

## SENIOR FELLOWS AND FRIENDS

Alert. Relaxed. Collegial.



### **Recap of 5/15/25 conversation with Gabriel Petrescu, OrgXO Managing Partner, on Building Resilient Organizations**

Dear Senior Fellows and Friends,

Now, that's commitment! Gabriel Petrescu joined us at 2 a.m. his time (in Bucharest, Romania) to show us how the OrgXO tool works and how it can be used to discover actionable insights that are unique to a particular organization, so that changes can be made to strengthen it. Anyone who's ever been involved in "making the elephant dance" will appreciate the utility and potential of this tool. During our hour together, while Gabriel made sure not to neglect the use cases most likely to interest us, he also explained other ones, such as an investment firm's hiring OrgXO as part of its HR due diligence prior to a merger. What we learned whetted my appetite to learn more. Thank you, Gabriel.

The OrgXO tool was originally developed to try to get a handle on big problems such as the separation of Romanian families during migration, and to "help migrants migrate better." The company then pivoted to organizational mapping. It's a diagnostic – think of an MRI for organizations – that's conducted, not by using sensors (too intrusive), but via Microsoft Office 365 APIs, logs, and questionnaires. Two key questions, "Who do you collaborate with to do your job?" and "Who would you like to work with?" made sense to me, and also the latter was refreshing.

As an Italian team that has used OrgXO in another context pointed out, the model has limitations: "As the great statistician George Box said: 'All models are

wrong, but some are useful.' Ours is intended to be a tool for reading the context, not an oracle." That's the spirit in which our discussion occurred.

## **One Organization, Many Perspectives**

We were escorted through numerous alternate visualizations, beginning with the hierarchical org chart which was then overlaid by the network (who's actually working with whom, and to what extent). The tool is interactive, enabling quick switching between views that helps raise questions and provide tentative answers that can then be followed up on. One of the things the tool shows is the organization's complexity, which tends to be overlooked by leaders. Looking at a prior client's sanitized scan, we could see the geographic and organizational distribution of:

- **Generations** (which sparked ideas about mentoring)
- **Influencers & Energizers** (prompting questions like Where are they and How broad is their reach – valuable information for internal change leaders)
- **Bottlenecks & Gatekeepers** (highlighting areas where work is not flowing or there is dysfunction)

It was also possible to detect low connection in the middle management layer, which reminded me of Barry Oshry's book, "Context, Context, Context" (a good way into organizational systems thinking and the bind that middle managers live with). We also thought about how organizational structures as reflected in org charts differ based on the type of work – have you ever thought of a large catering business as a network of projects?

AI is used against unstructured narrative answers to find patterns and elevate potential insight on such aspects as psychological safety. Insights can then be tested. The tool is applied to client organizations once or on an agreed-on schedule (such as twice per year), giving client executives who understand their organization – and now have new perspective on its functioning – time in between to address organizational issues.

Most useful of all, to me, is the view that shows the continuum between fragility and robustness. See slide 5 in the slide deck – each vertical line in a chart represents a respondent in the organization, and the height of the line relates to the number of collaborative relationships the person has self-reported. The charts can also be used to see tradeoffs between efficiency and effectiveness, and to gain initial data on whether employees are functioning as mere cogs in the machine or may be overly collaborative (a condition leading to burnout that Prof. Rob Cross has explored thoroughly).

Gabriel used the word "antifragile" in explaining that a convex shape becomes better under stress, whereas one that's too concave is fragile and may break.

This provides an additional lens through which to view enterprise risk management. Here's how The Antifragile Mindset, Psychology Today, March 16, 2020, puts it: "When something is antifragile, it 'gains from disorder,' as the subtitle of Nassim Taleb's book Antifragile would imply. For example, your body is antifragile. You can apply stress to your muscles through lifting weights, and your muscles will get stronger. On the other hand, a coffee mug is fragile."

The "disorder," in an organizational context, is signified by the necessarily messy network that always overlays the tidy org chart. Could it be that encouraging more ties between employees is an organizational equivalent of building more muscle?

Gabriel's slide deck is available [here](#) – although it's not nearly as useful as the discussion was. Fortunately, he's available for further inquiry. Wish you'd been there!


### **Participant affiliations**

Alpine Rose Advisory  
ASPA National Capital Area Chapter  
OrgXO  
U.S. Department of Education, Retired

People joined from Olympia, Washington, Colorado Springs, Colorado, and Bucharest, Romania.

Each time, we begin with a round of introductions to warm up the space. Afterward, participants are sent a "Who was in the room" message to facilitate ongoing connection. Please consider joining us in the future.

Sincerely,  
Kitty Wooley



## HOW WILL YOU CONTRIBUTE?

Cooperating freely, learning on the fly, empowering ourselves, and navigating unknown waters beyond the edge of the comfort zone are the name of the game. We began our public leadership journey in calm harbors, and now we're surrounded by the white water of constant change. Business as usual isn't working well enough. We choose to gather our strengths and lead from wherever we are, applying our best efforts to the challenges of our time. Are you coming?