The Agility Imperative

How Businesses of the Future Will Leverage Agile Talent to Win
Discussion Topics

Understand the importance of agility to **business success** in the future

Sample the **research** behind learning agility

Discuss how you as a leader can spot learning agility to **increase performance** in your organization

Explore the concept of ‘fit’ in determining the difference learning agility can make in your **talent strategy**
### Spectrum of High Performance

<table>
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<th>Mastery/Expertise</th>
<th>Learning Agility</th>
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<td><strong>[DEPTH]</strong></td>
<td><strong>[BREADTH]</strong></td>
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- Recognized functional/technical **experts**
- Difficult to **replace**
- **Trusted** resources
- Can be **counted on**
- **Superior performers in similar jobs/functions year after year**

- Easily learn **new functions**
- Clever **problem solvers**
- Deal with **ambiguity** and **complexity** well
- Thrives on **change**
- **Performs well under new, first-time conditions**
Learning Agility is…

...a mind-set and corresponding collection of practices that allow leaders to continually develop, grow and utilize new strategies that will equip them for the increasingly complex problems they face in their organizations.

- Columbia University

...the ability and willingness to learn from experience, and subsequently apply that learning to perform successfully under new or first-time conditions.

- Korn Ferry

...the ability to rapidly study, analyze, and understand new situations and new business problems.

- Bersin by Deloitte
## Traditional vs. agile learning

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<tr>
<th><strong>Traditional</strong></th>
<th><strong>Agile</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Conventional intelligence</td>
<td>Reflect on experiences</td>
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<td>Grades/test scores</td>
<td>Initiative/curiosity</td>
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<td>Functional/technical skills</td>
<td>Fresh connections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analytical skills</td>
<td>Principles/rules of thumb</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>Broad-range thinking</td>
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People who are learning agile…

Seek more **new** and **diverse experiences**

Enjoy **complex problems** and **challenges**

Want to **make sense of these experiences**

**Perform better** incorporating new skills and behaviors
It’s not so much what you have accomplished in the past...

Agile leaders step out of their comfort zones.

It’s what you will be able to do when faced with new business challenges or changing situations that require new behaviors and attitudes.
"Developing leaders and high-potential talent has become a strategic necessity if an organization is to succeed long-term."

"Learning agility is the name of the game. Where the rules are changing fast, your ability to be agile in letting go of old rules and learning new ones is increasingly important. Learning agility is the key to unlocking your change proficiency and succeeding in an uncertain, unpredictable and constantly evolving environment, both personally and professionally."
Why Does Learning Agility Matter?

Those High In Learning Agility

- get promoted faster and more often than their peers
- advance closest to the top
- are recognized as having the most potential for advancement
- are rated more competent
- achieve greater success after a promotion to a new role
- earn higher salaries

Sources: Dries et al, Center for Creative Leadership, Journal of Managerial Studies, Korn Ferry
Why Does Learning Agility Matter?

Companies with greatest rates of highly learning agile executives produced 25% higher profit margins compared with peer companies.

Source: Lewis, 2012
Where does learning agility come from?

Two major research streams from seminal work at the Center for Creative Leadership and ongoing studies by multiple I/O psychology firms:

What behaviors are most important for executive success

Why executives derail
Lombardo & Eichinger (2000)
Indicated that learning how to deal effectively with first-time or changing situations is more predictive of long-term potential or performance than is raw intelligence.

Sternberg et. al. (2003)
Reported a revised college admissions test that measures creative and practical skills did better at predicting college success than the current SAT and GPAs.

Bennis & Thomas (2002)
Describe the signature skill of leaders as the ability to process new experiences, and to integrate them into their life.
How does learning agility come to life?
Those with self-awareness

- Know what they’re good, and not so good at
- Seldom surprised by feedback
- View criticism as helpful
- Know what causes their feelings and moods
- Willingly take accountability for mistakes
- Solicit and welcome feedback

“I am a woman in process.”
Oprah Winfrey
Founder and CEO, OWN Television Network
Those with mental agility

• Curious on broad range of topics
• Get to root causes
• Enjoy exploring the new
• Find parallels and contrasts
• Question conventional wisdom
• Find solutions to tough problems

“Creativity is just connecting things. ...creative people...are able to connect experiences they’ve had and synthesize new things.”

Steve Jobs
Co-founder of Apple Inc. and Pixar Animation Studios
Those with people agility

- Open minded
- Understand others
- Politically agile
- Skilled communicators
- Handle conflict constructively
- Value getting work done through others

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.”

Nelson Mandela
Former President of South Africa
Those with change agility

- Strive for continuous improvement
- View risks as opportunity for learning
- Introduce new perspectives
- Able to take the heat and pressure of change
- Understands and manages the impact of change

“...if Singapore goes down everyone goes down.”
Lee Kuan Yew
Singapore’s first Prime Minister
Those with results agility

• Build high performing teams
• Very flexible and adaptable
• Get the most out of limited resources
• Drive and personal presence
• Resilient
• Accomplish things against the odds

“It’s about balance. You’re heavy, I’m small. When I’m small, I can jump. You’re heavy, you cannot jump.”

Jack Ma
Founder of Alibaba Group
Spectrum of high performance: a closer look

DEPTH

BREADTH
Going broad: high learning agility

- Easily learn new functions
- Clever problem solvers; think strategically
- **Performs well under new, tough conditions**
- Change behavior or approach easily
- Have wide interests
- Deal well with ambiguity/complexity
- Like to try different approaches
- Impatient, don’t accept the status quo

“Every day I’m learning something new”
Sir Richard Branson, Founder–Virgin Group

Adapted from: Becoming an Agile Leader, Swisher
Going Deep: mastery-oriented

- Recognized functional, technical expert
- Know current job extremely well so can be counted on; difficult to replace in kind
- **Superior performers year after year***
- Works independently with little or no supervision
- Good people developers
- Trusted resources within the organization
- Widely recognized outside the company

“We’re going to be in the Hudson”
Capt. Chesley (Sully) Sullenberger,
Pilot, US Airways (retired)

Adapted from: Becoming an Agile Leader, Swisher
Case in Point: Pepsico

Indra Nooyi, CEO
What critical roles in your organization are more depth or breadth oriented?
Matching Talent to Opportunity

If the role...

- Is new
- Requires fresh ideas and new ways of thinking
- Is in a quickly changing field or area of business where the future is undefined or emerging
- Needs major fixing
- Requires strategic thinking and/or strategy development
- Is supported by strong technical help
- Requires political savvy
- Is change-driven

... deploy **high learning agile/breadth-oriented** talent to the role
Matching Talent to Opportunity

If the role...

- Requires considerable in-field experience or depth of knowledge
- Is relatively stable
- Requires understanding of the past in order to address future situations
- Needs strong and decisive tactical skills
- Involves the major development and/or mentoring of others
- Is relationship-driven or depends on continuity

... deploy **mastery/depth-oriented** talent to the role
Identifying learning agility in others

In interactions with colleagues and when evaluating talent, consider…

How does this person **deal with difficult concepts?**

How multi-faceted is this person’s **perspective?**

How does this person **deal with difficult people?**

How does this person **handle change?**

How quickly does this person **learn and adapt?**

How easily could this person move to a **new function?**
Developing learning agility.

Experience

Observe

Apply

Distill

Reflect
Building Agility in your Organization

• How might applying an agility lens to talent management/development increase our ability to thrive in a VUCA world?

• What’s our biggest challenge to moving forward with a agility focus?
“If someone offers you an amazing opportunity and you’re not sure you can do it, say yes – then learn how to do it later.”
Thank You!

Learn More …