

BEING FAST: Making Organizational Speed A Competitive Advantage

By Tom O'Shea, CMC, Organizational Agility Practice Leader



Fast is important. As Gary Hamel wrote in his classic Harvard Business Review article, "The Quest for Resilience," "The only dependable advantage is a superior capacity to reinvent your business model before circumstances force you to." Accelerated obsolescence is certainly putting this notion to a real test across all industry sectors and geographies. Both your customers and their customers continuously expect and demand the next innovation that will increase value, service or convenience, and have come to expect innovation in real-time or even quicker. The idea that speed matters is becoming increasingly evident even in industries that once seemed somewhat immune to this dynamic. Organizations and leaders able to adapt and adjust like a NASCAR driver weaving through the crowded track at 200 mph will be well-positioned to succeed.

For speed to be an advantage, an organization must become faster than competition at what really matters. It is not a matter of always being faster at everything. Speed is a relative measure-after all, how fast is fast? Your customers and competitors will determine that for you. Historically, speed and cycles times were mostly measures found in manufacturing environments. In the current hyper-competitive world, however, speed matters every step of the way in every kind of product or service organization. From recognizing emerging trends, navigating your various decision-making loops and on to all aspects of your innovation processes, fast is not only expected, it is demanded. Below are a set of characteristics that we have found to differentiate FAST vs SLOW organizations. You can find much more discussion on how to help your organizations become more **FOCUSED, FAST & FLEXIBLE** in our new book.

Characteristics of Fast and Slow Organizations	
Fast Organizations ...	Slow Organizations ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build cultures with an expectation for action and widespread sense of urgency embraced at all levels in the organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have built cultures where urgency is not valued or where lack of clarity on focused priorities befuddles the need for speed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish effective mechanisms for sensing and monitoring the forces of change impacting enterprise success in order to recognize trends and act faster 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have not established “early alert system” to help them become more proactive, so they spend most of the time fire-fighting ... often involving the same issues over and over
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get new products and services to their customers better and faster than others because customer focus is a constant value and not periodic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find themselves missing growth opportunities and having to trim margins to compete
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify where speed matters throughout the value chain and create metrics to track and educate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to focus only on internal efficiencies and miss customer and marketplace perspectives to benchmark speed in market requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize that first quality and reliability drives speed so they strive to be better and faster through discipline but not rigidity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have not built a real commitment to quality-first culture and lack the discipline that enables speed and adaptability



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