

The Connection Between Personality Traits and Learning Agility

What does personality have to do with learning agility?

According to early research out of Columbia University, the answer in short, may be “a lot.”

Findings from a study involving a convenience sample of 207 working adults in the United States suggest learning agility does significantly correlate with the “Big Five” personality traits - agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness to experience and locus of control (see [Burke LAI Technical Report](#) for additional information).

As one might expect, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience were all *positively* significantly correlated with learning agility, whereas neuroticism and external locus of control produced *negative* statistically significant correlations. This suggests that the more emotionally unstable the person, the less likely he or she is to be learning agile. Further, those who believe that events in their lives are caused by uncontrollable external factors are also less likely to be learning agile. They may not experiment with new behaviors, for example, because they believe their actions are not likely to affect their outcomes.

Among these findings, perhaps the most well-researched and strongest relationship to date is that of learning agility with openness to new experience ($r = .44, p < .05$). This is not surprising, given that flexibility and willingness to try new things are at the heart of becoming more learning agile.

Perhaps the relationship between learning agility and personality is less about trying to determine whether someone *can* become learning agile and is more related to whether someone is likely to *want to try*, notes Dr. Rebekah Cardenas, Vice President of Business Development and Assessment Solutions at E·A·S·I·Consult®.

E·A·S·I·Consult is in the process of expanding these findings within current practice to better answer questions such as these. The number of Burke Learning Agility Inventory® test-takers is increasing daily and as our numbers and data grow, so, too, does our ability to research new relationships, reflects Cardenas.

Next on our list is to systematically examine how the dimensions on the Burke LAI correlate with respected “Big Five” personality traits, as measured by well-known assessments, such as the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) or the Jackson Personality Inventory (JPI).

We are starting to see some clear patterns, Dr. Cardenas notes, and hoping to be able to continue to support our anecdotal evidence with additional significant correlations. For example, as you might expect, it seems that Inquisitiveness (HPI) correlates very strongly with overall learning agility ($r = .89$, $p < .05$), as well as Flexibility (on the Burke LAI; $r = .89$, $p < .05$). And - parallel to the Columbia University findings of a negative correlation between Neuroticism and learning agility - our results to date have identified significant negative correlations between the Emotional construct on the JPI and Information Gathering ($-.78$, $p < .05$) and Flexibility ($-.65$, $p < .05$) dimensions on the Burke LAI.

You might ask - why does it matter? At E·A·S·I·Consult, our mission rests in helping our clients better understand people by providing accurate information through professional assessments. We know that learning agility is a unique construct from cognitive ability and personality; thus, the Burke LAI is an excellent addition (i.e., provides incremental value) to other well-researched assessments of potential.

A better understanding of how this measure relates to others we use will further enable us to identify both employee fit and employee potential for our customers, notes Cardenas.

At the end of the day, that is our job and what sets E·A·S·I·Consult apart she concludes. We build trust by offering professional recommendations based on sound science.

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 or call 800.922.EASI.