OSA from on Open-Patterns Perspective

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Effective practices implement and embody effective patterns. What the Open Leadership Network calls The Eight Open Patterns of Effective Business Agility can inform higher-functioning team and organizational behavior.

Open patterns encourage the following specific behaviors:

1. Generation and free exchange of ideas for improving results
2. Participation in decision-making that effects the group or team
3. Voluntary and enthusiastic participation in making changes to procedures, roles and practices
4. Greatly improved levels of overall employee engagement
5. Improved (superior) results

Since superior results are always preferred, it makes sense to investigate Open patterns. The Open Leadership Network has identified the following eight (8) core patterns that support the set outcomes listed above.

Here are the eight Open Patterns of Effective Business Agility:

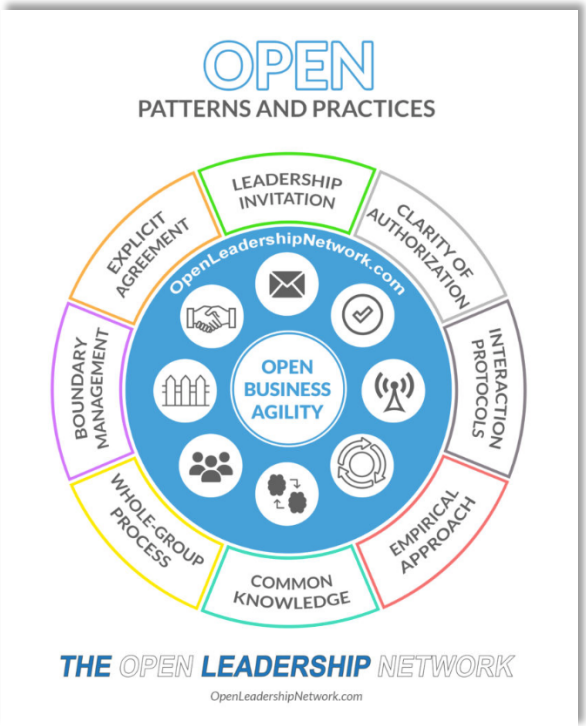

Figure 1: The Eight Open Patterns of Effective Business Agility.

Pattern #1: Leadership Invitation: Open patterns use an opt-in “pull” approach rather than an imposition-based “push” approach to manifest and maintain enterprise-level change.

Pattern #2: Proceeding with Explicit Agreement: An organization of individuals is largely defined by the expressed and implied agreements that those individuals enter into. Open patterns and practices make those agreements explicit.

Pattern #3: Clarity of Authorization: In the Open approach, the delegation of responsibility always includes the clear and explicit delegation of the authority that is actually needed to deliver. Clarity of Authorization “rolls up” several other patterns: Explicit Agreement, Boundary Management, Leadership Invitation, Explicit Decision Rights, and Clear Delegation of Authority.

Pattern #4: Boundary Management: Especially with respect to authority and authorization, when using Open patterns and practices, essential boundaries are clearly defined by executive leaders. These boundaries are open enough to generate self-organization and are explicitly communicated and carefully maintained. Boundary Management domains include Time, Task and Territory.

Pattern #5: Use of Interaction Protocols: Open approaches clarify communication and understanding through protocols, which are small, shared agreements about how essential interactions are structured. Protocols enhance clarity of communication.

Pattern #6: Whole-Group Process: Open approaches favor whole-group process over closed-door dialogue. To the maximum extent possible, the Open approach favors “getting the whole system in the room” to validate assumptions, gauge overall group readiness, and obtain validated, org-level alignments before proceeding.

Pattern #7: Empirical Approach: Organizations are more like living systems than they are like machines. Acknowledging this reality includes recognizing the need for frequent iterations of experimentation and “learning by doing.” Practices include Agile practices such as Scrum and Kanban, and empirical coaching approaches such as Fail Agility and The Agile Open Practitioner.

Pattern #8: Generation of Common Knowledge: Often associated with transparency, common knowledge is up-to-date shared information that everyone in the organization knows. The generation of common knowledge is essential to coordinating very large groups at scale. Practices that enable Common Knowledge (such as periodic and participatory all-hands meetings) always have a whole-group aspect.

Open Space Agility- “OSA” and the Open Patterns

With the above as background, we can now investigate the practice called OpenSpace Agility and see how it aligns, or not, with the 8 Open patterns listed above. The following assumes you have the following background:

1. You understand Open Space Technology (OST)
2. You understand OpenSpace Agility and how it leverages OST

If you are new to Open Space Technology you can learn more here.

If you are new to OpenSpace Agility (OSA) you can get the basics here.

OpenSpace Agility and the Eight Open Patterns of Business Agility

Let’s hold up OSA next to these eight patterns and see how aligned or not OSA actually is with respect to these Open patterns:

Pattern #1: Leadership Invitation

OSA uses two Open Space (OST) meetings, both of which separated by a 90-day period of experimentation which is entirely based upon a genuine invitation from an executive decision-maker. No one is compelled to attend either meeting.

And there are never any sanctions for declining these invitations. Through the use of Open Space, OSA clearly displays the use of the Leadership Invitation pattern.

Pattern #2: Explicit Agreements

OSA employs leadership invitation to build employee engagement in the ongoing org-level changes. Explicit in these invitations are a set of ground rules and goals for the meeting. These ground rules and goals set out in the invitation and include:

1. A description of the overall Theme of the meeting (the “why”)
2. The time to arrive (the “when)
3. The option to accept or decline the invitation (the “who”)
4. Clarity on roles, rules, expectations, how to RSVP, participate, etc. (the “how”)
5. The overall “who, what, where, how and why” of the meeting

As you can see, everything is based on invitation in OSA. And every well-formed invitation sets out exactly what is (and is not) being invited. Through the use of clear and unambigious invitations, OSA

clearly displays the use of the Explicit Agreement pattern because every invitation constitutes a small, explicit, optional-to-accept agreement.

Pattern #3: Clarity of Authorization

Under OSA, a period of experimentation and learning commences after the 1st Open Space meeting. Everyone is encouraged and fact authorized to experiment with practices that align with and honor the 12 Agile Manifesto principles.

During the Open Space events, everyone is authorized to participate as they please, via the “Law of Two Feet” principle of Open Space.

From the beginning to the end, a cycle of OSA always embodies the Clarity of Authorization pattern. Everyone knows what they are authorized to do and there is no guessing needed because everything is very clear at each point along the OSA timeline.

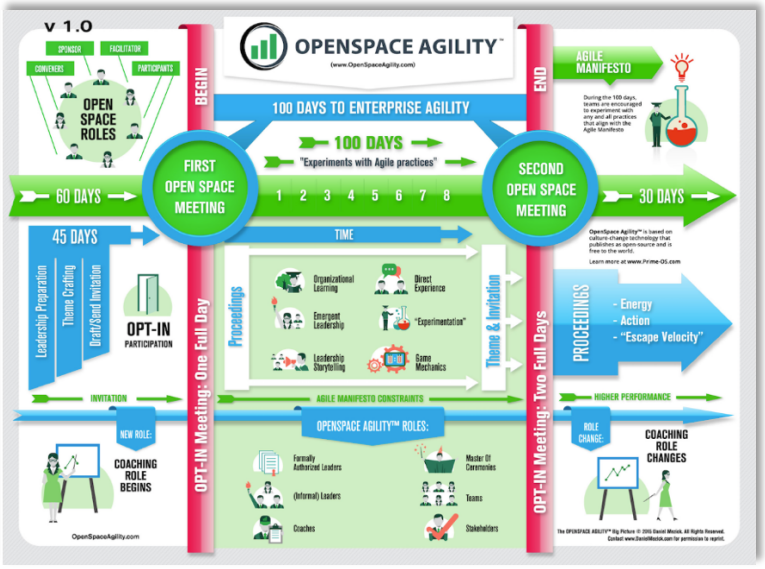

Figure 2: The OSA Timeline.

Pattern #4: Boundary Management

Time, task and territory boundaries are common boundary types. Other boundary types include boundaries on authorization, for example: clear limits on authorized decision-making.

OSA sets out the boundaries very clearly. The Open Space meetings are optional to attend, with no sanctions for opting out. Each OSA cycle starts and ends according to a defined schedule. After the first meeting, the “container” includes an important rule: practices must align with (and not offend)

any of the 12 Agile Manifesto principles. In OSA, everyone involved knows the limits with respect to time, task, authorizations, and responsibilities.

The reality is that the entire design of OSA, from end to end, is informed by the Boundary Management pattern.

Pattern #5: Use of Interaction Protocols

OSA uses invitation, and well-formed invitations employ a protocol. The OST meeting itself suggests procedures and protocol for announcing sessions, posting sessions and making changes to sessions. Beyond this, OSA implementations encourage but do not mandate specific protocols for meetings such as Check In and Check Out. So overall, in OSA, support for the use of Interaction Protocols is not that strong.

Pattern #6: Whole-Group Process

A major goal of the OSA approach is to identify those in the organization who are willing to support and in fact champion the change. This is done primarily through an series of invited Open Space events. Everyone is invited, meaning that OSA is a whole-group process where those with a sense of passion and responsibility about the meeting's Theme.
Since the use of whole-group OST events is absolutely integral to OSA, it is clear that the Whole Group Process pattern is integral to the overall design of the approach.

Pattern #7: Empirical Approach

A cycle of OSA is 45 to 90 days long and starts and ends in Open Space. In between, the people do experiments with practices that align with the Agile Manifesto. Most of these practices are empirical in approach. These experiments with Agile practices are using an empirical approach via the use of experiments and the practices themselves are empirical in nature. Lastly the entire approach of an invited, opt-in meeting with no sanctions for non-attendance is itself an empirical experiment in leading by (and with) invitation. In light of the foregoing it is safe to say that OSA takes a 100% empirical approach and in fact is designed around the Empirical Approach pattern.

Pattern #8: Generation of Common Knowledge

OSA uses whole group process in the form of periodic Open Space meetings. A cycle of chapter of OSA is starts and ends with one of these meetings. A cycle of OSA generates a considerable amount of common knowledge. Further, the generation of this common knowledge is additive over time. The primary mechanism is the whole-group inspection of results during the whole-group OST events.

The common knowledge that is produced from whole-group OST events is substantial. OSA strongly

implements the Common Knowledge pattern.

SUMMARY

Open patterns encourage employee engagement which is a critical success factor in creating genuine, sustainable and lasting improvement. OpenSpace Agility strongly implements most of the Open patterns as defined and described by the Open Leadership Network. As such, the OSA approach and especially the use of Open Space Technology are integral to the implementation of enterprise-wide business agility.

Reference Links:

OpenSpaceAgility.com
OpenLeadershipNetwork.com

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