

THE JOURNAL OF BUSINESS AGILITY

emergence

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EDITORIAL & OPERATIONS TEAM

MANAGING EDITOR

Christopher Morales

ADVERTISING & SALES

Business Agility Institute

GUEST EDITOR

Laura Powers

MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

Laura Powers

EDITOR-IN CHIEF

Christopher Ruz

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BUSINESS AGILITY
INSTITUTE

76 Woodhill,
Irvine, CA 92620

DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT TEAM

COVER DESIGN

Sinisa Poznanovic

LEAD DESIGNER

Nyssa Zelman

TYPESET, PRINTING & PUBLISHING

Best Value Copy, NY USA

email

publishing@businessagility.institute

web

businessagility.institute/emergence

Prior to becoming Editor-in-Chief at Emergence, I was an event organizer for a Sydney-based convention, one of the largest of its kind. The jam-packed months leading up to each annual event, followed by the sleepless three-day weekend of the convention itself, were the most stressful and rewarding of my career. They also pulled back the curtain on the monumental effort given by so many people in bringing events like the Business Agility Conference to life.

The Conference is a unique and special space. It unites people from across the globe, from vastly different backgrounds and paradigms, and asks them to share openly, collaboratively, and vulnerably. It asks everyone to give a little of themselves in order to nurture and grow their community.

This Conference edition of Emergence is much the same. So many amazing authors have come together to share their perspectives, interpretations, and real-world applications of the revised Domains and Capabilities of Business Agility, and all under the shared umbrella of community growth. The Domains and Capabilities themselves are the same, revised and honed through BAI-led research that could not have happened without the support of an international community of agilists.

The continued maturation of Agility as a concept, practice, and mindset is (for me, at least) defined by its nature as a commonwealth of ideas. Out on the mean streets our businesses may compete for market share, but behind the scenes, Business Agility is a neighborhood. We share our recipes and water each other's flowers. There is an undeniable sense of camaraderie and fellowship.

This edition of Emergence is what it is because a community made it so. The Business Agility Conference is the same: a product of love shared by hundreds of professionals who all wish to improve the ways in which we work. As you arrive in New York for this year's conference and shake the hands of friends and colleagues, I would ask you to remember and take pride in this. Together, collaborating, we make the world a little bit better.



Christopher Ruz

Editor-in-Chief

THE JOURNAL OF BUSINESS AGILITY

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Welcome

You are cordially invited to join us in a celebration of business agility. This is your ticket to explore and celebrate new ways of working, thinking, and leading that give organizations the freedom, flexibility, and resilience to achieve their purpose.

No matter what the future brings.

And the future has always been unpredictable.

I remember when I was 12 years old, coming from school one day and telling my Mom that she and I were going to plan a potluck dinner for my entire school. I thought that putting on a party at that scale sounded like fun. My extremely introverted Mother was horrified.

How could we possibly organize and manage a dinner for several hundred people where each family would be bringing a dish to share? How would we control what people brought? What if—perish the thought—everyone decided that they were bringing cake?

My wise Father (definitely a self-organizing agilist ahead of his time) suggested that the odds of dinner being

only cake were very slim. And if—by some wild chance—it was a dinner of chocolate, lemon, and spice cake... would that be so bad?

And so the potluck dinner happened. I don't remember what dishes showed up. I do remember being very disappointed it wasn't all cake.

This issue of Emergence is a celebration on several fronts. First—it's a celebration of the sixth annual Business Agility Conference taking the stage in New York and online. The journey of creating the program, selecting the speakers, and planning opportunities for connection and conversation has been a blast. We look forward to sharing that energy and excitement with you.

This issue of Emergence is also a celebration of the publication of the revised Domains and Capabilities of Business Agility. You may recall that at the 2022 Business Agility Conference, we shared a preview of a new model of business agility based on behaviors and capabilities. We promised that the full model would be published within weeks of the conference.

That didn't happen.

In reality, not long after the 2022 conference, Evan Leybourn, Ahmed Sidky, and I sat down to discuss the remaining work needed for publication. One thought led to another. Before we knew it the model lay on the floor in bits and pieces. There were parts we loved. Parts we questioned. Parts just didn't feel right. Feedback from our customers confirmed our concerns: Our cake wasn't fully baked.

And with that, we embraced our failure and began again. The tacit agreement was that we would work until we had something that we all agreed captured the joy, power, and potential of business agility. We think we've got it! In fact, one of our early customer reviewers told us:

“I was more excited about it since we could and should use this as a tool in our journey. Really putting it to work in our ability to take stock of what we are (and are not) doing in this transformation. A lot of what we have been doing lately feels transactional, not transformative. In this way, taking a step back to re-assess against these domains and capabilities and create a backlog to refine for greater & deeper transformation... active renewal and continuously reinventing ourselves to higher levels.”

— Head of Transformation,
North American Bank

This issue of Emergence presents the revised Domains and Capabilities of Business Agility in a concise format ready for sharing with your teams, executives, and clients. We have also invited a number of authors to share their thoughts and stories related to the new Domains and Capabilities.

And just like the potluck dinner—there was discussion about whether we should specifically assign topics to each author. In the end, we decided to embrace the unknown. Each author chose what story they wanted to bring to the party. The end result is a collection of vibrant ideas capturing the essence of business agility. I have tremendously enjoyed the new perspectives shared by the authors and look forward to you joining the party!

Welcome!



Laura Powers

Guest Editor

CEO, Business Agility Institute





Building the Airplane as it's Flying

The Agile Story of Wake Forest Engineering

DR OLGA PIERRAKOS & JIM YORK

On July 1, 2017, Dr. Olga Pierrakos and three founding faculty gazed out on a newly renovated building that would become home to Wake Forest Engineering. This former tobacco warehouse in the heart of Winston-Salem's innovation district would become the canvas upon which to build a brand new department. The building was only the start. Arriving just six weeks before the first students, this team had no distinct vision or identity, no website, no equipment, no curriculum, and no annual operating budget. Over the next five years, Pierrakos and her team aimed to reimagine and deliver a new, accredited engineering degree. It would be like building an airplane while it's flying. Ingenuity, agility, and radical collaboration would be required.

What compelled the pioneering students to undertake such a journey? An admissions study at WFU revealed that engineering students were hungry

for something different—an educational experience beyond the traditional approach. The opportunity to participate in a re-imagining of engineering education in a liberal arts and research setting presented an attractive prospect.

Taxiing to the Runway

Just six months earlier, Wake Forest University had announced its selection of Pierrakos as founding chair. Pierrakos, a mechanical and biomedical engineer, was a recognized national thought leader and innovator in engineering education and published scholar. She brought practical knowledge as founding faculty of another engineering program and had managed a large portfolio of STEM education research at the National Science Foundation. Pierrakos also had experience

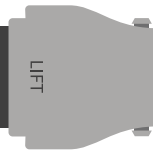
with agile and had exchanged ideas on using agile in the creation of an engineering program with Jim York, an agile expert with experience introducing agile to higher education and research organizations.

Upon their arrival, the founding team started to envision the attributes of the ideal WFU engineering graduate—what they should know, what they should be able to demonstrate, what attitudes they should embody. With this vision of the ideal graduate, the team worked backwards to imagine the curriculum, the classroom environment, the types of projects and learning experiences they would have to face, the type of physical spaces that would be needed, and even the type of faculty that would be needed.

The team distilled their mission into four words—Educate the Whole Engineer. Their differentiator: to be the only ABET accredited interdisciplinary undergraduate engineering degree authentically integrating liberal arts education within the research university’s commitment of Pro Humanitate (For Humanity).

To both attract students and keep them, WFU Engineering would need to create something new and, in its creation, incorporate ways to refresh the program or risk obsolescence and irrelevance. To succeed, the team would need to rapidly sense and respond to student needs in an emergent and dynamic environment. A fierce focus on the student would be essential to both building WFU Engineering and sustaining it in the future.

The quality of the new Engineering program would be measured in part by its ability to meet accreditation standards—an outcome that could not be known until 2022, nearly a year and a half after WFU Engineering graduated its first students. Accreditation is by necessity backward-looking so as to evaluate what students have learned in their four years. The first five cohorts would join with no guarantee of accreditation. Accreditation was not the only goal for Pierrakos—she also wanted to influence the culture of engineering education and agility was a core strategy to this culture shift.



Cabin Crew, Please be Seated

Pierrakos was informed that graduating 10-15 students in the first few graduating classes would be considered a success. Admissions was expecting 25 students in the inaugural cohort, with women making up about 15%. However, on August 23, 2017, 55 students (40% of whom were women) excitedly assembled in the auditorium for day one of the first ever WFU Engineering course: “Introduction to Engineering Thinking and Practice.”

Building WFU Engineering would require input and feedback from three

major stakeholders—students, faculty and external experts—with student needs taking precedence. Student engagement would drive understanding of each incoming class and their unique and evolving interests, motivations, and dreams.

The team established practices to draw in and reinforce student perspectives. These practices included entrance surveys, exit surveys, class feedback sessions, a 12-15 member Student Advisory Council, and multiple student-run initiatives. The integration of these touchpoints with the student in building the program are not the norm for most academic departments.



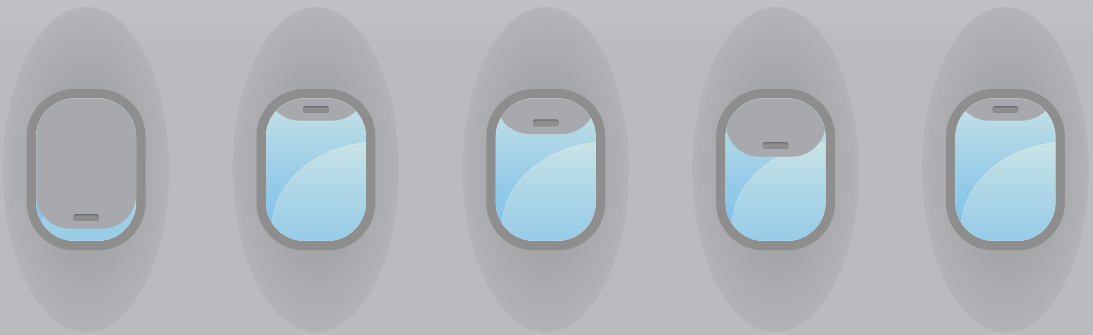
Student insights proved invaluable. For example, the team discovered early that the majority of students came to WFU for the broad range of study abroad options and undergraduate research opportunities. For the founding team, these insights reinforced the need to design a flexible curriculum, not rigid like traditional engineering programs.

By the start of year two, the number of incoming students had doubled and the team had doubled as well to match. The rapid growth placed extreme strain on the faculty and staff. One week felt like a month's worth of work for the team. To support the team's need to preserve and enhance their agility, York joined the team as an agile coach.

Having a coach was not an easy sell for the faculty. In the team's first activity with York, they engaged in a workshop to explore and experience Scrum as an example agile framework. An early exercise stirred debate when York asked the team

to discuss "Who is our customer?" The answers were many—students, university, parents, employers, society. Not all team members were comfortable with the use of the word customer either. The discussion revealed that, as the team was growing, we risked losing focus on who it was all for.

The workshop surfaced many questions and few clear answers on how to apply agile principles and practices within an academic department. York facilitated team conversations around these questions. Follow-on coaching led to the team deciding to reinforce their emphasis on creating value from the student's perspective, establish better transparency of work, rigorously set and re-set clear goals and priorities, adopt an iterative approach, welcome feedback, hold retrospectives, pilot ideas, and fail and learn quickly.



Preparing For Takeoff

The team's ability to welcome and integrate new and diverse ideas became part of the culture. While most WFU departments meetings tended to only involve faculty, the WFU Engineering team brought faculty and staff together for their meetings. This collaboration sent a message of inclusion and unity for the team. Even part-time staff whose supervisory structure was not Engineering would join meetings, and several still do.

Bold new ideas were needed to innovate and rethink engineering education. Pierrakos invited colleagues from all parts of the university to join department meetings and retreats. This inclusive approach became the norm for many meetings and would include historians, philosophers, humanists, social scientists, entrepreneurs, policy experts, environmentalists, engineers from industry, etc. This intentional attempt to diversify the curricular conversations with diverse disciplinary perspectives resulted

in nearly all engineering courses inviting guest speakers outside of engineering in addition to professional and practicing engineers, to enrich their students' context and knowledge.

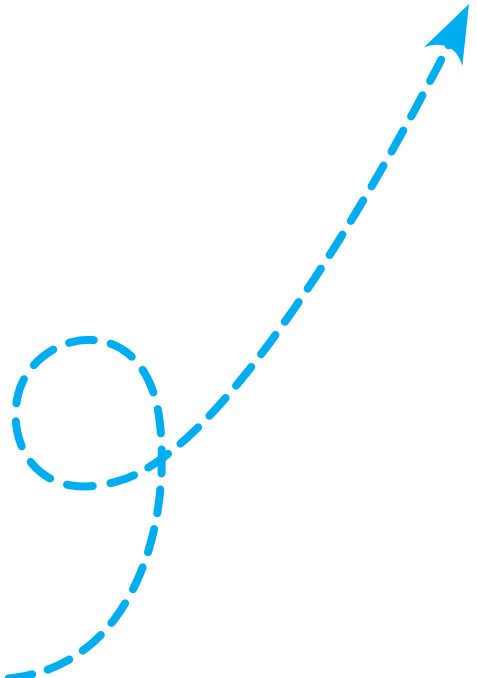
Ultimately, student-centered pedagogies (which place focus on the learner and the learner's needs) took precedence over the traditional instructor-focused pedagogies (e.g. didactic instruction and lectures). Innovative pedagogies like project-based learning, problem-based learning, mastery-based learning, just-in-time learning, case-based learning, and inquiry-based learning infused every course of the WFU engineering curriculum.

Student-centered learning also meant that faculty were soliciting student feedback just-in-time and were quick to respond to improve the student learning experience. The department faculty performance evaluation process was revised to include explicit criteria around responsiveness and student-centered learning to reinforce their importance. Faculty and staff worked in sync to deliver learning value quickly and to prepare students for internships that would lay the foundation towards job placement.

Discovering unmet student needs became critical to the success of WFU Engineering, and working quickly and effectively to support these needs became the norm. Emergent information would mean at times pivoting from planned directions. As an example, by year three, students searching for internships and jobs discovered that they were disadvantaged by not being able to show some specialization. Surveys confirmed that many students desired the ability to pursue engineering concentrations that could be listed on transcripts and added to resumes.

The diverse engineering faculty team, representing over 12 disciplines of engineering, was already starting to offer a broad range of technical electives leveraging existing degree credits. These electives enabled the team to quickly pivot to offer five optional engineering concentrations. As a result, over 65% of students now pursue a concentration.

A small subset of faculty did not support this direction. Such tensions point to the realities that teams and leaders face. In this case, Pierrakos sided with students and empowered the faculty team to develop the structure and implementation of the concentrations.



WFU is Now En-Route To Our Destination

WFU graduated 43 engineers in its inaugural cohort in May 2021. While most engineering programs lose an average of half of their students to attrition, WFU engineering retained 80%. The second graduating class was 45 in May 2022.

Agility also meant intentionality in creating a culture of inclusion and empowerment. Engineering has become one of the most diverse departments at WFU and one of the most diverse engineering programs in the US. Nationally, about 15% to 20% of engineering graduates are women and 5% to 10% non-Caucasian. WFU Engineering has sustained 40-42% women and 20-25% non-Caucasian. The WFU Engineering permanent faculty body is 60% female too, whereas national averages are about 10%.

Accreditation evaluators cited as a program strength WFU Engineering's flexible curriculum in creating diverse experiential learning. The student-centric approach led to choice for students to customize or personalize their four year curricular experience. In fact, WFU Engineering evolved to represent 60% core curriculum courses and 40% customizable courses and experiences. Most other programs are so rigid that 90-100% of the engineering curricula are fixed. Flexibility driven by students' engagement as part of the team was key.

Exit surveys revealed surprising perspectives on student outcomes. Graduates didn't just identify as engineers, but rather brought their whole self; they didn't just bring the answer, but also asked the right questions and incorporated different perspectives; and expanded the horizon of what engineers can do and their role in society beyond engineering.

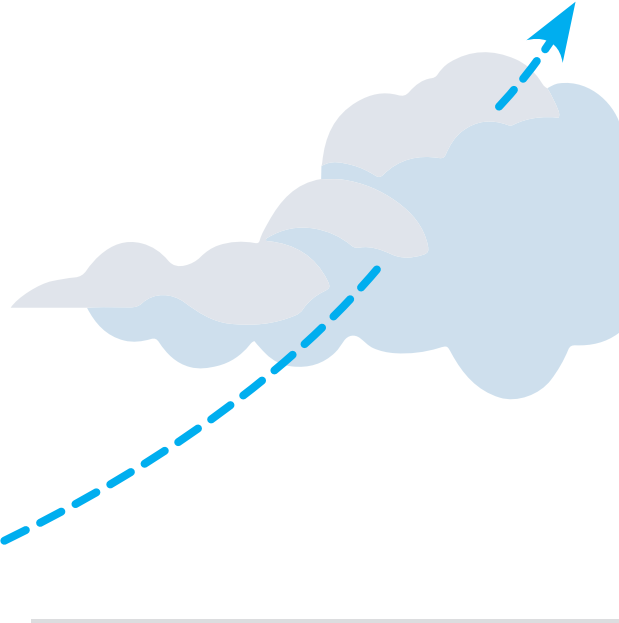
Please Enjoy Some In-Flight Snacks As We Continue Building The Plane

Today, five and a half years after the founding team imagined its future, WFU celebrates the engineering program's accreditation, meeting a key success criteria of its founding mission. Accreditation is retroactive for the first two graduating classes.

In three years, WFU Engineering went from zero to 200 students. In four years, WFU Engineering grew to over 20 faculty and staff. To build out its engineering facilities, the team oversaw a doubling of its footprint and underwent four rounds of renovations ultimately occupying nearly 28,000 square feet.

Along the way, the successes and challenges were many. The team's agility was key to nearly all of the successes. The challenges that remain represent opportunities for the organization. As WFU Engineering thinks about its future, sustainability is a major theme. Will the agile approach that helped build the program remain with the team under new leadership? Will fierce focus on students guide future decisions even when faculty values conflict with what students value? Will the status quo institutional culture force standards and norms of operation that will hinder innovation and agility within WFU Engineering? Will the university fully embrace the unique value of engineers in its ecosystem? Will the engineering team continue to feel empowered to define its path? These and so many yet-to-be discovered unanswered questions will challenge WFU Engineering as it transitions to a more steady-state mode of operation.

A student-centric approach and integrating students as part of the team truly paid off. WFU Engineering quickly became a sought out national leader in engineering education. Annually, leaders of many new and established engineering programs visit, seek counsel and collaborate with Pierrakos and the WFU Engineering faculty and staff. Building the airplane in flight required innovation, intense teamwork, agility and, above all, a fierce focus on the students' success.



Jim York is a business owner helping teams discover how to delight their customers. He uses systems thinking, agile and lean to co-create resilient, learning teams. As a coach, he works with his clients to help them grow in directions that matter to them to achieve their goals. Jim is a Certified Agile Coach®, holding both the Certified Enterprise Coach and Certified Team Coach credentials; Certified Scrum Trainer®; Agile Fluency® facilitator; LeSS Practitioner and co-founder of FoxHedge Ltd.



Jim York

Dr. Olga Pierrakos is an Engineering Professor at Wake Forest University and served as the Founding Chair of Wake Forest Engineering from 2017 to 2022. She is a national thought leader in STEM and higher education as well as innovative ecosystems. She led her team to redefine engineering education with an inspiring vision. Under her leadership, Wake Forest Engineering has been recognized for the diversity of students and faculty, curricular innovation, and inclusive excellence.



Dr Olga Pierrakos



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