



Leading Agile Transformation

4 Skills To Advance Your Response to Change

by Joe Folkman

My father had essentially the same job for his entire working life with some changes because of modernization. Things are quite different today. The pace of change now has made the lives of every employee more complicated. There is a great deal of data to suggest that while Generation X workers changed jobs two times in a decade, millennials are expected to change jobs four times in the same amount of time. Also, as you consider the

impact of robotics and artificial intelligence, all employees in the near future will be faced with the need to learn new skills quickly. Being agile not only helps organizations and athletes, but it's also a critical skill for every person. Our grandparents thought about selecting a profession or skill that would keep a person employed for life. In the future, skills and competencies will only keep a person employed for a short period until everything changes.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, countless people experienced significant shifts in how they did their jobs in a very short amount of time. Office workers went immediately from working in a crowded office to working at home. Collaborating with peers became difficult. Typical face-to-face meetings moved online, and for many, proving to their boss that they were working hard became a full-time job in and of itself. For a lot of you the shift was easy, but for some, it was much more difficult. This was a test for your agility. While the pandemic will end, we believe the need for agility will increase every year. Researching agility, we found that the least agile employees rated at the 8th percentile on their overall effectiveness, but those who were the most agile rated at the 89th percentile! Being agile is directly connected to an individual's overall effectiveness. Analyzing data from thousands of managers and individual contributors, we discovered four empowering skills that were keys to helping anyone be more agile. The four essential skills that empower agility are as follows:

1. Being open to learning, listening, and respecting the opinions of others.

Professionally, I have given thousands of people anonymous feedback. It is impressive that protecting people from being personally identified allows them to be more candid in their feedback to others. We know that this feedback is both accurate and predictive. In a few cases, people getting negative feedback are unwilling to accept that feedback from others. They claim the data is biased, they were set-up for failure, or some negative person is responsible for these inaccurate perceptions. The old English proverb, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink," fits this situation incredibly well. A person needs to be willing to listen and learn in order to change and develop new skills. More importantly, those you work with are better informed than you about what changes would make you more effective.

2. Willingness to Stretch.

Learning a new skill will require some time and effort.

Many people feel completely overwhelmed by the amount and pace of work. When a person feels overwhelmed, they will persistently resist taking on additional challenges. The new skills that need to be learned are often not immediately utilized in the current job, so the effort may not have an immediate payoff. To be agile, people need to be willing to put forth some additional effort.

3. Optimism that You Can Change and Improve.

If people assume they cannot change they certainly will not put forth any extra effort.

4. Honesty with Yourself.

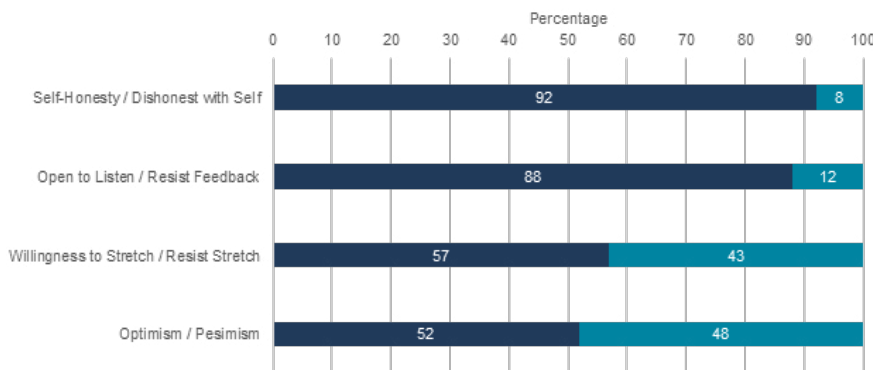
Andy Hertzfeld described how Steve Jobs could create what he called a reality distortion field. Jobs used this to convince coworkers that impossible things were possible. Many people have a reality distortion field for their behavior, causing them to believe they are more effective than they are in reality. The most influential people tend to assume they are less effective than others rate them. This trait is perceived by others as humility.

Improving Agility

In studying the impact of these four dimensions on agility, we discovered that if a person scored above average on all four dimensions, agility would be at the 79th percentile. But, if one of the dimensions were at the 10th percentile or lower, agility would be on average at the 19th percentile. It seems the message here is being above average at all four dimensions and ensuring that none of the dimensions are a problem puts a person in a good position in terms of their agility.

Using our preference assessment, we gathered data from 496 people on the four empowering behaviors above. We find that preference is a good indicator of effectiveness.

The higher the positive score on a dimension, the more likely it's one of your strengths. Low negative scores indicate that this is something you prefer less, and possibly, it is a weakness. People tend to have better skills in those behaviors they prefer. In the graph below, we show our results. Note that the blue line indicates the percentage of people with a preference for Self-Honesty, Open Openness to Listening, Optimism, and Willingness to Stretch. The orange line indicates the opposite end of the continuum. From the data we have gathered thus far, self-honesty and openness to listening are strong preferences for most people but optimism and willingness to stretch are not.



For some, change is hard; for others, change is exciting and something they crave. For you, the ability to adapt to change quickly and efficiently is a skill that can be developed and should be prioritized now.

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About Us

Zenger Folkman relentlessly seeks to rise above the inconsistent, and sometimes misleading, nature of popular leadership philosophies and beliefs brought on by opinion. The discipline of leadership and those who pursue it deserve better. Our most valuable asset is the expertise of combining hard data and statistical analysis with logical explanations and actionable application that help individual leaders thrive and organizations succeed.

