

Agile Business Leader Specialist Incorporating Expertise to Deliver Results



In our last article we spoke about Agile Business Leaders (ABL) and their ability to play a key role in the future of organisational success. An ABL thinks strategically and innovatively and is skilled in multi-tasking” the following roles:

- **Enabler-** Being able to leverage the knowledge and wisdom of everyone in the business.
- **Champion-** Having the character and integrity to achieve and succeed.
- **Specialist-** Possessing industrial intelligence and the means to continuously gather more.
- **Strategist-** Creating a sustainable organization and pushing to embrace greater possibilities.

In short an ABL is responsive, resilient, quick, flexible and extremely agile to meet the needs of customers and achieve outstanding results.

This article focuses on the ABL Specialist role which guides the leader in dealing with the two realities of needing to be business focused and continuously building

capability for the organisation. The Specialist aggressively hunts and gathers ideas and opportunities before others are even aware of the need. They study trends, technological developments and are focused readers. They are a sponge for information and experiences. They know that a highly diverse and broad base of knowledge and experiences will enable them to assimilate novel ideas and connect seemingly unconnected pieces of information. They are quickly able to analyze a situation, make decisions and act on opportunities. They search out ways to form shortcuts to slash red tape. This article presents ideas on how to develop these skills.

The ABL Specialist

The role of the ABL Specialist is not only to gain knowledge, expertise and wisdom; it is also to use the collective intelligence of those around him or her to build an understanding of how to be as effective as possible. Specialists know that having a highly diverse base of knowledge and experiences will enable them to assimilate novel ideas and connect seemingly unconnected pieces of information. To this end, they strive to continually grow their knowledge base and convert it into value for the target market. ABL Specialists study trends, technological developments and are focused consumers of knowledge and information. They are a continuous sponge for information and experiences and incorporate all they have learned to be a specialist in their field.

The Specialist is aware of the current revolutionary change occurring in the global economy and is adapting to the 'Digital Natives' (the new generation who are growing up on the Web with Podcasts, Blogging, Mashup, Life-hacking, Citizen Media, Collective Intelligence and Wiki). The fact is that today's leaders are not only faced with the challenges of globalization, they are also faced with the challenge of googlization.

To work amongst these changing global strategies, the ABL Specialist values formal knowledge along with knowledge based on experience, reasoning, expertise, judgment and insight. The value of the ABL Specialist has increased within organizations. If you want to assess how critical Specialists are to the success of any business, think about how much of their job depends on their knowledge and therefore what would be the full cost of replacing that person.

The competencies of an ABL Specialist have become a leading commodity for economic success. In his book "The New Knowledge Organisation", Charles Sigismund writes "Because knowledge does not wear out and people can duplicate it practically without cost, knowledge is a source of super value and super productivity. Knowledge alone can add value to an otherwise closed, zero-sum system of value." Since knowledge has become a hot commodity, it is no longer acceptable for a leader to simply have normal cognitive abilities. Today it is essential for the leader to have the ability to reason, solve problems, perceive relationships and store and retrieve information.

If organizations are to succeed in an economy where small insights can quickly shift the competitive edge and where capabilities can rapidly be brought, borrowed or built then an organization's intellectual capital (employees' brainpower and know-how must be valued). Each organization must form a clear sense of what promotes the best leader within the organization.

Today, the knowledge economy is calling for leaders to have 'metacognition' abilities (a higher order of thinking that involves the capability of knowing whether

or not you know). Metacognition involves having the ability to acquire knowledge, manage knowledge, monitor all comprehension, evaluate progress, as well as change and adapt business strategies as needed.

In the role of an ABL Specialist, metacognition requires leaders to be more agile and know:

1. **What-** to have knowledge and understanding of industry characteristics and trends.
2. **How-** to comprehend trade secrets, best practices, best processes for delivering exceptional results.
3. **When** – to be able to present information in a timely matter (recognizing that intelligence diminishes as time lags).
4. **Who-** to be able to locate the key people who know what to do and how to do it.
5. **Why-** to be able to comprehend and understand the real issues and contribute to an accelerated pace of technical and scientific advancement in order to assume an advantage over your competitors.
6. **Where-** to be able to navigate networks or systems accurately and maximize business impact while optimizing the use of available resources.

The ABL Specialist uses metacognition and perseverance to effectively apply and distribute knowledge throughout the organization. They build flexible organizations that reduce waste and increasing productivity by integrating 'thinking' and 'doing' at all levels.

Four traits make up the Specialist:

- Industry Knowledge
- Operational Intelligence
- Specific Expertise
- Corporate Accountability

Here is a brief understanding of each of these four important traits which make up the role of the ABL Specialist.

Industry Knowledge

ABL Specialists respect tradition and build their Industry Knowledge through experience with and understanding of industry trends. They keep their minds open to evolving ideas and developments and remain current to help achieve business success. Specialists use knowledge, insights and trends to increase business profits. Today, leaders are being called to respond to the acceleration of emerging and new discoveries and must keep up-to-date on critical success factors and requirements to succeed in their industry.

Operational Intelligence

Operational Intelligence includes the techniques and methods for optimizing business processes and identifying patterns and bottlenecks which impact the accomplishment of the strategic objective. The concept of Operational Intelligence is to deliver information to individuals so they can make quick, accurate, well informed decisions. It helps with learning new ways of thinking, behaving and performing and becoming more agile. The presence of Operational Intelligence within an organization can be found through Web 2.0 technologies, including wikis, blogs, mash-up, simulation applications, chat rooms, advanced search capabilities and applications that connect to 3-D worlds (for example Google Earth).

Specific Expertise

Specific expertise refers to having a high degree of proficiency and skills along with an in-depth knowledge in a particular subject. In our experience, we find specific expertise has become the sustainable base for organizations to maintain their unique competitive advantage. They effectively and quickly understand the issues and provide information about the process or topic area to answer questions and create solutions. The ABL Specialist recognizes the need for rapid

knowledge transfer, sharing expertise within an organization, reducing duplication, and increasing coordination and efficiency. Specialists know how and when to apply 'specific expertise' at crucial times during performance through forethought and planning.

Corporate Accountability

Corporate Accountability is a combination of internal business practices where the board of directors, executives, managers, employees and other stakeholders operate a company. It addresses fairness, transparency and accountability for the purpose of equitable and adequate return on investment. Exemplifying corporate governance has come to mean consistently living up to the values of an organization, being conscious of the impact on people and making an overall positive contribution to society.

By promoting the development of Agile Business Leaders, we are calling for a shift that requires an increased level of adaptability and flexibility in business operations. We are challenging organizations to find ways to support Agile Business Leadership and ensure their leaders receive all the support needed to address doing business in this globally connected, hyper-active environment.

This article challenges you to take the ordinary and make it extraordinary. We challenge you to develop the skills of the Agile Business Leader.

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