

Kim's response to a question posted on LinkedIn.

Question: Executives need to be innovative and adaptive in today's challenging, changeable work environment. This means leaders need to develop and practice a fundamentally different set of capabilities. How do you develop today's leaders for tomorrow's adaptive world?

I agree that innovation and adaptability are important and somewhat related, but they're not the same thing. I'll speak to adaptability and being effective in a VUCA environment. It's helpful to have a valid construct that can guide assessment and development of this capability, and learning agility is that construct. Learning agility is the ability to transfer what's been learned in one situation to a different, challenging situation. It's been described as "knowing what to do when you don't know what to do," and there's significant research support to show that this construct predicts leadership success in a VUCA environment. Although it sounds pretty simple – being adaptable and able to transfer learning – learning agility is a multi-faceted meta-competency. Like any other competency, learning agility can be assessed and developed. There's a personality component in all competencies, and learning agility is strongly driven by personality traits. People high in learning agility tend to be achievement-oriented, insatiable learners. They are more curious, less averse to risk, more self-aware, more resilient, and have higher emotional intelligence. In short, you could say that those high in learning agility are comfortable in a broader range of situations. And though personality is important, it doesn't have to be our destiny. Our preferences for patterns of thinking and behaving can change with focused, motivated practice. Developing learning agility mainly happens by intentionally placing myself in situations that are uncomfortable and learning to expand my range of comfort. The simple truth is that we are more effective in situations in which we're comfortable (or less uncomfortable). There are neurological reasons for this, and understanding and developing learning agility is a powerful driver of success in our complex and volatile world.