



Learning Agility and Competencies: Does one predict the other?

Lawrence P. Clark, Ph.D.
An Independent Master Korn Ferry Associate
January 2016

As the concept of Learning Agility becomes more embedded in the talent management processes of organizations the question arises - can other key elements of talent management predict Learning Agility? The purpose of this whitepaper is to report on one such effort.

Drs. Robert Eichinger and Mike Lombardo, founders of Lominger, did much of the early research on Learning Agility. They defined it as:

Learning Agility: As the ability and willingness to learn from experience and subsequently apply those lessons to perform successfully in new or first-time situations.

In addition to the overall concept of Learning Agility, there are five separate sub-factors that cover different aspects of Learning Agility. They are:

Mental Agility: The extent to which an individual embraces complexity, examines problems in unique and unusual ways, is inquisitive and can make fresh connections between different concepts.

People Agility: The degree to which one is open-minded towards others, enjoys interacting with a diversity of people, understands their unique strengths, interests, and limitations, and uses them effectively to accomplish organizational goals.

Change Agility: The extent to which an individual likes change, continuously explores new options and solutions, and is interested in leading organizational change efforts.

Results Agility: The degree to which an individual is motivated by challenge and can deliver results in first-time and/or tough situations through resourcefulness and by inspiring others.

Self-Awareness: The degree to which an individual has personal insight, clearly understands his or her strengths and weaknesses, is free of blind spots, and uses this knowledge to perform effectively.

Learning Agility was first measured using a multi-rater assessment, CHOICES, developed by Lominger. CHOICES provides a comprehensive view of a person's Learning Agility. Even more so than most multi-rater assessments, a person completing a CHOICES survey should know the person being assessed quite well. It is recommended that the person completing the survey know the person being rated for at least 6 to 12 months. Having to know the person well and having multiple raters can create problems for some organizations. Having to know the person also means that CHOICES cannot be used as part of the pre-employment hiring process.

For these reasons and others Korn Ferry recently develop a self-assessment for Learning Agility. The viaEDGE self-assessment measures Learning Agility and each of the five sub-factors. viaEDGE takes the person being assessed about 30 minutes to complete. The Learning Agility and sub-factor scores generated by viaEDGE are highly correlated with the Learning Agility and five sub-factor scores generated by CHOICES.



For more than 20 years Korn Ferry has been collecting management competency data based on its library of 67 competencies. The data has been collected using Korn Ferry’s multi-rater management competency tool, VOICES. Recently that data was analyzed to determine the management competencies most closely associated with Learning Agility and the five sub-factors. Korn Ferry identified 22 competencies related to the overall concept of Learning Agility and 10 competencies related to each of the sub-factors.

The Study

Background

A large financial services company used both viaEDGE and VOICES to focus the developmental efforts for 20 of its global vice presidents. The two instruments provided the framework for developmental discussions with each of the vice presidents. These discussions were conducted by either an internal or external coach. Multiple times during these conversation the question was asked "how are the data in the competencies related to the viaEDGE results. Do the behavior seen by others (VOICES) reflect my self-assessment results on Learning Agility (viaEDGE)?

To answer those questions an analysis was done on the VOICES and vaiEDGE data for the 20 vice presidents. The company chose to use a subset of the total library of 67 competencies. As a result not all the competencies identified by Korn Ferry as associated with Learning Agility and its five sub-factors were assessed. The breakout for the competencies is listed below in Table 1:

Table 1: Competencies related to Learning Agility

Learning Agility	Number of Competencies Related to Learning Agility	Number of Competencies used in the Study
Overall Agility	22	11
Mental Agility	10	5
People Agility	10	4
Change Agility	10	8
Results Agility	10	8
Self-Awareness	10	4

Analysis

The data for the study consisted of two parts. First, a person's overall Learning Agility score and their scores on the five sub-factors were determined by their results on the viaEDGE assessment. The management competency data came from the VOICES feedback report. For this analysis only the data from the independent raters was used, self-ratings by the Learner was excluded. To ensure that the ratings would be comparable across the 20 vice presidents, the competencies were grouped into three groups: the top one third, middle third, and lowest one third. Each competency rated in the top one third was given a score of 3, middle one third was scored 2, and the bottom one third was scored as a 1. An average competency score for overall Learning Agility and the five sub-factors was calculated by averaging the scores for the competencies, from the VOICES report, that had been previously identified by Lominger. The average competency score was then correlated with its respective viaEDGE score.



Results

As Table 2 indicates the correlation between management competencies and viaEDGE scores is highest for People Agility (0.64) and lowest for Results Agility (0.02). The correlation between management competencies and overall Learning Agility is a respectable 0.27.

Table 2: Management Competency Scores, viaEDGE Scores and Correlations

	Overall Learning Agility	Mental Agility	People Agility	Change Agility	Results Agility	Self-Awareness
Competency - Average	1.87	1.79	1.72	2.03	1.99	1.94
Learning Agility - Average	71	50	65	78	56	67
Correlation	0.27	0.50	0.64	0.42	0.02	0.20

The lack of a correlation between management competencies and Result Agility maybe due to the nature of the business. These 20 vice presidents all manage a sales force where you have to deliver the sales. As a result all of them, with one exception, are rated very high on the competencies associated with Results Agility.

Summary

The results of this study indicate there is a relationship between Learning Agility and management competencies. The underlying concepts measured by self-assessment (viaEDGE) are reflected in the results shown by a multi-rater management competency assessment (VOICES). The relationship is particular strong for Mental and People Agility. Confirming the relationship between viaEDGE and critical management competencies should prove helpful to executive feedback coaches. This study had several limitations. First, the number of people (20) in the study is relatively small. Second, not all of the management competencies associated with Learning Agility were used in the study. Still the fact that this relationship between Learning Agility and management competencies was confirm, given the limitations of the study, is significant.