

AGILE LEARNING

AGILE SERIES NO. 2

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IT IS NOT HOW GOOD YOU ARE; IT IS HOW GOOD YOU WANT TO BE.¹

“THE ABILITY TO LEARN IS DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF BEING HUMAN; THE ABILITY TO CONTINUE LEARNING IS AN ESSENTIAL SKILL OF LEADERSHIP. WHEN LEADERS LOSE THAT ABILITY, THEY INEVITABLE FALTER. WHEN ANY OF US LOSE THAT ABILITY, WE NO LONGER GROW.”²



In the late 1990s, the U.S. military used the term “VUCA” to describe the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous landscapes in which today’s soldiers must operate. More recently, the corporate world has used the term as a description of the challenges companies face as they compete in a business environment characterized by constant, rapid, and unpredictable changes.

Rapid and ongoing changes in the nature of work itself are changing the relationship between learning and work, making them more integrated and connected than ever before. According to a recent World Economic Forum report, **more than half (54 percent) of all employees will require significant reskilling and upskilling in just three years.**³

As indicated in Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends Report 2019, leading organizations are taking steps to deliver learning to their people in a more personal way, integrating work and learning more tightly with each other, extending ownership for learning beyond the HR function, and looking for ways to bring solutions we use in our daily lives into the learning environment at work.

¹ Paul Arden

² Warren B. Bennis and Robert J. Thomas: Geeks and Geezers: How Era, Values and Defining Moments Shape Leaders

³ World Economic Forum, The Future of jobs report 2018, September 17, 2018

LEARNING ORGANIZATION

Learning organization, as defined by Bersin by Deloitte⁴, does not mean the Learning & Development (L&D) function – instead, the term refers to an organization that learns – **that not only provides the right culture for learning to occur but also learns and grows and makes better decisions based on the data in the organization.**

This obviously demands a different mindset for the organization as a whole, and especially for the L&D function.

LEARNING AGILITY

In order to cope with the ongoing changes, organizations need people and leaders with learning agility skill to move ahead successfully. But can we teach someone to be a more agile leader? YES, we can.

Learning agility is characterized by mindset and behavior and is defined as **intentional development of the competence, capacity and confidence to learn, adapt and innovate** in changing context for sustainable success.

Table 1: Harvard Business Publishing report

Competence	Capacity	Confidence
Skills, knowledge and expertise	Degree of VUCA*	Human need to trust in own and others competence

*VUCA = describes the Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous landscapes in which business world operates

Based on the Harvard Business Publishing report⁵, the learning agility is characterized by:

- All leaders and employees routinely seeking out and learning from new experiences and apply the knowledge in a fresh concept
- Leaders embracing this capability on their own
- Leaders “driving a learning culture”
- Continuous learning throughout the organization

⁴ Capital H Blog Deloitte: Work is learning, and learning is work, August 8, 2017

⁵ Harvard Business Publishing: How to cultivate learning agility, 2016

EMBRACING LEARNING AGILITY

Let's look at some elements that can help you, your organization and your people increase learning agility:

1. Experience

Experience is at the heart of learning agility because focus on learning from experience is the most valuable approach that drives long-term career. **Three aspects of our experience make this learning even more valuable – quantity, quality and diversity.**⁶

The more experience, the richness of experience and the number of new situations or stretch assignments that require different skills and knowledge, the more we can potentially learn.

Experiences with characteristics such as novelty, complexity, and high stakes offer greater opportunity for learning than those that are familiar, straightforward, and low risk.

2. Adaptability and Versatility

As we all have our experiences, only some are able to reflect on the insights they had gained from it, apply it and as such adapt for future challenges. **Developing learning agility requires an intentional willingness to immerse yourself in new, diverse and challenging situations** – learning agile individuals see these situations as opportunities for new learning and growth – actively seeking them and embracing them.

3. Curiosity

Learning from experience is a highly active and ongoing process marked by curiosity and willingness to improvise and experiment. Questions like "Why?", "How?", and "Why Not?" are essential to gaining the insight and perspective that encourages the learning. It is all about theory testing in real time – start with small-scale experiments to get more clarity, information and insight and then move further.

⁶ Center for Creative Leadership, George Hallenbeck: Learning Agility, 2016

4. Creativity

Agile learners are very creative in exploring new pathways for themselves and others. They are not afraid to break the routines to avoid doing the same things over and over again, but they try and see how things might be done differently. Learning agile people find ways to discover the new and fresh approaches to everyday situations and reinvent.

But lesson is not really learnt until it is applied – real agile leaders are able to build on their experience, find the right opportunity, and have the courage to take action. A better solution may be well within reach, but it takes someone willing to question the status quo and invite new ideas.

CULTIVATING LEARNING AGILITY

Learning does not end with the experience – seeking feedback and taking time to reflect are necessary for an ongoing development as are the failures – agile learning is not only about the success – failed experiments, setbacks, or criticism are an important and necessary part of it.

Organizations need leaders with learning agility in order to move ahead successfully in volatile times. Many leaders doubt their abilities to cope with these complex challenges, because they have never in the past faced such a complexity, uncertainty and speed of change. However, this is a perfect opportunity to start doing things differently, because doing things the old way is no longer an option for success...

As always – the change starts with you. So ready to find a new opportunity and start exploring today?

„TO IMPROVE IS TO CHANGE; TO BE GREAT IS TO CHANGE OFTEN.“
WINSTON CHURCHILL

Next Agile Series No. 3: AGILE LEADERS

