
A PROJECT MANAGER'S PERSONAL AGILITY SIGHTINGS¹

Raji Sivaraman, M.S, PMI-ACP, PMP

Principal of ASBA LLC, Singapore/USA, Adjunct Professor, Feliciano School of
Business, Montclair University, USA

Michal Raczka, MBA, PMI-ACP, PMP, CISA

IT Strategy Vice Director at mBank S.A., Warsaw, Poland

Abstract

This paper explores the nuances of different aspects of agility on a personal level of Project Managers honing business/professional agility through Personal Agility (PA) self-assessment. This paper highlights the different flavours of PA that projects and project oriented organization frames need for successful project implementation, whether it is a small/medium/large project in any industry. Agility brings personal value, leadership, navigation, managing the tides of knowledge and putting on the captain's hat of resilience. The lighthouse of this paper guides you to the safe shores by guiding you through several colours of agility such as emotional, outcome, cerebral, flexibility, adaptability and preparedness. Our PA lighthouse guides you to the secure shores of your personal vision, prepare you to tread the long roads of mergers/acquisitions, use Individual and Collective PA Assessment, which is a vital requisite for managing successful projects in the present fast changing environment. Influencing with PA to work on personal visions (long-term plans) and development sets a Project Manager's directions, be it right or wrong. Many strong pillars of PA steers you to your goal alignment, paving the way to project agility, getting ready for opportunities and changes when and where all your stakeholders need it. The problem statement is - "why are projects less than 100% successful?". The aim of our research is to instil in PMs that using our PA methods results in projects reaching the desired outcomes. The findings of our paper are 7 main PA subtleties that are the guiding light to avoiding turbulences.

Key words: Resilience, Healthy procrastination, Project adaptability

Introduction

Decision on management mindset and best practices cuts through impact and quality of personal and group knowledge. Take a journey on a Personal Agility Boat to visualize options, alternatives and opportunities. Visualization is the way to your shore's lighthouse.

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Maintaining leadership competence with personal agility means Return on Trust, diplomacy, maintaining and building attributes at all the stages of involvement. Training at the Personal Agility gym is crucial for balance/speed to cope with Project Managers' business approach and quality and honing of business/organizational agility through personal agility self-assessment. Agility is an amenity. We need to work on our personal and collective habits in order to merit and master Agility.

The quintessential question at hand is; to what changes should we adapt to? There are so many of them. We need to work on our personal thermostat and figure out the right temperature for each entity. We could also say that we live in a VUCA environment, reflecting on the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of general environments and circumstances. We can also say that every project sails in a VUCA environment.

Research results and discussion

In this present era, the trend is such that changes in our environment and projects occur at the very high pace. In order to survive we need to learn and adapt at a much faster pace than ever before. This then step up to the Hyper and Hypo factors of crucial and unplanned agents for vigilance, which includes individual and team characteristics as the Personal Agility Lighthouse shown in the Exhibit 1 below:

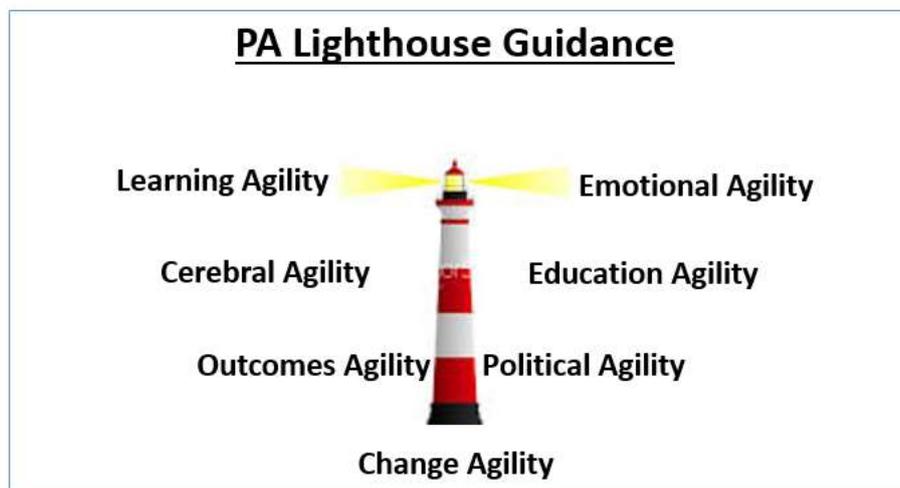


Exhibit 1: Personal Agility Lighthouse Guidance

1. *Learning Agility* equates to learning fast, extracting and applying learnings from proficiencies and realizing results optimally. Learning agility intertwines with personal agility when it comes to 1980s to 2000 born workforce in many ways. Looking beyond the notebook knowledge to survival with individual qualities, skills etc. 'Not being afraid of change' is the rowing rhythm of the millennial coxswain. Learning Agility also means that we need to have the courage to admit that we do not know everything. We need to be brave enough to accept the fact that we can be wrong about our assumptions. Only

then, will we be open to new discoveries and learning opportunities. This situation is visible at the beginning of every project. On one hand, we want to know everything – meet all of the stakeholders' requests and gather all requirements. But at the end of the day, we need to know that it is impossible to know everything. Even if we gather most of the requirements, we need to treat them as assumptions and be open to check them throughout the project timeline.

2. *Cerebral Agility* fetches new viewpoints, shows ease in difficult and obscure situations, coming up with timely guidance. Here is the mantra that combines the ingredients to maturity - know more, read more, be curious – therein lies your adaptive achievement! When you want to have good ideas you need to have many ideas. Having options and ideas is a luxury. Keeping it in a repository radar screen, monitoring, generating more ideas to use and gauge the ideas as and when it is needed. When we manage projects, we need to build interdisciplinary project teams that are able to generate new ideas and options on how to deliver consensus driven projects. Interdisciplinary teams use different perspectives and this guides them to convergent and creative options. For a Project Manager it is also important to wear two hats:

- Leader of a team – Leadership from PMI Talent Triangle (shown below from the Project Management Institute) - These skills help us develop a vision for our team members and inspire them to achieve the target. Leadership is about winning as a team, not as an individual.

- Partner to a business – Strategic and Business Management from PMI Talent Triangle (shown below from the Project Management Institute) - These skills help us analyze business decisions before you implement them. These analyses include cost benefit analysis, strength and weakness analysis, market conditions, legal requirements and compliance, etc.



Putting on the captain's hat of resilience, a Project Manager seeks for the PA lighthouse to be a leader and partner by wanting to know/learn/read more, be more curious about project outcomes, team members, organizational strategy, to list a few guidelines.

3. *Outcomes Agility* means enterprising, inspiring, and pushing to excel beyond one's limit. It is ok to never reach the lighthouse, it is not ok to not improve and strive for excellence. It is ok to understand that excellence in outcomes can be treated as an object that moves in a forward direction constantly inspiring us to better ourselves to excel to the next level.

4. *Emotional Agility* is to develop an understanding of the relationship between moods, thoughts, behaviors and then to take charge of them by practicing skills to cope with intense negative feelings, extreme sadness, anxiety and anger, so on and so forth. One broadens oneself via awareness, coping skills, regulating difficult feelings, killing skepticism and tolerating challenging situations in setting goals. Emotional intelligence and partnership in government visibility and innovation can be smooth sailing by following all of these.

5. *Education Agility* in our context is to do role-playing in companies, getting the feel of the pain points of the person sitting in a different chair and doing the roles that does not necessarily fall into your daily routine.

6. *Political Agility* according to our take is being effective within a setting where politics together with great media and community analysis are an inherent ingredient of a company scenario. Steering multifaceted political waves and navigating towards safe shores without turmoil is viewed as the tugboat that guides and adjusts reality with the political typhoons.

Every project has many stakeholders with different impact on future outcomes. Project Managers must be fluent and transparent in Political Agility in order to cope with different interests, needs and wants. The challenge is that most of the politics are not visible thus require Emotional Agility to capitalize accomplishments throughout the length and breadth of the journey.

7. *Change Agility* in our minds translates to: Are all the stakeholders rowing the boat or are some sinking the boat? In other words, 'what, where, how' are the three questions all the stakeholders need to sync to the same beat for an organization to glide smoothly. Taking the LRM (last responsible moment) concept borrowed from Lean thinking, as an example, authors think that reaching the lighthouse can be achieved without much turbulence if one keeps in mind that commitment can be deferred to the point where non-decision moments will have a negative impact. Therefore, a fair balance can be struck to avoid rocking the boat by understanding that LRM is often essential. Having options is a luxury, but at some point, we need to take a decision and choose one. This is every wave in a PM's ride to make a decision between options.

Many times when we deliver upfront detailed analysis and planning, we take thousands of decisions without a need. Due to this, we lose our natural change agility. Also our team members are affected by old decisions as they may believe that whatever was decided before is still valid and they lose the agility flavor. Project Managers in order to maintain Change Agility need to communicate what the vision is, what decisions were taken and to what options we are open. Both Project Managers and team members

must be aware about LRM so that a shared vision can guide all stakeholders to the shores with emergent and empowered success.

Educational Agility has to happen on both the project level as well as the leadership level in order to increase the process and people alignment. There must be flexibility in all types of problem solving techniques and critical thinking skills to allow innovation and agile thinking to address new challenges in both the next step of the project and the PM. Decision makers of policies at the higher level sometimes are faced with policy challenges that prevent new technology from being implemented quickly. This prevents PMs and their teams from accessing the most advanced technology that could help engage in moving through the projects in a way that feels familiar to them.

This then brings the authors' research to the **Change Agility** waves namely setting, working toward and achieving common goals that not only directly relate to organizational objectives but also contributes to PM commitment by making a PM feel like an important part of the organization. Looking at how their overall actions are affecting others, and the organization in the long run, as every crewmember of a ship is as important as the captain to lead the ship to the PA lighthouse. If one PM has a negative affect and still contributes, she or he is in a sense is "weighing" the project down. So individualistic mindsets, needs to change to agile mindsets such as servant leadership to prevent anchoring the project or the PMs, and boost business value.

For business value to grow, **Political Agility** is a must, which the authors think emerges with distinctive divide may it, be between PMs, other stakeholders, departments etc. Perfect alignment is never a possibility, so avoiding overbearing, overriding conflicts with rationalistic and ideological waves will guide a PM to the PA lighthouse with persistence, dedication and collaborative contribution.

For collaboration, emotions cannot come in the way, which navigates us to **Emotional Agility** that warrants agile appearances and sometimes suppression of inner feelings. Psychological adaptability and cognitive improvisations under stress creates anticipating changing situations include obstacles. A PM may arise to a non-programmed decision, and emotional agility would, without a doubt be a great trait to have to utilize in unusual, unpredictable opportunities and threats.

Emotions involve the brain and the mind, two of the most agile parts of a PM that is now seen in the horizon as **Cerebral Agility**. To reduce mental fatigue, reduce anxiety, support healthy brain function of a PM, etc., a clear intellectual thought is imperative. Efficiency and alertness combined with a sharp risk response mitigation is supported by this sailboat cerebral agility.

All of the above Personal Agility can be engineered only if **Learning Agility** is part of a PM. PMs with strong learning agility, always willing to learn new information can rapidly study, analyze, and understand new situations and new business problems to understand difficult problems and strengthen possibilities by making fresh connections. PMs need people skills to understand tough situations and improve by means of collective performance. PMs perform well in new and first-time situations through resourcefulness and inspiring teams. Self- Awareness in PMs who know themselves

well viz about their strengths/weaknesses and do not have any blind spots become better performers.

Last, but not least the **Outcomes Agility** is now shown in the full beam of the authors PA lighthouse with all of the fog lifted up towards far-reaching clarity of the PM's vision, goal and consequences that will row the boat to the shores that the organization sees as well. Thinking of all ends of the spectrum brings a PM to walk the sands of a happy shore.

Some of the main characteristic of Personal Agility that organizations desperately need are:

- ⚠ Leadership and how we manage personal value - Making project leaders through candid conversations, cost transparencies (guesstimations, actuals and false assurances).
- ⚠ Personal Agility and its influence in resilient projects - Address cultural customs and adaptations by all stakeholders. Build trust internally and externally amongst stakeholders throughout all projects.
- ⚠ Stable adaptability in choppy atmospheres - Optimizing trust and integrate planning involving all stakeholders periodically, not take a "when needed" attitude/policy.
- ⚠ Innovative thinking and openness to alternatives - Use both divergent and guided ideas. Openness to experimentation and solving problems by drawing alternative thought processes from within and outside the comfort zone.
- ⚠ Using 'Influencing with and without positional authority' to cross the environment bridge. Hindsight. Environmental factors. Team dynamics.

Strategic Business Management Skills for Project, Program and Portfolio management encompasses characteristics specific to a few essential guidelines.

1. Leadership and how we manage personal value
2. Making agile leaders through transparency
3. Personal Agility and its influence in a resilient organization

Conclusion

In conclusion, the authors opine that Personal Agility is:

Adapting one's approach to the needs of a change that is not comfortable in uncertain conditions.

Rather than exhausting oneself, security zone is where one can relax, have fun, and accomplish complicated issues in simple ways.

Listen inwards, juggle tasks and projects in improvisational ways to ensure needs are met while enhancing long-term goals.

Ability to use principles or tools to help you adapt to situations, and figure out the right decisions to make for each situation.

Creatively work through obstacles in life, learn and grow from mistakes, listen to one's own resistance instead of fighting it.

Boldly face challenges, to use them to learn and grow in an agile arena where you feel relatively in charge, protected and confident in your capability to handle whatever is thrown at you.

Learn to distribute one's use of time more purposefully, connect and collaborate with others in a way that enhances relationships, and view criticism and rejection as feedback that we can use to help and learn from.

To sum it all up the authors feel that to maintain stability and attain one's highest quality of work to meet the project purpose, Personal Agility discoveries will lead one to:

- ⚠ improve organizational achievement in a PM's career as well
- ⚠ have the capability to be open minded and positive when adapting to change
- ⚠ find ways to counteract oppositions to change
- ⚠ improve project team member satisfaction, customer satisfaction, increased sales and revenue, and improve the overall efficiency of the company holistically
- ⚠ commitment which lessens fear that leads to lag
- ⚠ take work skills to new heights enabling honing of personal agility technicalities as shown in the Exhibit 2 below



Exhibit 2: Personal Agility Subtleties

If all four quadrants are dealt and addressed in a timely and efficient manner, it will definitely result in:

- ⚠ Analyzing the situation genuinely
- ⚠ Understanding emotions aptly
- ⚠ Interpreting and empathizing with others

The authors have touched on just a few pointers of Personal Agility and wish the readers a smooth sailing experience guided by the PA lighthouse.

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About the Authors



RAJI SIVARAMAN

SINGAPORE / USA



Raji Sivaraman, M. S, PMI-ACP, PMP, Principal of ASBA LLC, a Singapore citizen, helps USA/Singapore companies with strategic planning/overseas start-ups. She speaks several languages. She has worked in Singapore, Thailand, India and the USA. She helps fortune 50/500 companies with CSR/BSR projects. She is a Consultant, Director, Strategic Advisor and an Advisory Board member for non-profit organizations. She has worked in IT, publishing, financial, standards and logistics industries. She is an Adjunct Professor and visiting specialist at Montclair University, USA. She is a Researcher, Author, Contributor to Project Management books, published articles, research and white papers internationally. She is a global facilitator, trainer, speaker, discussant, chair, CXO moderator and a panellist. She is an Agile practitioner with a Master of Science Degree in Project Management. She has held leadership positions with the Project Management Institute at the chapter/global level and conducts workshops around the world. In a nutshell, she is a Pracademic.

LinkedIn: [/raji-sivaraman](https://www.linkedin.com/in/raji-sivaraman)

Website: <http://agilitydiscoveries.com>



MICHAL RACZKA

WARSAW, POLAND



Michal Raczka, MBA, PMI-ACP, PMP, PSPO, AgilePM, CISA, is a project management expert, experienced in new technologies & digital leadership fields. Currently, he is the IT Strategy and Project Management Vice Director at mBank S.A. He is also a project management lecturer at the Executive MBA programs. He has conducted several organisational changes involving the optimisation of project management methods and agile transformations. Always keeps Team in the centre. Value and results focused with lean and agile approach. Individual with proven achievements in project & business management, process improvement and team leadership. Experienced in managing geographically distributed, multi-disciplinary projects and customer teams. Experienced in project excellence awards assessments. Conference speaker. Strategic Advisor. Lecturer. Volunteer. Mentor.

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About Me: /michal.raczka

Website: <http://agilitydiscoveries.com>