

Competency Center



Agility

Agility Defined

When professionals have *strategic agility*, they see and take advantage of pivotal, game-altering opportunities. Agility is a close cousin to *leadership unity*, which allows top executives to make risky yet effective decisions quickly because they are not caught up in political battles.

Portfolio agility or resource fluidity involves the ability to quickly move resources such as managerial focus, funds, and employees away from fading business ventures and into more promising areas. *Operational agility* is the capacity to take advantage of business prospects while adhering to a clear, overall business plan. When combined, these agilities expand into *organizational agility*, which is a company's ability to recognize and reap opportunities before its competitors do.

Impact

A key indicator of an agile organization is that it obtains, applies, and distributes knowledge when and where it is needed—and in real time, not only at prescheduled quarterly reviews.

Agile organizations enjoy many benefits, including increased revenues, higher satisfaction among clients and workers, more efficient operations, and quicker entry to market.

Companies that practice overall organizational agility are in a strong position to take advantage of golden opportunities, such as entering quickly growing markets, introducing revolutionary products into the market first, or purchasing tangible assets in the midst of an economic downturn.

Leaders should always be aware of project-level decisions before they are implemented, as they can impact their businesses' overall strategies. Similarly, leadership-level moves can impact initiatives. Leaders must therefore have dual-directional awareness regarding how changes in their strategies can affect projects, and how changes in projects can move their organizations in new directions. By focusing on the larger picture, leaders can quickly and confidently decide whether to provide input on an upcoming project or to approve or deny a suggested change in organizational strategy.

Techniques for Development

To successfully practice organizational agility, individuals must possess two key skills:

1. The patience to delay until the time is right to move.
2. The boldness to take action at the right moments.

Such dual skills are easy to recognize in retrospect, but the key is to practice them in the tumultuous, unclear present.



Leaders can become more patient and bold by:

- *Exploring potential opportunities.* Some of these explorations may prove profitable, while others may not. In combination, however, they provide the organization with new knowledge about potential golden opportunities.
- *Avoiding the pitfall of acting recklessly while intending to be agile.* Effective leaders carefully manage risks by studying possible acquisitions in new markets. A screening team comprised of highly competent leaders should scrutinize all possible acquisitions and base their decisions on data and other hard facts so that agility does not unintentionally morph into foolishness.
- *Developing company attributes that allow the organization to survive during lean times.* Such attributes can include diverse cash sources, client lock-ins, modest fixed expenses, and powerful allies, such as regulators or clients whose fortunes are connected to the organization.
- *Preparing to redirect talent when needed.* Leaders can build and maintain an agile company by continuously exploring the following four factors:
 1. Which worldwide sociopolitical forces affect how the organization operates.
 2. Some of the ways the future may be changed by those forces.
 3. How public policies can impact the organization.
 4. Where and why the most sought-after talent will be living in the coming years.

Related Reading

- *The Agility Factor* by Christopher G. Worley, Thomas Williams, Edward E. Lawler III, Business Book Summaries
- *Agile Innovation* by Langdon Morris, Moses Ma, and Po Chi Wu, PhD, Business Book Summaries
- *The Changing Face of Agility* by Robert M. Mason, *Management*



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