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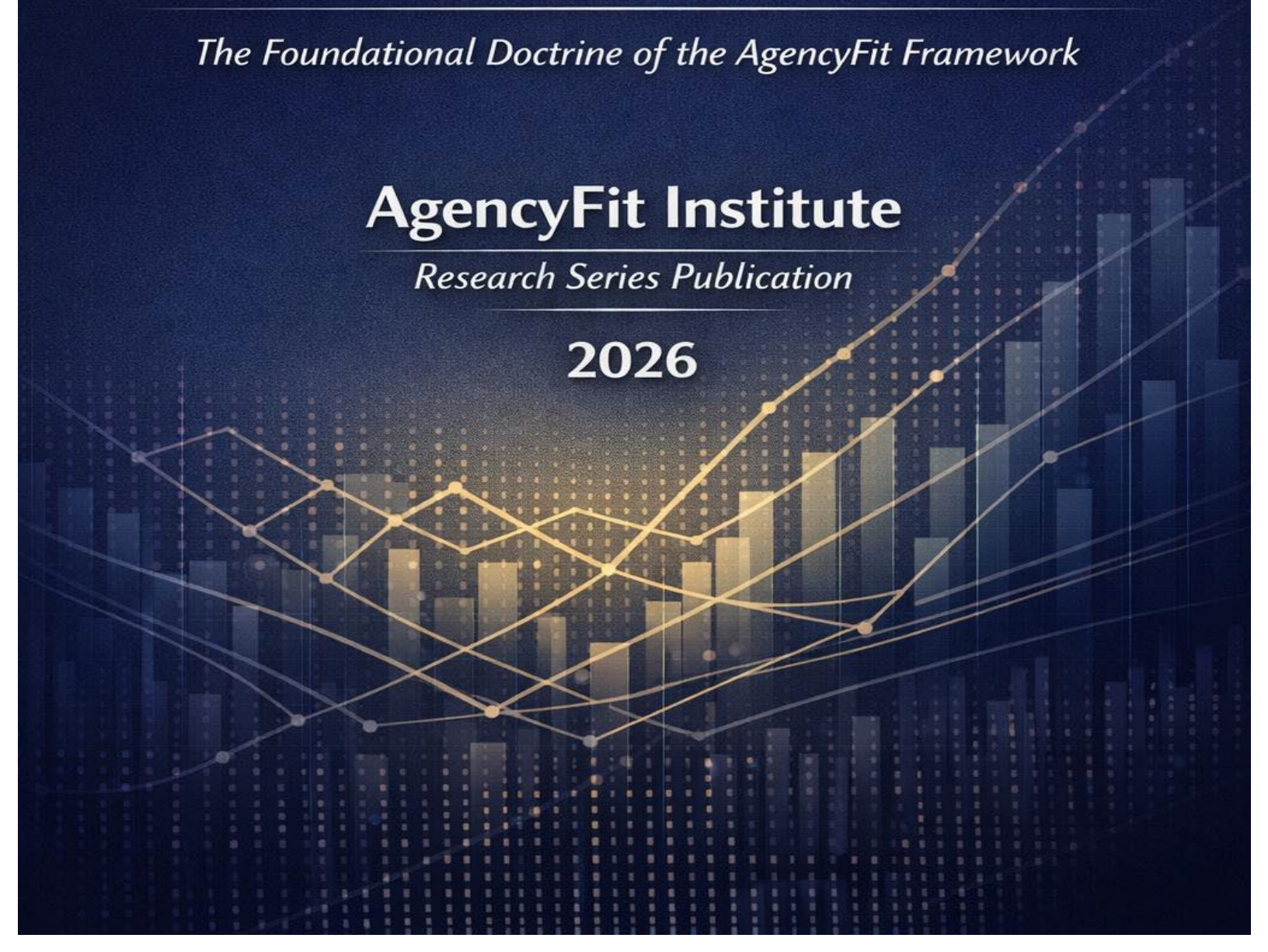
Operational Fit Before Procurement

The Foundational Doctrine of the AgencyFit Framework

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Abstract

Public sector organizations invest billions annually in technology modernization initiatives intended to improve services, increase efficiency, and strengthen operational resilience. Despite this investment, many modernization initiatives fail to achieve their intended outcomes. Systems are implemented but underutilized, platforms are procured but never fully integrated, and programs stall under the weight of operational complexity.

These failures are frequently attributed to vendor shortcomings, technical limitations, or insufficient funding. In practice, however, the root cause is often more fundamental: technology is selected before the operational environment required to support it is fully understood.

This paper introduces the concept of **Operational Fit**, the central doctrine of the AgencyFit framework. Operational Fit describes the degree to which a technology solution aligns with the workflows, staffing structures, governance models, infrastructure realities, and security obligations of the organization adopting it.

The AgencyFit framework argues that technology modernization should begin not with procurement, but with structured evaluation of operational readiness. Agencies must first understand their existing capabilities, constraints, and internal workflows before selecting solutions intended to improve them.

Operational Fit Before Procurement establishes the intellectual foundation of the AgencyFit methodology and introduces the lifecycle used to evaluate technology adoption within public sector institutions.

1. The Modernization Paradox

Governments around the world face persistent pressure to modernize their technological infrastructure. Citizens expect digital services that rival private sector experiences. Legislators demand transparency and measurable outcomes. Agencies must respond to growing cybersecurity threats, evolving regulatory requirements, and expanding volumes of data that must be processed and managed responsibly.

Technology modernization is widely viewed as the mechanism through which these pressures can be addressed. Public sector technology budgets continue to grow, and agencies regularly pursue new platforms intended to improve service delivery, automate workflows, or enhance security posture.

Yet despite unprecedented investment, a substantial portion of government technology initiatives struggle to produce their intended outcomes.

Systems are deployed but remain underutilized. Platforms are purchased but never fully integrated into operational workflows. Modernization initiatives stall midway through implementation. In other cases, projects are completed successfully but ultimately provide limited operational value because the problem they were intended to solve was already addressed internally through existing systems or processes.

This phenomenon can be described as the **modernization paradox**: organizations invest in technology to improve operational efficiency, yet frequently experience increased operational complexity as a result.

In many cases, the technology itself is not the problem. Modern platforms are often highly capable, flexible, and technically sound. Vendors continue to develop increasingly sophisticated solutions addressing workflow automation, data management, cybersecurity monitoring, and digital service delivery.

However, when these technologies are introduced into environments that are not prepared to support them, even the most advanced solutions struggle to succeed.

Technology adoption does not occur in isolation. Every new platform interacts with existing workflows, governance structures, staffing models, infrastructure constraints, and regulatory obligations. When these factors are not evaluated before procurement decisions occur, the likelihood of misalignment increases significantly.

The modernization paradox therefore arises not from technological limitations, but from a failure to evaluate how technology interacts with the operational realities of the organizations adopting it.

2. Procurement-First Thinking

A persistent structural pattern in public sector modernization initiatives is what can be described as **procurement-first thinking**.

In many organizations, the process of solving an operational challenge begins with identifying a technology product rather than understanding the operational environment in which that product will be deployed.

This pattern emerges for several reasons.

First, procurement systems are often designed around vendor acquisition rather than operational evaluation. Public sector procurement frameworks provide structured pathways for acquiring technology solutions, but rarely include equivalent mechanisms for assessing internal operational readiness before technology selection occurs.

Second, technology vendors frequently present their solutions as comprehensive answers to complex operational challenges. Demonstrations emphasize feature sets, automation capabilities, and integration options that appear to promise immediate improvements.

Third, organizational pressure to “modernize” often translates into pressure to deploy visible technological solutions. The acquisition of a new platform signals progress in ways that operational process improvement alone often does not.

The result is a predictable sequence.

An organization identifies a challenge, begins exploring available technology products, and initiates procurement discussions before fully understanding the internal conditions required to support the solution being considered.

In this model, procurement becomes the starting point rather than the final step.

Once a vendor is selected, agencies attempt to adapt internal workflows, staffing models, and governance structures to match the capabilities of the newly acquired platform.

This inversion introduces significant risk.

When organizations commit to technology before understanding their operational readiness, they effectively commit to solving a problem whose full scope has not yet been defined.

The consequences frequently appear during implementation.

Systems require configuration work that internal staff were not prepared to perform. Integration requirements reveal undocumented dependencies between existing systems. Security reviews

introduce compliance requirements that were not considered during procurement. Workflows must be redesigned to accommodate system limitations.

In some cases these challenges can be resolved through additional investment. In others, projects stall or fail entirely.

The technology itself may function exactly as designed. The failure occurs because the operational environment required to support it was never evaluated.

3. Operational Readiness vs Product Selection

Successful technology adoption requires more than selecting a capable product. It requires ensuring that the organization adopting that product possesses the operational capacity required to deploy, configure, govern, and sustain it over time.

Operational readiness includes several interdependent elements.

Workflows must exist that align with the capabilities of the technology being introduced. Staff must possess the technical and procedural knowledge necessary to operate and maintain the system. Infrastructure must support integration requirements. Governance structures must exist to manage configuration, security, and ongoing change.

In many public sector environments, these elements evolve gradually through institutional experience, policy development, and operational practice. Introducing new technology into this environment therefore requires careful alignment between the solution and the operational structures expected to support it.

When alignment exists, technology can dramatically improve efficiency and service delivery.

When alignment does not exist, technology introduces friction.

A common misconception in modernization initiatives is the belief that technology replaces operational labor. In reality, technology almost always **adds operational impact before it reduces it**.

Every system must be configured. Every platform must be governed. Security controls must be applied and maintained. Integrations must be monitored. Updates must be evaluated and deployed.

These activities represent real operational work.

The long-term value of technology frequently emerges through automation, improved data visibility, or reduced manual processes. However, these benefits only materialize when

organizations possess the operational capacity required to support the system throughout its lifecycle.

Recognizing this reality is essential to responsible modernization.

Technology should not be evaluated solely on its feature set or vendor promises. It must also be evaluated on whether the organization adopting it can realistically support the operational demands it introduces.

4. The Concept of Operational Fit

The concept of **Operational Fit** provides a structured way to evaluate whether a technology solution aligns with the environment into which it will be deployed.

Operational Fit describes the relationship between a solution and the operational structures required to support it. These structures include workflows, staffing capacity, governance processes, infrastructure dependencies, and security obligations.

A solution demonstrates strong operational fit when it aligns naturally with the organization's existing capabilities or when the operational adjustments required to support it are clearly understood and manageable.

Conversely, a solution demonstrates weak operational fit when successful deployment would require significant changes to workflows, staffing structures, infrastructure, or governance that the organization has not yet planned to implement.

Evaluating operational fit requires examining several fundamental questions:

- Does the organization possess the staffing capacity required to deploy and maintain the solution?
- Do existing workflows align with the system's operational model?
- Are governance structures in place to manage configuration and change control?
- Can existing infrastructure support integration and data exchange requirements?
- Are security and compliance obligations compatible with the proposed architecture?

These questions appear straightforward, yet they are frequently addressed only after procurement decisions have already been made.

Operational Fit reframes this sequence.

Rather than selecting technology and then attempting to adapt the organization to support it, the AgencyFit doctrine proposes evaluating the operational environment first.

Technology should be selected only after the operational conditions required for successful deployment are understood.

5. Structural Causes of Technology Misalignment

The recurring misalignment between technology solutions and operational environments is not simply the result of poor planning.

Several structural characteristics of public sector organizations contribute to this pattern.

Procurement frameworks often emphasize compliance with purchasing procedures rather than evaluation of operational readiness. Agencies are required to demonstrate that vendor selection processes follow appropriate rules, but there may be limited institutional guidance on how to evaluate internal capability before selecting a solution.

The rapid expansion of Software-as-a-Service platforms has also accelerated the pace at which technology solutions can be acquired.

Cloud-based platforms promise rapid deployment, minimal infrastructure requirements, and simplified maintenance. While these capabilities are valuable, they can create the perception that operational readiness is less important than it would be for traditional on-premises systems.

In reality, SaaS platforms introduce their own operational complexities.

Data governance responsibilities remain. Integration requirements persist. Security controls must still be evaluated. Vendor configuration models must align with agency workflows.

When these factors are not examined before procurement occurs, agencies may find themselves deploying systems whose operational demands exceed the capacity of the organization adopting them.

Another structural factor is organizational fragmentation.

Procurement teams, technology teams, security teams, and program leadership often operate within separate divisions. Each group evaluates technology proposals from its own perspective, yet there may be no structured framework ensuring that these perspectives are integrated before procurement decisions occur.

The result is a decision-making process in which technology selection proceeds without a unified understanding of operational impact.

6. The Need for Structured Evaluation

Addressing these challenges requires more than improved procurement procedures. It requires a structured methodology for evaluating operational readiness before technology selection occurs.

A structured evaluation framework allows agencies to examine their operational environment in a consistent and repeatable way.

Such a framework enables organizations to map existing workflows, evaluate staffing capacity, identify infrastructure dependencies, and assess governance maturity before committing to technology procurement.

By establishing a structured evaluation phase before vendor selection, agencies can ensure that modernization initiatives are grounded in operational reality rather than vendor promise.

This approach does not slow innovation. On the contrary, it reduces the likelihood that modernization initiatives will stall during implementation.

Organizations that understand their operational environment are better equipped to select technologies that align with their capabilities.

7. Introducing the AgencyFit Lifecycle

The **AgencyFit Lifecycle** provides a structured pathway for evaluating modernization initiatives before procurement decisions occur.

The lifecycle consists of nine stages:

Discover
Map
Align
Qualify
Validate
Secure
Assess
Execute
Adopt

These stages represent a progression from understanding operational reality to executing technology adoption responsibly.

The early stages of the lifecycle focus on identifying operational conditions within the organization. Later stages focus on evaluating potential solutions and implementing technology that aligns with those conditions.

The lifecycle is not intended to slow modernization efforts. Instead, it ensures that modernization initiatives are grounded in operational capability rather than aspirational assumptions.

By evaluating operational fit before procurement, agencies dramatically increase the likelihood that technology investments will deliver meaningful outcomes.

8. Implications for Government Technology Leadership

The implications of Operational Fit are significant for government technology leaders.

Chief Information Officers, Chief Information Security Officers, program directors, and procurement leaders must shift their perspective from technology acquisition to operational alignment.

Technology decisions should follow structured evaluation of internal capability.

Procurement teams should collaborate with operational leaders before issuing vendor solicitations. Security teams should be involved early in architectural planning. Program leaders should assess whether modernization initiatives align with staff capacity and workflow realities.

Leaders who prioritize operational fit create conditions in which technology investments produce measurable improvements rather than unexpected complexity.

9. Conclusion — Modernization Through Alignment

Technology will remain a central driver of government modernization. New platforms will continue to emerge, vendors will introduce innovative capabilities, and agencies will face growing expectations to deliver digital services efficiently and securely.

However, the success of these initiatives depends not only on selecting capable technology but on ensuring that the organizations adopting these systems possess the operational capacity required to support them.

Operational Fit Before Procurement establishes a simple but powerful principle: modernization should begin with understanding how organizations actually operate.

When operational reality is understood, technology becomes an enabler of progress rather than a source of unexpected complexity.

The AgencyFit framework provides a structured approach for achieving this alignment, ensuring that technology investments strengthen public sector capability rather than unintentionally undermining it.

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