



Research
**Does Learning Agility
Predict Team Success?**

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Does Learning Agility Predict Team Success?

The Importance of Successful Teams to Companies

In the current dynamic world, where assignments are becoming ever more complex, the ability to effectively deal with these complex assignments more often than not requires teamwork. That's why companies want to know how to get the best out of teams. The focus on teams has grown in the past decades and companies are still trying to find the right models to ensure that their teams will succeed in a dynamic, evolving, and complex working environment. It's important for companies to investigate what needs to be done to ensure that their teams are able to adapt and succeed.

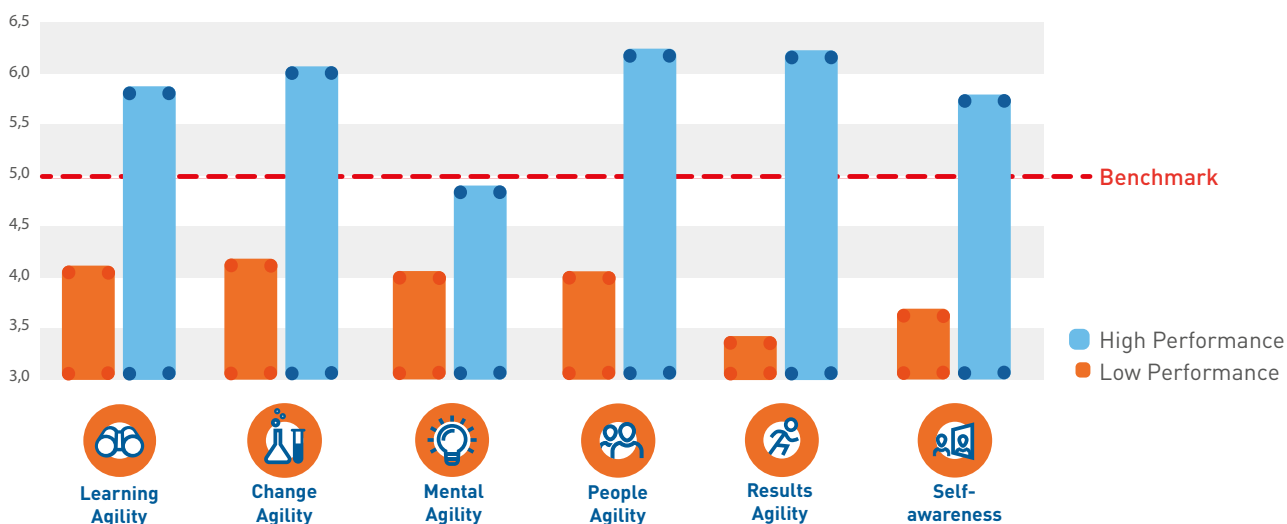
There are a multitude of different models of teams that companies use. Especially agile teams (self-managing teams whereby "individuals manage their own workload, shift work among themselves based on need and best fit, and participate in team decision making" [Hoda, Noble, & Marshall, 2011/2012; Highsmith 2004]) are quite popular in recent years. This article aims to investigate what the interplay is between Learning Agility and team success.

The data for the analysis was gathered from clients that were interested in knowing more about this relationship. They were asked to fill out a short questionnaire about their team(s). The questionnaire was aimed at finding out what type of model each team was (i.e. agile team), and what their performance was over the last year. The investigation looked at both successful and unsuccessful teams, to find out which characteristics make teams successful or unsuccessful. The preliminary analysis focused on the comparison between high and low performing teams only, since there was not enough diversity in team models to draw any conclusions.

The Relationship between Learning Agility and Team Success

High versus Low Performance

The comparison between high and low performing teams showed a clear difference in Learning Agility and the underlying domains, with the high performance teams scoring better compared to the low performance teams. The differences between the two types of teams were found to be significant, except for Mental Agility.



The high performance teams generally consist of individuals who score higher than the population average. The opposite is true for the low performance teams, in which the team members generally score lower than average. These findings are quite exciting as they illustrate that Learning Agility may be able to conveniently predict team success. The findings indicate that for a team to be successful, it needs to consist of people who score above average on Learning Agility and its domains.

Predominant Group Differences

The biggest differences between the groups are found within the domains Results Agility, Self-Awareness, and Change Agility respectively; these three domains contribute most to the differences in overall Learning Agility. It shows that successful teams contain individuals that are able to keep their team goals and individual goals clear in their minds (Results Agility), that they are aware of their individual strengths and weaknesses (Self-Awareness) and lastly are very curious, willing to experiment and wanting to try and tap into new experiences. The latter potentially makes them more innovative, because this provides them with a broader experience set to utilise for problem solving (Change Agility). The added advantage of Self-Awareness is that [previous research](#) has shown that those who score high on this domain have developed the most within their current function in a year's time. Potentially this is because Self-Aware teams are able to implement feedback on how they are doing, so that they are able to perform better in the future. With these three elements working together, it is not difficult to grasp why teams that contain these types of individuals are successful.

It is worth re-iterating how exciting these findings are. It makes sense that the characteristics explained above lead to teams being successful, and the fact that Learning Agility is able to tap into these traits is great. Through the use of Learning Agility one has the ability to potentially find out how successful a team might be.

Team Breakdown

The above analysis illustrates the relationship between Learning Agility and team performance at a macro level. It shows that teams that score high on Learning Agility, are likely to perform better than teams that score low on Learning Agility. However, we can sketch a more nuanced picture by looking deeper into each performance group.

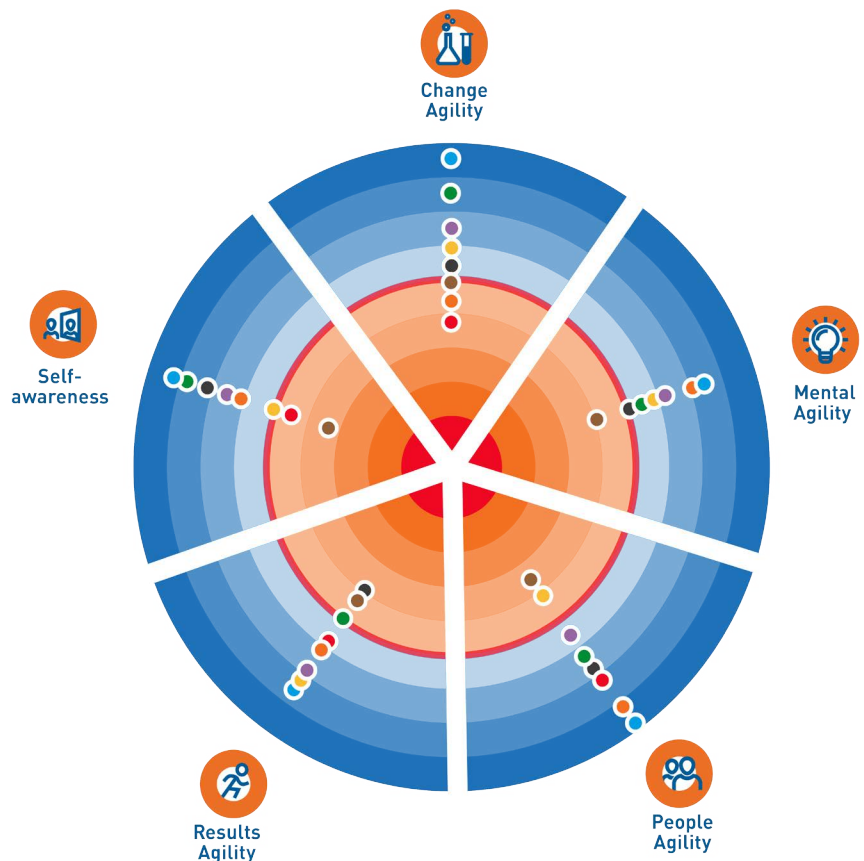
For example: do the different teams within the high performance group share the same characteristics? Do all individuals within the team score high on Learning Agility and its domains? Or do the teams consist of individuals with a combination of strengths and weaknesses that complement each other?

We created a breakdown for each team by graphing each team member's Learning Agility scores, illustrating the interplay between team members. We then compared these breakdowns to each other to assess what commonalities (or dissimilarities) they had. For both the high and low performing groups, the analysis showed that teams within the groups actually have a common profile.

Each of the high performing teams had a similar dynamic between team members; the same goes for each of the low performing teams. We therefore used one high performing team and one low performing team to graphically represent the profile.

High Performing Teams

Each series of coloured dots in the figure represents a team member and their individual scores on the Learning Agility domains. The blue dots represent team member 1, the yellow dots team member 2, etc. The average score on Learning Agility and the domains in the general population is 5 (the red line), meaning that individuals with a score of 6 or higher are considered above average. Ideally, these are the individuals that companies are looking for. Individuals who score below average are in the orange to red area.



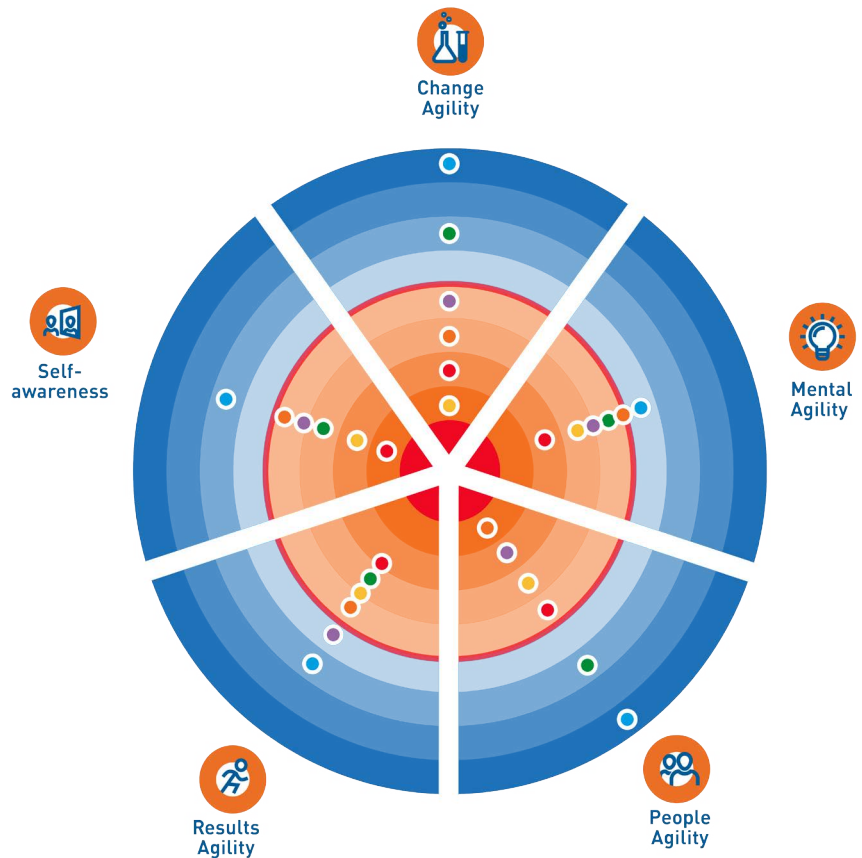
The majority of team members from teams within the high performing group score around or above the population average: their scores are in the blue zone. This is illustrated by the team breakdown in the figure, with all members scoring above average, except for maybe two to three individuals. A tentative conclusion would be that for a team to succeed, it must consist of mainly individuals who score above average on Learning Agility. Furthermore, it illustrates the variation in scores that is found in many of the high performing teams. Overall, about 70% of the team members within the high performance teams score around the average for Learning Agility or above (with exception of the Mental Agility domain, which is around 52%).

What about the team members in the red 'danger zone'? Are they bringing down the overall team performance or do they fulfil a certain function within the team? For instance, they may be more practical, doing the work that needs to be done, leaving the more agile team members more time to innovate, think outside the box and ensure that the team attains its goals in the best possible way. However, we would need more research and data before making such a concrete conclusion.

Low Performing Teams

As can be seen at a glance, the majority of team members in the low performing teams are in the red zone: these teams consist of individuals who score below the population average on Learning Agility. As with the high performing team breakdown, this is not surprising in light of the overall analysis conducted between high and low performing groups. Here too, this analysis highlights the variation in scores

between team members. Approximately 67% of the team members score below average, with exception of the People Agility domain, which is at 53%. The findings demonstrate that Learning Agility is able to indicate in which domains an individual needs to grow in order to succeed, and thus for their team to succeed.



Conclusion

In a quickly changing and evolving landscape, due to for example changes in company vision or technological innovations, research into how teams function has picked up in the last decade. One of the more pressing questions in those studies is: what makes for a successful team?

To contribute to the answer to that broad question, we looked into the relationship between Learning Agility and team success. With the help of clients who were interested in investigating this, we were able to gather a diverse group of teams. The analysis focused on comparing the Learning Agility between a group of high performing teams and a group of low performing teams.

The preliminary findings are quite exciting and illustrate that the high performance group, as a group, scores above average on Learning Agility and its various domains. The difference in scores between the two groups was found to be statistically significant (the exception being the domain of Mental Agility).

The biggest contributors to the differences between the two groups were Results Agility, Self-Awareness and Change Agility respectively. These domains of Learning Agility represent the ability to keep goals clearly set and defined (Results Agility), being aware of one's strengths and weaknesses (Self-Awareness) and the willingness to explore and experience new things (Change Agility). The link between these traits and team success may not be surprising, but Learning Agility is able to tap into these traits with ease.

The analysis was taken a step further by delving into the two specific groups. From each group, a common profile emerged which provided some insights into what benchmarks could potentially be used to ensure team success. Teams that are successful predominantly consist of people who score above the population average, meaning that they have scores of 5 or higher. Less successful teams predominantly consist of individuals scoring below average, with scores of 4 or lower. With that, the analysis provides a benchmark for team success or, for those who see the glass half empty, a benchmark for failure.

Although the findings of this research can already be used in practice, they are also preliminary. We hope to gather more data on both successful and less successful teams, to gather even more insights into the relationship between Learning Agility and team success. If you are interested in participating, [please contact us](#).

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