

# The Six Attributes of Agile Institutions

Assess your institution’s readiness to respond to mounting sector pressures—and pinpoint the capability gaps that matter most.

Intensifying financial and market pressures are pushing colleges and universities to make faster and bolder decisions. Increasingly, campus leadership teams are recognizing that traditional approaches to decision-making and cross-campus coordination cannot keep pace with the current environment.

This infographic outlines six attributes of agile institutions and the core capabilities associated with each one. Rate how consistently your institution exhibits each capability using the scale below. Enter your ratings in the teal boxes, then total them to calculate your overall score for each attribute. Higher scores indicate areas of strength, while lower scores highlight priority areas for improvement.

- Operating Capabilities**  
The structures and processes that enable institutions to act quickly and effectively
- Endurance Capabilities**  
Leadership practices that sustain momentum through upheaval and change

**Rating Scale:**      **1** We do not or very rarely demonstrate this capability      **2** We sometimes demonstrate this capability, but not in a consistent or repeatable way      **3** We consistently demonstrate this capability across our campus



<div><b>1 Decision Resolve</b></div> <div>Can we make smart decisions fast enough?</div> <div><div>Clearly Scoped Mandates: We charge committees with narrowly defined questions and fixed decision timelines.<input type="checkbox"/></div><div>Transparent Decision Rules: We publicly assign ownership for final calls to clarify who is responsible for advancing initiatives.<input type="checkbox"/></div><div>Tripwires for Action: We set clear deadlines for input and predefined thresholds (e.g., market signals) that automatically trigger appropriate next steps.<input type="checkbox"/></div><div>Constructive Conflict: We create forums that surface opposing views, weigh trade-offs, and drive explicit group commitment to decisions.<input type="checkbox"/></div></div> <div><div>Overall Score ▶</div><div>___ /12</div></div>	<div><b>2 Unapologetic Focus</b></div> <div>Are we truly willing to stop doing things?</div> <div><div>North Star Vision: We define a mission compelling enough to rally support but specific enough to discipline decisions.<input type="checkbox"/></div><div>Tradeoff Discipline: We apply consistent criteria and clearly communicate tradeoffs when launching or sunseting initiatives.<input type="checkbox"/></div><div>Competitive Humility: We strengthen market position by focusing on true differentiators, rather than chasing peers or competing everywhere.<input type="checkbox"/></div><div>Less-with-Less Mentality: We intentionally stop low-value activities and reward teams for focusing their efforts where it matters most.<input type="checkbox"/></div></div> <div><div>Overall Score ▶</div><div>___ /12</div></div>	<div><b>3 Portfolio Logic</b></div> <div>Are we investing (and divesting) where payoff is greatest?</div> <div><div>Seeded Innovation Pathways: We direct promising ideas into funded pathways for testing, refinement, and scaling.<input type="checkbox"/></div><div>Portfolio Diversification: We diversify funding sources and investments to reduce risk and boost financial resilience.<input type="checkbox"/></div><div>Sunset Mechanisms: We have explicit processes to phase out underperforming initiatives and reallocate resources for higher-value priorities.<input type="checkbox"/></div><div>Regular Health Checks: We conduct recurring reviews for academic, athletic, and research programs that are tied to clear performance outcomes.<input type="checkbox"/></div></div> <div><div>Overall Score ▶</div><div>___ /12</div></div>	<div><b>4 Change-Ready Systems</b></div> <div>Do our structures enable—not stifle—innovation?</div> <div><div>Innovation-Linked Incentives: We tie faculty and staff recognition and advancement to risk-taking, experimentation, and proven impact.<input type="checkbox"/></div><div>Innovation Incubators: We have centralized teams, funds, and processes for approving and quickly testing innovative ideas.<input type="checkbox"/></div><div>Change-Ready Leadership Pipelines: We prepare future leaders to champion transformation and guide stakeholders through uncertainty.<input type="checkbox"/></div><div>Adaptive Cost Structures: We keep costs variable through shared spaces, flexible staffing, and modular services that adjust with demand.<input type="checkbox"/></div></div> <div><div>Overall Score ▶</div><div>___ /12</div></div>	<div><b>5 Urgent Long-Termism</b></div> <div>Are we prepared to act now for outcomes years away?</div> <div><div>Vision-Driven Talent Recruitment: We select leaders for mission fit and future readiness—not just near-term needs.<input type="checkbox"/></div><div>Cascaded Strategic Goals: We translate institutional priorities into aligned objectives that guide decisions across all levels.<input type="checkbox"/></div><div>Long-Range Financial Forecasting: We use forward-looking projections to guide investments and anticipate emerging fiscal pressures.<input type="checkbox"/></div><div>Future-Focused Compensation Plans: We reward leaders for driving initiatives that create durable value and advance institutional transformation.<input type="checkbox"/></div></div> <div><div>Overall Score ▶</div><div>___ /12</div></div>	<div><b>6 Executive Resilience</b></div> <div>Can we sustain momentum when leadership turns over?</div> <div><div>Succession-Planning Discipline: We anticipate transitions early and develop potential successors to minimize disruption.<input type="checkbox"/></div><div>Continuity Roadmaps: We document goals, milestones, and handoffs to maintain progress amid leadership turnover.<input type="checkbox"/></div><div>Charter-Backed Priorities: We codify strategic commitments in formal charters so they persist beyond leadership and agenda changes.<input type="checkbox"/></div><div>Institutionalized Decision Norms: We use standing approvals, fixed review cycles, and delegated authority to sustain momentum through transitions.<input type="checkbox"/></div></div> <div><div>Overall Score ▶</div><div>___ /12</div></div>
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