

What is Your Fragility Epitaph?

By Mike Richardson, Team Agility Practice Leader



Innovation, most would agree, is the secret of sustained success. But maintaining innovation for the long haul is hard. Just look at companies like Blackberry and Sony, who used to be among the most innovative companies on the planet and now aren't. What caused these companies to fall? Their approach to innovation wasn't agile enough.

Innovation that lacks agility can cause a business to flat line or die. To help companies avoid this fate, I often put CEOs and teams through an exercise: I ask them to write a “**fragility epitaph**” for their company, which serves as a eulogy to the inevitable when innovation isn't agile enough. It typically reads something like this:

We failed to innovate with sufficient agility, falling behind the pace of industry disruption. We ended up being the disruptee not the disruptor because we tolerated excuses, wishful thinking and stupid-simplicity. We had plans, but they were way too “waterfall”, in a futile attempt to avoid failure, rigidly sticking to one view of the future rather than testing, verifying and learning from failure as we went along. We had eternal debates about who was right about which was the right future and the best direction to go, unable to resolve the chasm between left-brained analysis and right-brained intuition. Our trajectory as a business derailed in the chasm.

We produce a poster-sized version of this “**fragility epitaph**” and put it up on the wall (alongside the company's core values/behaviors and excuses posters, which I also help with). Then, when anyone sees those behaviors playing out, they can use the poster as a mirror, pointing out complacency and promoting productive paranoia. Only the paranoid survive! Read more here in my post at Vistage's Executive Street Blog: [The Path to Agile Innovation](#).



Mike Richardson
Team Agility Practice Leader
mike@agilityconsulting.com



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