

Testing the Test: What Science Says About Learning Agility

Scientists are a skeptical group. That's the better part of our training.

When anyone brings something new to the world, we do our best to try it out. We see if we can break it or make it do what it's said to do. This holds true for medical science and social science researchers, as well as those in the field of psychological testing.

This is no less true for those who have created instruments to measure learning agility. It's said that the Burke Learning Agility Inventory[®] (Burke LAI[®]) *accurately measures* learning agility and *predicts* how well leaders will perform in day to day leadership roles and new situations.

There are a number of researchers who have completed work on the Burke LAI or are in the process of doing so. They come from Teachers College, Columbia University, as well as the University of Utah School of Medicine and OSF HealthCare. Even PepsiCo is in the process of testing the test, so to speak.

How do we test the test?

We begin by finding an appropriate sample of leaders or guinea pigs, as you might call them, to complete the Burke LAI (the "predictor"). There are two important things to note about this research process. First, it's important to have a large number of participants, so the statistical tools used to do the evaluations are able to do their work. Second, the participating leaders must be in a position where they are able to be observed on the job regularly by someone who can evaluate their leadership skills (typically their boss).

Once the predictor data (the Burke LAI) is collected, scientists can then gather information about the leader to gauge performance in some way- typically called the "criterion". Leadership skills observed might include leading a work team in new and challenging tasks, taking on a new and ambiguous assignment or simply performing the basic duties of a leader. The criterion could be a boss' rating of how well a person in the sample group performs in his or her leadership role, the number of promotions the person receives over a period of time, or the value the leader brings to the company (e.g., sales if they lead a sales group), among others. If the test works, people who score higher on the predictor - in this case, the Burke LAI - will receive higher scores on the criterion.

So, how does the Burke LAI stack up?

Research on learning agility assessment is not new.

Dr. Warner Burke and his research team at Teachers College, Columbia University began their research on the development and evaluation of the Burke LAI nearly a decade ago. In addition to following professional standards for the development of the tool ([see Burke Learning Agility Inventory Technical Report](#)) Burke's team completed a test of the test, or validation study.

In their white paper published in 2016, Burke, Kathryn Roloff and Adam Mitchinson reported that candidates for executive positions in the wealth management industry completed the Burke LAI and were later rated by their recruiting firm on the probability of success. Statistical analyses were done on this group and the predictor (Burke LAI) showed a strong ability to predict the criterion - recruiter ratings.

In the last two years, E·A·S·I·Consult® has joined in this effort.

E·A·S·I·Consult provided more evidence that the Burke LAI does what it's designed to do, which is to predict leadership success. In another study conducted at OSF HealthCare, a major Midwest healthcare organization, medical and professional mid- and senior-level leaders were asked to complete the Burke LAI and were independently rated by their direct supervisors on a number of leadership qualities.

Again, the inventory did a scientifically significant job of predicting leadership success. Those who scored higher on the Burke LAI were rated higher on two key criteria: Results Orientation - driving aggressive goals to strategic targets in the organization - and Drives or Enables Growth - anticipates organizational challenges and changes approaches accordingly.

What's next?

Clearly, there is scientific evidence that the Burke LAI does what it claims to do - accurately measure learning agility and predict leadership success. In short, we tested the test and it passed.

Columbia University and E·A·S·I·Consult will continue to collect scientific data on the Burke LAI along with PepsiCo, the University of Texas School of Medicine and others who have been corresponding with us.

We know learning agility is important for leaders and we believe it's perhaps equally important for individual contributors. We are looking at that now. We are also receiving interest from different countries around the world. Collecting data on other cultures is in the horizon for the Burke LAI.

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

About the Author

David Smith, PhD, is the president and CEO 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.