Agile Government is not an Oxymoron:

Helping Agencies Sense and Respond in Today's Environment

AFITC

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MITRE

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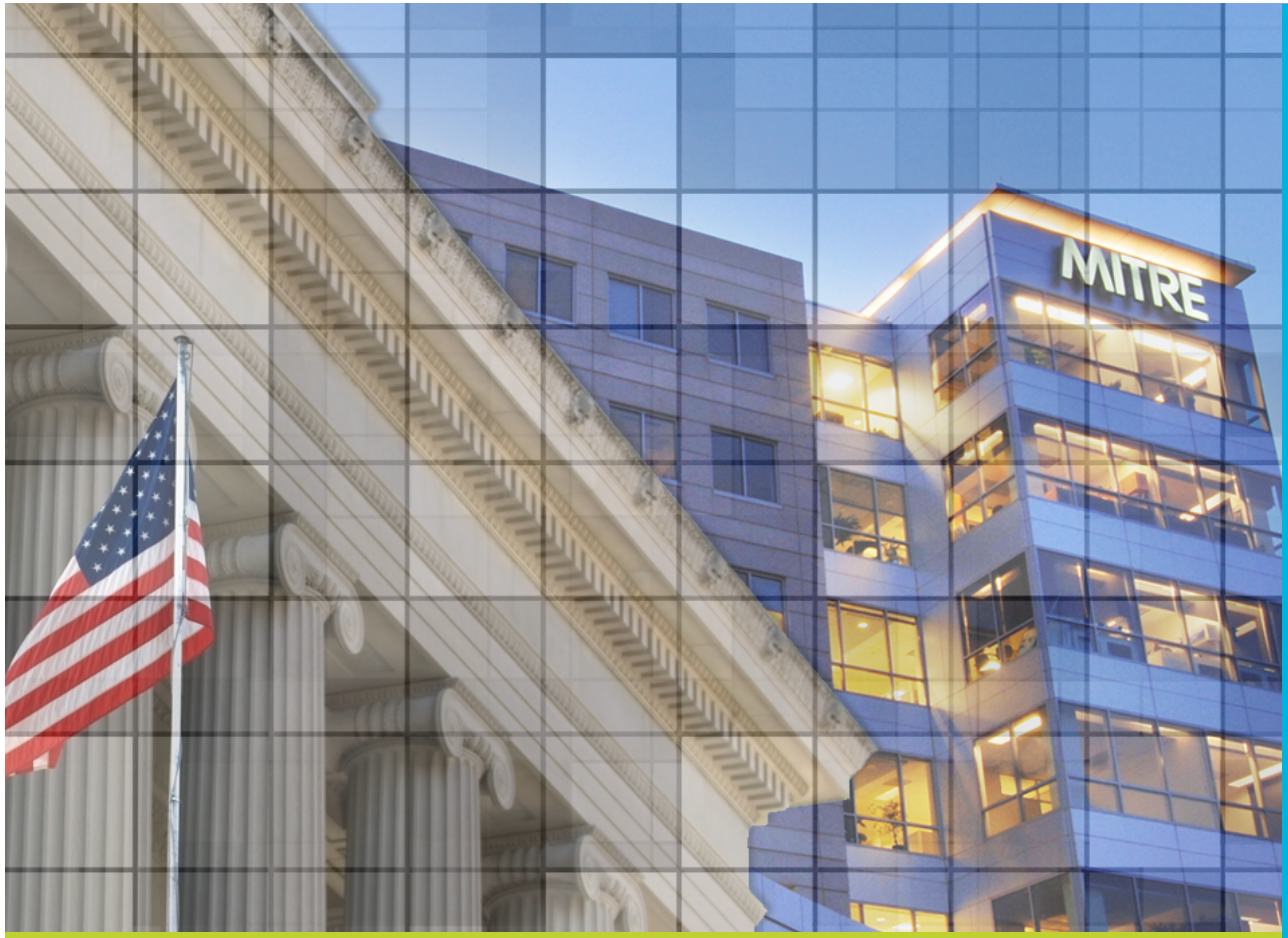

Working in the public interest

Strategic partner

Long-term relationship

Objective & independent

Serve as channels of expertise to advance government missions

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What is Organizational Agility?

An organization's capacity to
sense and **respond**
in a **timely** and **effective manner**
in a changing and uncertain environment

*Our definition based on literature review

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Development of the Government Organizational Agility Assessment (GOAA)

Summary of GOAAs Conducted So Far

- Five operating units in three government agencies
  - Two civilian, one military
- IT and non-IT units
- 726 participants invited
- 90% response rate

The GOAA was developed under MITRE Innovation Program funding.

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Agile Government Is Not An Oxymoron

Why do federal agencies want to become more agile?

We know we can't operate the same way as we have been, but we just can't keep our heads above water if we keep doing things the same way.

Agility is now part of our agency mission statement, but we're not sure what it means for our division.

The world will be different in 10 or 20 years. We need to start planning now for approaching our work differently. We need to empower employees.

Our reality is that we will not get more money or staff. But, we need to be more strategic and find ways to stream line and collaborate.

Some of our development teams are embracing an agile mindset more than other teams. Using the GOAA can help us understand how to help our teams continue to become agile.

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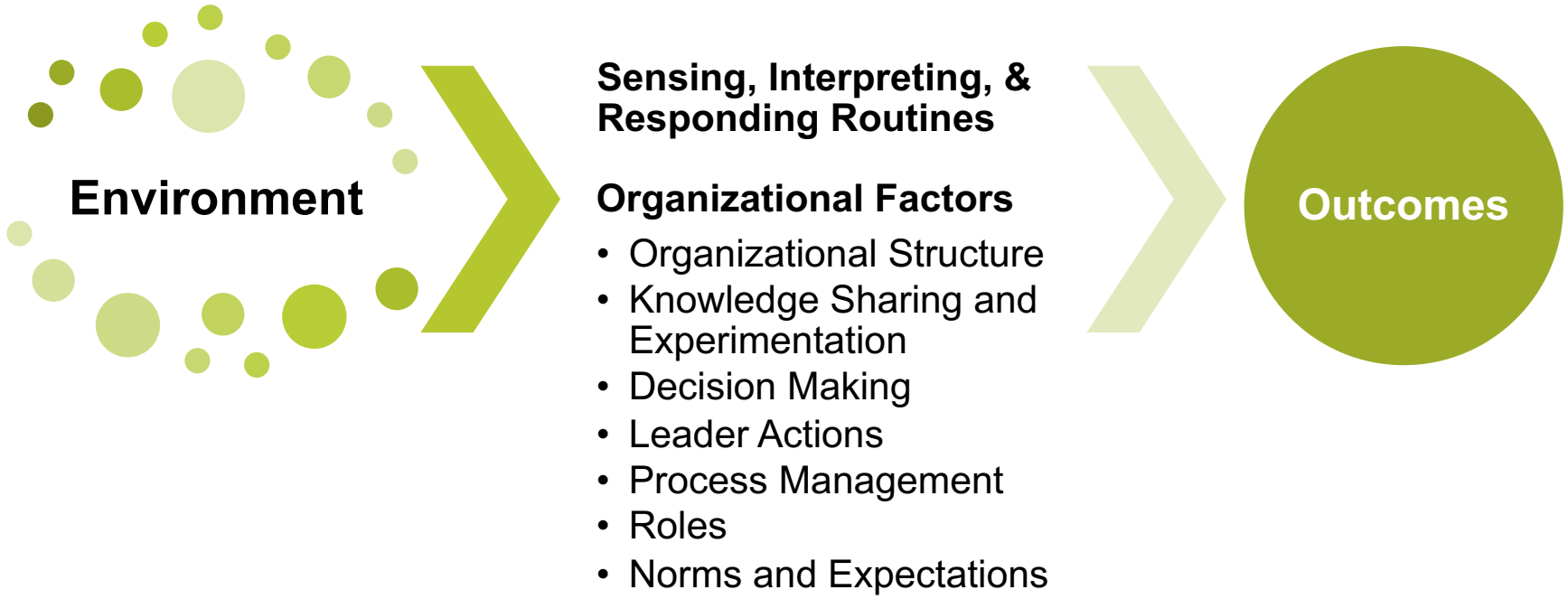
GOAA Framework



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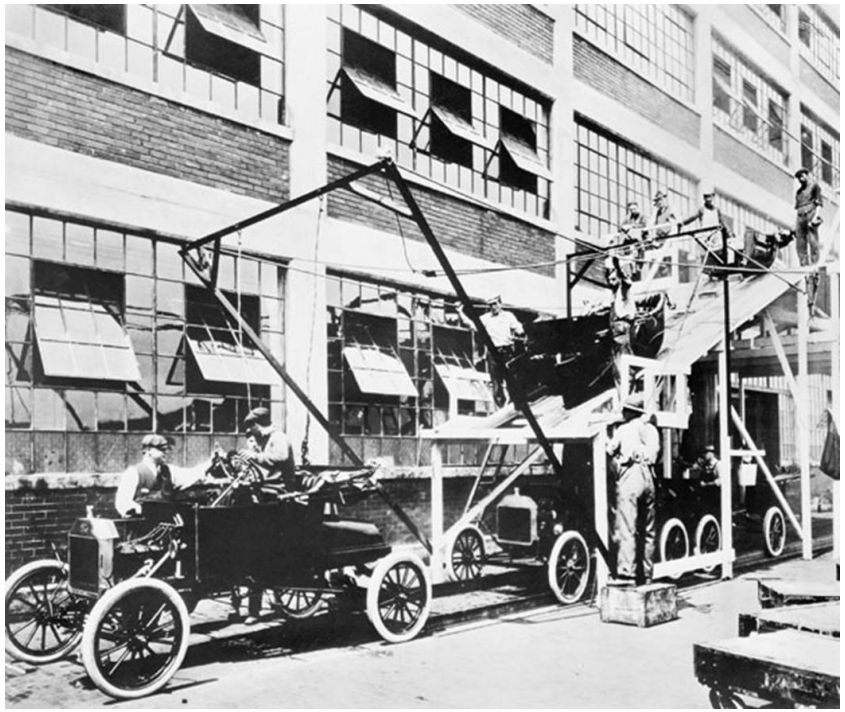
Organizations of the past…



“Any color you want, as long as it is black”

- Henry Ford

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…are not prepared to meet the conditions of today.

Organizational agility can help us reconceptualize how work gets done and meets the demands of our VUCA* environment.

*VUCA – Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous

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GOAA Organizational Dimensions

Organizational Dimension	Characteristics of Agile Organizations
Organizational Structure	A stable, flat organizational structure is used in conjunction with groups of employees that form and re-form as needed to share information, perform experiments, and modify processes.
Decision Making	Decisions are made based on expertise and at the lowest possible level.
Knowledge Sharing	In addition to continually scanning the environment, knowledge is obtained through reflection and lessons learned reviews; information is widely shared as needed and is stored systematically and proactively.
Process Management	Some processes are well-defined and stable while others are intentionally flexible, allowing for continual improvements in response to changes in environment.
Leader Actions	Leader actions are participative and collaborative; actions reinforce norms and expectations. Leaders create climate of psychological safety.
Roles	Employees roles in stable routines and flexible routines are clearly defined. Employee engage in regular training and develop multiple skills.
Norms and Expectations	Organizational norms focus on high achievement, employee development, and enjoyment of work. Employees are expected to view mistakes as positives and as learning events in a climate of trust and psychological safety.

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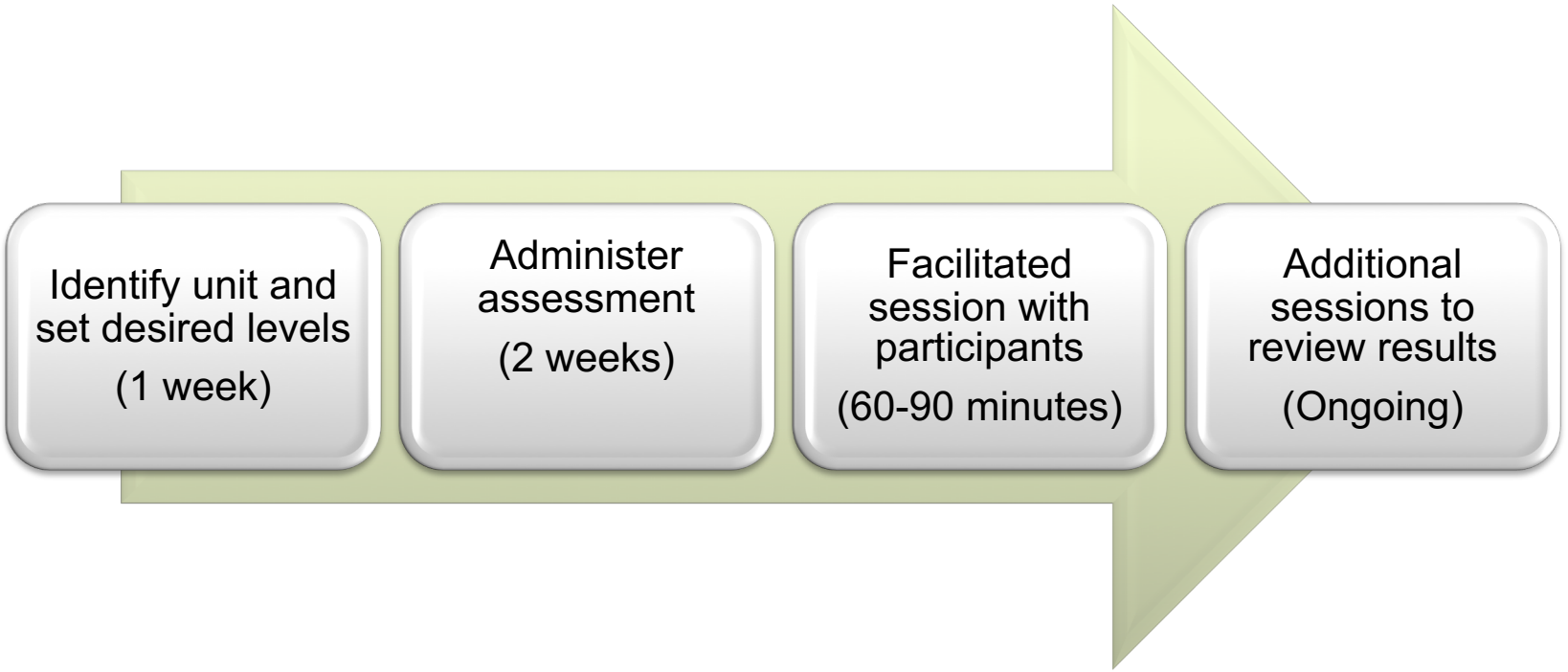
The GOAA Process Models an Agile Approach



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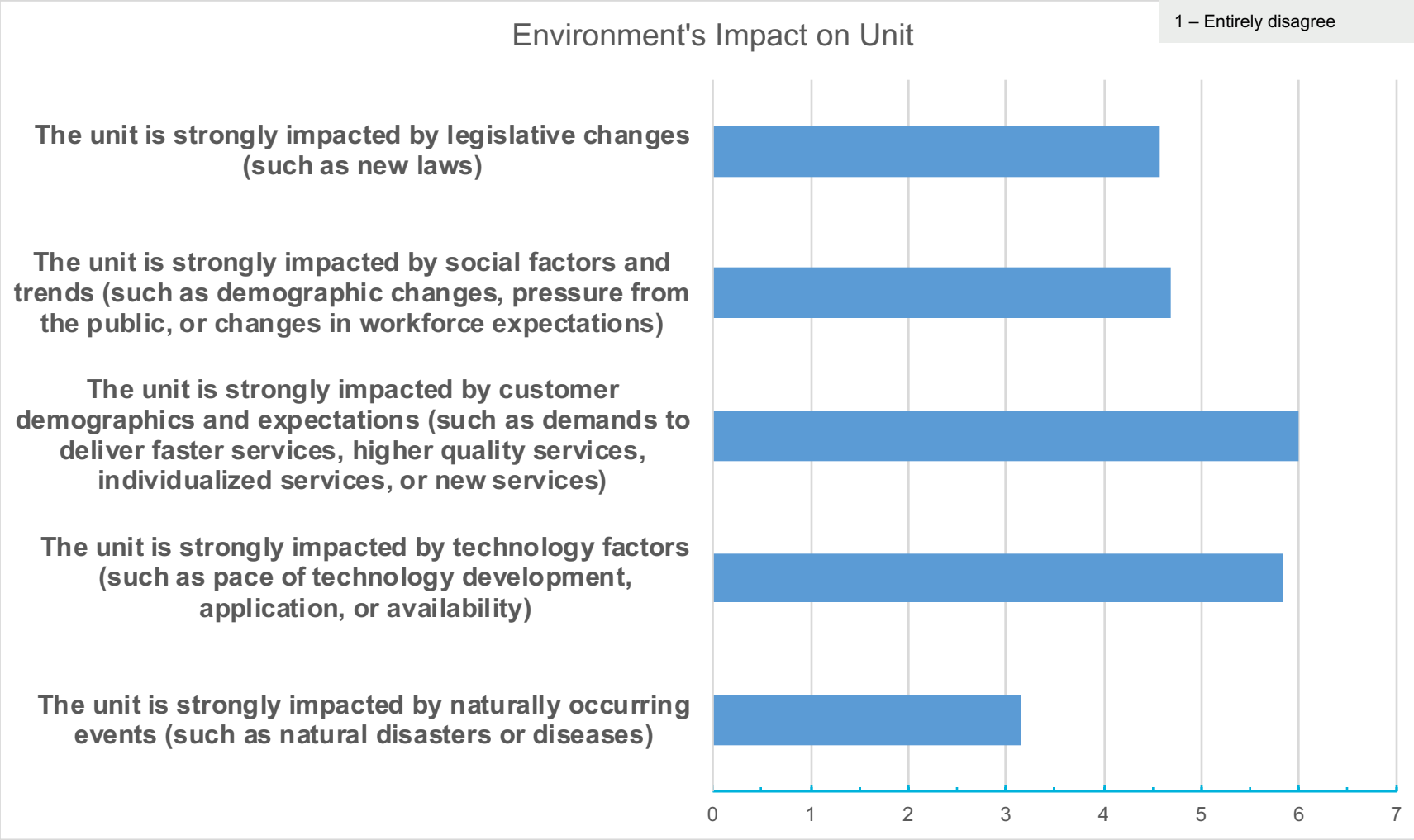
Representative Results: Environment Items

7 – Entirely agree
6 – Mostly agree
5 – Somewhat agree
4 – Neither agree nor disagree
3 – Somewhat disagree
2 – Mostly disagree
1 – Entirely disagree



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Participant Insights: Environment Questions

We really are impacted by our environment!

We are high on most of the dimensions. The results confirm what we've been feeling and give us a way to talk about how the environment impacts us.

It's not surprising that we are so high on customer and demographic factors, given our unit's mission!

These results help us understand the types of pressure we have been experiencing.

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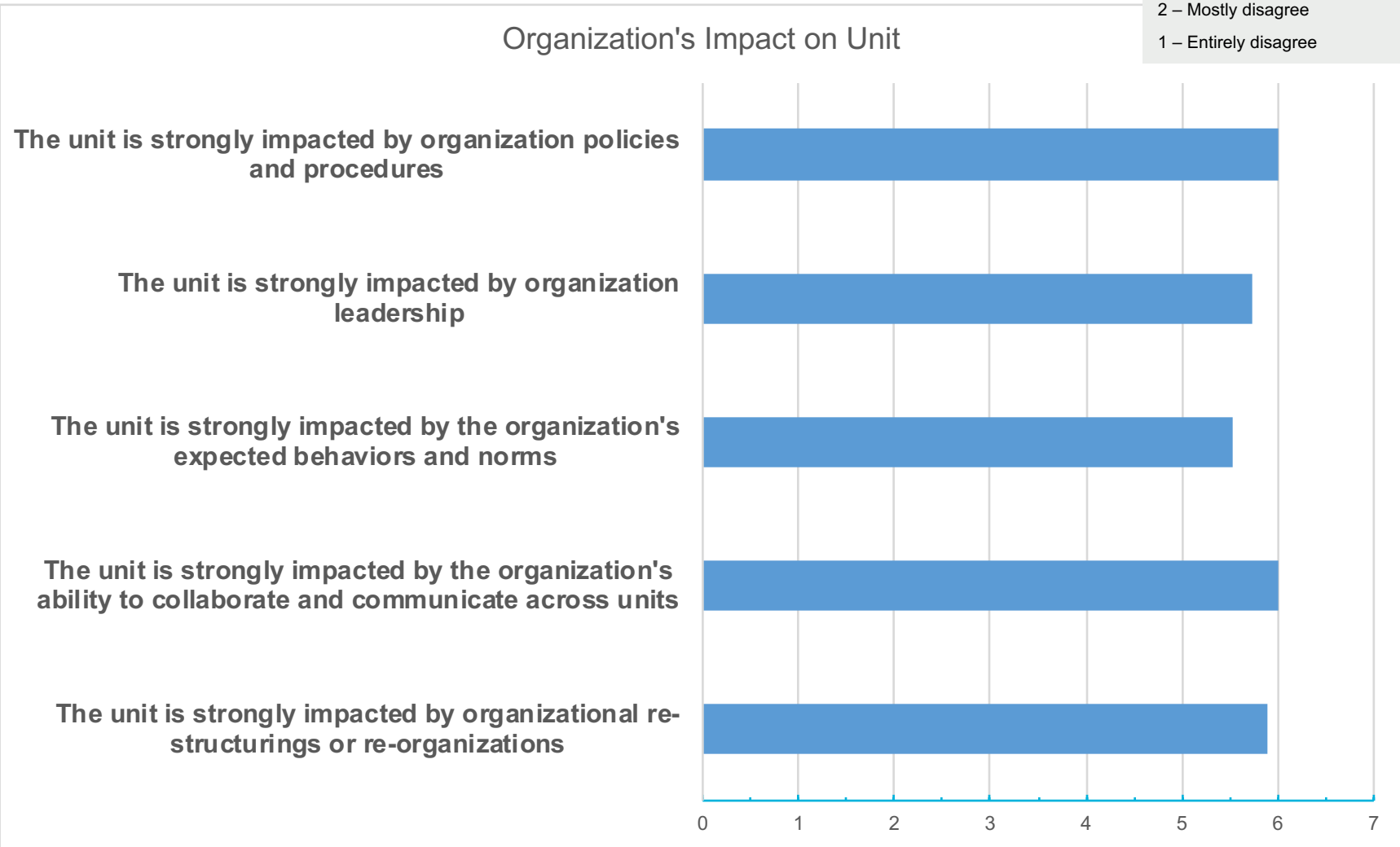
Representative Results: Organization Questions

7 – Entirely agree
6 – Mostly agree
5 – Somewhat agree
4 – Neither agree nor disagree
3 – Somewhat disagree
2 – Mostly disagree
1 – Entirely disagree



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Participant Insights: Organization

I have a better understanding of what we can and cannot control.

We can control some factors that impact our unit but cannot control other aspects.

How can we do a better job communicating with other units? Let's talk more as a leadership team about how to do that.

We can try to figure out how to accept the factors that are outside of our control and how to influence some of the factors that we might be able to control.

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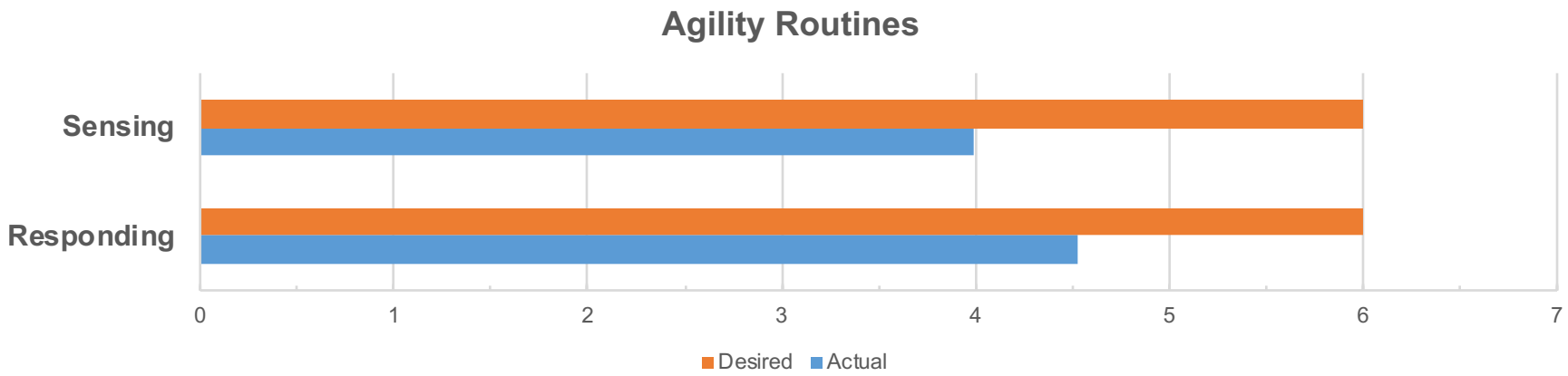
Representative Results: Sensing and Responding Questions

7 – Entirely agree
6 – Mostly agree
5 – Somewhat agree
4 – Neither agree nor disagree
3 – Somewhat disagree
2 – Mostly disagree
1 – Entirely disagree



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Participant Insights: Sensing and Responding

I now realize the **importance of sensing and scanning** the environment.

We have been **over-responding** to our customers changing needs, resulting in us feeling pulled in every direction. **Through sensing, we can begin to anticipate** customer needs, which will lead to us feeling less hectic.

It really made me think about the role I have in **scanning the environment** and the role I need to play in making sure my staff is scanning the environment and **bringing that information back** to the team.

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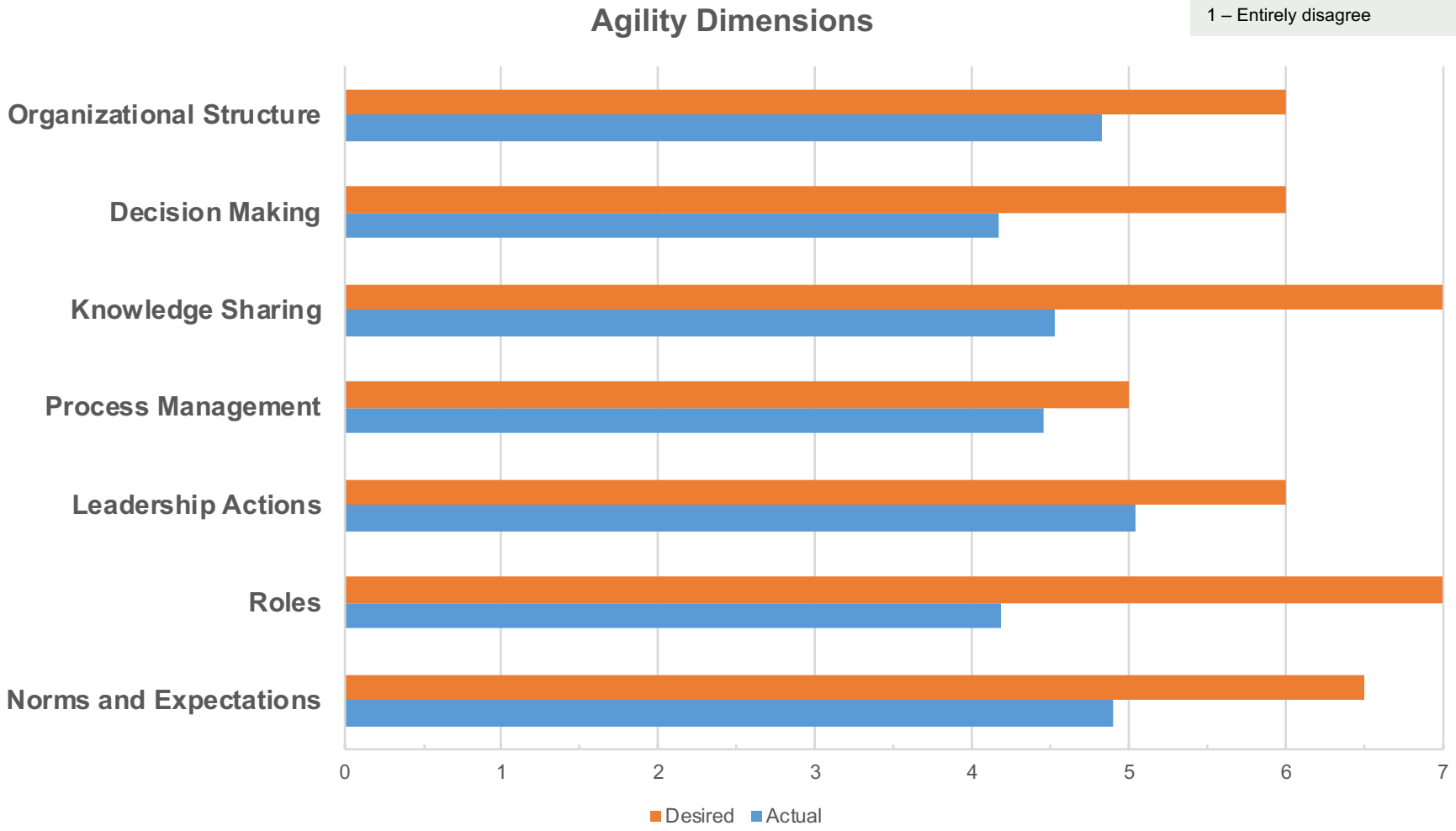
Representative Results: Agility Dimension Questions

7 – Entirely agree
6 – Mostly agree
5 – Somewhat agree
4 – Neither agree nor disagree
3 – Somewhat disagree
2 – Mostly disagree
1 – Entirely disagree



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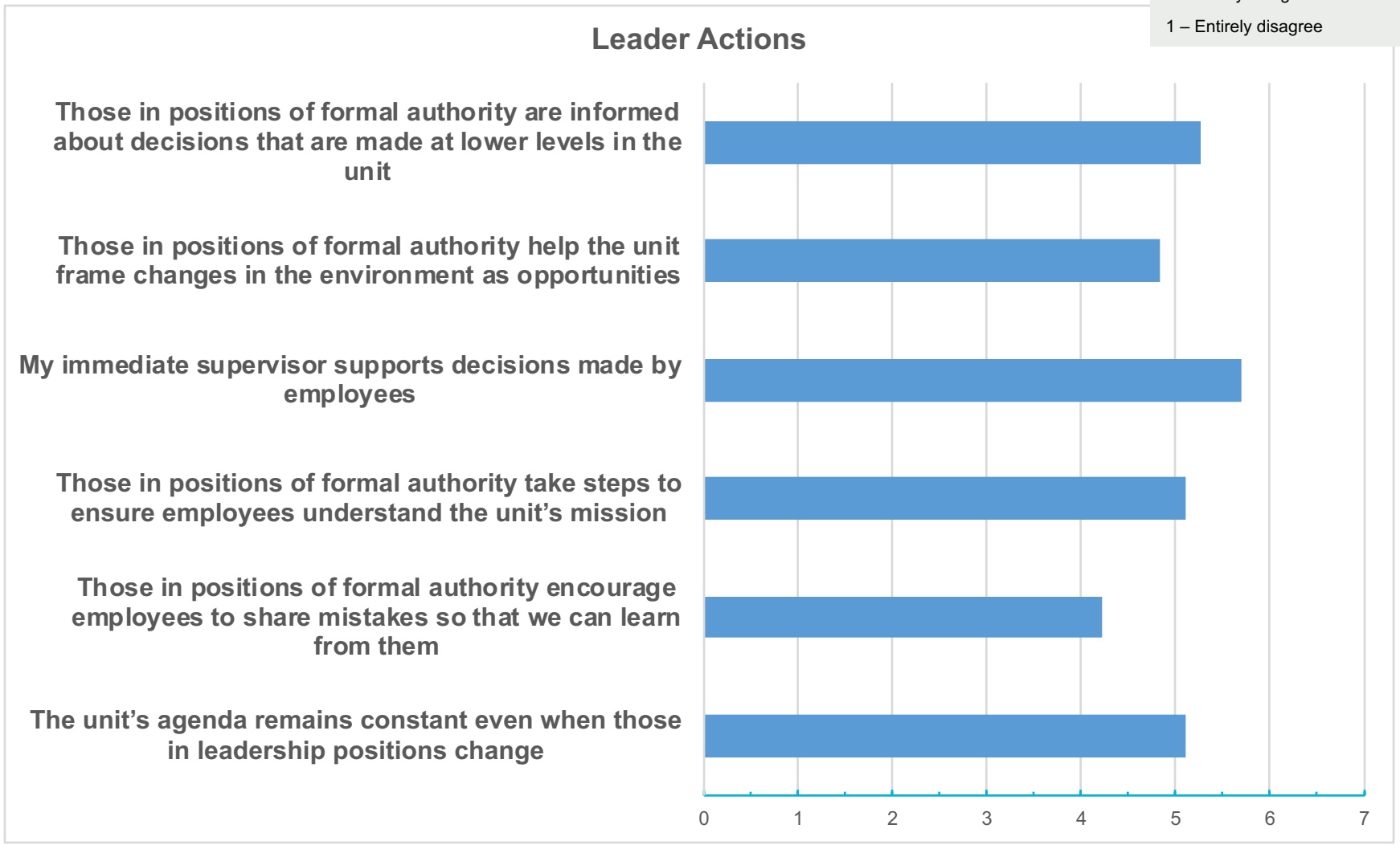
Representative Results: Leader Actions Questions

7 – Entirely agree
6 – Mostly agree
5 – Somewhat agree
4 – Neither agree nor disagree
3 – Somewhat disagree
2 – Mostly disagree
1 – Entirely disagree



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Participant Insights: Leader Actions

Unit Leader: Why are we low on “Those in positions of formal authority encourage employees to share mistakes”? I am always telling people that **it’s ok to fail**!

Individual Contributor: That’s not the message that we hear. We hear, “**It’s never ok to fail**.”

Unit Leader: An immediate action that I can take as a leader is to **more clearly communicate** that it is ok to fail in production but not in operations.

Manager: As managers, we can do a better job **listening** to our more junior employees when they have ideas about how to improve our processes.

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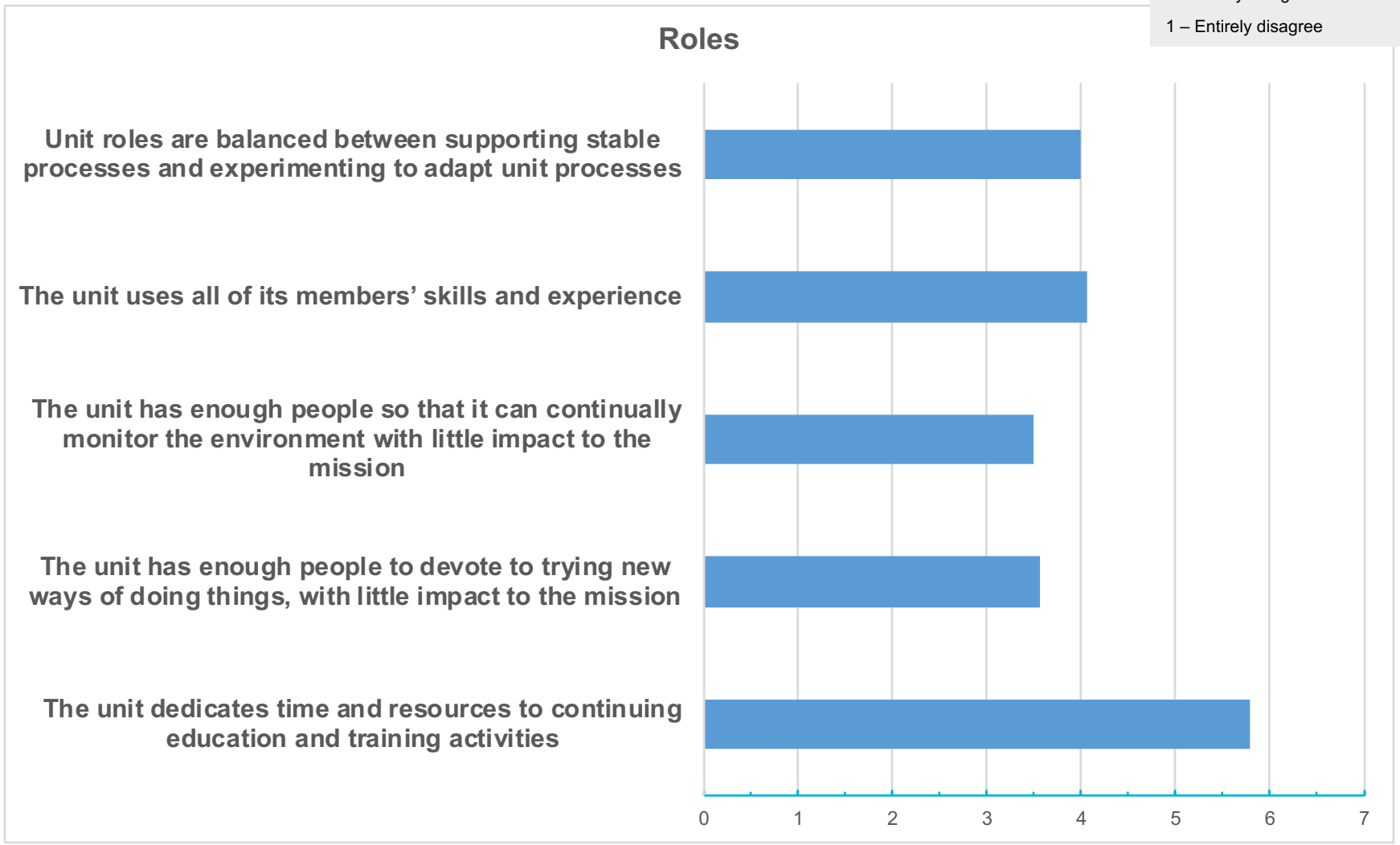
Representative Results: Roles Questions

7 – Entirely agree
6 – Mostly agree
5 – Somewhat agree
4 – Neither agree nor disagree
3 – Somewhat disagree
2 – Mostly disagree
1 – Entirely disagree



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Participant Insights: Roles

As a manager, I am often overwhelmed by emails from my employees asking me to **make decisions** that they should be making. I can talk with them to make sure they understand what decisions they can make on their own without asking me and what decisions I need to make.

Manager A: I wonder why we are low on both “the unit has enough people” and “the unit uses all of its members’ skills and experiences.”

Manager B: When we re-organized last year, some **silos were created**, which made it harder for us to share staff.

Manager A: As managers, we can all agree to **share information** about what skills we have in our unit. We can work together to **share staff** when needed.

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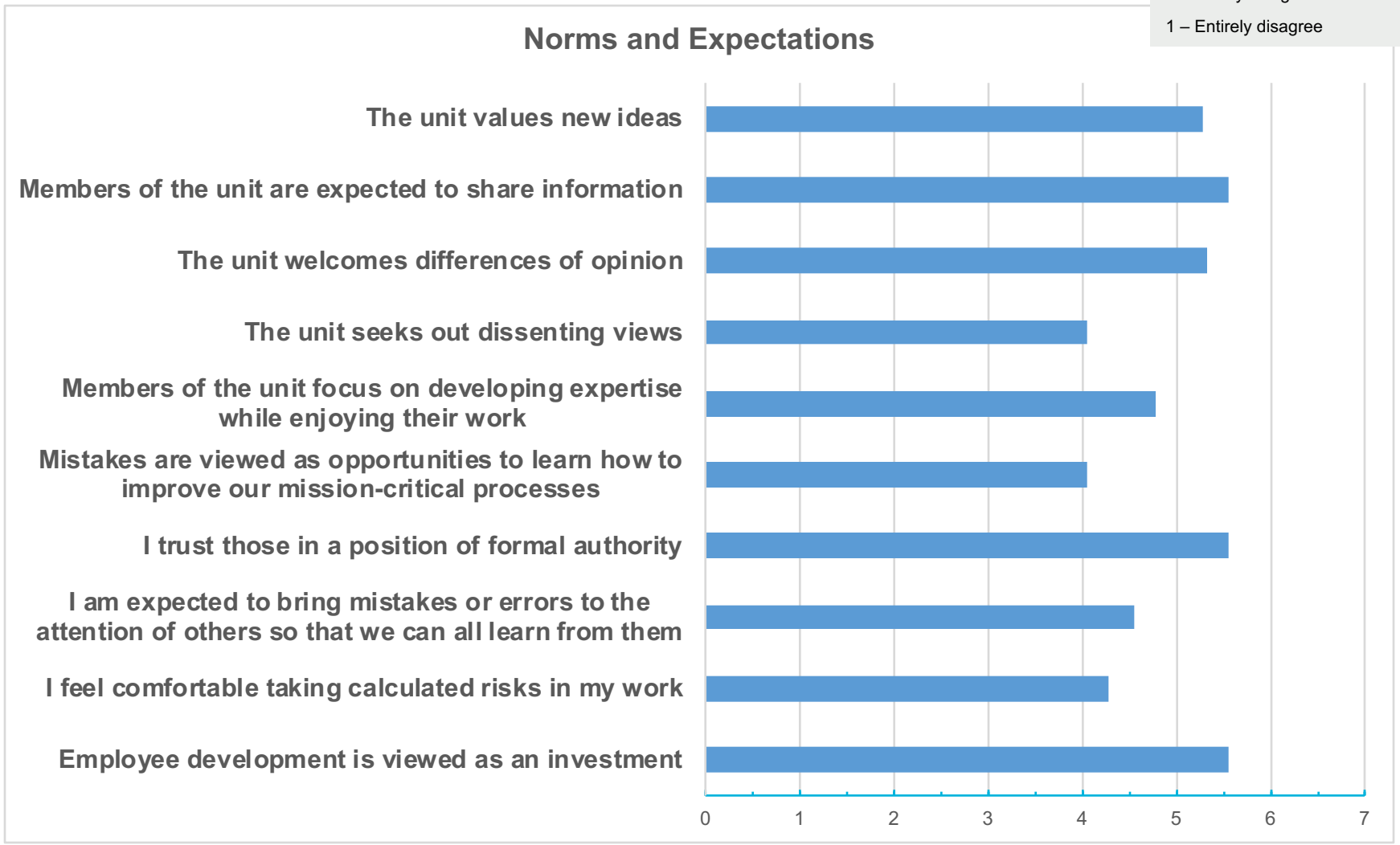
Representative Results: Norms and Expectations Questions

7 – Entirely agree
6 – Mostly agree
5 – Somewhat agree
4 – Neither agree nor disagree
3 – Somewhat disagree
2 – Mostly disagree
1 – Entirely disagree



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Participant Insights: Norms and Expectations

I am now more aware of how my words and actions impact my employees…if I want them to bring new ideas forward, I need to **make sure I don't chastise** them when they do that.

I want to share more information with unit staff about decisions that are made at higher levels. I can **test out** different ways of making that information available in a manner that is convenient for our staff.

Let's talk more about how we can do a better job sensing by **talking with other units and outside experts**.

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Our Recommendations to GOAA Participants

- **Use an agile approach to interpreting the results**
  - Leaders can model agility by acknowledging that they do not have all of the answers
  - Engage staff members in open discussions of results
- **Take an "appreciative inquiry" approach to action planning**
  - Acknowledge and build on positive results
  - Frame areas for improvement as opportunities to learn
  - Invite and support experimentation to test remedial actions and solutions
- **Continue the journey toward agility**
  - Use GOAA to gauge impact of actions and progress over time
  - Expand GOAA to cover a larger group of employees

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Take-Aways

Organizational agility can be measured.

Any organization can find ways to become more agile.

Organizational agility is a paradigm shift, not a checklist.

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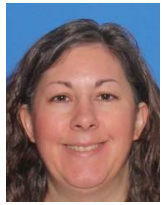
Thank You!

Questions?

For more information, please feel free to contact us:



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