

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



1 Decision Resolve

Can we make smart decisions fast enough?

Clearly Scoped Mandates: We charge committees with narrowly defined questions and fixed decision timelines.

Transparent Decision Rules: We publicly assign ownership for final calls to clarify who is responsible for advancing initiatives.

Tripwires for Action: We set clear deadlines for input and predefined thresholds (e.g., market signals) that automatically trigger appropriate next steps.

Constructive Conflict: We create forums that surface opposing views, weigh trade-offs, and drive explicit group commitment to decisions.

Overall Score ▶ /12

2 Unapologetic Focus

Are we truly willing to stop doing things?

North Star Vision: We define a mission compelling enough to rally support but specific enough to discipline decisions.

Tradeoff Discipline: We apply consistent criteria and clearly communicate tradeoffs when launching or sunsetting initiatives.

Competitive Humility: We strengthen market position by focusing on true differentiators, rather than chasing peers or competing everywhere.

Less-with-Less Mentality: We intentionally stop low-value activities and reward teams for focusing their efforts where it matters most.

Overall Score ▶ /12

3 Portfolio Logic

Are we investing (and divesting) where payoff is greatest?

Seeded Innovation Pathways: We direct promising ideas into funded pathways for testing, refinement, and scaling.

Portfolio Diversification: We diversify funding sources and investments to reduce risk and boost financial resilience.

Sunset Mechanisms: We have explicit processes to phase out underperforming initiatives and reallocate resources for higher-value priorities.

Regular Health Checks: We conduct recurring reviews for academic, athletic, and research programs that are tied to clear performance outcomes.

Overall Score ▶ /12

4 Change-Ready Systems

Do our structures enable—not stifle—innovation?

Innovation-Linked Incentives: We tie faculty and staff recognition and advancement to risk-taking, experimentation, and proven impact.

Innovation Incubators: We have centralized teams, funds, and processes for approving and quickly testing innovative ideas.

Change-Ready Leadership Pipelines: We prepare future leaders to champion transformation and guide stakeholders through uncertainty.

Adaptive Cost Structures: We keep costs variable through shared spaces, flexible staffing, and modular services that adjust with demand.

Overall Score ▶ /12

5 Urgent Long-Termism

Are we prepared to act now for outcomes years away?

Vision-Driven Talent Recruitment: We select leaders for mission fit and future readiness—not just near-term needs.

Cascaded Strategic Goals: We translate institutional priorities into aligned objectives that guide decisions across all levels.

Long-Range Financial Forecasting: We use forward-looking projections to guide investments and anticipate emerging fiscal pressures.

Future-Focused Compensation Plans: We reward leaders for driving initiatives that create durable value and advance institutional transformation.

Overall Score ▶ /12

6 Executive Resilience

Can we sustain momentum when leadership turns over?

Succession-Planning Discipline: We anticipate transitions early and develop potential successors to minimize disruption.

Continuity Roadmaps: We document goals, milestones, and handoffs to maintain progress amid leadership turnover.

Charter-Backed Priorities: We codify strategic commitments in formal charters so they persist beyond leadership and agenda changes.

Institutionalized Decision Norms: We use standing approvals, fixed review cycles, and delegated authority to sustain momentum through transitions.

Overall Score ▶ /12