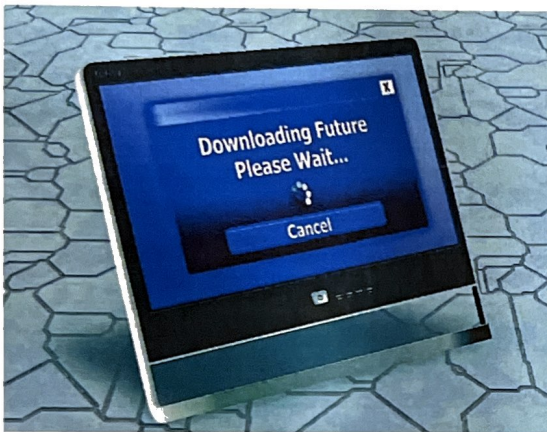


# Downloading Success: 9 Learning Agility Strategies to Help You Thrive During Challenging Times

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Turbulent times are not new to leaders and organizations. However, the recent pandemic has produced a level of personal stress and organizational upheaval not seen in modern times. With healthcare experiencing more unexpected volatility, uncertainty, and complexity than most, it's no surprise that leaders and teams are fatigued and languishing under the relentless pressure.

During the pandemic, many organizations have struggled, yet many others are thriving in the chaos. So, what is it that sets them apart? In the recent SIOP Professional Practice Series book, *The Age of Agility: Developing Learning Agile*

*Organizations and Leaders*,<sup>1</sup> we share our research which identifies a critical factor that determines whether leaders and organizations will adapt and grow during challenging times – learning agility.

At its core, learning agility is the capacity to adapt to first-time, often tough situations using a variety of behaviors and personal strategies to nimbly learn from our experiences and adjust. Learning agility empowers leaders, teams, and organizations to grow and evolve with a changing landscape, making them more agile and focused with each challenge.

Thankfully, learning agility is a skill that can be cultivated and improved. But developing this “muscle” requires willingness, effort, discipline, and resilience. By focusing on the following nine strategies and behaviors, you can build and strengthen your learning agility.





### 1. Mindful Awareness

A leader's "get things done" mentality is great for action but can make it difficult to see a situation without judgement. Mindfulness is not simply about meditation. It requires full awareness of the present reality to quickly shift from System 1 (fast-reactive) thinking to System 2 (slow-deliberate) thinking. Mindful leaders are self-aware – they know what they're feeling and why, so their emotions don't control their actions or cause them to act impulsively.

### 2. Forecasting

To be agile, leaders should anticipate what new skills they and their team will need and predict what ongoing capabilities are necessary. For example, a manager might ask some team members to attend a conference on business management, while others read a book about working with remote teams. This allows the entire team to become more aware of current issues, and how their skills may affect them in the future.

### 3. Curiosity and Openness

While mindfulness and forecasting can point the way, curiosity and openness allow you to move toward an agile learning experience. But changing a deeply ingrained mindset about how you have always worked can be the hardest part of learning agility. Leaders should ask themselves and their teams what new opportunities may arise if they change their approach. In addition to changing **what** they're thinking about, being curious and open to new ways of thinking may also enable the team to impact **how** they approach current and future

challenges.

#### 4. **Courage, Experimentation and Practice**

Trying new things is frightening and exciting, and it's normal to be apprehensive as you venture beyond your comfort zone. As with any difficult skill, courage is required and is nurtured through deliberate experimentation and practice. Each success will bring you more confidence. Be prepared to "get comfortable being uncomfortable." Start small. Focus your practice by being intentional and testing a variety of tactics to discover the method that best fits your style.

#### 5. **Maintain a Learning Mindset**

Studies show that leaders who demonstrate a learning mindset notice opportunities for improvement, grow their skills, and adapt more easily. They often view challenges – and even mistakes – as opportunities to learn and develop. To get into this state of mind, replace self-defeating messages, such as "I'll never be able to lead a remote team," with more productive ones like "What approach might work better next time?"

#### 6. **Learn from Others**

People often believe their leaders have all the answers, are confident and self-assured, capable of mastering any task or situation without assistance. However, it's important to realize that successful leaders recognize their limitations and embrace the knowledge of others. They don't know it all, but they know where to turn to find answers. Asking for help demonstrates wisdom and maturity rather than weakness.

#### 7. **Seek Feedback**

Knowing what to start, stop, or continue is tough to know without seeking regular feedback from a variety of viewpoints. Asking for comments may feel awkward at first. However, requesting feedback can be as simple as calling, emailing, or texting a colleague to ask, "What do you think went well?" or "What would you suggest I do differently next time?" It's easy to be defensive if the feedback is critical, but being open and curious will ensure others remain comfortable giving feedback in the future.

#### 8. **Reflect**

Reflection provides opportunities to distill lessons from your experiences and turn them into "learning experiences" that can then be applied in the future. It enables you to proactively think ahead about how you will put a new capability into practice. Set goals such as, "For our next meeting, I'm going to focus on asking questions rather than telling the group what to do." After-action reflection helps you determine what worked and what didn't. This can be done immediately following a meeting or at longer intervals, such as recapping daily or weekly progress.

#### 9. **Resilience**

Clarity of purpose about why change is important keeps us grounded when times are tough. Having a structured learning plan and goals gives us focus, allows us to plan action steps for how to achieve our goals, and identify ways to measure progress. Considering obstacles and preparing "if-then" statements can help clarify opportunities to change our thoughts or behaviors. For example, "IF I find myself talking too much in a meeting, THEN I will pause and ask a question to engage others."

Becoming learning agile requires looking at life through a new lens and being courageous as you approach things differently. While it takes tremendous, intentional effort to develop, learning agility empowers us to survive and even



thrive in these unpredictable times.

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## References

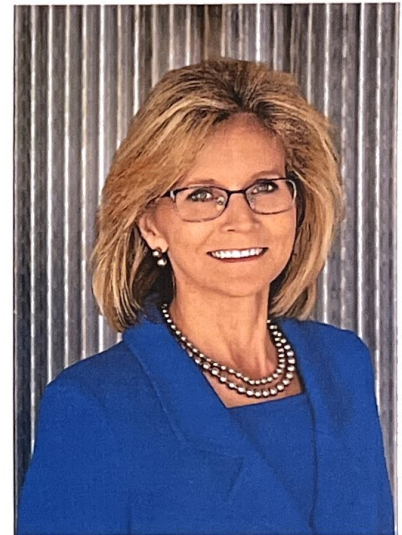
1. Harvey, V. S., & De Meuse, K. P. (2021). *The age of agility: Building learning agile leaders and organizations* (<https://www.siop.org/Research-Publications/Professional-Practice-Series/Age-of-Agility>). London: Oxford University Press.

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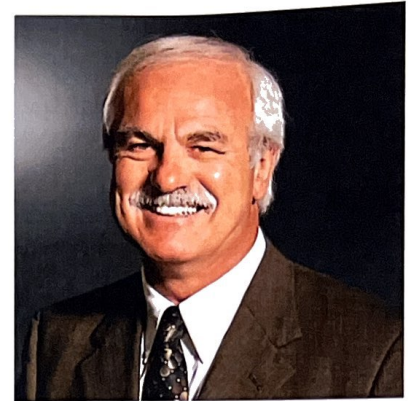
Dr. Veronica Schmidt Harvey, Senior Consultant at NuBrick Partners, supports organizations in building strong, healthy leadership pipelines through assessment, coaching, and design of holistic leadership development processes. She is co-editor of the book *The Age of Agility: Building Learning Agile Leaders and Organizations* (<https://www.siop.org/Research-Publications/Professional-Practice-Series/Age-of-Agility>), published in 2021 by Oxford University Press.

Early in her career, Veronica developed a passion for using science-based practices to accelerate the development of learning agility in leaders. In 1987, she began her research on how leaders learn from their experiences based on data from 5,000 leaders. Over the course of her 30+ year career, Veronica has been privileged to partner with hundreds of organizations and their leaders to help develop the mindsets and capabilities that will enable leaders at all levels to not only survive but thrive during the dynamic times in which we live and lead.

Some of Veronica's most influential learning experiences have been growing up on a farm in Iowa, earning a M.S. in Counseling Psychology and Ph.D. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from Iowa State University, working with some of the most respected organizations in the world, and serving as Partner of a leading global consulting firm. Through her work assessing and coaching leaders around the world, she has had a unique window to some of the most learning-agile leaders in the world.



Dr. Kenneth P. De Meuse is a global thought leader on the assessment and development of leadership and has presented his research on learning agility, leadership competencies, and succession planning at professional conferences around the world. He has published more than 50 peer-reviewed journal articles and authored seven books. He is co-editor of the book *The Age of Agility: Building Learning Agile Leaders and Organizations* (<https://www.siop.org/Research-Publications/Professional-Practice-Series/Age-of-Agility>), published in 2021 by Oxford University Press.



In acknowledgement for his contributions to the science and practice of talent management, he was elected Fellow in the American Psychological Association, the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, and the Society of Consulting Psychology. Currently, he is president of the De Meuse Leadership Group LLC, a global network of more than 250 coaches certified on the *TALENTx7® Assessment*.