



Learning Agile Leadership As A Strategic Capability

By Hilary Sayers on 1st September 2017

Origins of Learning Agility

Learning Agility refers to a person's ability and willingness to learn from experience and subsequently apply that learning to perform successfully under new and different situations.

The concept was derived from systematic research over many years into the careers of successful business leaders, which revealed they shared strong and similar patterns in the way they learned from experience.

These leaders were keen observers of what was going on around them and interested in how and why things worked the way they did. Broad thinkers, they were eager to explore and take on fresh challenges.

The Case for Learning Agility

The world is changing faster than ever before, bringing challenges of economic and political uncertainty, disruptive technologies and many more, regardless of the size of your business or industry.

The organisations most likely to succeed under these conditions are those that are more nimble and flexible, and under the guidance of forward-thinking and strategic leaders who can deal effectively with unfamiliar challenges.

The fundamental skills and ways of thinking that enable executives to thrive in this context are known. They include openness, curiosity and resourcefulness, along with comfort with complexity and ambiguity and the ability to relate well to all types of people. These are hallmarks of the learning agile.

People differ significantly across the continuum of Learning Agility, from those who readily embrace change and seek diverse jobs and experiences to those who like structured, stable environments and prefer proven solutions.

Capacity to Change

When CEOs express doubt about their organisation's capacity to change, adapt or innovate, most likely they are sensing a lack of Learning Agility among their leaders, or indeed across the whole workforce.

Organisations that effectively leverage the skills and abilities of their people recognise that all talent is important, but not all talent is the same.

High professionals, for example, are those who have deep expertise and are well suited to functional positions, whilst high potentials who look for variety in their careers are better suited to general management roles.

The professional and potential dimensions are fundamental to managing talent, and the key criterion that differentiates them is Learning Agility.

A certain level of Learning Agility is required for any organisation to succeed in a changing business landscape, but higher levels are needed when an organisation has to design and implement a new strategy to create and sustain value in the long term.