

## **The Nine Components of Learning Agility**

After over five years of studying the topic, Warner Burke, Ph.D. and his doctoral students have identified the nine skill sets associated with learning agility - and presented a new definition of what learning agility is and means.

According to Burke, learning agility is rooted in cognition (thinking skills) and motivation. These qualities are demonstrated through the nine skill sets that Burke has tied to learning agility:

- Speed
- Flexibility
- Feedback seeking
- Information gathering
- Performance risk taking
- Interpersonal risk taking
- Collaborating
- Experimenting
- Reflecting

The skills, and how well a person has mastered them, determine the degree to which a person is an agile learner. This information is potentially useful to organizations desiring to accelerate development and better identify future leaders, especially when considered in conjunction with cognitive ability and personality assessments.

**Burke's research has provided a new understanding of learning agility and the framework for a new assessment, the Burke Learning Agility Inventory™. The inventory involves a partnership between Burke and E·A·S·I·Consult® and will be available for purchase in January 2016.**

### New Thinking on Learning Agility

Burke is well-known in the field of social-organizational psychology and more recently for his work in the area of learning agility. He currently holds the Edward Lee Thorndike Professorship of Psychology and Education at Teachers College-Columbia University and is the incoming Editor of the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*.

From his research, he has determined that people who demonstrate learning agility share **the skills he's identified together with a willingness to try new things, even if, along the way, it results in mistakes.**

Burke believes that learning agility is a singular concept and says that it can be strengthened like a muscle - if people know which of their skills most need development.

### The Two Most Important Skills

**What Burke's research has shown to date, and quite strongly, is that two of the nine skill sets turn out to be most important to being an agile learner: flexibility and speed.**

In the context of learning agility, a person who is flexible is able to sift through information, consider various options for action, and then choose the best one to address the situation at hand. For example, people being sent on international work assignments are required to demonstrate this capability. In the face of a different language and culture and norms, those who are flexible are able to figure things out and behave appropriately.

As Burke explains it, speed refers to how quickly a person can walk into an unfamiliar situation, assess it, and find solutions to any problems that have arisen from it. Sometimes **people with this capability are described as being "a quick study".**

### The Seven Other Skill Sets

There are seven remaining skill sets related to learning agility, according to Burke. Four of them are skills that could have an individual acting alone. These include:

- Reflecting. This skill involves your ability to step back from an event and review what occurred to determine positive occurrences and things that need to be altered in future trials. This is the thinking part.

These next three can be performed alone or with others.

- Experimenting. This skill involves your ability to create a conscious plan to attempt one or more things and determine the results of your efforts after each trial.
- Information gathering. Information is collected from animate or inanimate objects to confirm or disconfirm a plan or hypothesis.
- Performance risk taking. Knowing your current level of performance of a skill, you attempt some higher or lower level of performance related to the risk involved.

Examples would be running a race at a faster time or producing a product more efficiently.

The other three learning skills must involve other individuals.

- Feedback seeking. This means approaching someone who is knowledgeable of your ability in a specific area and asking what you did well and what you need to improve.
- Interpersonal risk taking. This approach involves taking a relationship with another person to a higher or deeper level. For example, you might enlist the support of another person in your effort to make a change in your behavior.
- Collaborating. In this approach, you enter into an understanding with one or more people about an activity you are going to do together. In collaborating, you learn from each other as you work.

So knowing the nine skill sets, how do you determine the areas in which you need to improve?

The Burke Learning Agility Inventory should help provide answers to those questions, said David E. Smith, the president and CEO of E•A•S•I-Consult®. Available online in January 2016, the **38-question assessment will provide a baseline measurement of a person's learning agility** and identify their areas of strength as well as those that need development.

Smith said that the Burke Learning Agility Inventory also can be used as a selection tool to evaluate a job candidate and his or her fit with the culture of an organization.

In coming months, Perspectives will revisit this topic to share what E•A•S•I-Consult is finding out about learning agility through the use of the Burke Learning Agility Inventory, and how this information applies to selection and talent development.

### About the Author

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.