

## **Agility: You Thought You Knew What it Meant Until Now!**

Consider this all-too-plausible scenario: ABC Corp Manager John Sample is called into his annual performance review. He is told that the organization has realized it is not agile enough and wants each of its leaders to become more agile over the next year.

Having only heard the term *agility* mentioned in passing, John asks his HR manager to tell him what, more specifically, he needs **to do**. **The HR manager says, “Learn to grow your leader agility so ABC Corp will be more agile.”**

*Huh?* John thinks to himself, but he nods, smiles and leaves the office to Google the word agility to figure out what it is and how it differs from ability.

What he finds has him more confused than ever. *Do they want me to focus on learning agility, leader agility or organizational agility, he wonders, and do I even have the ability to do that?*

**Let’s see if we can help John out by breaking down some key terms.**

Depending on your favorite browser, a quick internet search reveals the following definitions/perspectives:

- Agility: The power of moving quickly and easily ([dictionary.com](http://dictionary.com))
- Organizational Agility: The capability of a company to rapidly change or adapt in response to changes in the market. A high degree of organizational agility can help a company to react successfully to the emergence of new competitors, the development of new industry-changing technologies, or sudden shifts in overall market conditions. ([businessdictionary.com](http://businessdictionary.com))
- Business Agility: Business agility refers to distinct qualities that allow organizations to respond rapidly to changes in the internal and external environment without losing momentum or vision. Adaptability, flexibility and balance are three qualities essential to long-term business agility. ([hrzone.com](http://hrzone.com))
- Strategic Agility: The ability to continuously adjust and adapt strategic direction in core business, as a function of strategic ambitions and changing circumstances, and create not just new product and services, but also new business models and innovative ways to create value for a company. ([strategicagility.com](http://strategicagility.com))

***And last but not least...***

- Learning Agility: Dealing with new experiences flexibly and rapidly by trying new behaviors, getting feedback on these attempts and making quick adjustments so new learning will be realized when you do not know what to do. ([LearningAgilityBook.com](http://LearningAgilityBook.com)) (page 9).

So, now that we have defined some terms, what does that mean for organizations, individual **employees and aspiring leaders? Let's look at what the definitions have in common, then** move on to where they might differ.

Commonalities:

- Change: Nearly all the definitions above either directly state or at least imply that **agility involves either initiating, managing or adapting to some sort of change in one's** environment.
- Adaptability: Given that most imply inevitable elements of change, several also identify a need to adjust along the way.
- Speed: Several definitions above include the concept of rapid change and the need to be responsive.

So, it seems most definitions would support that *agility involves adapting to changes in a timely manner*.

There are **likely no “right or wrong” conclusions to be drawn from this discussion. Rather,** the goal would be for John Sample to better understand what his organization was trying to convey.

If E•A•S•I-Consult® were to sit down with John to review his Burke Learning Agility® (Burke LAI®) results, we would likely summarize it this way:

**“We know from research that the leaders who can ‘let go’ of what has worked well for them in the past and ‘pick up new behaviors on the fly’ tend to be the most successful in today’s** volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world.

Our Burke LAI identifies the speed and flexibility with which you are able to do this. It also measures seven *learning related factors* (i.e., Experimenting, Performance Risk Taking, Interpersonal Risk Taking, Information Gathering, Reflecting, Collaborating and Feedback Seeking). Because it focuses on specific behaviors, we can work with you to identify the practical strengths to leverage and opportunities to grow your *leadership potential*.

And, with our 360 Burke LAI Survey, we can ask your colleagues to help gauge your baseline and gather quantitative and qualitative feedback to track progress over time.

**Helping ABC Corp’s managers become more agile leaders will no doubt grow the *organization’s ability to be agile, as well.***”

#### About the Author

*Rebekah Cardenas, Ph.D., is vice president of business development and assessment solutions at E•A•S•I-Consult®. E•A•S•I-Consult works with Fortune 500 companies, government agencies, and mid-sized corporations to provide customized Talent Management solutions. E•A•S•I-Consult specialties include individual assessment, online employment testing, survey research, competency modeling, leadership development, executive coaching, 360-degree feedback, online structured interviews, and EEO hiring compliance. The company is a leader in the field of providing accurate information about people through professional assessment. To learn more about E•A•S•I-Consult, visit <https://easiconsult.com> or email [ContactUs@easiconsult.com](mailto:ContactUs@easiconsult.com) or call 800.922.EASI.*