

LeaderShift: Learn Fast or Go Home

By Joe Hunt

What we value in workers is changing. Emphasis is now placed on employees' ability to learn and adapt on the job, rather than mandating they enter a job with the skills required to do everything. While this shift in emphasis has certainly accelerated in recent years, the underlying competency which serves as its indicator has always existed. Unfortunately, most are either unaware of its existence, or more frustratingly, do not have the tools to measure it.

The **LeaderShift Architect** - a proprietary talent assessment system developed through decades of collaborative research and practice - is designed to both identify and grade the competencies most imperative for any need.

In today's ever evolving professional environment, one *LeaderShift* competency, has emerged as the single best determinant and predictor of future success on the job. That competency: "Learning Agility."

Two Types of Workers

In the old system of classification, workers were generally divided into two categories - white collar and blue collar. On one hand were the "knowledge workers." These positions dealt with knowledge and information and typically required advanced education.



This generally described most everyone working in an office. On the other hand, were the manual workers - those whose workplace was a factory, plant, field, or job site.

When these delineations were initially formed, knowledge was a commodity. Access to education, apprenticeships, or vocational training was not available to all. In today's modern workplace, knowledge is no longer restricted or unattainable due to most individuals' situations. Anyone can access knowledge on anything, from anywhere, at any time. All it takes is a smartphone or an internet connection.

The Age of the Learning Worker

The proliferation of the internet and its boundless access to knowledge, has brought an end to the “Era of the Knowledge Worker,” and brought about the dawn the “Age of the Learning Worker.”

The Learning Worker still in large remains college educated and possesses advanced training, but unlike the endangered knowledge worker, they have adapted a greater understanding of learning process. Furthermore, the learning agility they have developed through this greater understanding allows for drastically improved synthesis and application of new information.



The Value of Learning Agility

Reliance on learning agility above knowledge allows workers to learn on the fly, adapt, and apply their learning to new situations and issues. This sets them apart from less agile knowledge workers. These workers entered the workforce with knowledge passed down from a predecessor of how to work within the parameters of the systems. Knowledge workers tend to be set in their ways, and resistant to change. A team lacking in learning agility is destined to fail. To quote Rear Admiral, Grace Hopper, “The only phrase I’ve ever disliked is, ‘Why, we’ve always done it that way.’”

Today’s employees must be self-directed, able to think for themselves, and apply the core principles they learned to a variety of situations, while continuing to adapt and learn as they go. A learning worker is far more valuable to an organization, because he or she possesses the learning agility required to handle the challenges of an ever-changing workplace environment.

While having specific skills about certain industries or technologies may have worked in the past, what got you here, won’t get you where you need to go. Technology is changing too rapidly to accommodate workers who are pigeon-holed by only knowing how to use certain programs or systems.

What About the Knowledge Workers?

I imagine the picture painted above seems rather bleak for any knowledge workers reading this piece. You likely feel like the old man in *Monty Python’s Holy Grail* protesting, “I’m not dead yet,” while being tossed on the undertaker’s cart.

If you are a knowledge worker, don’t worry, all hope is not lost.



Transitioning from a knowledge worker to a learning worker is not an easy task. For knowledge workers, everything from their academic experience to the work ecosystem has served, over their entire lifetime, to ingrain an old-fashioned way of doing things.

The old-fashioned method may work for things, like hand-churned, homemade ice-cream. When it comes business though, we must adapt to change swiftly. Those who don't will have plenty of time to churn their own ice-cream.

Contrary to the cliché, old dogs are more than capable of learning new tricks. Learning agility is a competency we all possess to varying degrees, and it is one we have the ability to improve. As we improve our understanding of when/how to apply and exercise this competency, we can proficiently develop and demonstrate learning agility.

The new generation of workers brings fresh perspectives and a thirst for knowledge and growth. It's inevitable that their learning worker drive will irreversibly change the face of the workplace. Those that don't develop learning agility will be among the next to go home. Those who embrace this challenge will discover the potential that can be unlocked by combining the best traits of knowledge and learning workers.

				
Innovating:	Performing:	Reflecting:	Risking:	No Defending:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are not afraid to challenge the status quo. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They remain calm in the face of difficulty. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They take time to reflect on their experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They purposefully put themselves in challenging situations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are simply open to learning and resist the temptation to become defensive in the face of adversity.

Becoming a Learning Organization

The evolution of learning workers comes with the growth of “learning organizations.” Learning organizations value collaboration and innovation. They are led by learning workers who adapt and evolve as the industry changes. Instead of having rigid business plans and set of business principles and processes, these companies remain tuned in to disruptive forces within their industries. They embrace these disruptions as tools to steer growth.

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To exemplify this organizational *LeaderShift*, I'd like to refer to a recently published study by Accenture Strategy - *Go Fast, Scale Up...Or Go Home: The New CFO Growth Agenda*. As part of their research, it was noted for the first time since 2008 that cost reduction was no longer the CFO's top strategic priority. Taking its place as the paramount objective was growth – which doubled in importance in 2016.

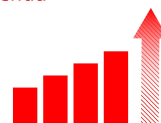
Companies with CFOs who lack the requisite learning agility required to handle the new scope of these changing priorities will not only struggle to compete, much less meet growth expectations. Today's successful CFOs must learn to effectively evaluate ROI on new product development, the impact of acquisitions or divestitures, how consumer habits are changing, and the impact of disruptive newcomers. These skills fall outside what we would have expected from the CFO of yesteryear, but with organizational delayering technological advances, they are now essential for success.

The importance of learning agility is paramount across all organizational functions. As the future of work continues to morph, learning organizations are the ones that will be leading the pack and winning the game.

For more information about how we can aid your transformation into a learning organization using the *LeaderShift Architect*, feel free to contact me personally to set up a consultation.

Go fast, scale up...or go home:
The new CFO growth agenda

CFOs have not been focused on growth for years.



71%

of CFOs say their organizations consider growth to be the strategic priority for 2016.

This is a turning point for CFOs.



Just 36% cited growth as a priority in 2014, and only 22% did in 2011.



5%+

74% of CFOs believe their organization's growth will be 5% or higher in 2017, with 24% expecting growth to be in the double digits.



M&A has topped R&D as the primary growth engine. 35% of CFOs say their companies are looking at M&A activity to fuel their growth and ensure they survive disruption. Their main goal: gain new technologies and/or new products and services.

The risks of failure remain high.

37%



of CFOs say that when identifying and evaluating organic growth initiatives, their organizations consider their top priorities to be entering new markets or geographies, and expanding their marketing and sales efforts.



CFOs are flying blind in the new growth agenda.

Consider the number of CFOs that lack visibility into key insight areas:

62%

ROI on new product/service development

62%

Cannibalization effect of new products/services on existing products/services

57%

Accretive or dilutive effect of acquisitions or divestitures

63%

Impact of disruptive new players in markets

66%

How customers substitute products for competitors' or vice-versa

Learn more about how CFOs can prepare to act as quickly as the market demands with our full report:
www.accenture.com/CFOGrowthAgenda

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