Stay relevant

To stay relevant as a successful leader you must develop on the job. You can never stop seeking stretch assignments and leveraging on-the-job opportunities to improve.

What made you a successful leader in the past is no formula for your future success. And may even be detrimental, if pursued blindly. Research shows in today's and tomorrow's worlds, leadership success depends on your curiosity and willingness to risk and step out of your comfort zone. This includes your ability to adapt and therefore remain relevant.

Leaders in every walk of commerce and community are challenged by the opportunities and threats caused by the converging waves of technology, globalisation, supply chain disintermediation, attitudes and demands of talent, and rapid changes in markets and customers.

These trends mean that your current skills are not a lay down misère for your future prosperity. In fact, your current skills are much less important, many even irrelevant, than your ability to learn, adapt and – in the genre of start-ups – to pivot.

Five facets of learning agility

Learning About Learning Agility, an outstanding white paper from the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), describes five facets of continuous learning (1).

Innovating   Performing   Reflecting   Risking   Defending
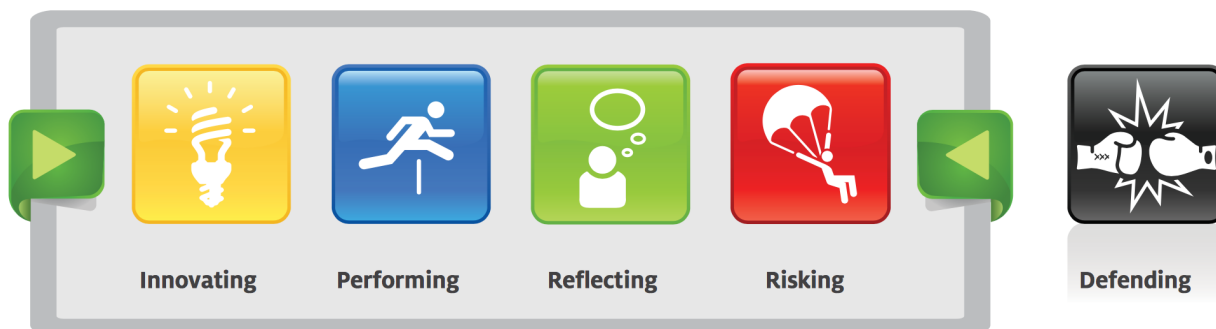
Graphic sourced with acknowledgment from the Center for Creative Leadership.

The first four facets enable your learning agility, and the fifth impedes it, as the CCL graphic illustrates:

1. *Innovating*: Agile learners welcome the opportunity to challenge the status quo.

2. *Performing*: Agile learners are unruffled by challenges and difficulties.

3. *Reflecting*: Agile learners reflect on their experiences, making the personal space to do so.

4. *Risking*: Agile learners deliberately stretch themselves by getting into, rather than avoiding, challenging situations.

5. *Defending*: Agile learners are always open to learning and resist the temptation to become defensive in the face of adversity.

To understand your personal learning agility, reflect on your behaviours in these five categories. Assess yourself using the following table:

	DO YOU…		**DO YOU…**
Innovate	Challenge the status quo in an attempt to make improvements? Experiment with new ideas and endeavour to find the best solution to each individual problem?	OR	Try to achieve the best with what I have at my disposal? Choose the most readily available solution and move on to the next challenge?
Perform	Pick up on subtle cues to build a better understanding of the problem? Stay calm when faced with a challenge or stressful situation?	OR	Trust my intuition to guide me to a solution? Use stress as energy to get things done more quickly?
Reflect	Make time to critically reflect on my experiences? Examine past failures for lessons?	OR	Move quickly from one task to another in order to accomplish more? Put failure quickly behind me in order to focus on the next challenge?
Take risks	Volunteer for roles that are ambiguous, new or otherwise challenging? Take enjoyment from struggling with a challenging problem?	OR	Take on challenges where I know I can be successful? Take enjoyment from managing a well-oiled machine?
Defend	Consider my personal role in both successes and failures? Seek feedback because I need it?	OR	Take credit for success and quickly make excuses for failure? Listen to feedback because others want to give it?

When you read these statements, on balance, which column best describes you?

If you identify more strongly with the statements on the left, you may already embody many of the components of learning agility; you don't ever stop.

If you fall more on the right, you've got room to improve our learning agility. And, not matter, your career stage or age, you *can* learn to learn to be agile.

Tips on how to never stop learning (2)

✓ Rather than choose the first, usually habitual, solution to a challenge, take the time to consider your options and try a more innovative way. Reflect. What worked? What didn't? Why? How will you approach this next time?

✓ Under pressure, don't knee-jerk. Stop and consciously search for alternatives. Consult others. Allow your subconscious to help.

✓ Rather than a pure task-oriented focus on *what* you are doing, pause and ask yourself *why* you are doing it? What can you learn from your motive and *modus operandi*?

✓ Never let a day pass without taking some deliberate risk.

✓ View feedback as a gift, something to be welcomed, not deflected or denied. Feedback is like oxygen; breathe deeply.

Read more about this topic

(1) *Learning About Learning Agility*, a Center for Creative Leadership white paper by Adam Mitchinson and Robert Morris, Ph.D. (2012)

(2) Read pages 9–10 for the authors' outline of developmental activities to become an agile learner.