



Building Organisational Agility

Some organisations seem better equipped to change than others. They are able to evolve with the times and change is no big deal, just a part of doing business. Unfortunately these organisations tend to be the exception rather than the norm. If we choose a word to describe these organisations a good one would be *agile*. But agility is a relative term; organisations can become more *agile* or less *agile* depending upon their circumstances and how they are managed and led. Agility can be created or destroyed by the choices and actions that leaders take.

Agile principles over practices

Organisations that want to become more agile often look at other organisations for ideas and practices. The danger with this approach is that practices are very difficult to transfer between organisations because they are context specific and the context differs between organisations. Operating principles however can transcend organisations. It is the application of the *agile* principles in a specific context (ie within a specific organisation) that establishes the *agile* practices. This is the reason why it is always dangerous to advocate best practices over best principles.

Agile principles

Operating principles are conscious choices made by leaders that define how they would like their organisation to operate, and for each principle there is an equally valid alternative choice. *Agile* principles are simply those operating principles that focus on making an organisation more *agile*.

For example, an *agile* principle could be '*each business process is defined in terms of outcomes of value delivered to the customer*', as opposed to '*each business process is defined as a set of related tasks each with individual performance targets*'. Both operating principles are valid but the former will lead to greater agility.

The value of making the principles explicit is that they are visible for everyone to see and operate by. In the absence of explicitly defined principles default ones, often based upon self interest and misperception, will become established.

Agility Lessons from a Fighter Pilot

In a recent [article](#) Don Sull asks "If agility confers success, what confers agility?" He discusses how agile companies succeed by consistently identifying and exploiting opportunities more quickly and effectively than their rivals.

He draws upon the work of US Air Force Colonel John Boyd who analysed the surprising success of the F-86 fighter over the MiG 15. Boyd generalised his findings to a much more general phenomenon – how to seize opportunities in any rapidly-changing, turbulent situation.

To read Don's blog article, click [here](#).

Fixing the Flaws in Government IT

On 2 March the UK's [Institute for Government](#) launched its report on fixing a £16 billion a year IT problem. It concluded that government IT is locked in a vicious circle: struggling to get the basics right and failing further behind the fast-paced and exciting technological environment that citizens interact with daily.

Its key recommendations are to move to common platforms and apply agile approaches to all IT projects.

To find out more about this, click [here](#).

More Insights

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Domains of organisational agility

Our recent research into agility in IT organisations showed that agile principles can be grouped into a relatively small number of domains and that it is possible to determine an organisation's agility 'footprint' by assessing the extent to which the principles in each domain act as *agile* enablers or barriers. Within each of the *agile* domains there are typically between six to eight *agile* principles that could help an organisation to become more *agile*.

Agility can be developed as an organisational capability but it requires intent, action and practice.

To read the full article, which includes descriptions of other agile principles and definitions for the agile domains, click [here](#).

I welcome your thoughts.

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Parting Thought

"We need to improve agility."

Steven Ballmer, CEO
Microsoft