

The “Well Run” Adaptive Organisation

Characteristics

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Introduction

A well-run organisation is not defined by the absence of problems but by the quality of its response to them. Across the ten analytical lenses, four recurrent dimensions appear: *coherence*, *learning*, *reciprocity* and *memory*. Together, they describe the difference between systems that merely function and those that *know themselves*.

Structural Coherence

From the systems and complexity traditions, a well-run organisation exhibits short, honest feedback loops in which cause and effect remain visible. Structures adapt to emergent conditions rather than freezing them into procedure.

- ❖ Information flows freely across boundaries.
- ❖ Local autonomy is balanced by shared purpose.
- ❖ The organisation can tune itself without central command.

Moral Reciprocity

From the moral-economy, relational and phenomenological perspectives, a well-run organisation honours the moral contract between what people give and what the system returns. It treats trust, dignity and belonging as operational resources rather than cultural ornaments.

- ❖ Employees feel seen and valued, not extracted.
- ❖ Purpose outweighs politics.
- ❖ Power and care are held in proportion.

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Reflective Learning

Drawing on the learning-organisation, pragmatist and complexity lenses, a well-run organisation learns faster than its environment changes. It tests ideas through safe-to-fail experiments and converts experience into insight.

- ❖ Psychological safety enables truth-telling.
- ❖ Lessons are captured once and used many times.
- ❖ Reflection is built into process, not bolted on after failure.

Institutional Memory

From the institutional, narrative and systems traditions, memory is the invisible infrastructure of good management. A well-run organisation remembers why it exists, preserves what works and retires what does not.

- ❖ Strategy is evolutionary, not episodic.
- ❖ Knowledge survives personnel turnover.
- ❖ Story and structure reinforce each other.

Stewardship over Control

In Hegelian terms, the well-run organisation is one that has achieved a degree of self-awareness—a synthesis of purpose and practice. Its leaders act as stewards of coherence, not controllers of activity.

- ❖ Leadership is distributed through conversation, not concentrated by hierarchy.
- ❖ Contradiction is treated as information, not insubordination.
- ❖ The system becomes wiser because it listens to itself.

Summary

An organisation is well-run when coherence outpaces complexity, learning outpaces change and care outpaces control.

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