

Complexity Has an Address

A standing design principle underneath the Fitness Sequence

By Mario Aiello | Adaptive Ways

Every organization has a layer where the work actually touches the customer, the transaction, the decision in front of a person right now. Call it the front line, the process, the point of contact — it doesn't matter what you name it. What matters is what's allowed to live there.

The instinct, especially under pressure, is to solve problems at the point where they surface. A process breaks, so a rule gets bolted onto the process. A gap appears, so an exception gets written into the flow that's already carrying the weight of everyday execution. Each fix is locally reasonable. The cumulative effect is a point of contact that has become the most complicated, least changeable part of the system — exactly the part that most needs to stay simple, because it's the part everyone touches, every day, under time pressure.

Complexity has to live somewhere. The question isn't whether to have it, it's where you let it accumulate. The layer closest to daily execution should carry as little of it as possible — not because the work there is unimportant, but because it's the layer with the least room to absorb a mistake and the least appetite for slow, careful reasoning. Push the hard decisions upstream, into the layer built to hold them: the place where a judgment call can be made once, deliberately, by someone with the standing and the time to get it right, instead of a thousand times, improvised, by whoever's closest to the friction when it appears.

This isn't a property of one stage. It shows up first at the point of contact because that's where the strain is visible, but the same failure repeats anywhere complexity gets left where it landed instead of moved to where it belongs. Local adaptation absorbing weight it was never built to carry is the same mistake as a process flow absorbing an exception it should have delegated upward. A change mechanism bolted onto daily execution instead of given a layer of its own is the same mistake again, just showing up at the point where the system is supposed to evolve rather than the point where it's supposed to run.

Complexity has an address. Part of getting an organization fit isn't just proving what's true at each stage — it's knowing which layer was built to hold which kind of decision, and refusing to let the nearest available layer absorb something it wasn't designed for just because that's where the pressure happened to land.

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