

ORGANIC Agility Principles

ORGANIC is both an acronym and a metaphor that suggests a natural and biological context. The core concept is to shift the paradigm of organizational design thinking and change management away from the engineered or manufactured, towards something that grows and evolves naturally. Organizations are more similar to networks of organisms than they are to machines. Using an organic metaphor allows us to consider properties such as resilience which are difficult to achieve in an engineered world, but are common in nature. The acronym pretty much sums up the value of shifting our thinking towards this metaphor.

Organizational Resilience: is the capability of an organization to react to unknown challenges and volatility by co-evolving with the change into a new and improved stable state.

Growing Autonomy: means investing in growing people to enable them to act more autonomously and consciously within and for the organization. Decisions need to be good and quick, and they need to be made constantly and autonomously within the organization to allow fast feedback and rapid reaction times.

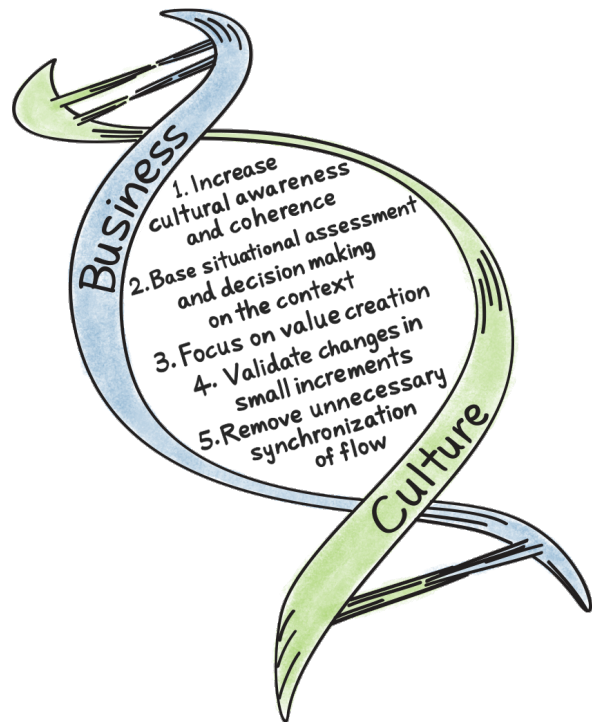
Nurturing an Inter-dependent Culture: requires enabling communication between different groups and people within the organization. Increasing transparency and encouraging development of interpersonal relationships outside of team and group boundaries accelerate reaction times. Cultural coherence deepens and with it the understanding of how to act in everyone's interest.

To help organizations achieve this higher level of resilience with the help of the Cynefin Framework and Dave Snowden, agile42 has identified **5 Principles** that enable organizations to evolve to a more resilient state. The principles are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Alongside the identified principles, a vast number of methods and tools that act as catalysts for the principles exist, and certain combinations of methods and tools can significantly boost the implementation of the principles. For example, market analysis, value stream mapping and continuous delivery are well-known tools that enable or support value creation. As every organization is different, the practices and operational tools that will emerge while applying the principles might be considerably different from one to the other.

1st Principle: increase cultural awareness and coherence

Organizational culture exists and manifests in the form of behaviors, habits, parables, sacred stories, failure stories. By making these explicit, awareness will increase and coherence will emerge. Culture is a lagging indicator, and can be used to measure which behaviors are successful, which stories are heeded and followed, and which habits stick. If these qualities are measurable, we can act to promote more of the stories we like and



less of those stories we don't like. The same applies to behaviors and habits. These can be fostered through rituals.¹

2nd Principle: base situational assessment and decision making on the context

Understanding the context is key to being able to identify the right approach. Depending on the context, the assessment of the situation and the way the decision-making process will be implemented varies significantly:

- **Obvious Domain:** Decisions are made using rules that are understandable and applicable by everyone. A review process will grant that decisions are consistent with the rules. Situational analysis isn't necessary as in this domain things are self-evident anyway.
- **Complicated Domain:** Decisions are made using rules and processes that are understandable and applicable only by experts. Peer collaboration and peer reviews will provide insights on how to improve outcomes, and iterating will help improve decisions. Situational analysis is done by experts or peers, and it is validated through peer reviews.
- **Complex Domain:** Situational analysis is distributed, actions are distributed (to probe faster) and decisions based on probes are made locally, in real time. Direction decisions and Respond decisions are centralized, to keep coherence in an environment in which a lot of unexpected outcomes and unintended consequences will emerge.
- **Chaotic Domain:** Decisions need to be taken very fast. Situational analysis is not possible because we don't have much time. Draconian decision making is necessary to provide a minimal level of coherence. A bad decision which leaves options open is better than no decision at all.

3rd Principle: focus on value creation

Your organization supports the creation of value. The traditional approach has been to optimize organizations to support the management of the business, which has a negative impact on value delivery to customers and stakeholders. Identify what "value" means to you, and evolve the organization to effectively create it while removing waste and making adjustments to streamline the simplest path to delivery.

4th Principle: validate changes in small increments

Change is difficult and confrontational. Validate changes with small safe-to-fail experiments, executed at regular intervals, to reduce resistance and minimize the waste of two coexisting systems of work, while gradually incorporating validated learnings. A portfolio of safe-to-fail experiment will help with emerging options that can then be vetted and tested before being implemented, thus significantly reducing risk.

5th Principle: remove unnecessary synchronization of flow

Dependencies are a symptom of an over-synchronized system design. They carry the excessive burden of coordination, handovers and plans which dramatically increase transaction costs. Design a decoupled system which removes unnecessary synchronization and establishes effective working agreements, which grant collective responsibility and ownership. Interdependences between teams are temporary, and emerge and disappear based on current needs. This allows for minimal alignment while remaining strongly coherent through principles.

¹ Rituals create a cognitive activation and an identity shift. We can fulfill multiple roles, even at the same time, and this shapes our identity. We behave according to the role we are impersonating at any moment in time. It is possible to describe what a role should do, but it isn't possible to predict how an identity will manifest. So playing with roles, rituals and story telling, allows to influence identities and behaviors.