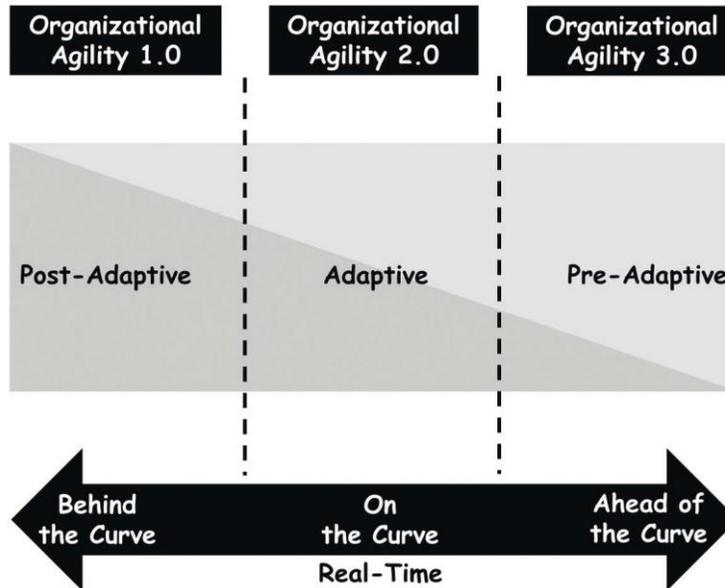


Luck Primer

Three Modes of Organizational Agility

There are three modes of Organizational Agility, on a spectrum from post-adaptive to pre-adaptive:



This might be a little counterintuitive. We might think that the words “adaptive” and “agility” are synonymous, as they are often used interchangeably. Therefore, we might easily think that there are only two modalities of organizational agility, “adaptive” and “non-adaptive,” which are binary: We are either adaptive, or we aren’t. In fact, that’s not the point, as we always have to adapt eventually, one way or the other, and it’s just a case of how long it takes us begrudgingly to come

around to it. BP is adapting. Toyota is adapting. We adapted to get from the Wrong Hazelwood to the right Hazelwood. The aviation industry has adapted with new approaches, processes, and technologies for flight safety. The financial markets are adapting.

More to the point then, there are actually three modes of agility, depending upon whether we are adapting behind the curve, on the curve, or ahead of the curve. Let me explain.

- **Post-adaptive.** If we are post-adaptive, we are largely reactive. Things happen, and we react to them after the fact, behind the curve. We are constantly running to catch up with what just happened, reacting to it as best we can, post-adaptively. We will call this post-adaptive mode, “Organizational Agility 1.0.” In martial arts, this is called “go no sen”: Your opponent strikes, and you strike back with a counterattack.
- **Adaptive.** If we are doing better, we may be adaptive on more of a real time basis, reacting a lot quicker and being more proactive to be on the curve. We are keeping up, and we will call this adaptive mode “Organizational Agility 2.0.” In martial arts, this is called “sen no sen”: You know what your opponent is going to do from his or her movements in real time, and you strike simultaneously.
- **Pre-adaptive.** Now it gets a little trickier, as we consider what we mean by “pre-adaptive.” Surely, keeping up with real time is as good as it gets, and we can’t do any better than that, can we? How can we go beyond that, getting ahead of the curve and getting ahead of real time? In martial arts, this is called “sen sen no sen”: Mysteriously, you sense what your opponent will do even before he or she does, and you prevent it.

When I ask audiences what we mean by “pre-adaptive,” they typically respond with things like: “proactive and preemptive.” To which I reply, “Yes, that’s part of it, and more than that, what do we mean by pre-adaptive?” Now they will typically respond with things like: “vision, goal setting, and planning ahead”. To which I reply, “Yes,

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that's also part of it, and *even* more than that, what do we mean by pre-adaptive?" Now they will typically try things like, "environmental scanning, scenario- thinking, and seeing-around-corners." They may even refer to our discussion of hindsight, insight, and foresight, from earlier in this chapter, calling out the foresight part. To which I reply, "Yes, that's also part of it, and *even* more than that, what do we mean by pre-adaptive?" Now I typically get blank stares. So what do we mean by pre-adaptive? Let's return to Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection.

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change."

–Charles Darwin

Darwin became intrigued by the diversity of species he saw all around the world, which were highly suited to their local environment and yet clearly had shared origins. He wondered what process could explain this, and eventually, in 1859, he published his *Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection*, explaining:

"If variation be admitted to occur occasionally in some wild animals, and how can we doubt it when we see thousands of organisms. If we admit such variations tend to be hereditary, and how can we doubt it when we remember resemblances of features and character. If we admit selection is steadily at work, and who will doubt it when he considers amount of food on average fixed and reproductive powers act in geometrical ratio. If we admit that external conditions vary, as all geology proclaims they have done and are now doing. Then, if no law of nature be opposed, there must occasionally be formed races, different from parent races."

–Charles Darwin

"If variation be admitted to occur occasionally in some wild animals" and "there must occasionally be formed races, different from parent races." **My translation: In other words, the core of the whole *Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection* is based upon nothing but... luck!** Here's how it works. Within the genetic bandwidth of DNA variability, some are born on the lucky side of average, being a little bit stronger, a little bit faster, and a little bit more suited to their particular environment. Some are born on the unlucky side of average, being a little bit weaker, a little bit slower, and a little less suited to their environment. The lucky are more likely to get to the food first. Therefore, they are more likely to survive, reproduce, and spread their lucky DNA. The unlucky are less likely to survive and to reproduce, and their unlucky DNA dies off. And so the process continues, of species branching off into highly evolved variants, acutely aligned and attuned with their local environment, resulting in the diversity of species we see all around the world.

This is the process which we touched upon briefly in Chapter 2, from the book, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, in which Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky talked about preserving, discarding, and creating DNA.

Thus, the whole *Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection* is based upon nothing but luck. So, being pre-adaptive is about being lucky. Usually, that's still a little uncomfortable for most people, so let's think more about

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that with some other reminders about luck:

- Supposedly, Napoleon Bonaparte, on being told the virtues of a new general (the man’s heroism, bravery, skill in battle, and so on) waved his hand impatiently, saying, **“That’s all very well, but is he lucky?”** Napoleon only wanted generals on his team who had a demonstrated track record of being lucky. He understood that luck is not as accidental as we might think. Did that Eastern Airlines crew have a track record of being lucky in that cockpit that evening? Do you have a track record of being lucky?
- **“Luck is where preparation meets opportunity.”** Being lucky is about always being prepared, recognizing opportunity when it crosses your path, disguised as good luck. Blind luck? Nothing of the sort! We were prepared! If we hadn’t been prepared we might not have recognized opportunity at all, or we might perceive a missed opportunity and a problem as bad luck. Did that Eastern Airlines crew experience bad luck in the cockpit that evening? Do you experience bad luck?
- **“Chance favors the prepared mind.”** (Louis Pasteur)
- **“Luck is not chance, it is toil.”** (Emily Dickinson)
- **“I am a strong believer in luck and I find the harder I work the more I have of it.”** (Thomas Jefferson)
- **“We have all had those perfect moments, when things come together in an almost unbelievable way, when events could never have been predicted, let alone controlled, remarkably seem to guide us along our path.”** (Joseph Jaworski, 1996, *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*)
- “Many scientists and inventors, like artists and entrepreneurs, live in a paradoxical state of great confidence—knowing that their choices and actions really matter—and profound humility—feeling guided by forces beyond their making. Their work is to **‘release the hand from the marble that holds it prisoner,’** as Michelangelo put it. They know that their actions are vital to this accomplishment, but they also know that the hand ‘wants to be released.’” Jonas Salk, the inventor of the polio vaccine, spoke of tapping into the continually unfolding “dynamism” of the universe and experiencing its evolution as “an active process that... I can guide by the choices I make.” (Peter Senge, Joseph Jaworski, Otto Scharmer, Betty Sue Flowers, 2004, *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future*)
- “Luck exerts a dramatic influence over our lives. A few seconds of bad fortune can unravel years of striving, while a moment of good luck can lead to success and happiness. Luck has the power to transform the improbable into the possible; to make the difference between life and death, reward and ruin, happiness and despair.” (Dr. Richard Wiseman, 2004, *The Luck Factor: The Four Essential Principles*). In this 10-year study of the beliefs and experiences of lucky and unlucky people, Dr. Wiseman discovered that good fortune is less about supernatural forces, and more about a positive attitude, and **we can learn to be lucky.**

So, being pre-adaptive is about being lucky, through toil, hard work, and preparation, tapping into the synchronicity of things for guidance on our path, the evolution of which we can influence by the choices we make, and learning to be lucky. In other words, luck doesn’t happen just by accident. **It is not by accident that the pre-adaptive are lucky, and the lucky are pre-adaptive.** Rather than that old saying, “In business it’s always better to be lucky than smart.” **I want you to be smart about luck.**

That’s what pre-adaptive Organizational Agility 3.0 is about, being smart about luck, and making more of our own luck. In his 2007 book, *The Future of Management*, Gary Hamel relates this to business and our organizational agility challenge, putting it this way:

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"Evolution occasionally equips organisms with apparently superfluous, reproductively neutral features that turn out, quite by accident, to be highly useful when conditions change. This is known as pre-adaptation. To be resilient, a company needs a lot of lightly scripted pre-adaptation— policies that give associates the chance to pre-adapt rather than react. Too much of what gets done in most companies is in response to some already pressing issue; there's no slack, no space for improvisation, and no way to defend projects that aren't immediately useful. That's why so many companies end up on the wrong side of the change curve. Your job as a management innovator is to make sure that the management systems in your company encourage strategic pre-adaptation." –Gary Hamel, 2007, *The Future of Management* To read more, visit: [www.mydrivingseat.com/booklinks/booklink #15](http://www.mydrivingseat.com/booklinks/booklink#15)

"Your job as a management innovator is to make sure that the management systems in your company encourage strategic pre adaptation." That's our job, to develop the "management systems" we need to achieve this level of Organizational Agility 3.0. In our mindful process of integration, alignment, and attunement, from gray matter to gray matter, it's about a new mindset, a new chassis of business acumen, and a new framework of understandings, strengths, and intelligences. Overall, as those come into integration, alignment, and attunement, it's about future-proofing our business.

Future-Proofing Our Business

Achieving this pre-adaptive mode of Organizational Agility 3.0 is about future-proofing our business. In business, evolution is about the surviving and thriving of those most ready, willing, and able to adapt, no matter what. No matter what the future brings, we will have the organizational agility to deal with it. No matter how the landscape shifts on us, we will be able to find a pathway through. **Being pre-adaptive means we are lucky in never running out of options. We are lucky in always having some things in motion that allow us to steer our way through. We are lucky with coincidences of timing. Actually, we make our own luck by being pre-adaptive. It is not by accident that the pre-adaptive are lucky, and the lucky are pre-adaptive.**

As we have been discussing so far, and will continue discussing throughout this book, **developing pre-adaptive organizational agility is about changing our relationship with luck and some other key attributes of agility** (see chart on the next page).

When there is less and less we can count on these days with any certainty, we must be able to count more and more on our agility to cope, no matter what. As we do so, we become more and more future-proofed, success becomes more and more inevitable, no matter what, and we become more and more certain to win, no matter what.