



In search of agility

Speed, fitness, flexibility, resilience...words more often used to describe a world class athlete than a business organization. By all accounts, the 21st century is bringing a frenzy of innovation driven by the continuing digital revolution and expanding global markets. This environment of accelerated uncertainty and change is not going to blow over and settle down...ever. A quick read of Thomas Friedman's best-selling book, "The World is Flat," will give you perspective of turbulence that lies ahead. This is the era of "turbo turbulence."

What concerns you?

If you are like most business leaders and CEOs today – one of the main challenges you face is how to get your organization to sense and respond to those unpredictable forces of change (customers, consumers, suppliers, regulators, etc.) more quickly and reliably than your competition does or your customers expect. Recent studies by

McKinsey & Co., The Conference Board and the American Management Association consistently highlight that the top one or two challenges facing CEOs today is how to make their organizations more nimble, adaptable or agile.

The July 2006 McKinsey & Company study of 1,500 global executives overwhelmingly reported an "urgent need to increase the agility and speed in their organization" and that executives around the globe are "trying

in various ways to do so." In fact, almost nine out of 10 executives reported the need for agility as either "extremely" or "very" important to their business performance and 86 percent said the same about speed. Agility was defined as an organization's ability to change tactics or direction quickly – that is, to anticipate, adapt to and react decisively to events in the business environment. Speed was defined as a measure of how rapidly an organization executes an operational or strategic objective.

Every year, we find new examples of companies and products entering our life with new capabilities and benefits that we didn't even know we needed...and then before we know it... we can't live without them. How long has Google™ been part of your life? A recent report declared Google as the world's most recognized brand! Could you imagine life without a search engine?

Finding the speed and agility you need to survive

What have your competitors been doing to enhance their adaptability and responsiveness? How can you get your organization to use fresh, innovative thinking and to anticipate change rather than simply reacting to it? How can you create a more decisive, responsive organization where initiating action is a smooth reflex and not an ordeal? The challenges and barriers to a sustainable transformation to an agile enterprise include behavioral, attitudinal and organizational dimensions that are woven into the leadership and cultural fabric of most organizations.

Based on years of research and experience along with collaborative

work with the likes of CIO Magazine's AGILE 100, the Human Resource Planning Society (HRPS) and Cornell University, the answers begin with an objective and candid self-assessment of the three key enterprise domains: your people, processes and technology. Creating and sustaining a truly agile enterprise requires all three arenas to reach a high standard of excellence – it is not enough to rely on good people or the latest technology. The bar is raised higher each day. You must deliver on all three fronts if you are to be successful today and tomorrow.

Based on research and experience, the AGILE Model™ was developed and reflects core dynamics and five critical drivers of organizational and strategic agility: 1) anticipating change, 2) generating confidence, 3) initiating action, 4) liberating thinking and 5) evaluating results. Each of these key areas involves important organizational processes and speaks to specific and important implications for the individual leader – which is the key to the overall agility equation.

Over the coming months, we will address each of these drivers and provide useful, practical suggestions for how you might begin the journey of becoming a more AGILE organization – and leader. ■

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