The AGILE Scheme

A conceptual framework for analyzing processes and systems
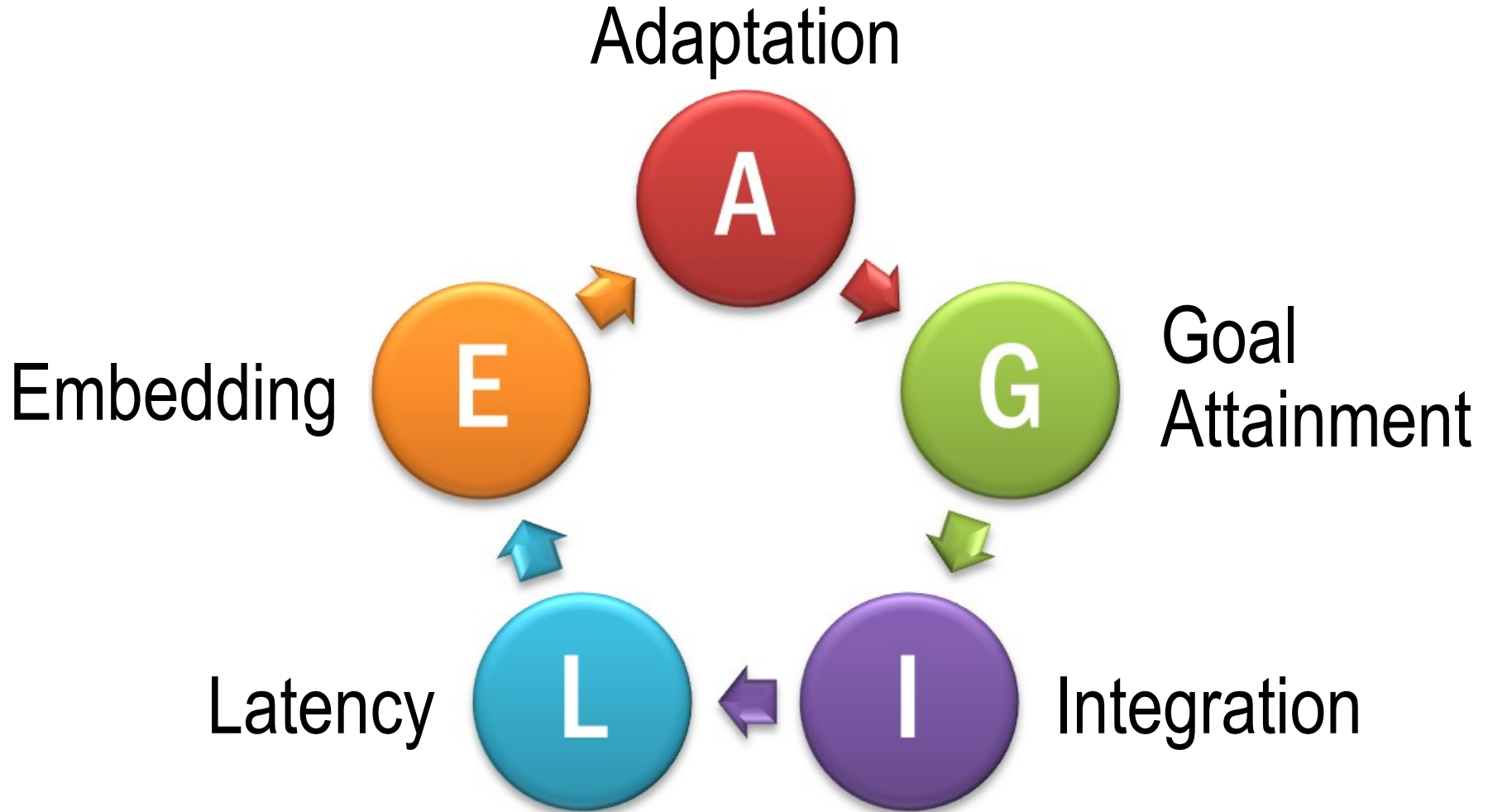
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AGILE scheme for analyzing (all kinds of) **systems**

Adaptation

A

Embedding

E

Goal Attainment

G

Latency

L

Integration

I

Adaptation (economy)

- **Why?** All systems must process resources and adapt to their environment to survive

- **How?** Through competition & selection

- **Who / What?** Cells, animals, humans, families, populations, informal organizations, businesses, nations, societies, political parties, cultures, civilizations

- **Examples:** biological evolution, economic growth cycles, "long waves" in technology, growth & decline of nations, modernization, culture war, "clash of civilizations"

Goal Attainment (government / leadership)

- **Why?** All systems must define and pursue goals to focus their activities

- **How?** Decision making, planning, defining objectives and targets, controlling

- **Who / What:** Brain, leaders, governments

- **Examples:** officers in military, dictators, CEOs, governments of nation states, Pope in Catholic church

Integration (society / informal groups)

- **Why?** All systems must integrate their components to prevent internal conflicts

- **How?** Promotion of shared norms and values, group meetings, retreats, joint activities, informal organizations

- **Who / What:** HR departments, media, sports teams, celebrations

- **Examples:** Team spirit, corporate identity, worker's solidarity, nationalism, racism

Latency (culture)

- **Why?** All systems must ensure that basic structures and processes are maintained (pattern maintenance)

- **How?** Establish a joint culture, ideology or economic philosophy; formal organizations & contracts

- **Who / What:** Constitutional courts, international organizations, patent registers, churches

- **Examples:** WTO, GATT, patent protection agencies, international trade laws,

Embedding (environment)

- **Why?** All systems must ensure that any interaction with their environment is sustainable

- **How?** Increase system efficiency to minimize resource use; recycle materials, products and ideas; monitor natural, economic, social, political and cultural environment

- **Who / What:** Border agencies, marketing departments, public relations,

- **Examples:** "Green" taxation, Kyoto protocol, trading of pollution rights, Germany's nuclear power secession, multiculturalism, liberalism, religious tolerance

What can be done with the AGILE scheme?

- The AGILE scheme is an analytical raster which should facilitate analyses of complex processes and structures

- It can be used to analyze systems at all levels – from living cells to the international economic system

- It helps to avoid naïve, one-dimensional or mono-causal theories

- It does not replace data-driven analyses or mathematical models, but helps to provide context to such analyses

Sources

- The AGILE scheme is an extension of the AGIL scheme, which was developed by the American sociologist Talcott Parsons in the 1950s.
The AGIL**E** scheme adds the important aspect of "embedding" to the original four components of "adaptation", "goal attainment", "integration", and "latency".

- Parsons, Talcott (1970). *The Social System*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. ISBN 0-7100-1931-9.

- Overview: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AGIL_paradigm

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