

PepsiCo and E·A·S·I·Consult® Study Learning Agility

When it comes to the effectiveness of the *Burke Learning Agility Inventory*® (Burke LAI®), you might say the proof is in the pudding.

I wrote about that proof - more specifically, the scientific research that backs the Burke LAI's ability to identify future leaders - in the March edition of *Perspectives*. My article for the newsletter was aptly titled "Testing the Test."

But as with all scientific study, the work is never done.

We recently set out to help PepsiCo with a major pilot study in which data could be collected and once again the test could be tested.

The Initial Science

In my March newsletter article, I briefly covered the science behind how psychologists investigate the validity (accuracy in measurement, ability to predict leader success, value to an organization, etc.) of a test. I mentioned that the common approach is to go into a study with a sense of skepticism until we're satisfied with the scientific evidence.

Original research on the Burke LAI was conducted at Teachers College, Columbia University by Dr. Warner Burke and his research team and, under scientific scrutiny, it passed muster. Dr. Burke and his team demonstrated that the tool accurately measures learning agility. They went a step farther, showing that the inventory predicts leadership success with [leaders in a wealth management company](#).

E·A·S·I·Consult® joined Columbia University's research team in 2016 and have since moved the findings even farther. We started by demonstrating the ability of the Burke LAI to predict success with the leadership at OSF HealthCare (see [Burke Learning Agility Inventory Technical Report](#)).

The PepsiCo Study

A senior vice president at PepsiCo had an interest in trying out the Burke LAI in its leader potential program at Pepsi.

In assisting PepsiCo with the pilot study, the key question that needed to be answered in the data was whether learning agility, as measured by the Burke LAI, is a crucial component of

leadership success - more to the point, can a test of learning agility (i.e. Burke LAI) predict leader success?

Pepsi has one of the best leadership and talent management programs in the world. For years, the company has invested millions of dollars in scientific approaches to identify and develop its leadership talent throughout its enterprise. Highlighted in publications, such as *People and Strategy and Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, Pepsi's leadership programs are clearly best-in-class.

But Pepsi is always looking for new ways to better its processes. Thus, the company turned to Teachers College, Columbia University, Dr. Warner Burke and E•A•S•I-Consult.

On a biannual basis, Pepsi conducts a potential leader development program (the "Program"). Eligible participants are professional individual contributors who meet a minimum score on a two-year performance rating and have at least two years of tenure with PepsiCo. The Program is based on a scientifically proven approach to identify potential leaders using a thorough assessment battery (a combination of proven tests and questionnaires).

Learning agility has been increasingly viewed as an essential part of leadership success. Company leaders want to know if employees can be successful with new and ambiguous challenges, especially when considering a person for a new leadership role. It was expected that Pepsi would have interest in a way to measure learning agility in potential leaders.

Here's how Pepsi did it. More than 200 participants in the Program were asked to complete the Burke LAI. Along with this, each participant was evaluated using a number of job-related assessment procedures. The key approach Pepsi took was to compare participants' scores on the Burke LAI to how they were evaluated on PepsiCo's leadership competency model.

The Convincing Results

Participants who scored higher on the Burke LAI were also rated higher by their supervisors on key leadership competencies, such as Inspirational Leadership, Strategic Agility, Innovation, Coalition Building, and Judgment (*Church, Prager, Burke and Smith, 2017*).

If you are a psychologist or statistician, you may be interested in the following numbers - correlations between the Burke LAI and these Pepsi leadership competencies ranged between .14 and .34 ($p < .05$). Once again, this is scientific evidence that learning agility is related to leadership potential and, further, that the Burke LAI can accurately predict a person's leadership potential through evaluation of his or her learning agility.

Columbia University and E·A·S·I-Consult will continue to collect scientific data on the Burke LAI with the help of our friends at the University of Texas School of Medicine and others who have been corresponding with us.

We already knew that learning agility is important for leaders. Now, we know it is important for individual contributors, as well, in particular those aspiring to a leadership role. We are also receiving interest from different countries around the world. We expect to be collecting data on other cultures for the Burke LAI within the next year.

[Click here](#) for more information on the Burke Learning Agility Inventory.

About the Author

David Smith, PhD, is the president and CEO of 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.