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EXPEDITE

WE TALK ABOUT AGILITY, BUT DEFINING WHAT THAT REALLY MEANS IS OPEN TO CONJECTURE. ESSENTIALLY, AN ADVANCED AND DYNAMIC ORGANISATION-LEVEL CAPABILITY REPRESENTS THE ABILITY TO MAKE TIMELY, EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINED CHANGES WHEN AND WHERE THOSE CONFER A PERFORMANCE ADVANTAGE. THE REALITY IS, SUCCESSFULLY MAINTAINING AN 'AGILE' BUSINESS PROFILE IS RELATIVELY RARE.

Organisations are struggling to find a foothold on a meaningful plan for developing agility, in their people and processes. On the journey to agility, the difficult question that needs to asked at an early stage is; are my people processes overengineered? The processes which connect leaders, teams and individuals can either grease the wheels or gum them up. Turning the spotlight on HR itself, the key requisites of agile are speed and flexibility: Speed in responding to questions or issues at a pace that matches the business operation cycle, rather than their default cycle - for example, having spending capacity available mid-year, rather than waiting on the annual budget. Flexibility so that HR can operate differently in different contexts, like managing talent in new and existing departments within the same organisation. Achieving these requires a shift in terms of what HR delivers, ensuring that organisations have the capability to operate in agile ways. That's where OD comes in, as wholescale redesign can help to shift old patterns and cycles to make way for faster and more flexible processes.

Flexible resourcing trumps lean management. Lean systems can be efficient, but they struggle to be agile - there simply isn't enough spare capacity in budgets or timescales to redeploy resources as needed, to develop new products or solutions. What sets agile companies apart is not necessarily that they do different things, it's that they do things differently. Like other firms, agile organisations develop strategies, allocate resources and manage talent, but they do these things with inbuilt flexibility and the capacity to adapt as rapidly as their technologies, competitors and markets do.

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A key consideration is time resources, because if a teams' plates are already overflowing with day-to-day tasks, they simply will not have time to take a step back and interrogate their ways of working. To become agile, businesses need to commit to creating the conditions for innovation. So, another key and candid question is; does HR currently have the capacity and credibility to facilitate change? HR may be one of the drivers of the move towards agility, but they may need additional time, skills or training in order to support other teams or departments. The sheer pace of change in the current markets means that many strategies and models become 'wasting assets' - assets with value that deteriorate quickly over time. Instead, try to incorporate more dynamic checks and balances and use checklists or skills assessments, to identify strengths, weaknesses and areas where improvements could be made.

Developing agility is not about a one-off change programme - nor is it easy - requiring rigour, discipline and ongoing investment in improving management practices. It requires a whole-systems approach - an integrated view of how the organisation's systems, processes and strategies work together. As an example, some organisations have tried tactics like changing individual team structures to reduce siloing, but those teams run the risk of being bogged down in rigid project management scripts or suffocated by old-fashioned oversight. Adjusting any one aspect of an organisation is one step towards agility, but it won't carry you over the finish line. Instead, organisations need to interrogate every step of the deliverable journey; goals, progress, communication and more. The superior performance achieved will be worthwhile.

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