

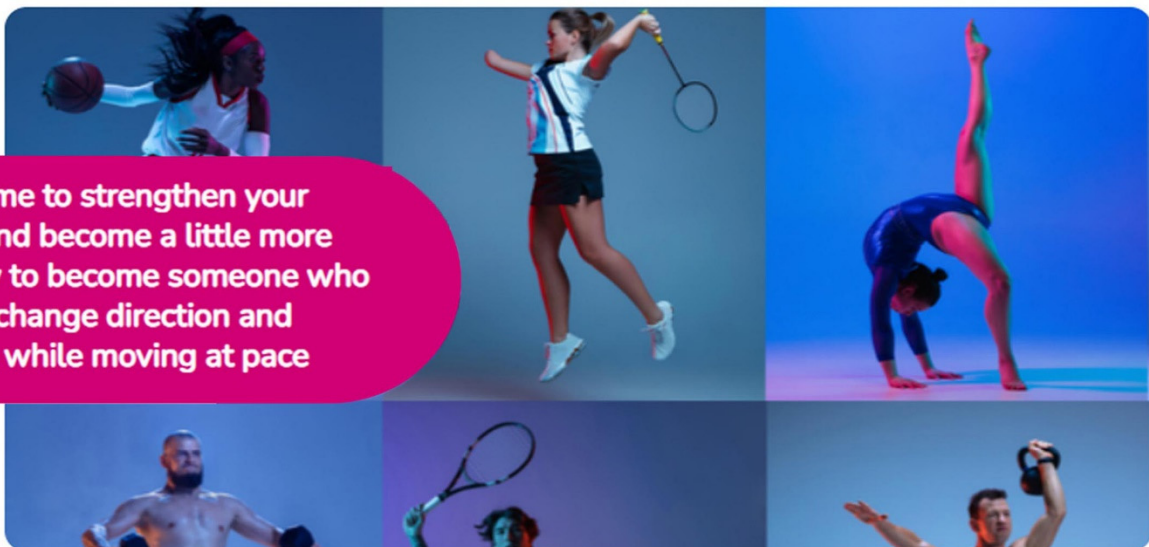
Pivoting at pace: The secrets of building personal agility at work

Written by Patrick O'Brien CMgr FCMl

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Now is a great time to strengthen your agility muscles and become a little more agile. Here's how to become someone who can comfortably change direction and remain in control while moving at pace



Agility refers to an organisation's ability to adapt to changes in their turbulent environment; how well do they cope, how responsive are they, and how able are they to pre-empt change? 'Organisational agility' thus reflects where they sit: ahead of, or behind, that change curve.

Despite the uncertainties they face, effective organisations find ways to raise their performance levels and make positive impacts. They're able to change direction in a timely way while maintaining their business momentum. They've developed ways to think about change and have built sets of capabilities to manage it.

Stephen Covey's [7 habits of highly effective people](#) encouraged us to control what we can control. In this article, we'll frame change at a more granular level, to see what individuals are more able to 'control'.

We'll position individuals as agents in that organisational change process and explore what 'personal agility' might mean. The intention is to provide insights and ideas that can help strengthen your agility muscles, to nudge you closer towards becoming a little more agile.

Do you know what your strengths are?

Understanding your skills and strengths is key to your career development. It can help you define your career direction, celebrate what you are good at and accept the things you are not. Use the CMI Strengths Career Assessment tool to discover your prime and untapped strengths, as well as underdeveloped skills and weaknesses.

[Take the quiz now](#)



Mentally, an agile person doesn't agonise or freeze when things change. Instead, they respond by sizing things up, letting go, and moving ahead to make a positive impact

Patrick O'Brien CMgr FCMl

Get mentally fit

There's merit in exploring those agility muscles through a sporting lens. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM)'s model of physical fitness, of which agility is part, in fact has a lot of parallels to mental fitness. We can consider these physical aspects from a psychological, soft skills perspective. Namely, as an individual, how mentally fit are you, and how can you reach your peak performance levels?

The ACSM considers strength, endurance, and flexibility key health-related components to fitness. They're part of our DNA, which means we have less ability to control them.

On the first component, strength. To what extent are you articulate, decisive, passionate or self-directed? What about endurance – how determined, hard-working, focused or motivated are you? And for flexibility, do people say you're adaptable, curious, inventive or open-minded?

It's important to be realistic when determining strengths. A perceived weakness may often just be an overdone strength. For instance, some may view themselves as unimaginative when, in reality, they are just quite disciplined and focused. Keep in mind that where you perceive some weakness, you've often a well of other compensating strengths to draw from.

Flex your mental muscles

The ACSM set out six skills that, when combined, work to enhance fitness. These are: power, coordination, balance, speed, reaction time, and agility.

- In a physical sense, **power** is the ability to combine both strength and speed. Mentally, this equates to an ability to settle quickly into, and stay focused on, a task. It also speaks to an ability to manage attention, and maintain your attention span, over a long time period.
- **Coordination** is an ability to see and respond to things, using hands, eyes and feet. In sport, those things typically tend to be in motion. Mentally, this equates to an ability to work smoothly with effortless precision. It also speaks to an ability to coordinate a multiplicity of demands. For clarity, coordination is not referring to multi-tasking, juggling tasks, or switching things at speed.
- **Balance** when performing comes next, an ability to keep movements fluid. Critical to this is the ability to remain upright and in control, despite the movements demanded. Mentally, it reflects an ability to organise, keep track, and stay on top of things. It relates to emotional intelligence, too, as it captures an ability to keep emotions in check despite the pressures.
- **Speed** represents time taken to travel a distance. Businesses, however, focus on achievements over effort – ie, impact. Ernest Hemingway encouraged purposeful movement and cautioned us to “never confuse movement with action”. Despite speed being closely associated with agility, ‘pace’ is a more helpful term, as it reflects the distance covered (impact) over time (resource).

Mentally, people are unable to continually run at constant speed. They need time to release, reflect, refresh and recharge their batteries. So, are people able to vary pace for a given situation? Do they manage time to consider where they've been, what they've done, where they want to go? And do they consider what they've learnt along the way to help them progress further?

- **Reaction time** aligns closely with agility. It reflects how quickly people respond to an external stimulus. It is a fair indicator for how well people might cope with change. Mentally, it speaks to an individual's perceptions. To what extent do they operate with raised antennae that are fully turned on, tuned in, looking out into their environment, and listening live for changes?

Relevant expertise contributes here too. The expert sees patterns that a novice doesn't even know exist. This allows them to make sense of the world more quickly and interpret things better. This leads to swifter decisions and actions. Therefore, upskilling in relevant areas is always a productive action. It also makes an effective contribution to building a more agile self.

- And finally, there is **agility** itself, which ACSM defines as an “ability to change the position of the body in space with speed and accuracy”. Mentally, an agile person doesn't agonise or freeze when things change. Instead, they respond by sizing things up, letting go, and moving ahead to make a positive impact. Being time-effective means they're swift to act. They achieve progress by making decisions and converting them into productive actions.

Closing and moving ahead

To build personal agility begins with an exploration of mindsets, those silent assumptions that people hold about the world they know. These shape attitudes, and subsequent behaviours. Interpersonal aspects related to interaction, collaboration and customer focus are especially relevant here.

Next, continue with an exploration of strengths. Understand those that enhance your personal strengths, endurance, and flexibility. Finally, round things out by enhancing specific skillsets, especially ones that relate to mental power, coordination, balance, pace and reaction times.


Knowing that personal agility allows an individual to comfortably change direction and remain in control while moving at pace is a great first step. Though it begs the question: which one aspect is most relevant for you to work on now?

Having isolated your agility muscles, I hope you are now well placed to get to work, as you step out into your growth zone.

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Complete the CMI e-learning course in personal agility

By the end of this module you'll be able to identify eight key personal agility habits, develop your workplace agility and understand how being agile can benefit both your professional and personal lives.

[Explore now](#) 



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Patrick is managing director of The Amanuenses Network in Singapore, which helps people and organisations to engage in personal growth and change through the design and delivery of soft skills training solutions.

www.managers.org.uk/knowledge-and-insights/article/pivoting-at-pace-the-secrets-of-building-personal-agility-at-work/

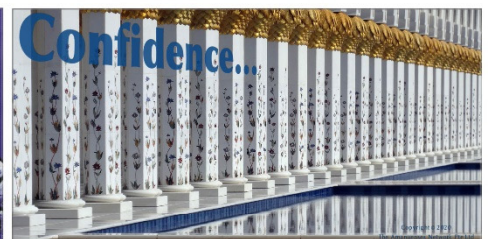
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