Becoming More Agile

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☰ WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how to apply strategies for developing a positive attitude and a change-oriented mindset at work.

Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. An Agile Mindset
2. Agility and the Three Ps of Business
   a. People Make the Difference
   b. Eliminating Process Waste
   c. Products and Services: Test, Learn, Redo
3. Agile Processes: A Shift in Thinking

1. An Agile Mindset

Agility is a mindset that allows us to drive change and to **cope** when things don't go as planned. Remember, the ability to pivot is dependent on the following attitudes and traits:

- Optimism
- Adaptability
- Supportiveness
- Proactivity
- Stability
- Inquisitiveness
- Open-mindedness

While agility is a mindset, there are also tangible things that we can do each day to infuse agility into our work. This lesson takes a look at several of them.

📄 **TERM TO KNOW**

Cope
To deal with a difficult situation in healthy ways.

2. Agility and the Three Ps of Business

Every company has **workstreams**. These are all the tasks that the company performs to complete a project or reach an outcome. In the simplest terms, workstreams are made up of three basic components. Sometimes these are referred to as **the three Ps of business**. Agility is important in each of the three facets:

- People
- Process
- Product (or Service)

[TRY IT]

Can you identify the three Ps in this scenario?

Gretchen Wallace works as a police officer in the second precinct. She's been called to the scene of a minor three-car accident to write a report on the cause of the crash.

In this example, the person is Officer Wallace. The product (service) is a detailed report about a fender bender. The processes she'll likely use are driving to the scene, interviewing people, taking photos and measurements, gathering evidence, and summarizing her findings.

Agility is a skill that Gretchen can deliberately apply to the Three Ps: what she's thinking *(being open-minded and inquisitive)*, what she's doing *(interviewing and gathering)*, and what she's creating *(a detailed report)*. In the next sections, you'll see how your agility skills can be developed in each of these general areas.

Workstream
A sequence of tasks that a business performs to complete a project or reach an outcome.

The Three Ps of Business
People, process, and product.

2a. People Make the Difference

Few would argue that people are the most important asset to any business. This includes owners, managers, and staff. Here are a few ways you can grow your agility skills while you're at work.

- *Take pride.* When you take pride and ownership in your work, it leads to enthusiasm, and enthusiasm is a fantastic way to cope with change. Energetic people tend to know more about their business and have facts in hand when difficult situations arise or they see a new opportunity. Taking pride in your work is one reason it's important to choose a career that you love.

- *Check in regularly.* If you stay in contact with coworkers, you're more likely to know when something has changed or when you can anticipate a roadblock on a project. Whether you work in a profession or a skilled trade, it's important to check in with your team often to receive project updates. Always update your location status so people can reach you in a timely manner.

- *Never stop learning.* A good way to eliminate waste from your work and become more agile is to fill gaps in your knowledge. You should never feel ashamed to ask questions that will improve your knowledge or skills. The more you know, the better equipped you'll be to anticipate, adapt, and recover from situations.

  ⤳ EXAMPLE William is in his second day of training as a bank teller. The bank's branch manager is training William and four of his colleagues. William grasps all the concepts with the exception of remote deposits. He doesn't understand whether the tellers have responsibilities when deposits arrive digitally, but he doesn't want to look silly by asking. After several minutes, a different trainee inquires about remote deposits. "Great question," the branch manager chimed. "I was meaning to discuss that with all of you."

🚩 HINT

Staying agile means that we must be inquisitive and resourceful. Confident people fill gaps in their understanding rather than remaining silent. Remember that many people can benefit when you pose thoughtful questions, and often, people are eager to help.

- *Take care of yourself.* Have you ever had someone approach you with a problem and you found yourself responding with the following?
  "It's not a good time for me right now."
  "Let me call you back because I haven't eaten lunch yet."
  "Ugh, it's been a really long day."

  It's difficult to be agile if you are running on empty. Being proactive and optimistic requires fuel for your mind and body. Without fuel, our emotions tend to go unchecked and it's difficult to think clearly on complex issues. To be an ambassador for change, be sure you do the following:

1. Listen to your body when you're hungry, tired, or ill.
2. Prioritize your work by doing the most difficult tasks while you're fresh.
3. Take five-minute breaks every 25 minutes to recharge your spirit. After several hours, take a 20-minute break.
4. If possible, go for a walk outside to get some fresh air.
5. Eat your lunch someplace other than your work area.

2b. Eliminating Process Waste

Unintended **waste** prevents us from being agile. Consider this example:

⤿ EXAMPLE Oslo is moving from a two-bedroom apartment to a small studio flat so he can be closer to work. He initially planned to rent a 15-foot truck for the move, but he realized that the new studio could not accommodate all his stuff. In a change of plans, Oslo sold about one-fourth of his unneeded belongings and rented a less expensive 10-foot truck for the move. He felt good knowing that he was going to be living a bit leaner.

We are at our most agile when we don't have clutter standing in our way. Like Oslo, it helps to differentiate between what we want and need in order to be able to pivot. Let's see how getting rid of process waste relates to agility in the workplace.

- *Stay organized.* Agility often means acting quickly but thoughtfully. We can react to change faster when we have less physical and mental clutter to contend with. Be sure to delete unnecessary files, emails, and software programs from your computer. Consider using cloud storage if your system is getting bogged down. If you work with tools, be sure your toolboxes, drawers, and storage rooms are clutter-free.

- *Avoid diminishing returns.* To build agile processes, be sure to stay within your project's scope so your

work is always value-added and you aren't generating waste. **Diminishing returns** are incrementally smaller benefits derived from a project as more time and money is invested in the project. This can occur when a project strays from its original objective in an effort to add more quality or features. (It can also occur if a project is not delivered on time.) When you reach diminishing returns, the quality or features you're adding go unnoticed and therefore do not add any value.

See if you can identify the diminishing returns in the example below.

IN CONTEXT

Audrey is a part-time hairstylist at a suburban shopping mall. She's been fascinated by the art of styling for years and she's meticulous about her work. Audrey books eight 30-minute appointments, back to back, for four hours each morning. One of her downfalls is when she aims for perfection. Sometimes, Audrey's appointments run long with an extra snip here and curl there, which is an inconvenience for some of her clients. Some of her late-morning clients feel rushed as Audrey tries to make up for lost time. As a result, she's been losing some of her most valued customers.

As Audrey works to perfect her craft, she's not seeing the bigger picture. While one or two clients might appreciate the added attention, she's losing vital business to competing hair salons.

⭐ BIG IDEA

In today's workforce, more companies are placing a higher value on agility than perfection. That's because agility helps you stay competitive and focused on continuous improvement rather than asking you to layer on additional value which can be difficult to measure or justify.

- *Set aside time for innovation.* Agility means you continuously search for ways to improve your performance at work while still taking care of your daily routines. When you reimagine the way you do things, you can stay competitive in a changing world. You'll begin to anticipate situations rather than just reacting to them. Try to set aside time for innovation at work in parallel with your day-to-day tasks. By having a broader vision of your work and purpose, you'll generate outputs that have a lower risk of becoming obsolete or wasteful.

📄 TERMS TO KNOW

Waste
The unusable remains resulting from a process.

Diminishing Returns
Incrementally smaller benefits derived from a project as more time and money are invested in the project.

2c. Products and Services: Test, Learn, Redo

Part of your agility skill is anticipating and researching new trends in the way you work or possibly figuring out what to do in a crisis. As you read the next example, think about ways you've anticipated or reacted to events in your own life at work or home:

IN CONTEXT

In March 2020, in the midst of a global pandemic, hospitals all over the world faced a shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) in the fight against COVID-19. Sports equipment supplier Bauer Hockey LLC, was there to help. Accustomed to making plastic face shields for ice hockey players, the company pivoted and began manufacturing specialized shields for essential hospital workers—their very first order reached 100,000 units (Bumbaca, 2020)!

Like Bauer, when we use our agility skill to anticipate opportunities and test new ideas, it can open doors. But applying agility this way also involves some degree of iteration. Let's see how a cycle of testing, learning, and redoing is closely tied to agility.

- *Test out new ideas.* To stay agile, we sometimes need to put our newest ideas into the world as a test to see how they perform. While you may not always feel ready to try out your innovations, getting early feedback on them can eliminate waste before too much cost and effort have been invested.

- *Learn from feedback.* Trying out new products, services, and processes takes time—you might not be successful on the first attempt. Be sure to collect feedback and data from the people who depend on your work, such as your clients and coworkers, so you can make improvements to your ideas. Having data and metrics in hand to reflect upon will help guide further decisions.

⑦ DID YOU KNOW

Learning from constructive feedback is a core component of your self- and social awareness skill.

- *Try a redo.* Exercising your agility skill means that hurdles don't stand in your way. If one of your ideas doesn't go as planned, use the feedback that you've gathered to make the idea even better. It's possible that you might need more than one redo, and that's okay. The iterative process of test, learn, and redo around products, services, and processes helps you grow your agility skill and avoids the pitfalls that accompany perfection.

3. Agile Processes: A Shift in Thinking

Agility is a mindset. People and companies stay relevant by building processes, products, and services based on their learned agility skills. More and more, companies are turning to formal, agile frameworks to help them evolve especially in fields of technology.

📋 SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned some strategies for developing **an agile mindset**. One way to think about your agility skill is in terms of **the Three Ps of business**: people, process, and product. In most companies, **people make all the difference**. They stay agile through their enthusiasm, connectedness, and curiosity. They also take action to **eliminate process waste** from their workstreams. By focusing on outcomes that are measurable and value-added, you are using agility as a means for continuous improvement through **testing, learning, and redoing**. With a cultural **shift in thinking toward agility**, individuals and companies alike will be able to grow and adapt in the modern workplace.

REFERENCES

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