

Learning Agility

What We Know, What We Need to Know, and Where Do We Go From Here?

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The illiterate of the 21st Century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.

—Alvin Toffler (1928–2016), American author and futurist

As we wrote this chapter, the Covid-19 pandemic continued to spread across the globe. Two months before that, very few people outside of the medical profession had ever heard the word *coronavirus*. Now, it has completely turned the world upside down. Companies, schools, churches, shopping malls, and governmental offices have closed. Business owners are attempting to survive with little or no revenue coming in. Stock markets have plummeted. Parents are trying to cope with working from home, teaching their kids, and maintaining their sanity. Governments are spending trillions of dollars to stave off some of the negative outcomes a broken economy is creating. The question is, What will cause the next big disruption—a breakthrough technology, global integration, climate change, World War III, or another contagion? The term *learning agility* never seemed more relevant.

The acronym VUCA has been used frequently to describe our world today. Indeed, authors of two chapters in this book used it in their titles. While VUCA represents volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, the antidote can be characterized as follows:

- V—Vision
- U—Understanding

- C—Clarity
- A—Agility

In this book, we focus on *agility*, learning agility in particular. Our fundamental goal is to enhance our understanding of the construct of learning agility, synthesizing scientific knowledge and best practices from both research and application. We assembled a community of more than 50 highly respected scholars and professional talent management practitioners. We devoted over a year editing and writing this book, which itself was an exercise in learning agility! When the process first began, we did not fully anticipate just how deeply relevant the need for learning agility would be in 2020 and beyond. It is our sincere hope that the readers of *The Age of Agility* will learn as much as we did. And in the words of Sir Isaac Newton, this learning for us occurred by “standing on the shoulders of giants” (the authors of this book).

In our view, we have reached a critical pivot point in the evolution of learning agility. Learning agility can become simply another bright shiny object in the catalog of human resource trends. Or, it can become an effective, durable life raft for the turbulent times we face. In this chapter, we distill key elements from all the chapters and cases presented in this book. This summary chapter focuses on (a) what we know, (b) what is emerging in our understanding, (c) how we can better apply the lessons we have learned, and (d) key research needs.

What Do We Know?

In this section, we summarize those “truths” that we can articulate with a high degree of certainty based on existing scientific evidence.

Change Is Constant and Likely to Accelerate

The world around us is changing at a relentless and increasing pace. It is rare for a day to go by without news of another technological advance, scientific discovery, or black swan event (Taleb, 2007) that changes the way we live and work. The flood of information and choices we encounter can cause us to perpetually feel “in over our heads”—to use the term of Harvard Professor Robert Kegan (1994). Organizations are dynamic, and the future will be

more fluid, not less. As noted in Chapter 1, society has transformed from an era of stability, predictability, and incremental change to a period of insecurity, uncertainty, and chaos, or, in the words of the title of this book, *The Age of Agility*.

It is abundantly clear that the ability to adapt is essential to survival. As defined by Merriam-Webster (2020), adaptation involves “modification of an organism or its parts that makes it more fit for existence under the conditions of its environment.” However, most of us would likely prefer to do more than *just* survive! While adapting to circumstances is required for continued existence, it is learning agility that enables us to *thrive*. Learning agility shifts the focus from being “passive victims” of change to being “proactive creators” of our future. It switches the onus from being controlled by the environment to controlling it, from putting one’s faith in others to show the way to placing trust in our own ability to adapt.

Leaders Will Need to Become More Learning Agile—*And* Lead the Way

We read in Chapter 1 that the “organization man” (and woman) of the 1950s and 1960s is long gone. And while we may have some good indications of what it takes to be successful as a leader today, we cannot predict with much accuracy what leadership capabilities will be needed next year, let alone 50 years from now. Leadership roles have changed dramatically and will continue to change. As aptly described by David Peterson (Chapter 13), leaders operate in “wicked” environments where they must solve problems never before encountered—perhaps by anyone—and without a rulebook. The importance of learning agility will increase, not decrease. As noted by Dai and De Meuse in Chapter 2, person–job fit is not static, and leaders need to continuously evolve as they find themselves in first-time situations.

But, we should not lose sight of another truth. Leaders have *always* been pioneers. The word *leader* is derived from an Old English word—*lædan*—which means “to go before as a guide” (Macmillan Dictionary, 2020). As McKenna and Minaker point out in Chapter 18, we not only need learning agile leaders, but also need leaders who can inspire learning agility in others. Learning agility is likely required for other roles, perhaps many roles, but *it is leaders who must lead the way*.

Learning Agility Requires Courage

In the Backword to this book, the “fathers” of learning agility Michael Lombardo and Bob Eichinger wrote: “The development of those who lead well is the land of the first time and the risky.” Virtually all of the contributors to this book recognize learning agility is not (at least initially) easy or comfortable. The essence of learning agility is performing under first-time, tough, and often difficult conditions (De Meuse, 2017). Frequently, learning something new or doing something for the first time is painful (Snell, 1992). However, much like riding a roller coaster, the journey is exhilarating as well as scary and challenging! As described by Kim Ruyle in Chapter 5, we are neurologically wired to feel threatened when changing requirements exceed our comfort level. While organizations can create conditions of psychological safety (Stomski & Jensen, Chapter 15), ultimately it is each individual leader who must choose between short-term comfort and development of learning muscle.

Highly learning agile leaders realize “courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the assessment that something else is more important than fear” (Franklin D. Roosevelt). Courageous people lead in the face of fear. Learning agility requires stepping to the edge of our comfort zone (Yost, DeHaas, & Allison, Chapter 12) and often moving intentionally *outside* our comfort zone to confront our fear until we can tolerate the discomfort. It is about our willingness and ability do something different, to change “even in the moments when it may be difficult to do so” (McKenna & Minaker, Chapter 18). It can require the leap of faith to suboptimize current performance as an investment in the future, something that feels quite risky (Peterson, Chapter 13). It is no wonder that Brené Brown’s TED Talks on vulnerability and daring greatly are among the most viewed TED talks of all time! The paradox of leading in the age of agility is *getting comfortable with being uncomfortable*.

Learning Agility Can Be Empowering

One aspect of learning agility rarely discussed is its potential for empowerment, engagement, and inclusion. Increasing learning agility creates a pathway to change for anyone who has the minimum qualification of willingness. While there may be some foundational elements of learning agility

that are relatively “fixed,” this book has revealed there are many more that are malleable and can be developed. Consequently, the measurement of learning agility provides for a more level playing field in the identification of high-potential talent because it offers an objective, quantifiable metric when making such decisions. Research evidence indicated there are no group differences across race, gender, and age when learning agility is assessed properly (see De Meuse, Dai, Zewdie, et al., 2011; De Meuse, Lim, & Rao, 2019). As Lombardo and Eichinger note in their Backword, “Learning agility has turned out to be as egalitarian as we hoped it would be.”

Many have forgotten about the transformative book *Breaking the Glass Ceiling*, by Ann Morrison, Randall White, and Ellen Van Velsor (1987). It was published about the same time as another classic book on leadership, *The Lessons of Experience*, by Morgan McCall, Michael Lombardo, and Ann Morrison (1988). At the time, both groups of authors participated in the Center for Creative Leadership research project to identify important executive experiences to develop leaders. However, Ann Morrison and her colleagues recognized a problem with the original research—it included very few women. With considerable effort, they identified and interviewed a sample of executive women, many of whom were “pioneers on the corporate prairie” (p. 9). Ultimately, these researchers concluded that the lessons most crucial to success were essentially the same for men *and* women (although the opportunities as well as the process of navigating through those experiences were indeed different).

As pointed out by Harvey and Prager in Chapter 6, we cannot afford to limit the development of learning agility to empower only the elite few. Furthermore, it would be shortsighted to place all our bets on those individuals we predict now will be the best leaders in the future because we *don't know* what those leadership requirements will be! It is a wise investment to build learning agility among the many versus the few. The scientific assessment of leadership talent and then providing opportunities for that talent to learn from experience and develop learning agility will surely contribute to greater diversity within the leadership ranks. Differential investment in talent is important, but at the same time we must strive to be inclusive to ensure appropriate access to the experiences and resources that build learning agility. We address the importance of fostering a culture where learning agility can flourish in a further section of this chapter.

Learning Agility Offers Organizations an Opportunity to Apply Science to Leadership

Executives continually report being dissatisfied with the current state of leadership development (Kotlyar & Karakowsky, 2014). And, it is no wonder, given we reportedly spend \$366 billion each year on leadership development globally, with this figure regularly increasing (Westfall, 2019). Unfortunately, there appears to be no corresponding decline in the inadequacies of our leadership pipeline. As lamented by Kaiser and Curphy (2013), “we are spending more to develop leaders with whom we are less and less satisfied” (p. 295).

Learning agility presents a significant opportunity to reduce the gap between our investment and return in the identification and development of effective leadership. Empirical research continues to grow on the value of learning agility in predicting leader success (De Meuse, 2017, 2019). Although the mechanisms for *developing* learning agility are less clearly established, it is not for lack of trying on the part of practitioners! Certainly, research lags behind practice. Nevertheless, the chapters and cases in this book suggest there may be more evidence available than realized—albeit piecemeal and cross-disciplinary. Moving the development of learning agility from art to science may very well be one of the greatest opportunities facing industrial and organizational psychologists and talent management professionals today.

What Trends Are Emerging?

The chapters in this book suggest a number of trends that are surfacing but not yet fully confirmed. In the following section, we review the “emerging truths” about learning agility, which we hope will help illuminate pathways for research and guidance for practice.

Growing Interest in Agility Is Creating Confusion

Interest in the topic of agility continues to accelerate (Harsch & Festing, 2020; Joiner, 2019; Pulakos & Kantrowitz, 2020). Agility is increasingly viewed as vital given “the need for organizations to compete more successfully

in today's hypercompetitive and rapidly changing work environment" (Pulakos, Kantrowitz, & Schneider, 2019, p. 305). The words *agility* and *agile* have become pervasive in the business nomenclature. For example, in a recent *Harvard Business Review* article, "The Agile C-Suite" is described as a new approach for top leadership (Rigby, Elk, & Berez, 2020). Further, AGILE is a set of principles and practices commonplace in the world of software development and project management (Benton & Radziwill, 2011; Denning, 2016). Some have even applied software terminology to agile learning (e.g., labeling a coach as "scrum master"; Longmuss, Höhne, Bräutigam, Oberländer, & Schindler, 2016; Overeem, 2015).

While this growing interest in agility is positive, using the terms *organizational agility*, *leadership agility*, and *learning agility* interchangeably creates confusion. Even among discussions with authors of this book, the lines between organizational agility and learning agility became blurred at times. While learning agility may *enable* both leadership agility and organizational agility, it is not synonymous with either concept.

Our perspective is that learning agility is an individual-level attribute that leaders of organizations possess in varying degrees. It is similar to other individual characteristics that are measured on a continuous scale—from low to high. It is also possible to be high on some dimensions of learning agility and low on others. For leaders, learning agility is typically a good attribute to have that will enable more effective leadership. The concept of "leadership at all levels" (Charan, 2008), which suggests that everyone is a leader in some capacity, implies that all roles require some degree of learning agility.

While undoubtedly some agility is required by everyone to deal with constant change, not all positions require high levels of agility. For positions that require strict attention to following rules and strict procedures, learning agility could be detrimental. It is also possible for a leader to possess too much learning agility for the position he or she occupies. It is analogous to "overuse" behaviors within the context of leadership (Kaiser & Overfield, 2011; McCall & Lombardo, 1983). If leaders are too learning agile for the role, they can be too change oriented and institute change for the sake of change. Or, they can take too many unnecessary risks or quickly become disengaged if insufficient learning opportunities exist. Perhaps, it can be construed as the "Goldilocks effect!" Possessing either too little or too much is not the ideal. Future studies are needed to confirm how much learning agility is needed for various roles and leadership levels.

Definitional Clarity Is Growing on the Construct of Learning Agility

As a construct, learning agility has suffered from a lack of consensus on what it does and does not include and how it differs from other related constructs. There is no doubt it is complex and multidimensional. The originators of the terminology focused on the *ability* and *willingness* to learn from experience (De Meuse, Dai, & Hallenbeck, 2010; Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000). A few authors (e.g., DeRue, Ashford, & Myers, 2012) have emphasized learning speed and flexibility. Likewise, other constructs, such as adaptability or versatility, appear closely related to learning agility. Wang and Beir (2012) asserted that learning agility has been researched under a host of aliases. Overall, it is suspected the typical talent management practitioner would have difficulty distinguishing among various related constructs.

Both scholars and practitioners have pointed out the commonality between the constructs of learning agility and adaptive performance. Performance adaptation has been defined as “behaviors demonstrating the ability to cope with change and to transfer learning from one task to another as job demands vary” (Baard, Rench, & Kozlowski, 2014, p. 49). Adaptive performance is viewed as “cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral modifications made in response to the demands of a new or changing environment or situational demands” (Baard et al., 2014, p. 52). It seems likely that this construct shares some common personality antecedents with learning agility (e.g., openness to experience, cognitive flexibility, self-efficacy). Mechanisms to develop both adaptive behavior and learning agility include increasing learning orientation, providing feedback, error management, and some of the same strategies suggested for the development of learning agility (see Harvey & Prager, Chapter 6).

In this book, learning agility has been described and defined in a number of ways (see Table 19.1 for examples). Despite the variations in definition, these conceptualizations have much more in common than not, including the following:

- learning agility includes *learning from all our experiences* (De Meuse & Harvey, Chapter 1; Dai & De Meuse, Chapter 2);
- it incorporates the intertwined components of *thoughts, emotions, behaviors, motivations, knowledge, and social interactions*

Table 19.1 Conceptualizations of Learning Agility

Conceptualization/Definition	Source
How you learn what to do when you don't know what to do	Lombardo & Eichinger, Backword
The ability to learn quickly and the willingness and flexibility to apply those lessons to perform well in new and challenging leadership roles	De Meuse & Harvey, Chapter 1
The willingness and ability to learn new competencies in order to perform under first-time, tough, or different conditions	De Meuse & Harvey, Chapter 1
Adapting and transforming oneself to meet the demands of one's environment	Heaton, Chapter 17
The ability to come up to speed quickly in one's understanding of a situation and move across ideas flexibly in service of learning both within and across experiences	Anseel & Ong, Chapter 10
The DNA of VUCA, the instruction set humans need to develop and thrive in a VUCA world; built around seeking and making sense of experiences with increasing levels of diversity, novelty, and adversity	Peterson, Chapter 13
A leadership metacompetency that facilitates agile experiential learning to cultivate required leadership competencies	Heslin & Mellish, Chapter 11
The self-regulated behaviors, strategies, and habits that enable learning at an accelerated pace, facilitate more agile adaptation to dynamic conditions and result in more effective leadership	Harvey & Prager, Chapter 6
The engagement in learning behaviors to enhance the capacity to reconfigure activities quickly to meet the changing demands in the task environment	Burke Learning Agility Inventory™ in Boyce & Boyce, Chapter 4

(Dai & De Meuse, Chapter 2; Harvey & Prager, Chapter 6; Peterson, Chapter 13; Heaton, Chapter 17);

- it is viewed as a *metacompetency*—an amalgamation of interrelated leadership competencies (De Meuse & Harvey, Chapter 1; Heslin & Mellish, Chapter 11);
- it includes the *temporal dimensions* of learning from the past, being mindful in the present, and taking action based on anticipated future needs (Harvey & Prager, Chapter 6; Lee, Chapter 7); and
- recognized as important for more quickly and *effectively adapting to future situations*, which are assumed to be even more dynamic than today.

At its core, learning agility is about adapting successfully, using various strategies to learn from all our experiences as the mechanism for change. The term *learning agility* is likely here to stay, but even those who coined it acknowledge the difficulty of capturing the construct in a single label: “The one regret we have is using the term *learning*. . . . It is more related to conceptual complexity and pattern recognition. It is closer to broad perspective, openness to change, and changing one’s behavior without poisoning relationships with others. On hindsight, maybe we should have called it ‘adaptiveness’” (Lombardo & Eichinger, “Foreword”).

A Shared Understanding of the Elements of Learning Agility

It may be difficult to ever develop one standard definition of learning agility. Many of the instruments, tools, programs, and processes associated with learning agility are proprietary or customized to organizational needs. This situation creates a vested interest in retaining certain definitions and dimensions of the construct. While understandable, we must agree on the foundational elements of learning agility in order to facilitate useful empirical research.

In Chapter 2, Dai and De Meuse provide a comprehensive review of the elements of learning agility. Boyce and Boyce synthesize the dimensions most commonly assessed in proprietary measures of learning agility (Chapter 4). Elements of learning agility are also cataloged by De Meuse and Harvey (Chapter 1, Table 1.6) and Harvey and Prager (Chapter 6, Table 6.6). As would be expected, *every* chapter incorporates a subset of the elements of learning agility.

Despite a broad range of terminology used among authors, there is considerable consistency on the elements thought to comprise learning agility. A summary of these dimensions and behaviors/strategies is included in Table 19.2. These have significant overlap with the elements included in the framework provided by Dai and De Meuse in Chapter 2. Overall, there is a high level of consensus among the contributors to this book on what constitutes the foundational behaviors and strategies associated with learning agility.

While there are some aspects of learning agility that appear to be influenced by more stable factors (e.g., personality traits, cognitive ability, demographics, upbringing), far more are “learnable” strategies that can be developed by leaders. Nevertheless, it remains to be demonstrated

Table 19.2 Foundational Behaviors and Strategies for Learning Agility

Dimension	Behaviors/Strategies
<i>Affective</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aware of and able to regulate emotions
<i>Behavioral</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeks opportunities to increase external awareness • Seeks information and actively listens • Seeks and responds to feedback • Applies structure to learning process • Behaviorally flexible • Willing to experiment and take risks
<i>Cognitive</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitively flexible, curious, and open-minded • Reflective and distills lessons from experiences
<i>Knowledge</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows and implements learning strategies • Possesses and seeks insight on strengths and weaknesses
<i>Motivation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning and growth oriented • Demonstrates self-efficacy • Driven to seek challenges and excel • Willing and motivated to grow and evolve • Resilient and resourceful
<i>Social</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socially intelligent and flexible to others' needs • Able to leverage relationships and manage interpersonal conflict • Inclusive and appreciates diversity

empirically which are (a) most influenced by predisposition, (b) most readily changed through development, and (c) most critical overall.

Underlying Mechanisms of Learning Agility May Mediate Multiple Elements

Some aspects of learning agility are particularly prevalent across many chapters within this book, suggesting they may be of greater importance and/or mediate multiple elements of learning agility. For example, mindfulness appears related to external awareness, cognitive flexibility, reflection, and emotional regulation. Growth mindset seems to influence virtually every learning strategy. Clearly, the elements of learning agility included in Table 19.2 are *not* orthogonal. It may be fruitful to determine the underlying *core mechanisms* of learning agility. Doing so may accelerate theory building and research, especially if we can leverage research that already exists on these core underlying mechanisms to build a nomological net around learning agility.

The following mechanisms seem particularly worthy of consideration: (a) a belief that personal change is possible, *learning mindset*; (b) the ability to control and shift our thinking, *cognitive control and flexibility*; (c) the capacity to regulate our emotions, *emotional regulation*; and (d) the willingness to let go of old behaviors and skill sets that are no longer useful and latch onto ones now required, *behavioral flexibility*. Interestingly, those align very closely with the mechanisms proposed by Bell and Kozlowski (2010) as those that moderate active learning.

Learning Mindset—A Belief That Personal Change Is Possible

One of the elements most frequently mentioned throughout this book is “growth mindset,” also described at times as “learning orientation” and “goal orientation.” In Chapter 11, Heslin and Mellish suggest that “learning mode” is a metacompetency for learning agility. In Chapter 7, Lee suggests that mindfulness is closely aligned with growth mindset due to its focus on approaching all experiences with openness and curiosity. The far-from-new concept of “self-efficacy” also seems related to growth mindset. According to Bandura’s (1977) theory of behavior change, it is self-efficacy that determines whether coping behavior will be initiated, effort expended, and sustained in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences.

Central to all of these concepts is *the belief that change is possible and under our personal control*. Without this mechanism in place, the likely consequences are inaction, resistance, and/or feelings of being a victim. The last sounds remarkably similar to the “Po-Po syndrome,” joked about by talent managers, whereby leaders not identified as hipos (high potentials) retreat to a state of being passed over and pissed off! Ironically, those individuals who choose to leave the organization are exercising some personal control.

Cognitive Control and Flexibility—The Ability to Control and Shift Thinking

A second underlying mechanism of learning agility that surfaces throughout the chapters is related to cognitive control and flexibility. Metacognition, mindfulness, and vertical learning have all been noted as important to learning agility, and all involve voluntary control of thinking processes. For example, Lee (Chapter 7) and McCauley and Yost (Chapter 8) describe how

we must be able to “move from the dance floor to the balcony,” so that we have a broader, more expansive perspective on our experience. Anseel and Ong (Chapter 10) likewise describe how reflection allows us to shift from System 1 (fast) to System 2 (slow) thinking and make sense of our accumulation of experiences and abstract lessons from them. Vertical learning is about gaining perspective on how we are making sense of the world at multiple levels to reduce our “tethers to invisible forces” (Heaton, Chapter 17). In other words, we must be able to consciously control and shift *how* we are thinking and *what* we are thinking about.

Leaders’ daily experiences are often driven by automatic, unconscious mental processes. Learning agility is about breaking the chains of automaticity (Harvey & Prager, Chapter 6). Mindfulness, metacognition, and vertical development all provide methods for taking voluntary control of our thinking processes rather than allowing these thinking processes to automatically dictate feelings and attitudes. Researchers are beginning to build connections between mindfulness and metacognition (e.g., Jankowski & Holas, 2014), suggesting they may share common underlying processes—*cognitive control and flexibility*. In a study of the nomonological net of learning agility, Allen (2016) observed that the strongest predictor of two different measures of learning agility was cognitive flexibility.

Likewise, “fluid intelligence” has been cited by Lombardo and Eichinger as a variable they considered when first defining learning agility (see Backword). Fluid intelligence is the ability to solve novel and abstract problems that do not depend on task-specific knowledge. In contrast, “crystallized intelligence” refers to the accumulation of knowledge, concrete skills, and facts. Whereas *fluid intelligence* is inductive and synergistic because conclusions do not mechanically follow from their premises, *crystallized intelligence* is deductive and additive because conclusions mechanically follow from their premises. It is believed that one’s overall IQ (what psychologists often refer to as the “g” factor) comprises fluid and crystallized intelligence (Cattell, 1963; Sternberg, 1982).

Fluid intelligence likely plays a role in the constellation of cognitive control processes that support learning agility. Some scholars have hypothesized that aspects of cognitive ability may influence learning agility by enabling faster information processing and increasing the ability to see patterns (e.g., DeRue et al., 2012). Other researchers have found little relationship between IQ and learning agility (Connolly & Viswesvaran, 2002; De Meuse, Dai, & Marshall, 2012). Perhaps a more focused measure of fluid intelligence—rather than

assessing overall IQ—would correlate with learning agility. It may also be more fruitful to look at the relationships between specific facets of learning agility (e.g., “mental agility,” “cognitive perspective”) to determine whether they have higher relationships to cognitive ability (e.g., cognitive control and flexibility).

Emotional Regulation—The Capacity to Moderate Emotions

In the process of learning from experience and adapting to new situations, emotional regulation is another starring player (both as a villain and hero). Emotion is central to our motivation to learn by creating dissatisfaction or discomfort with the status quo (Heaton, Chapter 17). Clearly, emotionally uncomfortable, disequilibrating experiences can be a stimulus for learning (McCauley & Yost, Chapter 8). Likewise, positive emotions resulting from a clear purpose for our learning or from experiencing desired outcomes creates inspiration (McKenna & Minaker, Chapter 18).

Emotional regulation is also central to the *resilience* needed to deal with tough, new leadership challenges (Yost et al., Chapter 12). In Chapter 13, Peterson points out that the “ambiguity” and “uncertainly” elements of VUCA cause the emotions of fear, anxiety, and confusion. Ruyle posits that moving forward despite the perception of threat is the essence of brain-based development (Chapter 5). In addition, regulation of emotion is central to many of the strategies thought to positively influence learning agility discussed in this book. Some examples include (a) a primary aspect of mindfulness is its role in strengthening regulation of emotions (Lee, Chapter 7), (b) receptivity to feedback is impacted by emotions (Adler & Neiman, Chapter 9), and (c) reflection can increase feelings of emotional well-being (Anseel & Ong, Chapter 10).

Behavioral Flexibility—Letting Go and Latching Onto

One of the key findings from *The Lessons of Experience* study was the willingness of successful executives to “let go” of old behaviors and “latch onto” new ones (McCall et al., 1988). Those researchers discovered executives who derailed during their careers tended to cling to behaviors and technical skills that had led to their previous success, either not recognizing or being unwilling to learn new behaviors and leadership competencies needed in their new roles. Thus, this unwillingness or inability to change prevented them from altering their leadership behaviors. Successful executives, on the other

hand, transformed themselves by latching onto the leadership behaviors and skill sets required for their new roles.

There are several studies that have found the roles of leaders, and the competencies required to perform those roles, change as they advance up the organizational ladder (e.g., De Meuse, Dai, & Wu, 2011; Kaiser, Craig, Overfield, & Yarborough, 2011). In an expansive review of the literature, Hogan, Hogan, and Kaiser (2011) found that fully one half of all managers fail. Further, research has shown nearly 40% of internal job moves involving hipos end in failure (Martin & Schmidt, 2010). An underlying reason for much of this derailment likely can be traced to reliance on behaviors and competencies that once were needed but now hinder leader success. The need for the behavioral flexibility is captured in Charan, Drotter, and Noel's (2001) concept of the "leadership pipeline" as well as Lombardo and Eichinger's *The Leadership Machine* (2002). The title of Marshall Goldsmith's book, *What Got You Here Won't Get You There* (Goldsmith, 2007) also reinforces the need for behavioral flexibility in leaders. Overall, the behavioral transformation process of letting go and latching on as one assumes new leadership roles is central to learning agility.

Learning Agility Is a Dynamic Process

Many of the chapter authors propose process-oriented models to explicate learning agility or facets of learning agility. There appears to be a pull toward conceptualizing agile learning as something that happens in stages or phases that have some logical sequence. Table 19.3 provides a synthesis of various stages suggested by different authors. While there is little empirical evidence to support any one specific model at this time, a logical sequence of steps in practicing learning agility is likely to include (a) anticipating and identifying what needs to be learned, (b) developing a plan and strategies for achieving learning goals, (c) initiating action, (d) self-regulating and monitoring learning, and (e) fully integrating lessons learned.

Learning Agility Can Be Developed

A question sometimes asked: "Isn't the development of learning agility simply just leadership development?" Developing learning agility is certainly

Table 19.3 Learning Agility as a Process

Stage	Descriptors Used by Authors in the Book
Anticipating Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipate: McCauley & Yost, Chapter 8 • Approach: Lee, Chapter 7 • Identify need: Harvey & Prager, Chapter 6
Planning for Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach: Heslin & Mellish, Chapter 11 • Plan for change: Harvey & Prager, Chapter 6
Taking Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapting: McCauley & Yost, Chapter 8 • Initiate action: Lee, Chapter 7 • Action: Heslin & Mellish, Chapter 11 • Implement change: Harvey & Prager, Chapter 6
Self-Regulating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulate and monitor: Harvey & Prager, Chapter 6
Integration of Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection: McCauley & Yost, Chapter 8; Heslin & Mellish, Chapter 11 • Integration, abstraction of lessons: Lee, Chapter 7

an important part of leadership development, but it has a narrower focus. Leadership development encompasses any of the myriad skills required to be effective as a leader, such as strategic thinking, time management, priority setting, or talent development.

In contrast, the development of learning agility involves understanding the learning agile process (Figure 6.1; Harvey & Prager, Chapter 6), as well as where, when, and how to deploy relevant learning behaviors and strategies to facilitate more nimble adaptation. As leaders increase their learning agility, they become more capable of regulating their own learning—regardless of the skill du jour that is required—and integrating learning it into their daily work. It can be considered a “meta-competency” that supports accelerated development in multiple areas of leadership.

There are likely factors that predispose individuals toward developing learning agility more readily (e.g., personality traits, cognitive ability, parenting practices, being exposed to an enriched and diverse environment as a child). However, learning agility requires actually implementing behaviors and strategies that can be learned and developed, as is the case with most talents. If someone is musically inclined, we cannot assume that he or she can play the piano without additional learning! While measures of learning agility reflect a leader’s level of learning agility *at a particular point in time*, the level may increase or decrease over time. Unfortunately, limited research currently exists. Nevertheless, the development of

learning agility can likely be accelerated through focus, effort, dedication, discipline, coaching, and a nurturing environment. As a starting point, leaders must be aware of learning agility, its importance to their success, and steps they can personally take to become more learning agile. The chapters in Section II offer a wealth of practical ideas for developing learning agility.

As described in Section III, the development of learning agility is likely supported or stunted by environmental conditions. Given the importance of learning agility to leadership success, organizations would be wise to invest in its development at all levels of leadership. While much more research is needed on organization-level impact, development of learning agility is likely to translate to greater organizational agility. We posit organizations that support learning agility and provide the conditions that nurture it will be more likely to thrive in the turbulent years ahead. Perhaps a silver lining of the pandemic will be increased awareness of the importance of leaders who can quickly learn and adapt.

Likewise, developing learning agility may result in higher levels of engagement and well-being. For example, Anseel and Ong in Chapter 10 cite evidence that reflection can reduce stress and lower blood pressure. In a recent *Harvard Business Review* article, Zao-Sanders and Schveninger asserted that we sometimes forget the joy sparked by learning: “There is an illumination of the unknown, as beams of light fall on hidden secrets and treasures. There’s the awareness of a new capability and the freedom and independence that may bring—the power to deal better with the big uncertain world” (2020, p. 3).

Applying the Lessons Learned

As previously indicated, research tends to lag practice. Nevertheless, we were able to identify some key implications for the application of learning agility within organizations based on existing research and the experience of this volume’s authors. They are divided into the following four categories:

- implications for fostering a learning agile organizational culture;
- implications for talent management professionals;
- implications for managers; and
- implications for leadership coaches.

Implications for Organizational Culture

It is clear from the chapters and case studies that organizational culture plays a significant role in supporting or suppressing learning agility. As defined by Schein, culture is “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration” (2004, p. 17). It includes shared beliefs, values, and assumptions about how things work in the organization. Those aspects of culture that appear most important to supporting learning agility include (a) creating psychological safety, (b) promoting a growth mindset, (c) encouraging experimentation, and (d) valuing learning agility.

Creating Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is especially important for learning agility. Many of the behaviors associated with learning agility (e.g., experimentation, risk-taking, asking for help, feedback seeking) require a psychologically safe work environment. When individuals feel safe, they are more likely to admit mistakes, ask questions, and demonstrate vulnerability. A growing number of studies support the importance of psychological safety for learning within organizations (see Edmondson, 2019). In Chapter 17, Heaton emphasizes the importance of providing a “psychologically safe container” where individuals can be vulnerable and explore perspectives and emotions. However, creating a psychologically safe environment should not be confused with “anything goes.” It is important that organizations set clear boundaries; learning cannot be an excuse for inappropriate behavior or impulsive risk-taking. In Chapter 15, Stomski and Jensen provide a great example of how psychological safety has been embedded in Walmart’s culture while maintaining accountability.

Promoting a Growth Mindset

Numerous organizations are beginning to promote the concept of “learning orientation” or “growth mindset.” Some organizations have even connected a growth mindset culture with their business strategy (Harvard Business Review Staff, 2014). In a recent *Forbes* article, Childs (2019) advised, “A growth mindset environment can’t merely be a branding campaign without engagement and substance. It also needs to be part of your organization’s

overall business strategy.” Microsoft, for example, has deliberately created a growth mindset culture (Dweck & Hogan, 2016). Several case studies in this book emphasize a growth mindset as part of their learning agility initiatives (Ultimate Software, Case A; Procter & Gamble, Case B; IBM, Case D; and Fosun, Case G).

Encouraging Experimentation

Curiosity, experimentation, risk-taking, and learning agility go hand in hand. By creating a culture of experimentation, organizations not only enhance learning agility but also accelerate continuous improvement. Thomke (2020) suggested organizations should encourage the creation of hypotheses, provide resources for experimentation, and have leaders display intellectual humility when testing new ideas. Learning agility is likely to blossom in climates that encourage leaders to look at the world through the lens of a scientist and view daily experiences as opportunities to experiment, test hypotheses, and reflect on cause-and-effect relationships.

Valuing Learning Agility

Another primary way for organizations to build a culture focused on learning agility is by demonstrating that key executives value it. Chapter 16 (Leisten & Donohue) provides a good illustration of how companies best known for developing leaders emphasize learning agile behaviors such as self-awareness and resilience. They have built ecosystems promoted by senior leaders around learning agility. Virtually all the case studies demonstrate how learning agility was valued by employees throughout the organization and especially their senior leaders.

Table 19.4 provides examples of some of the norms, values, and beliefs likely to foster a culture supportive of learning agility.

Implications for Talent Management Practices

Learning agility can be integrated into virtually all essential talent management practices. As stated by Church in Chapter 3, “It is a seemingly obvious conclusion that the concept of learning agility is and/or should be a core component of any successful TM system.” In Chapter 14, Ruyle, De Meuse,

Table 19.4 Factors That Support a Culture of Learning Agility

Norms	Beliefs	Values
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness to admitting mistakes • Acknowledgment that mistakes are an inevitable part of learning • Encouragement for experimentation and taking risks • Learning from others is promoted • Learning agile behaviors such as reflection mindfulness and resilience are supported • Leaders consistently promote learning from experience among their direct reports • Learning agile behavior is demonstrated by leaders at all levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mistakes are an opportunity to learn • Candid, constructive feedback is a “gift” • Asking for help is a strength not a weakness • It is okay not to have all the answers and ask questions • Learning from experience is an integral part of work and life • Failures do not have to carry a stigma 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning is rewarded in addition to performance • Behaviors that support the learning of others are recognized • Learning from mistakes is considered an aspect of effective performance • Forecasting future capability needs is expected • Diverse perspectives are valued • Diversity of thought is considered a strength

and Hughley describe how learning agile organizations implement talent management practices that integrate learning agility. The following is a brief summary of some of the ways learning agility can be incorporated in talent management.

Job Analysis, Position Descriptions, and Job Design

The world is shifting, jobs are becoming increasingly complex, and technology growth and globalization are unprecedented. The pace of change requires that virtually all employees are adaptable, can reskill, and can learn new job competencies. Organizations today hire not only “hands” but also “brains” (see Chapter 1). However, as discussed previously in this chapter, not all roles require equal levels of learning agility. A more nuanced approach is to ask what degree and facets of learning agility are required for various positions and various managerial levels. Consequently, we may need to update our methods for analyzing jobs and determining the optimal level of

learning agility based on the role, organization, and stage of organizational growth. For example, HumRRO (2020) suggested “Job Analysis 2.0” using artificial intelligence to profile jobs to more systematically track shifts in the importance of job requirements, identify emerging requirements, and automatically refresh job profiles.

It will also be useful for position descriptions to move beyond the typical knowledge, skills, and ability requirements and identify the competencies *learned* from the experiences encountered in particular roles (e.g., leading through crisis, turning around a failing business unit). As several contributors note, organizations should design roles specifically for the purpose of developing needed capabilities (e.g., Heslin & Mellish, Chapter 11). Many companies apply the 9-box model to evaluate talent and systematically provide developmental activities based on which box an employee is ascribed (Harvey & Prager, Chapter 6; McCauley & Yost, Chapter 8). Indeed, the purpose of “stretch assignments” is to develop employees on specific leadership competencies (e.g., international engagements to learn different cultural mores and business practices).

Assessment, Selection, and Succession Planning

Given the robust relationship between learning agility and leader success (De Meuse & Harvey, Chapter 1; Church, Chapter 3), it would seem prudent for virtually all organizations to assess learning agility for the selection and development of both internal and external leadership candidates. In Chapter 4, Boyce and Boyce provide a useful overview of commercially available measures and guidance for implementing the assessment of learning agility. Ruyle and his coauthors provide several valuable suggestions in Chapter 14. In addition, the application of multiple methods to measure learning agility (e.g., self-assessments, multirater surveys, interviews, simulations) can further enhance measurement accuracy. Many of the case studies provide examples of how assessments have been successfully used to support organizational needs.

We may also want to rethink the language used when describing leaders being groomed for higher level roles. As Heslin and Mellish point out in Chapter 11, labeling individuals as “hipos,” “stars,” or “legends” may inadvertently invoke a fixed rather than a growth mindset. These authors suggest using language that frames individuals in terms of the behaviors or strategies they use. For example, “consistently demonstrates learning agile behaviors”

certainly conveys the message that learning agility is malleable and can be modified with attention and effort.

Onboarding, Organizational Development, and Learning

Naturally, the assessment of learning agility can be leveraged for the development of the leadership pipeline. As noted by Harvey and Prager in Chapter 6, organizations can ill afford to select only leaders who are highly learning agile. Scores on various facets of learning agility can serve as valuable feedback as part of an onboarding process. Church also suggests in Chapter 3 that incorporating learning agility more broadly into internal development processes can have compelling benefits. And, providing opportunities to learn mindfulness, feedback seeking, and reflection need not be complicated or expensive! It is hoped in the years ahead we will have a deeper understanding of how to implement such programs to develop learning agility, including strategies for tailoring them to accommodate individual differences.

While some organizations offer developmental assignments specifically for the purpose of creating more opportunities to learn from experience, it seems to be more the exception than the rule. Organizations will benefit from identifying developmental experiences big and small. Simulations can also provide experiences with low risk (e.g., see Case Studies B and F). Given that diverse and varied job experiences are key to enhancing agility (Peterson, Chapter 13), it is essential that assignment to those most potent stretch experiences be doled out fairly. Unfortunately, as McCauley and Yost note (Chapter 8), inequities still exist. The development of learning agility can be highly empowering and has the potential to increase the representation of those who are underrepresented in the leadership ranks.

Most organizations already make extensive use of mentors and coaches. The value of these relationships could potentially be amplified by ensuring that these “guides” are well versed in how to develop and encourage learning agile behaviors. In addition, the accessibility of media can facilitate more vicarious learning by leaders sharing their own learning journeys and experiences via videos and podcasts.

Performance Management, Rewards, and Recognition

Unfortunately, too many leaders and employees still associate feedback primarily with formal performance evaluations. Organizations will benefit

from encouraging both *giving* and *seeking* feedback as a daily part of work to quell the notion feedback is only part of formal reviews (Ruyle et al., Chapter 14). Because many individuals find giving and receiving feedback uncomfortable at first, this learning agile behavior may require regular reinforcement. Providing simple feedback models such as the situation, behavior, impact model can be helpful in supporting a feedback-rich culture (Adler & Neiman, Chapter 9).

Performance management is a means of holding leaders accountable for doing what the organization views as valuable. If learning agility is really valued, formal performance reviews should include evaluating leaders on how well they demonstrate learning agility and the extent to which they encourage it among members within their teams. However, it is essential for this to be conducted in a way that does not exacerbate fixed mindsets. This often requires leaders to be reminded that performance and learning are not two separate objectives. As McCauley and Yost note in Chapter 8, most development happens *through* work experiences. Thus, learning and performing are one and the same! Learning agility truly must become a way of life for leaders, with acumen in learning agility valued equally with other key leadership capabilities (Leisten & Donohue, Chapter 16).

Implications for Managers

Immediate managers are in an especially key position to promote and support learning agility among those who report to them. While by no means exhaustive, the list that follows provides several practical ways managers can incorporate learning into their daily work.

- Modeling learning agile behavior. One of the best ways for leaders to encourage learning agility is by walking the talk. It may involve being vulnerable about their own mistakes or opportunities for development.
- Encouraging a “community of learners” within their team and being mindful of the importance of social support in the learning process (Yost et al., Chapter 12).
- Developing a “feedback-rich” culture where everyone knows how to provide effective feedback and is encouraged and expected to both give and receive it (Adler & Neiman, Chapter 9; Ruyle et al., Chapter 14).

- Understanding what motivates and uniquely inspires learning for each leader (McKenna & Minaker, Chapter 18).
- Making after-event reviews part of normal operating procedures and emphasizing the value of mistakes as opportunities to learn. Encouraging the same kind of reflection on an individual basis and allowing time to do it (Anseel & Ong, Chapter 10).
- Consistently embedding messages and cues related to learning agility in the environment (McCauley & Yost, Chapter 8), for example, sharing an important lesson learned at each staff meeting or posting messages that encourage a learning mindset. Heslin and Mellish (Chapter 11) advise managers to convey the message that we all are a “work in progress.”
- Giving adequate focus to “learning and adaptive performance” versus solely tactical performance (Peterson, Chapter 13). Hold direct reports accountable for learning as much as any other important performance goal. Encourage them to think about how learning can be embedded within everyday tasks (e.g., feedback seeking, deliberate practice, reflection).
- Consistently looking for opportunities to provide other leaders with stretch experiences large and small and providing the support and coaching needed to maximize learning from the experience (McCauley & Yost, Chapter 8). Be aware of how special assignments outside one’s own department are made within the organization (Harvey & Prager, Chapter 6).
- Actively encouraging learning from others by pointing out role models or making connections with those who can provide mentoring or “micromentoring” (Harvey & Prager, Chapter 6).
- Promoting behaviors that support resilience, not only for physical well-being but also for their importance in becoming learning agile (Yost et al., Chapter 12).
- Guarding against fixed-mindset language in themselves first and then coaching team members to change their own “self-talk.” For example, Childs (2019) suggested trying to transition members of the team from fixed-mindset languages such as “This is impossible,” “I am terrible at . . .,” or “I can’t . . .,” to more growth-mindset messages like “It will be difficult, but it will get easier” or “I can’t . . . *yet*.”

Clearly, there are many ways managers can develop learning agility within their teams. And, as described in the previous section, managers should be recognized and rewarded for doing so.

Implications for Leadership Coaches

Traditionally, leadership coaching has tended to focus on the development of managers in specific areas, either to prepare them for future roles or to prevent derailment in their current role. Coaching also can play a critical role in the development of learning agility (see Case Study F). In addition to supporting individuals in learning from current experiences, coaches can deliberately teach learning agile behaviors and habits along the way. For example, coaches typically encourage reflection. However, they likewise can emphasize it as a habit to be developed to support long-term learning agility. The development of questioning skills can be highlighted as a capability essential to both leadership *and* learning agility. There are significant opportunities to transform coaching to *learning agility* coaching.

When examining personality profiles and other assessment data to identify implications for leadership behavior, coaches can look simultaneously for factors that may help or hinder learning agility. For example, someone more introverted may require greater encouragement to pursue opportunities that involve learning from others. Someone naturally higher in anxiety may require more support when engaging in stretch experiences. Someone who is highly conscientious can leverage this strength within the learning agile process to overcome a lower degree of openness to new experiences. An achievement-oriented perfectionist may need more reminders to focus on learning and not only short-term performance.

Where Empirical Research Is Needed

While we have come a long way in our understanding of learning agility, many opportunities for research still exist. In this section, we outline the value of developing an agreed-upon nomonological net and highlight some of the most critical questions to be addressed by future researchers.

Learning Agility's Nomonological Net

One of the most vexing problems in learning agility science is the confounding circularity of how it has been investigated. As pointed out by Church in Chapter 3, learning agility has been applied as a predictor, a

process, and an outcome in various studies. Similarly, McCauley and Yost (Chapter 8) describe how stretch experiences can be viewed as an antecedent, a moderator, or an outcome. Boyce and Boyce (Chapter 4) also note that research on learning agility often confounds the predictor and the criterion. For example, learning agility is commonly used as a predictor of leadership potential. In the adaptive performance literature, learning agility has been presented as a moderator of adaptive performance.

In addition, the manner by which learning agility has been measured varies among studies. Some studies have used multirater methods, some have used interviews, and some have used self-assessments. For those studies that have employed self-assessments, the specific instrument used to measure learning agility varied. Some researchers have used *viaEDGE*[™], while others have used the *TALENTx7*[®], the *Burke Learning Agility Inventory*[™], or created their own self-assessment. Each of those measures assess learning agility a little differently (e.g., some assess five, seven, or nine dimensions of the construct). The measurement of the criterion variable also varies across studies. Moreover, in a few multirater studies, the same supervisors who are evaluating the participants' learning agility also are rating the participants' leadership potential. De Meuse (2017) examined those issues in detail.

Perhaps the most important step we can take is to clarify the nomological net surrounding the learning agility construct. Figure 19.1 provides an initial attempt to do just that. The model presents the following:

- Factors that may predispose leaders to be more or less learning agile such as personality, cognitive abilities, fluid intelligence, demographic variables and childhood experiences
- Central mechanisms such as learning mindset, cognitive control, emotional regulation and behavioral flexibility that potentially mediate predisposing factors and the effectiveness of various learning agile behaviors strategies
- The behaviors and strategies that accelerate the development of learning agility (e.g., asking for feedback, engaging in reflection)
- The role of environmental conditions for enhancing or suppressing learning agility (e.g., psychological safety)
- Both proximal outcomes (e.g., leader performance, leader potential) as well as possible distal outcomes (e.g., organizational agility)

It is our hope the model will stimulate more rigorous and systematic research examining the role that learning agility plays in the identification,

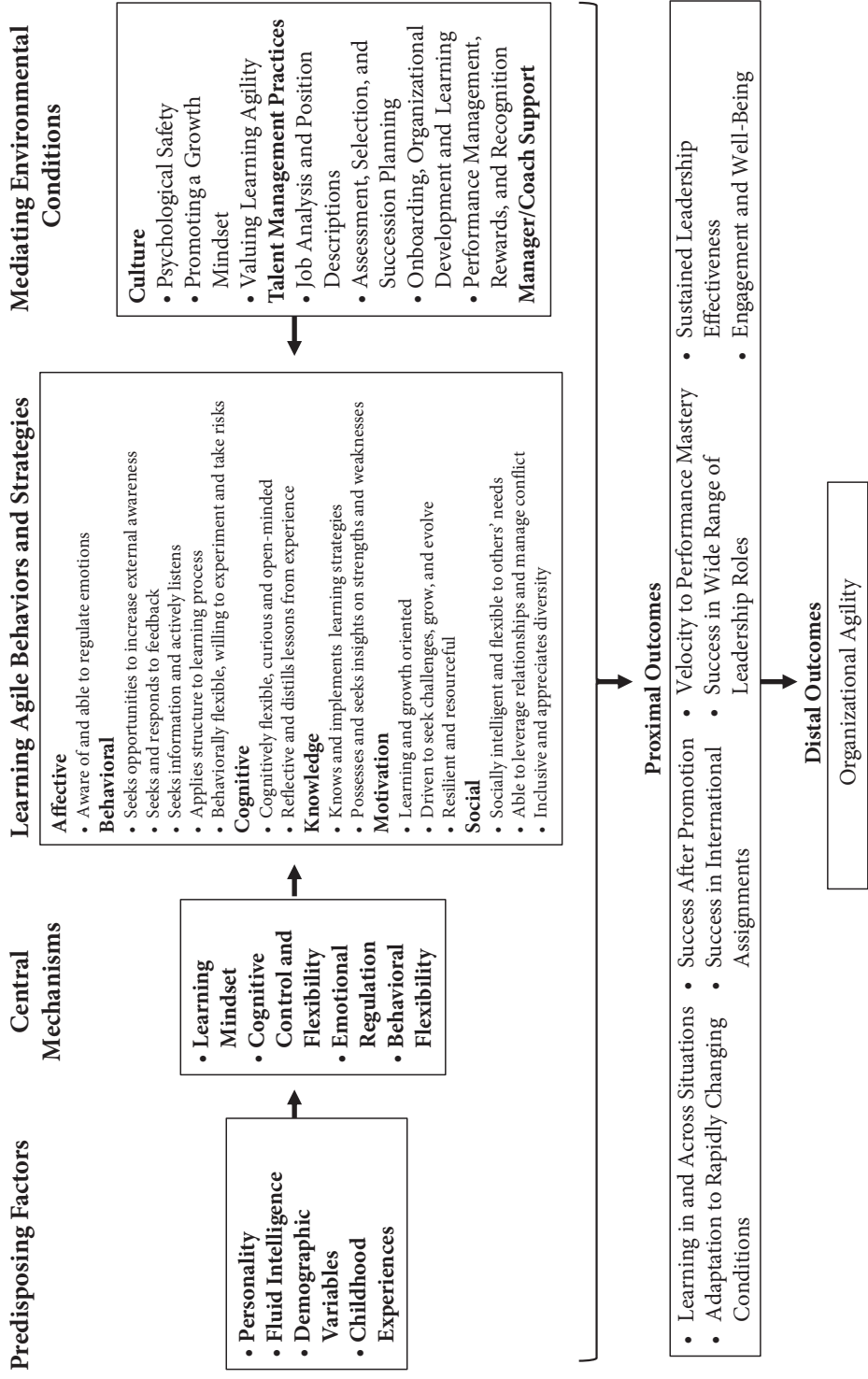


Figure 19.1 The nomological net of learning agility.

selection, and development of leaders. The depiction of predisposing factors, central mechanisms, behaviors/strategies, mediating environmental conditions, and outcomes should offer a foundation of variables and relationships for future research to explore.

Critical Questions for Research

Dozens of rich opportunities for research are presented throughout the various chapters of this book. These can be approached most effectively through an organizing framework such as the nomonological net proposed in Figure 19.1. In Table 19.5, we summarize some of the most significant questions to examine. Greater consensus on definitions of variables will greatly enhance our ability to build the empirical evidence required to clarify the construct and test various relationships among variables. In addition, more research is needed similar to the study conducted by Lim, Yoo, Kim, and Brickell (2017), which explored the mediating role of learning agility with other related constructs, such as adaptive performance, transformative learning, and learning organization.

As can be seen from the case studies and examples shared in this book, there is a wealth of opportunities for collecting data. However, what may be needed is a better process for connecting scholars who possess the time and resources to conduct empirical data analysis with talent management professionals who have the data available to them in their organizations.

There appears to be a golden opportunity for those of us who are scientist-practitioners. Perhaps we can serve as a bridge. We can develop protocols for collecting data in ways to protect the confidentiality of individual participants as well as to protect the competitive edge of those companies investing in learning agility activities. We should work jointly with talent management functions and leadership development teams to study learning agility with a planned methodology to enable clearer causality links to be made.

Conclusion

To a cynic, learning agility is not a construct at all. It is simply, as the proverbial saying goes, “old wine in a new bottle.” It is a confounded mixture

Table 19.5 Questions to Be Addressed by Future Researchers

Variables	Questions to Be Addressed
Predisposing Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which aspects of personality contribute most to learning agility overall? • How do various personality attributes and profiles of attributes help or hinder each type of learning agile behavior? • Do certain learning agile behaviors work more effectively for some personality types than others? • What aspects of learning agility are most helped or hindered by cognitive functioning and/or emotional intelligence? • Are there differences in learning agility for different demographic groups (e.g., age, gender, ethnic group, upbringing, and childhood experiences)?
Central Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the specific relationships between the central mechanisms of learning mindset, cognitive control, emotional regulation, and behavioral flexibility on each of the learning agile behaviors/strategies? • What are the interrelationships among these central mechanisms?
Learning Agile Behaviors and Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which behaviors and strategies have the greatest impact on outcome measures? • Which contribute most to acceleration of learning? • What is the incremental value of particular learning agile behaviors used in combination or in a particular sequence? • How do we measure the acquisition and development of learning agile behavior? • Do learning strategies have a differential impact based on demographic factors? • What approaches are most effective in developing learning agile behavior (e.g., coaching, formal training?)
Mediating Environmental Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which cultural attributes and talent management practices are most important to supporting learning ability? • Which leadership and coaching behaviors most encourage learning agility? • What is the incremental impact of various environmental conditions (e.g., culture, talent management practices, manager/coach support?)
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What outcome measures are most critical to focus on? • Does learning agility impact some outcome measures more than others? • For what roles or situations is learning agility detrimental? • What are the relationships among various outcome measures? • Are leadership agility and organizational agility distal outcomes of increased learning agility?

of independent and dependent variables. The construct lacks conceptual clarity. There are no theoretical underpinnings to support it. Instruments used to assess it lack consistency, reliability, and validity. There is no science supporting the presence or value of learning agility.

To the contrary, it is important for us to remember *the construct of learning agility is only 20 years old*. Contrast that timeline to the study of intelligence and personality. The measurement of intelligence can be traced back to the early 1900s when French psychologist Alfred Binet developed a test to evaluate a child's ability to succeed in school. General mental ability testing was used during World War I to select soldiers in the Army. The study of personality has a much longer history, dating back to Plato and Aristotle. Gordon Allport published his classic book on personality more than 80 years ago, sharing his vision for how personality should be systematically studied within the social sciences (Allport, 1937).

It was two practitioner psychologists by the names of Eichinger and Lombardo who asked the basic question, "How can organizations do a better job at predicting who will make successful leaders?" They argued, "Identifying those who can learn to behave in new ways requires a different measure strategy from those often used, one that looks at the characteristics of the learning agile" (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000, p. 321). The measurement of learning agility remained largely in the business world for the first 10 years. A journal article by De Meuse, Dai, and Hallenbeck (2010) published 10 years later created some interest in the academic community. Two years later, a series of articles published in the journal of *Industrial and Organizational Psychology* spawned additional interest (e.g., De Meuse, Dai, Swisher, Eichinger, & Lombardo, 2012; DeRue et al., 2012). Nevertheless, scholars are just beginning to investigate the construct of learning agility in earnest.

In the Foreword of this book, Dave Ulrich asserts "the science and practice of learning agility has evolved from some clever observations to elegant theory to rigorous science to shaping the world around us." Dave was gracious and generous in his acclaim. However, there is so much opportunity still ahead. And at a time when agility is indispensable. It is our hope as editors that we have laid some groundwork to help learning agility achieve that lofty status of shaping—and healing—our world.

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