpose of life is not a metaphysical concept, but a very pragmatic and the concept is directly related to the sense of being responsible and wise enough with his/her decisions and choices in life (Frankl, 2008). Viktor Frankl was responsible for the development of a theory called logotherapy and it puts the purpose of life in the center of human being's actions. More than a scholar, Frankl was a Jewish Psychiatry and Psychology who has developed what is common called the 3rd. Viennese school of psychotherapy. The first school was developed by Freud and it is related with the constant search to fulfill the human desires. The second school is Adler's and his motivation of power to overcome the inferior complex. Frank has had contact with both, Freud and Adler. However, for Frankl it was not desire, neither power the intrinsic motivation of human actions. Instead of it, the purpose of life was the enduring search for meaning. However, the Frankl's works were subtly interrupted because of the World War II. Viktor Frankl's family was a Jewish family and his parents could not leave Vienna out and he stayed until his last moments with his parents. All the Viktor Frankl's family, parents and brother, and sister, were dead in concentration camps. Even Viktor Frankl was a prisoner in several Nazi concentration camps such as Auschwitz and Dachau. Besides, his first copy of the logotherapy book was lost during that period. He survived and soon after World War II, the dictated his book by heart and what he remembered in nine days (Xausa, 2013). The result was his book "Man's Search for Meaning". The seeds of logotherapy have been planted and accordingly to a survey conducted by the Library of Congress the book had sold over more than 10 million copies. Like a Greek Temple, logotherapy is based in three columns: liberty of choice, will of meaning and meaning of life (Xausa, 2013). The first one is directed related to responsibility. Liberty without responsibility is portrayed by immature people. On the other hand, when liberty and responsibility walk together, the maturity and development of the human being is appreciated in a positive way. For Frankl, the statue of Liberty of the American east coast should be complemented with a west cost statue of Responsibility (Frankl, 2008). The will of meaning and the meaning of life are very important drivers for the human motivation. When a person knows his/her purpose in life, (s)he can be more resistant and resilient to transform obstacles and suffering in sources of inspiration and hope. Frankl has perceived in his concentration camp mates who have maintained a purpose of life they have a higher chance of survival. In the logotherapy, the meaning is not born with the own existence of life, but it is found in the confrontation of life and existence. This way, man is responsible for the fulfillment of his existence through a dedication to a cause, a person or to win the difficulties and suffering of a context or specific situation (Frankl, 2008).

The challenge and overcoming of the suffering is a like the hero path who can transform the inevitable suffering in a human realization. In a sense, it is the crucible experience that transforms human beings into extraordinary leaders with an altered sense of identity (Bennis and Thomas, 2002). According to Frankl "Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear with almost any 'how'." In a sense, due to his Jewish background, Frankl will transform every human action in a sacred action (Aquino, 2014) and "every human action is his/her own monument". Lao-Tsé, the famous East thinker says: "having completed a task means to be eternal" (Frankl, 2012).

6. Coevolution and the Integrative Framework

The human being is a project under construction by him/herself (Sartre, 2005). Yet, when inserted in the organizational environment there must be an institutional support to help build relations, and synergistic relationships in search of better conditions for the stakeholders and also for himself. Thus, not only the individual ethics becomes relevant, but also the organizational culture, the practices and routines found in the workplace (Smith and Peterson, 1998). In another words, it is necessary to have conditions to influence positively the coevolution among the collaborators. According to Zuben (s/d)"In biology, coevolution is associated with the mutual influence between two evolutionary species presenting dependencies between them, so that one species selectively exerts pressure on the other." Furthermore, the coevolution would be linked to the concept of adaptation, multiple adaptations through competition and/or cooperation. The competitive coevolution comes from the predator-prey link or the zero-sum games. Conversely, the cooperative coevolution appears in the symbiosis, in the mutualism, etc. In another area that the term coevolution appears with some frequency is in computing, especially with works of evolutionary algorithms (EA) that assist in troubleshooting dynamic and complex programs, especially those that intensify over time. In 2003, IBM - International Business Machine - held a symposium on the subject. According to Spohrer (2003) co-evolution is when two or more systems evolve jointly and progressively, not isolated changes. For Husbands and Mill (1991) the adaptation of any individual in any given population is influenced by coevolution, when they share the same world. The sharing of scarce resources and limited environment turns the coevolution in a natural way for adaptation. Besides, as observed by Levinthal and Fichman (1998) "as the amount of relationship-specific assets increases over time, the benefit of continuing the relationship increases". In the organizational area, although the term coevolution is recent, the organization as a living being metaphor is nothing new (Morgan, 1996). This metaphor provides conditions to explore aspects of survival, adaptation and cooperation in environments with different levels of hostility. It helps managers to achieve a better understanding of the individual-group-organization-environment relationship among the individual, group, organization and environment. The living organism metaphor adopts the assumption of an open system for the very sustenance of life (Morgan, 1996). The issue of coevolution is inserted in the organizational context (Lewin et al., 1999). However, the area still calls for more studies, especially in the contexts of the strategic choice (Child, 1972) and of business strategies (Lewin and Volberda, 2006). The article by Jacobides and Winter (2005) for example, is one of the pioneers in the area. The authors assert the coevolution existence between the capabilities and the transaction costs. That is, how they change and interact. The causal relationships, the mechanisms, and the likely consequences are the reasons for studying the coevolution. The term can be understood as the simultaneous evolution of the organizations in their environments (Baum and Singh, 1994). Conversely, Mckelvey (2002) notes that the coevolution can serve as a bridge between the strategy, and the organizational theory, as well as the company's micro strategy, and the industry's macroevolution. Moreover, it can assist in bringing together two areas that have had their differences: the organizational learning and the strategic planning (Ansoff, 1991; Mintzberg, 1991). According to Hall (1992) companies which realize that the learning and

operating processes work jointly can achieve sustainable competitive advantage. One possibility is presented by Rodrigues and Child (2008) with the institutional perspective. The authors follow the coevolution of the Telemig - public telecommunications company of Minas Gerais - through its 27 years of existence. The company ceased to exist in 2000 but left behind a historic track record marked by several stages of transformation and evolution. However, Mckelvey (2002) observes that the speed or the acceleration of the adaptation process, often refers only to the "the Red Queen paradox", i.e., it is necessary to keep running to stay in the race. This question refers to the Queen of Hearts from the book "Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There" by Lewis Carroll who calls: "You have to run as much as possible to stay in place". Perhaps, this is a great truth for both companies and humans. One question remains: Is all the running or the financial gains really worth it? The classic phrase immortalized in Shakespeare's Hamlet can set up part of the discussion: "There are more things between heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in our vain philosophy." Or as in Master Nazareno's words: "What is the use for a man to conquer the whole world and lose his soul in the process?" Thus, in a preliminary way, it is presented the following integrative framework of ethics, etiquette, and organizational strategy (Figure 3) for the coevolution of a person inserted in an environment of relationship and interaction with other stakeholders.
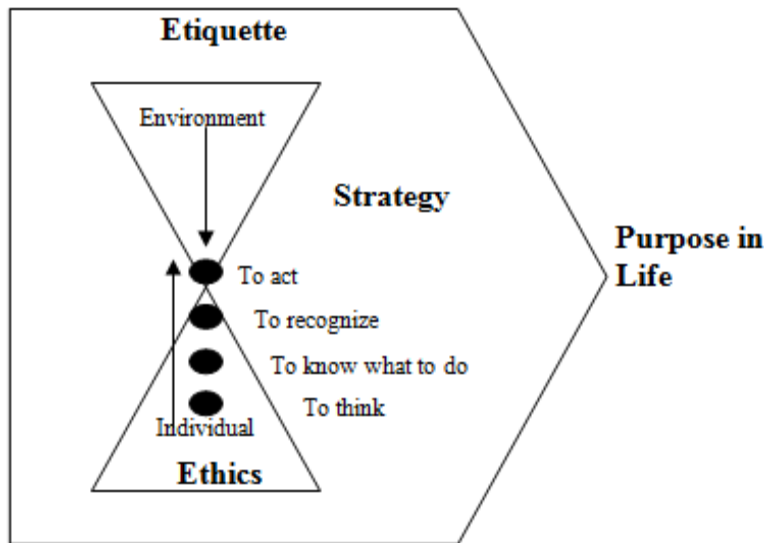

Figure-4. Framework of the ethics, etiquette and strategy integration
Source: Own ellaboration

The relationship among strategy, etiquette and ethics is a complex, multilevel, non-linear and multidimensional phenomenon that concerns the individual, the company, and society. Furthermore, the time dimension needs to be brought into play; thus, there is the formation of a spiral coevolution being operated mainly by the microenvironment, toward the meta environment as shown in Figure 4:
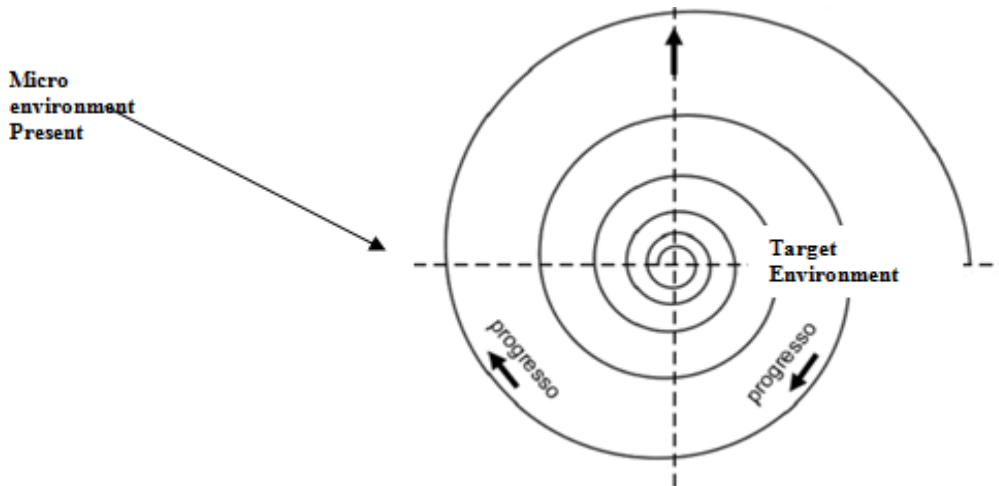

Figure-5. Spiral of Progress
Source: Own ellaboration

Moreover, to turn operational organizations and individuals that co-evolve in the spontaneous construction of good will becomes the right way for the improvements of mankind. However, more than a utopia, it is a challenge to be practiced every day and throughout life with hopes of mankind's own evolution as a whole.

7. Final Considerations

This essay seeks to explore, the preliminary approach and dialog of ethics, etiquette, and organizational strategy. If the latter seeks better competitive conditions and the organizations' survival; the relationship between individual etiquette and the ethics seems to point to the very challenging issues of the individual's coevolution along with the other stakeholders. At this point, the existence of a healthy and motivating environment contributes to the spontaneous performance of good will. In another words, the organization's characteristics affect the individuals' behavior. However, the ethical condition of the being is a project to be pursued primarily by oneself for his/her own development, since it is through his/her "ethical footprint" that he/she will leave traces of his/her worthiness in the world. And it is against the selfishness impetus, latent in every imperfect being, that the individual must go about

molding good habits to perform good will spontaneously. However, a good work environment may influence the people´s behaviors. Thus the importance of the organizational etiquettes. The morality and the social well-being are very important characteristics to the group of people and its social norms. Besides, the organizational etiquette can influence a median person to be better, if the group expect this kind of behavior. Finally, it is important to the strategy to keep sustainable patterns of actions, because the organization survival is a long-term game. The quality of the relationship among the different stakeholders influence the firm capacity to compete and positive collaborations may mean high return in terms of financial and non-financial returns (Tantalo and Priem, 2014; García and Aguilera, 2015). The relationship among organizational strategy, ethics and etiquette seeks to identify limitations and to provide conditions and opportunities for building trust, solidarity, and the integrity of interpersonal relationships. Besides, the alignment among ethics, etiquette and strategy can be perceived through the degree of the coevolution that exists in a organization. For coevolution we mean that a collaborator helps other to improve and he/she receives as a return the helping for the other parts. In a few words, coevolution will be to help me through the service of others. Ultimately, Takala (2006) summarized it well: it is the search for a better quality of life; depending on how a company is running, it can be an example of heaven or hell, as paths leading to the coevolution or to favor nefarious actions that can considerably delay the individuals on their path to enlightenment.

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