



THRIVING IN TIMES OF CHANGE

"To improve is to change; to be perfect is to have changed often."

- Winston Churchill

WHAT IS AGILITY

"Agility" (sometimes referred to as *"Learning Agility"* or *"Adaptability"*) has been defined in a number of different ways by organisational psychologists and human resource professionals. It broadly refers to the ability to be aware of changes in one's environment, combined with the ability to understand and respond to those changes promptly and effectively.

Key skills and dimensions of agile performance include:

- Solving Problems Creatively
- Dealing with Unpredictable Situations
- Learning and Applying New Knowledge
- Handling Work Pressure caused by Change

WHY IS AGILITY IMPORTANT

"Success today requires the agility and drive to constantly rethink, reinvigorate, react, and reinvent." - Bill Gates

- Agility allows individuals to adapt and thrive in Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) environments.
- Agility has been linked to higher job performance, particularly following a promotion at work.
- Agility has been recognised as a critical characteristic that distinguishes successful leaders from their less successful peers.

There is a growing body of research supporting the link between Agility, Job Performance and Leadership. Some key findings are outlined in the sections below.

AGILITY & JOB PERFORMANCE

Research funded by the U. S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences identified Adaptive Performance (or Agility) as an important requirement in a wide variety of job positions. Defined along eight dimensions describing how individuals adapt to and deal with novelty, uncertainty and changes in job requirements, a sample of over 3000 employees from the military and the private sector rated all eight to be of critical importance to their jobs, particularly for individuals who held higher level or supervisory positions.

Supporting this idea, a separate study conducted by Lominger Ltd in 2004 found a more direct link between agility and job performance. Using a measure of Learning Agility, they found that within their sample of 313 managers from three firms (two in insurance and one in electronics), individuals with higher learning agility were more likely to perform better following a promotion than those who scored lower. This suggests that more agile managers were better able to adapt to their new job requirements following the promotion, which translated into better performance compared to their less agile peers.

In addition, a study examining data from over 500 Front Line Employees from the power sector in India found that workers who scored higher on adaptability were also found to score higher on measures of job performance and job satisfaction, suggesting that this relationship between agility and job performance can be generalised across cultures.

AGILITY & LEADERSHIP

Research suggests that agility is an important quality for successful leaders. Leaders frequently have to contend with changes to their roles and responsibilities, particularly in the case of a promotion, introduction of new technologies or procedures, as well as unexpected crises or opportunities. In such cases, having the willingness to learn and flexibly apply new knowledge has been found to be a key factor in distinguishing leaders who remain successful in their careers, versus those who are unable to cope.

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– Winston Churchill

Indeed, two studies conducted on managers from two US multinationals found a number of links between learning agility and executive career success. In the first study on 101 managers from a consumer products company, those who scored high on learning agility were found to be rated higher on leadership competence, as well as more likely to occupy higher positions within the organisation. In the second study on 83 managers from a global pharmaceutical company, those who scored higher on learning agility were found to be more likely to receive promotions and salary increases for their work.

Furthermore, a survey of 454 global leaders conducted by the Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp) found that high-performing companies were more likely to report having greater agility than their low-performing counterparts. Companies that reported being better able to anticipate, identify and enact strategic changes were more likely to also be companies that could consistently outperform their competitors in profits, market share, as well as customer satisfaction. This finding implies that agile leadership is a key characteristic of high-performing companies around the world.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, agility is an important characteristic to have in the increasingly volatile and uncertain workplace. Agility has been found to not only contribute towards job performance, but is also essential for leaders, allowing them to adapt and thrive under complex and changing roles and responsibilities.

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