



## **Balancing Process Formality With Innovation**

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*“You need chaos in your soul to give birth to a dancing star.” ~ Nietzsche*

For this PinkLink article, I would like to explore the following questions:

- How much process formalization is necessary or beneficial?
- At what point do we cross a line with control and formality and begin to stifle innovation and creative thought?

I am sure you have asked yourself these questions or have been challenged by your co-workers with the statement that all of this focus on process and control will hinder and not improve service delivery.

The answer to these questions lies in finding a balance between the two extremes of rigid control and abject chaos. Neither extreme is healthy, nor are they conducive to sanity or organizational productivity.

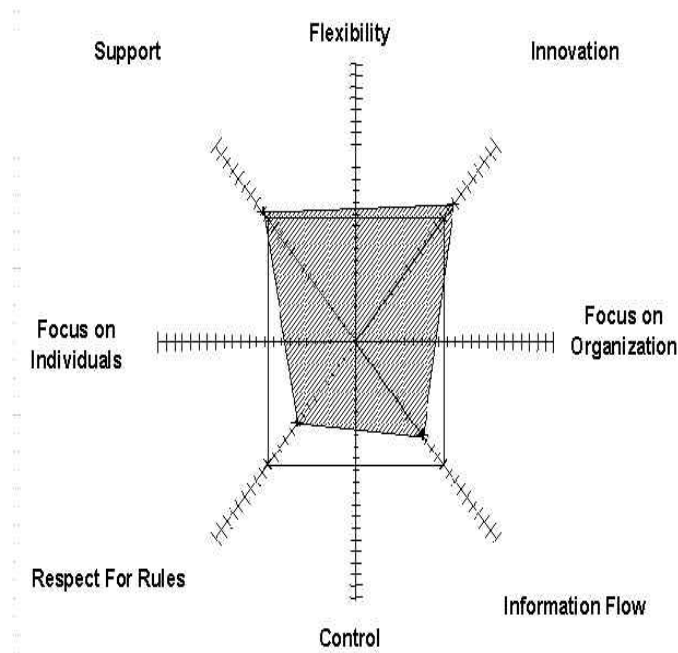
Contrary to popular belief, the adoption of Service Management is not about locking down, establishing rigid controls and corralling the IT Cowboys.

Adoption of Service Management is about establishing a consistency and balance of service delivery that is in line with the expectations of providing a utility of service that does not place the business at risk, while at the same time exploring new opportunities to leverage information technology.

The challenge that most IT functions have in achieving this balance is that our culture and often our incentive and measurement models value and reward innovation over and above consistency and reliability. The old axiom ‘you get what you measure’ is true in this context.

At Pink Elephant, we have a service for measuring and reporting on process maturity. As part of this service we conduct a cultural assessment, which measures the balance between the organization's focus on innovation versus respect for rules. Almost without exception, the cultural climate comes back to indicate that there is an imbalance between the two extremes in favor of a hero culture that rewards shooting from the hip and asking questions later.

Consider the following graph (see next page):



In light of this concept of balancing between extremes, I would like to introduce you to the concept of Chaos Theory. In short, Chaos Theory is based on the principle that any complex system needs to find a balancing point between rigidity and chaos to retain its vitality.

### **A Brief Look At Chaos Theory**

Chaos theory was not initially developed for use in a business context; however, its premise can be used to describe the behavioral tendencies of all complex systems regardless of their nature. I use it in this context to illustrate the tendency of a process to move naturally towards a state of chaos when not monitored and measured for quality and improvement.

*“Complex systems seem to strike a balance between the need for order and the imperative to change. These systems tend to locate themselves at a place we call the edge of chaos. We imagine the edge of chaos as a place where there is enough innovation to keep a complex system vibrant, and enough stability to keep it from collapsing into anarchy or chaos. It is a zone of conflict and upheaval, where the old and the new are constantly at war. Finding the balance point is a delicate matter. If a complex system drifts too close to the edge of chaos it risks falling over into incoherence and dissolution; but, if the system moves too far away from the edge, it becomes rigid, frozen and totalitarian. Both conditions lead to extinction. Too much change is as destructive as too little. Only at the edge of chaos can complex systems flourish. By implication, extinction is the inevitable result of one or the other strategy.”*

Ref: Norman Packard, [Adaptation Toward the Edge of Chaos](#) and A.B. Cambel, [Applied Chaos Theory: A Paradigm for Complexity](#)

Finding a balance between innovation and bureaucracy has been a constant challenge for countless organizations. Those IT functions that fail in this goal are most often perceived negatively by their customers, are outsourced or enjoy some form of protection from external market forces. If an obvious imbalance exists, the IT organization will either be perceived as immature and reactive or as overly bureaucratic and inflexible. Both extremes do not serve the needs of the business and are not the goal of Service Management.



Achieving a balance is always challenging and even more difficult to sustain. As was stated above, internal and external forces continue to pull from both sides.

An analogy you can use to illustrate the concept of Chaos Theory is a boat on a river above a waterfall. The river is a powerful force pulling the boat towards the waterfall and certain disaster, while the rowers in the boat are pulling against the current to keep the boat from crashing on the rocks below.

If the rowers give up the struggle, we know that the river will pull the boat over the edge of the waterfall onto the rocks below; however, if the rowers are too successful against the current and are able to row the boat so far upstream that they find themselves in a quite and calm eddy, they begin to lose their competitive edge and find themselves getting complacent and eventually lose their relevance.

One way to know if your boat is too far up or too far down stream is to continually and consistently take your bearings through the adoption of an accepted best practice framework such as ITIL<sup>®</sup>, CMMI, PMBOK, COBIT<sup>®</sup>, etc. and the application of a balanced measurement model.

In summary, adopting Service Management is not about words like formalization, rigidity and control. Finding the balance between process formalization and innovation is critical for the health and relevance of all service providers.

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*COBIT is a Registered Trade Mark of the IT Governance Institute (ITGI).*