

Is Learning Agility the “Silver Bullet” for Hiring Effective Leaders?

Some say there is an art and a science to assessing individuals (for purposes of selection or development). At E·A·S·I-Consult[®], we lean much more heavily on the science end of the spectrum, ensuring that all tools we use are validated for that specific purpose. And, we align our assessment for selection strategies closely with APA, EEO and SIOP Standards, Guidelines and Principles for psychological testing and selection (see sample resource documents below).

With this rigor in mind, we recognize that the research base is not yet developed enough to substantiate use of the Burke Learning Agility Inventory[®] as a standalone hiring tool. However, given the positive impact the tool is making in our clients’ lives in developing their leaders, we’ve started piloting use of the Burke LAI[®] within the assessment for selection process with some of our clients. At this point, you may be wondering about the following:

Why is the Burke LAI not yet recommended for selection decisions?

While we know from previous research that learning agility is a key component of effective leadership in today’s rapidly changing world, research is still under way to be able to definitively answer questions like, “What should the minimum cut score (overall or by factor) be for XYZ leadership position?” That is, “What is the minimum level a person needs to be successful on the job?” Until we can answer these specific types of questions, it is not responsible or appropriate to make hiring decisions based on this tool alone.

How is E·A·S·I-Consult piloting use of the Burke LAI in selection currently?

As industrial-organizational psychologists, we have an ethical obligation to ensure that all assessments are utilized properly. For our organizations who have a robust, validated hiring strategy (e.g., multiple validated, predictive assessments, structured interviews, business simulations, etc.), and for whom we manage all of the assessment data, the Burke LAI is being added as a supplemental tool to provide a well-rounded picture of the candidate’s potential in the area of leadership (largely for development purposes). The dimension level results are proving incredibly helpful in providing “incremental value” in two ways: 1.) Burke LAI dimension level results further explain and support other assessment data gathered and 2.) Burke LAI dimension level results provide E·A·S·I-Consult consultants with tangible data from which to coach newly hired applicants on Day 1 of the job, providing a clear picture of where to invest their efforts to become more learning agile.

Anecdote #1: According to Dr. Rebekah Cardenas, vice president of business development and assessment solutions at E·A·S·I·Consult, the Burke LAI has proven helpful in providing additional context and insight into many applicants. In particular, she recounts a hiring situation in which the applicant’s overall assessment results seemed to fall within the “Best Fit Ranges” set for that particular position. But, several dimensions on the Burke LAI were quite low (e.g., gathering information, experimenting, performance risk taking, etc.). The applicant had many years of experience and seemed highly qualified. But, the Burke LAI results led Dr. Cardenas to probe during the structured behavioral interview into the candidate’s interest in learning new things and willingness to try new approaches. She knew this would be critical for the role being filled as the organization’s strategy included revamping the way the function operated. The interview results aligned with the Burke LAI, leading Dr. Cardenas to conclude that the candidate would not be a good fit for the position. The hiring organization later confirmed this conclusion offering that the candidate was an internal applicant and while, having never measured the person’s learning agility, the person was known for “being stuck in their ways.”

Anecdote #2: Within another client organization, an added part of onboarding involves a feedback session with an E·A·S·I·Consult consultant and the newly hired applicant to discuss leadership strengths and opportunities. “Adding learning agility to the mix,” Dr. Cardenas notes, “has provided richer data from which to speak directly to the newly hired leader’s potential and highlights tangible behaviors he or she can enact to improve overall effectiveness.” For example, following the feedback session in which he learned that one of his lowest scores was in the area of Feedback Seeking, one newly hired leader set out to sit face to face with direct reports, peers and other key stakeholders within the first couple of weeks on the job. He wanted to ensure that his understanding of his new role was accurate and to seek feedback about how he could best accomplish his function’s goals in partnership with others. “There is simply no reason to wait a full year for an annual performance review or a 360 Degree Leadership Feedback Survey,” Dr. Cardenas notes. “If used properly, the Burke LAI gives applicants a ‘leg up’ their very first day on the job.”

Related Resources:

American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, National Council on Measurement in Education (1999). *Standards for educational and psychological testing*. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Civil Service Commission, Department of Labor, Department of Justice. (1978). *Uniform guidelines on employee selection procedures*. *Federal Register*, 43, 38290-38315.

Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Inc. (2003). *Principles for the validation and use of personnel selection procedures.*

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 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 or call 800.922.EASI.