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The economic downturn that began in December 2007 and the subsequent recession have changed the landscape of business dramatically. These events, more than ever, require our executives to perform as all-weather leaders; individuals with the right mix of skills and characteristics to make the right decisions, whatever challenges they face.

onsider Amazon and Netflix, who have emerged as stronger, with greater competitive advantage than competitors Barnes & Noble and Blockbuster, who struggle with new commercial challenges and uncertainty. At the time of writing, Amazon is expanding, and Netflix subscribers and shares are on the up, particularly after striking a deal with Apple that will include a streaming video service from Netflix. In contrast, Barnes & Noble is for sale and Blockbuster has filed for bankruptcy.

The New Yorker noted Blockbuster's slowness to evolve in relation to e-books and its nimble competitor Amazon. Its leaders' inability to learn and adapt quickly to changing markets proved fatal. Likewise, B&N's leaders believed that their "clicks-and-mortar" strategy would viably carry them into the future; instead it has slowed its growth (Surowiecki, October 18, 2010).

We present a leadership model for the 'all weather leader,' arguing that the leaders of successful companies demonstrate learning agility. We define "learning agility" as the ability to learn from one's experiences and apply that learning to new and different situations. Further, we discuss the role of 'context' in successful leader selection, focusing here on rigorous assessment of organizational culture in assessing candidate fit. Our L-I-V-E-D model highlights the pivotal role of learning agility in leadership and explains how these key elements can be assessed.

# What Makes an 'All-weather Leader'?

Warren Bennis (1998) said, "It seems the more that is written about leadership, the less we seem to know." And he's right; there appears to be a myriad of sometimes conflicting leadership theories and models that identify the critical competencies and behaviors required to excel as a leader. While no two theories or

models are the same, there are some consistent themes in the current thinking.

We know that a great leader can make all the difference to the success of an organization. However, some leaders thrive in one firm and then fail in another. What accounts for this difference? Change. Organizations change over time and businesses require a leader who has the capacity to adapt to the changing context. By narrowly focusing on a leader's individual characteristics, rather than also looking at how individual characteristics fit into a broader organizational, cultural and socio-economic context, we may lose the opportunity to evaluate and select leaders in a holistic and business-driven way. Given the unpredictable and uncertain times that we currently face, failing to take a more holistic view of leader selection is likely to detract from organizational success.

Despite the importance of selecting the right leaders, we repeatedly encounter organizations whose leadership selection models are decidedly lacking in delivering the leadership talent that is needed. More often than not, current selection approaches involve numerous interviews focused on past career history and accomplishments. We know this approach falls short in these times. The game has changed, and agility has become one of the most important competencies for the next decade. Does your business need leaders who will replicate what already exists or do you need something different?

# Where Does Culture Fit in?

Organizational culture is how we do things around here, the glue that holds the organization together as a source of identity and distinctive competence (Bass, 1992; Schein, 1992). Shamir and Howell (1999) discuss how the study of leadership needs to reflect not only leaders' personal characteristics, but

also the situational factors that influence leadership effectiveness. Country culture also is a factor, and recently, there has been global research discussing cross-cultural leadership traits. For example, House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorman and Gupta (2004) found that certain leadership traits like integrity are universally endorsed while other traits are culturally contingent (e.g., the importance and meaning of the traits "participative" and "team-oriented" are highly dependent on specific culture settings). This reinforces the importance of taking a cross-cultural perspective in selecting leaders for our global businesses.

# From 'Person-Centered' to 'Context-Centered' Leadership

To date, considerable focus has been given to the individual characteristics required of the leader, a 'person-centered' approach. We believe that a paradigm shift must continue away from this traditional focus to also embrace the context in which the leader has to operate; a 'context-centered approach.' Historically, contingency models of leadership (e.g., Fiedler and Garcia 1987; Hersey and Blanchard, 1984; Vroom and Yetton, 1973; House and Mitchell, 1974) touched on the "context" issue by discussing the interaction amongst variables, like the personal style of the leader and situational factors such as the characteristics of people being led and/or the nature of the task. These early models tended to focus on more tactical as opposed to more strategic contingency factors.

Context-centered leadership goes further and focuses more broadly on demands that the environment makes on the leader and includes both internal and external factors, such as the internal organizational culture and the external conditions in the marketplace. Bromwell's work (2008) suggests organizational context likely influences the relative importance of

specific skills and attributes required for effective leadership. Understanding precisely what these are and how they impact that particular organization will determine what qualities the leader needs to possess to ensure the right fit between leader and organization. Combining the analysis of the current context—the external conditions, business strategy and internal culture—alongside the analysis of the person—traits, behaviors and competencies—allows us to select the leaders who best fit the business and can drive it in the desired direction.

an individual's attitude or values. These elements may be emphasized or weighted differently based upon the particular context in which they are required. In the next section, we discuss why each of these is important to leadership.

## IQ — Intelligence

For our purposes here, we define intelligence or cognitive ability as the "mental activity directed toward purposive adaptation to,

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By focusing on the dynamic relationship between the leader and the business/organizational context, businesses are more likely to find leaders who break the mold and challenge some of the sacred cows in the C-suite, while appreciating and shifting the current culture. Before we can determine the fit of a particular leader for a given situation, we must understand the key elements of leadership. What are those key elements?

## The Five Core Elements of Leadership

Looking across numerous leadership theories/models (trait theories such as John Gardener's leadership attributes, behavioral models such as Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid, contingency models such as Hersey-Blanchard's Situational Theory, and Bass and Riggio's (2006) transformational model), we see there is broad agreement around a number of measurable elements related to personal traits of leadership effectiveness. For example, Yukl (1994) describes influencing/motivating, maintaining effective relationships and making decisions as consistent themes across the leadership research. Dubrin (2001) discusses emotional stability, enthusiasm, drive and trustworthiness as key traits for effective leaders. These all map onto the elements we will discuss as part of our leadership model: an intellectual element, an emotional element, an element that focuses on an individual's motivation to succeed and

selection and shaping of, real-world environments relevant to one's life" (Sternberg, 1985, p. 45). Sternberg's theory comprises three elements: analytical, practical and creative, all of which are keys to managerial intelligence (Sternberg, 1997). Cognitive ability has been shown to be the best single predictor of job performance in a wide range of occupations, as well as leadership success (e.g., Dulewicz & Higgs, 2002; 2003b; Ones, Viswesvaran, & Dilchert, 2005). Research by Pearman (1999) reports that cognitive complexity (IQ) accounts for nearly 24 percent of successful leadership. However, while intelligence is an important element, there is strong evidence that the brightest individuals are often not the best leaders, as they struggle to work with less intelligent colleagues. While strategic and quick thinking, High IQ leaders often fail to understand and motivate colleagues (Goleman, 1995).

## EQ — Emotion

Emotional intelligence is defined in the literature as the awareness of and ability to manage one's own emotions, as well as the emotions of others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Goleman (1995) added that emotional intelligence includes the ability to analyze and understand relationships, take someone else's perspective, resolve conflicts and manage one's own anger.

Research suggests that the most successful leaders possess high levels of Emotional Intel-

ligence (EI), while leaders with lower levels of EI are more likely to derail from senior positions (Higgs and Dulewicz, 2002). Prati, Douglas, Ferris, Ammeter and Buckley (2003) state that "the emotional intelligence of the team leader is important to the effective functioning of the team; the leader serves as a motivator toward collective action, and facilitates supportive relationships among team members."

## VQ — Values

The VQ or Values element focuses on integrity, honesty, sincerity, trust and respect and is the basis of what many leadership theorists have described as "character." O'Reilly and Pfeffer (2000) compared the performance of eight companies that had superior results in their sector with the performance of similar companies, matched on size and industry sector. The more successful companies had approaches to leadership that were based on values. As the authors put it, "The most visible characteristics that differentiate the companies we have described from others are their values and the fact that the values come first, even before stock price." Their values acted as guiding principles that helped them make crucial and difficult decisions. VQ has a solid base of research (Hogan and Hogan, 2001; Collins, 2001) and is clearly important when it comes to role-modeling desired behaviors and walking the talk. Self-management, e.g. courage (VQ), accounts for a little more than 16 percent of successful leadership (Pearman, 1999).

## DO — Drive

According to Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991), drive has been referenced in the leadership literature as a broad term that includes achievement, motivation, ambition, energy, tenacity and initiative. In the current model, DQ is concerned with the engagement aspect of leadership that inspires people into action. It covers passion, self-motivation, resilience and tenacity (Dulewicz and Higgs, 2003a). Decisiveness, e.g. action and results orientation (DQ), accounts for slightly more than 13 percent of successful leadership (Pearman, 1999).

# The Fifth Element — LQ — Learning Agility

We see Learning Agility as the "X" factor in this dynamic and unpredictable business

# **EXHIBIT 1:** PHASES OF LEARNING AGILITY

1

#### Becoming aware of needs

Having a perception of one's environment through mindfulness of the gaps between skills and requirements.

2

## Experimenting with new behaviors

Critical change phase with different behaviors followed by learning review and adaptation.

3

## Raising self-perception of the learning cycle

Internalize elements of Kolb's four-stage process from others.

4

#### Seeking feedback

Add extra input to the learning process from others.

5

#### Internalizing learnings

New behaviors become integrated into the skills set of the Leader.

6

#### Seeking new experiences

Ensure a high level of exposure to different and challenging situations.

world. This is the ability to learn from one's experiences and apply that learning to new and different situations. Focus on "learning agility" derives from research by Sternberg, Wagner, Williams and Horvath (1995). They distinguished learning agility as different from basic intelligence and related it to concepts such as 'street smart,' 'savvy,' or possessing 'common sense.' Sternberg found that this learning intelligence was more predictive of organizational success than basic IQ. Eichinger & Lombardo (2004) later defined learning agility as being "able and willing to derive meaning from all kinds of experience." Their business, Lominger (2000), researched learning quotient (LQ) across 10 companies and built an informal assessment model around the trait.

Given what we know from this research, leaders who demonstrate learning agility consistently exhibit the following behaviors:

- Seek out new challenges.
- Seek feedback from others and self-reflect.
- Record 'learnings' for future review.
- Evaluate their experiences and draw practical conclusions.
- Plan what they will do as a result.

While learning agility cannot be taught, it can be developed in those who have the innate trait. Maintaining momentum with planned experiences that stretch the leader is a key element in developing learning agility. Exhibit 1 describes the phases a leader goes through on his/her journey toward learning agility.

Understanding its importance in a global and turbulent business environment, a number of organizations are addressing learning agility in leadership selection. The authors have designed assessment programs incorporating learning agility for Asda (the U.K. subsidiary of Wal-Mart) and for Grundfos, a global equipment manufacturer.

# Learning Agility — The Integrative Factor

How does learning agility relate to the other key components of leadership? We see learning agility as the integrative factor that governs the ways in which the five core elements combine to deliver the level and nature of leadership required by the organization's context.

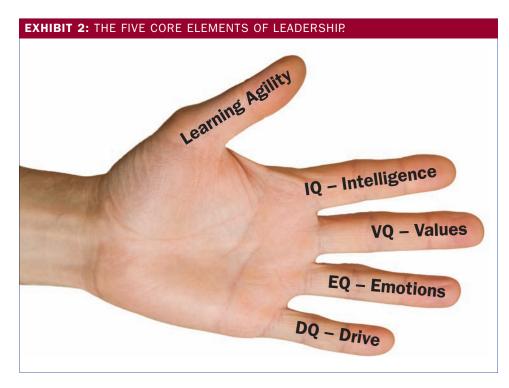
Using our "hand" analogy, learning agility provides the 'thumb' for the leader, which interacts with the other four 'digits' (elements) of intelligence, emotions, values and drive. For example, if leaders are able to learn from their experiences and adapt to different

contexts, they will be able to deploy the suitable levels of intelligence, values, emotions and drive for the situation.

Consider the manner in which learning agility interacts with intelligence: An individual with high intelligence but low learning agility may be able to perform better in examinations requiring accurate recall of knowledge, as compared to a person with high learning agility but average intelligence. However, put the high IQ individual into a different environment and he or she may fail to ask penetrating questions to increase understanding, may not consider the motives and expectations surrounding action, and, above all, might not recognize the situation as a learning opportunity at all. Conversely, we know that people with high learning agility will be more likely to seek out information from their surroundings and carefully and consciously apply that knowledge to help them form better judgments. The same types of interactions pertain to learning agility and values, emotions and drive.

# Achieving a 'Fit' Between Leader and Context

We use a "hand and glove" analogy, as shown in Exhibit 3, to describe the concept of "fit."





Determining 'fit' entails evaluating the internal and external factors that define the organization's context, based on the current reality and the vision of the anticipated future. What are the external conditions and challenges that must be faced in the external environment? What business strategy must be executed to address the external challenges? Is the company growing, or does a new growth platform need to be developed and executed? Is the current organizational culture going to facilitate strategy execution or does it need to change? The answers to these questions help define the competencies needed by an effective leader for that organization.

In essence, an effective selection process measures 'the hand' of the leader and ensures it suits the context/'glove' to promote a successful 'fit.'

# Defining the Glove for Your Organization

The glove represents the context in which the leader must work—the external conditions, the business strategy and the internal culture. External conditions include market conditions, customer feedback and competitor research. Given the current conditions, is your organization seen as a market leader, a smaller, but trusted player, or a rapidly emerging threat? This, in turn, is likely to impact the business strategy.

The business strategy will detail whether the organization is looking to expand, diversify or consolidate its offerings. For other organizations, the strategy may be about surviving. The business strategy will then break down the overall goal into tangible actions for relevant regions/markets and products or services, etc. The type of strategy will inform the required internal culture. If the organization is wishing to follow an aggressive growth strategy with significant diversification, it may need to shift the current culture to be successful. Alternatively, if the strategy requires stability and security, the current culture still may be valid.

# EXHIBIT 4: CULTURE AUDIT RESULTS FOR WORKING ON TASKS. Working on Tasks T1 T2 T3 T8 T6

# Determining the Current vs. Desired Culture

In turbulent times like these, you should review your culture to understand fully the current state and where your organization needs to go in the future. One way of doing this is to undertake an internal culture audit. There are several tools on the market that assess internal culture. We use our Cultural Alignment Indicator (CAI), which measures where the organization currently lies on various aspects of culture. Our tool groups these into three areas: working on tasks, working with people and change, and learning orientation. For example, the aspects of working on 10 tasks are broken down into bipolar scales, as shown here:

T1	Deliver Perfection	$\rightarrow$	Meet Requirements	
T2	Γ2 Remain Focused		Multi-task	
Т3	Be Structured	$\rightarrow$	Remain Flexible	
T4	Be Measured	$\rightarrow$	Be Dynamic	
T5	Provide Options	$\rightarrow$	Offer Simplicity	
Т6	Be Ambitious	$\rightarrow$	Be Content	
T7	Persevere	$\rightarrow$	Know when to quit	
T8	Get small things right	$\rightarrow$	Focus on big things	
Т9	Be Considered	$\rightarrow$	Be Decisive	
T10	Make Savings	$\rightarrow$	Invest in the best	

For the purposes of assessing and selecting leaders, we administer the culture audit to

## Case Study: Context-based Leader Selection at a Top UK Retailer

Company Z, a UK supermarket group recognized as one of the UK's top 'Every Day Low Cost' (EDLC) retailers, realized it needed an infusion of new leadership talent to help it weather the effects of the world recession. Despite its favored market position, Company Z was facing fierce competition. Prices were being driven down, while quality expectations remained high.

With its reputation of caring for customers, colleagues and excellence, Company Z was positioned to attract luxury-oriented customers forced to move "down-market." However, retailers often perceived as 'higher cost but higher quality' started playing a new game as well, such as pushing two-for-one type meal deals, targeting a population hungry for luxury at low cost. Company Z faced the challenge of attracting that population, as well as other target markets. Perhaps go online? Maybe offer more non-food products such as electrical, home ware, clothes and toys? Uncertain, it needed a shot of new thinking.

A new strategy would call for a shift in organizational culture at Company Z, one that promotes innovation, willingness to risk new ideas and encouraging the reflection time that accompanies learning. That kind of culture is a far cry from the fast-paced, performance-driven norms of the retail world. Company Z would have to synthesize formerly opposing cultural styles—fast-paced versus reflective, creative and innovative versus highly action-oriented, an internal focus and tradition of nurturing and caring versus an external focus on the market and frequent change.

This shift in emphasis would require more commercially oriented leaders who focus on the competition, market conditions and consumer spending habits, while remaining quick-acting and decisive with new market shifts. Currently, its leaders were respected for having the ability to build relationships, understand and influence others, with high emotional intelligence, integrity and levels of drive.

Company Z's existing leadership selection model was heavily focused on growing talent from within, its leaders often selected in their own image. Promotions were made during internal talent reviews, based on anecdotal data and gut feeling, rather than objective selection criteria. It was no surprise that the prevailing, heretofore highly successful, culture went unchallenged. It became clear that Company Z needed an infusion of more learning agile leaders, and, in the current climate, that required new leaders placed in key roles throughout the company.

Through consultation with Z, we developed the contextual behaviors required at different management levels using the LIVED model. Previous attempts to recruit leaders from the outside had not always proved successful. While these outsiders possessed the qualities existing leaders lacked (Learning Agility, Intelligence), they didn't always have sufficient levels of the culturally acceptable qualities—Values, Emotion and Drive—to ensure a good fit with the organization and often left soon after joining. We needed to help Z select leaders who demonstrated acceptable behaviors in all LIVED areas, but with an emphasis on LQ and IQ for the highest levels of management, given the desired strategic direction.

The new LIVED selection process was a significant leap from the previous interview-based process. It included a 360, simulations, personality assessment, and a structured interview. This multi-method approach provided a holistic picture of the individual while allowing robust coverage of all LIVED areas. By reviewing past experiences (interview), current performance (360) and work-style preferences (personality assessment) and evaluating performance in a new situation (behavioral simulation), it allowed us to explore the individual's level of learning agility and how readily they could transfer their knowledge and experience and apply it in a different context.

The outputs allowed the executive team to identify which individuals had the traditional and culturally acceptable profile and which individuals could potentially add something new or different to senior management, particularly in the areas of LQ and IQ where current leadership skills were weakest. This information could then be used to make talent decisions for internal colleagues and to identify where external talent should be recruited into the business.

Participants, HR and executives all have received this process very positively, with 95 percent of all feedback being enthusiastic. It provided decision makers with information that led to discussions of how to develop more strategic and learning agile leaders through job and project rotations. Already there has been recognition that every individual has different things to contribute to the business and that having a one-size-fits-all leader can create problems. Elements of Learning Agility are now viewed as key levers to pull to not only improve individual leadership effectiveness but also broader organizational effectiveness.

key stakeholder groups, e.g., the top team, managers and a sample from each department and level. We then have in-depth discussions regarding how much they want the new leader to fit this current culture profile—how much the individual is expected to maintain the status quo or break the mold. We have found it helpful to facilitate dialogue among key stakeholders to discuss which of the cultural aspects add most value or are most critical for success of the business strategy. This provides useful information for the preferred profile of a potential leadership candidate.

Some organizations use their annual employee survey to assess the current culture of the organization. The results then can be discussed with key strategic stakeholders to explore which directions on the bipolar scales they want the organizational culture to move and strategies for achieving this. An example is shown in Exhibit 4.

A culture tool also can be used to assess a candidate's fit. We ask the person to complete the tool, rating each scale based on his or her preferred culture. This 'fit' can be defined more closely by understanding how each leadership characteristic aligns to the desired

culture. For example, say your organization would like to shift the culture to be more pragmatic with a faster pace. Certain task behaviors within the culture support this and align to the leadership area of 'drive.' Thus, when assessing drive, it is crucial that a candidate demonstrate these behaviors to a very high degree.

# Assessing the 'Hand' of the Leader

Once the aspects of culture are determined and the external conditions are understood,

we settle on how to best measure the five key leadership components (Quotients) within the LIVED model. Table 1 represents an overview of each LIVED component and how to assess each component to ensure future leaders can demonstrate the required skills.

We recognize that learning agility is more difficult to assess than the other quotients set out in our leadership LIVED model. However, we still must face this challenge in this time of uncertainty. Effective leaders must demonstrate this capability or risk poor performance, especially through tough and changeable times.

We use a variety of assessment methods to ensure comprehensiveness, validity and robustness of the process: behavioral assessments (simulations, a competency-based interview and a 360-degree feedback assessment), ability tests and a personality questionnaire. This multiple-method approach allows for the fact that certain tools are better at assessing some LIVED components than others as is shown in Table 2.

### Conclusion

The concept of leadership 'fit' never has been more critical than it is now. Knowing that fit is an ideal concept, we can approximate it more closely with a solid set of contextual tools. Assessing "person-centered" leadership remains essential, but it can be made more accurate and realistic when assessed within the organizational and business context. The concepts of measuring 'fit,' both in leadership characteristics and culture, provide organizations with a basis upon which to identify effective leaders, leading to improved business performance and bottomline results. We further suggest that the most important personal leadership characteristic required is that of learning agility—the integrative factor that enables the all-weather leader. In the words of Bennis and Thomas (2002), "Learning to learn is the key to becoming a leader." P&S

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TABLE 1. THE LIVED MODEL AND HOW TO MEASURE IT								
LIVED	Sub-components	Why is it important?	How can it be measured?					
LQ	<ul> <li>Open-mindedness</li> <li>Flexibility</li> <li>Willing to reflect/change</li> <li>Learn from mistakes</li> <li>Keep up-to-date</li> <li>Interest/curiosity</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Ok to make mistakes, but not to repeat them.</li> <li>Must develop self and others or get left behind.</li> <li>Constantly search for improvement, reach for excellence.</li> </ul>	Personality questionnaires  Exploratory Interviews  Business Simulations (e.g., Inbox with 'real time feedback' on actions taken)  Capturing Candidate reflections after a scenario.					
IQ	<ul><li>General intelligence</li><li>Specific aptitudes</li><li>Dealing with complexity</li><li>Cognitive judgment</li><li>Critical reasoning</li></ul>	Potential and performance are related to intellectual abilities, specific aptitudes and overall common sense.	Psychometric ability tests     e.g. abstract, verbal,     numerical, and spatial tests     Business Simulations e.g.     a Case Study or Analysis     Exercise     Situational Judgment Tests					
VQ	<ul> <li>Moral and ethical values</li> <li>Diligence</li> <li>Conscientiousness</li> <li>Integrity and reliability</li> <li>Honesty and sincerity</li> <li>Trust and respect</li> </ul>	At the heart of a leader must lie trust     Trust is built on acting in accordance with, and being seen to act in accordance with your stated values and principles.	Competency Based Interviews (CBIs) e.g. focusing on Honesty and Integrity     Psychometric tools e.g. integrity tests (Giotto test)     Business Simulations e.g. a Role play or Group Exercise					
EQ	Recognize/manage own or others emotions     Manage impact on others     Influence others     Interpersonal sensitivity	Working with colleagues and stakeholders, understanding their views and being able to get your point across.	Psychometric tools e.g. emotional intelligence tests     Business Simulations e.g. a Role play or Group Exercise     360 feedback					
DQ	<ul> <li>Passion/vitality</li> <li>Self-motivation</li> <li>Tenacity/resilience</li> <li>Initiative/ambition</li> <li>Focus/Goal/Result orientated</li> </ul>	Being motivated to do something Passionate about doing it to the best of your ability.	<ul> <li>Psychometric tools e.g. personality questionnaires (Saville Wave)</li> <li>CBIs e.g. focusing on past achievements</li> <li>Business Simulations e.g. a Role play or Group Exercise</li> </ul>					

TABLE 2. MEASUREMENT METHODS						
LIVED Component	360 Feedback*	Analysis Exercise - Presentation*	Ability Test	Deep Dive Interview		
LQ	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$		$\sqrt{}$		
IQ	$\checkmark$	$\sqrt{}$		$\checkmark$		
VQ		$\sqrt{}$		$\sqrt{}$		
EQ		$\sqrt{}$		$\checkmark$		
DQ	$\checkmark$	$\sqrt{}$		$\sqrt{}$		

**Key:** Blank = no measure,  $\sqrt{\ }$  = measure,  $\sqrt{\sqrt{\ }}$  = strong measure

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