HAPPY PROFITABLE EMPLOYEES

cultivate career agility, don't fight it

A white paper
for management professionals
by Marti Konstant

cultivate career agility, don't fight it

The modern economy is shifting away from traditional steady employment patterns and accompanying worker mindsets, towards increasingly dynamic and often ephemeral lifecycles.

Company longevity is in decline and the employer-employee relationship is evolving to meet the needs of the future workplace.

In response, successful individuals are recalibrating their approaches to and expectations from the world of work, building individual brands and untethered career trajectories. Such individual agility need not pose a threat to organizational success, and instead provides corporate leadership with new opportunities for productivity, innovation and retention.

This white paper examines the need for workplace agility and lays out practical advice for leaders and hiring managers to cultivate and leverage career agility instead of combating it.

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INTRODUCTION

The world of work is not evolving. Rather, today's workplace exists in a state of creative destruction[1] and constant reinvention. This ongoing transformation demands a new outlook for employers and workers alike. Corporate leadership, middle management, indeed all types of contributors must learn to adapt to this inexorable current of change or find themselves unemployed and unemployable.

At the macro level, companies and ecosystems who fail to acknowledge this constant flux will fail and fade away or already have done so.

The shrinking corporate lifecycle is not exactly headline news. Over the last decade, business visionaries and social commentators have predicted the demise of the legacy corporate landscape. They foretell the extinction of a large swath of well-established companies occurring in fewer than ten years, supported by historical proof points:

"

Today's workplace exists in a state of creative destruction and constant reinvention"

- The life expectancy of a Fortune 500 company has dropped from seventy-five years (fifty years earlier) to fewer than fifteen years. [Stephen Denning – 2011]

- More than one-third of businesses will not survive the next decade, failing in particular in their efforts to go digital.   [John Chambers, CEO Cisco Systems – 2015]

- In 1964, companies on the S&P 500 enjoyed average listing tenures of 33 years. That average narrowed to 24 years by 2016 and is forecast to shrink to just 12 years by 2027. [Innosight Strategy and Innovation *Longevity Forecast* – 2018]

- The next ten years will see more change than the last 100 [Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus* – 2018]

The list of companies that have already succumbed to destructive change is long and sobering, full of brands that once defined the modern economy:

> **"**
> The lifespans of new companies, no matter how nimble, will shorten, to be even briefer than their predecessors"

- Kodak invented the digital camera, as a prototype, but failed to predict the utter dominance of digital photography embodied in the smart phone.

- Borders catered to an emergent Gen-X/Gen-Y café culture, but fell beneath the onslaught of Amazon and other online booksellers and retailers.

- Lehman Brothers, Motorola, Sears, Radio Shack, Blockbuster, Yahoo, and Blackberry survive as mere shadows of their former selves.

Even startups, the "new kids on the block", companies who disrupt the existing marketplace are not themselves immune to disruption, especially if they slip into the roles and habits of the players they displace. The lifespans of new companies, no matter how nimble they appear, are similarly predicted to shorten, to be even briefer than their predecessors.

To meet this wave of disruptive, even destructive change, organizations will require agility in their workforce, leadership and practices. Organizations, leadership, and staff need to adapt to the pace of change. Exponential scaling[2] must replace linear models to achieve and sustain growth and marketplace relevance – all else results in functional stagnation.

THE CAREER AGILITY RESEARCH PROJECT

The genesis of this white paper is the *Career Agility Research Project*, a multi-year effort combining over 100 interviews by Marti Konstant with substantial survey data gathered and analyzed by Researchscape International. The project studied how Millennials, Gen-Xers and boomers navigate their careers in this era of change and uncertainty. In subsequent sections, this white paper will build on that research to:

- define career agility
- sort out different types of agility in the workplace
- present new research findings on career types
- enumerate the seven principles of agility
- explain how to cultivate learning and growth for any career type
- provide guidelines for leaders to cultivate career agility

WHO SHOULD READ THIS WHITE PAPER

The emphasis of this white paper is on the workplace and so is of greatest interest to HR professionals, hiring managers, and executives concerned about organizational culture and success.

Career Agility should be a key focus for leaders in organizations who attract, hire, and retain workers of all types to grow their businesses. This white paper is also of interest to individual workers who want to solidify their position and expand their value in the future of work.

THE AGILE MINDSET

An agile mindset is foundational in both individuals and organizations who foster growth. Findings from the *Career Agility Research Projec*t revealed a spectrum spanning two career mindset types, from Steadfast to Agile.

The agility range also correlated with overall rigidity vs. flexibility and a progress measurement of stagnation vs. growth. All professionals fall somewhere along this spectrum.
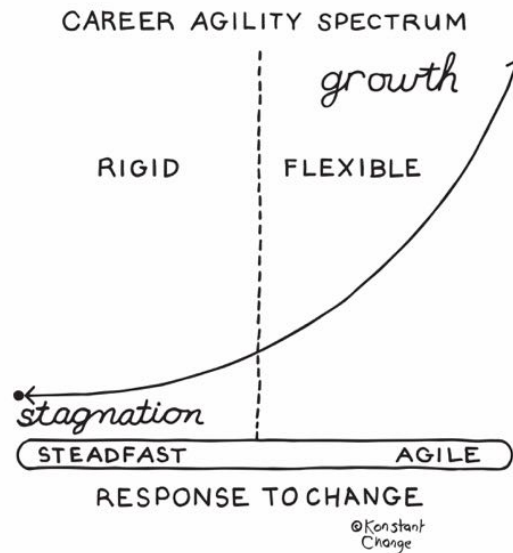
Agility solves for the problem of stagnation. With forward movement, workers and companies can achieve and sustain growth. A rigid mindset risks stagnation, while a flexible mindset favors growth.

AGILE

98%

STEADFAST

55%
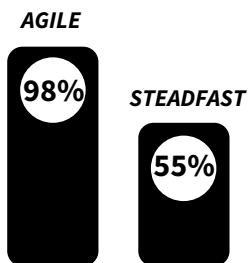
PRIORITIZE ADAPTING TO CHANGE

70% of professionals thought it important to adapt to change: 98% of agile thinkers prioritized adapting to change vs. 55% of steadfast careerists

The study revealed a number of differentiators that helped determine whether an individual behaves more Steadfast vs. Agile in the course of their career:

- How they respond to change
- How they seek help to grow, and in meeting job and career challenges
- How they prioritize career choices

Response to change is perhaps the most critical factor in defining agility. While 70% of professionals overall highlighted adapting to change as important, 98% of agile thinkers prioritized adapting to change as opposed to 55% of steadfast careerists.

How do attitudes between steadfast vs. agile careerists differ in response to change? Analysis of the survey data highlighted a series of key differences in how respondents thought about work and career, illustrated in the following table.

FOCUS AREA	STEADFAST	AGILE
Career Scope	Constrained	Open
Workplace Goal	Survive	Thrive
Approach	Rigid	Flexible
Emotional Disposition	Fearful	Confident
Decision Basis	Safety	Opportunity
Conflict Reaction	Avoid	Challenge
Reaction to Dissonance	Ignore	Acknowledge
Crisis Response	Pause	Move
Existential Threat Response	Deny	Adapt

The steadfast column reflects a rather dire outlook. Most workers and managers would not openly admit to so bleak a professional worldview. However, these stark contrasts were borne out by data in our study.

Anecdotal feedback during presentations on this topic indicate many workers aspire to adopt an agile mindset. By a show of hands in an audience, over 70% view themselves as north of the halfway point on the agility scale.

CAREER AGILITY

"
An agile career
is a self-reflective, iterative career path guided by
response to change, evolving job roles, and designed to optimize
creativity, growth, and happiness[3]"
— *Marti Konstant*

In the traditional workplace – the offices, factories, stores and other workplaces of our parents and grandparents – long-term, steady employment was the norm and the goal of both employee and employer.

A fresh-faced high-school, college or trade-school graduate, after running the gauntlet of search, interview and hiring, could anticipate a career trajectory that started "in the mailroom."

For the ambitious (or lucky), it led to the executive suite, with a range of stops along the way. Termination represented tragedy and leaving one's employer voluntarily was anathema, or at least ill-advised.

Over the last three decades, this symbiotic commitment between employee and employer has eroded or even vanished.

A trend first observed in the high-tech startup companies of Silicon Valley, Reid Hoffman, Ben Casnocha, and Chris Yeh, authors of *The Startup of You*, suggest the career escalator has vanished. Our career paths are nonlinear, and external forces interrupt career progression.

Hiring for tours of duty that resemble two- to four-year projects is a pattern that benefits the corporation and the employee. According to Reid Hoffman, founder of LinkedIn, the company develops much of their talent in this way. If you make progress on your project within a specific time period, you earn the opportunity to advance to another tour of duty, often within the company. The reasoning is two years is ordinarily long enough for a product launch cycle.

The silver lining of this project approach is Career Agility – a recasting of worker-employer relationships based upon an honest calculus of market value and corporate requirements.

While the notion of *individual* career agility is inherent in the above definition, career agility is a two-way street, with implications for both employee and employer.

FACTORS INFLUENCING CAREER AGILITY

While changes in the workplace have been long in coming, a handful of key trends amplifies the position of Career Agility in the consciousness of both employer and employee:

Record low unemployment: the U.S. unemployment rate today hovers at 3.7%, the lowest in over 50 years[4], with the result that employers find it increasingly difficult to attract and retain the best workers.

Freelance and Gig Economies: According to an Upwork and Freelancers Union study[5], *Freelancers in America* published in 2017, more than one-third of Americans participate in the freelance economy. The same survey predicts more than 50% of the U.S. population will be freelancing by 2027 if pace continues. These workers represent an extension of today's workforce.

Streamlined Operations: Companies increasingly only hire an optimal number of employees, bringing in (and shedding) specialists as needed. This trend is made possible by freelance and gig workers, including contract workers, and consultants.

Automation of tasks and business processes: Automation has streamlined many workplace tasks. Those operations, however, still require management, creativity, and a variety of "soft skills".

Upskilling and Reskilling: The ongoing growth and evolution of the business environment itself demands the creation and even invention of new jobs and job types, supported by continuous training to close remaining/emerging skills gaps.

WHERE AGILITY MATTERS

Agility has become a catchword and practice across a range of business disciplines and organizational departments. Readers will most likely have encountered the notion of agility in multiple settings:

> **"**
>
> In today's tumultuous markets, where established companies furiously battle assaults from start-ups and other insurgents, a fast-moving, adaptive organization is highly appealing[6]"

- Discussions of agile business transformation
- Modern software development, where agile methods dominate*, and related disciplines, e.g., agile testing, agile project management, etc.
- Other technical and professional fields adopting comparable agile methods, e.g., agile marketing, agile HR, or agile customer service
- Discussions of individual career agility

Agile software development – an approach under which requirements and solutions evolve through the collaborative effort of self-organizing and cross-functional teams and their customer/end user

Indeed, the concept of agility is so compelling that companies increasingly consider launching agile teams across many areas of operations[7], including product development (beyond software), marketing and even HR.

For the discussion at hand, agility can apply to any and all job functions. Career agility is concerned less with the particular business of the organization or employee roles, and more with how workers navigate across their careers there.

The following sections focus on the role of career agility in the workplace (a.k.a. Workforce Agility) as viewed by corporate leadership, and subsequently integrated by workers in the same setting.

CAREER AGILITY ATTRIBUTES

The contrasts called out in the table on page 7 (Steadfast vs. Agile) help define the agile mindset, and in our study yielded a series of attributes and habits with direct impact on career success.

Consistently, agile careerists exhibit a combination of the following seven attributes:

"

Agility thrives in organizations when leaders also develop an agile mindset"

1. Ability to respond to change
2. Career path introspection
   (e.g., "A/B testing" career choices)
3. Parallel pursuits, in and out of the workplace
4. Habitually capturing transitory ideas
   (a.k.a. "Idea Zone" or "Parking Lot")
5. Viewing one's career as a series of projects
6. Seeking feedback from peers and managers
   (continuously and at key junctures)
7. Cultivating a personal brand

WORKFORCE AGILITY

Workforce agility has expanded beyond the original meaning of hiring contingent workers and the ascent of the gig economy. The term includes a combination of three aspects of agility management within workplace operations.

1. **The Aggregate Career Agility of the Individuals Employed in and by an Organization**

   (FTEs, managers, contractors et al.). Ideally, workforce agility embraces individual career agility. It is the application and measure of how individual career agility is present, practiced and promoted in the workforce, with accompanying benefits.

2. **The Flexible Dynamic Workforce**

   The flexibility to "right-size" the workforce dynamically, hiring and shedding contractors and consultants is the central feature of both "Agile HR[8]" and what is often called the "gig economy." With regard to leveraging the sometimes-reviled gig economy, workforce agility does not necessarily involve "pushing out" surplus labor as it does "inviting in" agile contractors on an as-needed basis.

   Engaging outside talent on a variable term basis, as a feature of workforce agility, need not occur merely to avoid the loaded costing of FTEs but instead facilitates a project-based staffing paradigm, better utilization of skill sets, and more ecosystem engagement.

3. **Agile HR**

   This aspect of organizational management involves applying the principles of agility to employee management practices, with an emphasis on simpler management models that build on participant feedback. It has had its greatest impact in organizational goal-setting and performance reviews and has provided impetus for adoption of coaching, team formation, and peer-level and "upward" feedback.

   There are also implications for recruiting and compensation as well. Additionally, the practice of Agile HR refers to managing the dynamic workforce and a commitment to learning and development for members of the organization.

At first glance, corporate leaders and mid-level management might not readily welcome workforce agility as it pertains to individuals in their organizations. The concept of career agility emphasizes flexibility, independence and mobility, attributes that could just as easily lead the best workers towards free agency and employment in other organizations.

But consider the logical alternative – a workforce comprised solely of steadfast workers: heads-down, nose to the grindstone, dependent upon and intent on preserving the status quo. Desirable, perhaps, from a tactical management standpoint, but disastrous to organizational success in today's dynamic marketplaces.

Applying an agile mindset to the modern workplace has the potential to deliver a range of benefits, to employers and to workers themselves. An agile outlook helps works eschew office politics and preservation of status, shifting focus to projects, progress and resultant productivity. Non-territorial outlook engenders collaboration with peers and workers seek out training and mentoring to bridge project-based knowledge and skills gaps. Leaders and managers are freer to marshal appropriate resources (FTEs, contractors and consultants) to address marketplace challenges.

When organizations cultivate agility thinkers within their organization, leaders are more likely to respond to market changes and to foster an environment of learning and growth.

"

Agile isn't just for tech anymore – it's transforming how organizations hire, develop and manage their people"

Ultimately, agility thrives in organizations when leaders also develop an agile mindset, encouraging worker flexibility. Benefits of leadership agility then include:

- Greater innovation and productivity through better mission focus
- Ability to navigate dynamic marketplaces and anticipate customer demands
- Provide career paths for all types of team members and decrease turnover
- Being better armed in today's "war for talent"

FOSTERING AGILITY IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

Once organization leadership sees agility as a virtue and not a threat, workforce agility can become a guiding principle, informing day to day decisions, operations and even corporate mission.

Career agility is a management principle, not a checkbox. It represents the vector sum of multiple behaviors and outlooks and can thereby be difficult to quantify for individuals and for organizations. But it needn't be viewed as elusive. Organizations can and must develop more agile workforces, especially to meet and embrace digital transformation, new technologies and resultant marketplace change.

CULTIVATING CAREER AGILITY FOR INDIDUALS AND WORKPLACE NEEDS

Cultivating career agility does not merely mean additional rounds of training classes and seminars. To be effective, career agility must address individual needs and capabilities and engage workers in the success of the organization. It entails building competency to empower employees and leaders, to build, refine, augment and accurately represent their skills in their current job. And for future ones, to embrace the new digital workplace experience, within the boundaries of an organization and beyond.

The following table lays out five agile focus areas, how they apply to both individuals and corporate leadership, and their benefits to the organization.

AGILITY FOCUS	INDIVIDUAL WORKER	AGILE LEADERSHIP	ORGANIZATIONAL BENEFITS
Agile Mindset	Views career as a series of projects (vs. roles)	Manage/allocate team members to support change. Cultivate talent inventory	Respond more quickly to market realities and customer requirements
Career Evolution	Envisions professional evolution, iterative career path	Support mentoring, provide educational resources	Workplace evolves to be more adaptive, sustaining. Retain the best workers
Learning Agility	Willing to learn from new experiences and situations	Facilitate teamwork with collaborative workspaces	Innovating rapidly
Mentoring for Agility	Eager for mentorship, and actionable feedback	Match people to projects vs. job roles	Greater job engagement, Increased productivity
Workplace Experimentation	Support parallel pursuits, accommodate innovation time	Attract, employ and retain agile-minded team members	Innovation, invention, retention, increased worker ROI

STEPS TO ROLL OUT AND SUSTAIN AGILITY INITIATIVE

The imperatives and benefits in the Agility Focus table on page 13 merit additional consideration and explanation. The following sections provide concrete suggestions and actions to realize agility in the workplace.

1. Cultivate an Agile Mindset

Understanding agility represents only a first step to realizing and cultivating it in the workplace among team members. Agility doesn't "just happen" – it requires changes in policy, management practices and leadership vision.

- Survey your workforce – corporate leaders, middle management and individual contributors – to better understand where your organization lies on the steadfast-agile continuum (you can contract third parties and/or use available materials).

- Establish a set of metrics to monitor and measure progress towards a more agile workforce, for individuals and at an aggregate level.

- Include curriculum options that help your workforce prioritize career choices, in their current roles and future ones.

99

To create and sustain agility in corporate leadership, organizations need to attract leaders with agile sensibilities, in their own careers and in their management styles"

The future workforce[10] requires an agile mindset, one more welcoming to change and in facing the new digital workplace experience. Steadfast workers are less prepared or even frightened of today's man-machine interfaces, e.g., applications of artificial intelligence and machine learning, whereas workers with a more agile outlook are more likely to leverage and even embrace these emerging technologies.

2. Cultivate Leadership Agility

You might imagine that corporate leadership, by definition, embodies an agile mindset. But many managers rise through the ranks more on steadfast thinking than inspired agility. Non-agile mindsets translate into day-to-day management outlooks. Middle managers, especially, often possess role-based, steadfast expectations for their reports.

To create and sustain agility in corporate leadership, organizations need to attract leaders with agile sensibilities, in their own careers and in their management styles. When reviewing leadership in place and interviewing new leaders, look for behaviors that demonstrate:

- Flexibility in personal outlook and in management expectations

- Experience in establishing task forces and organizing collaboration (vs. leading by mandate)

- Willingness to learn new skills via projects, and appreciation for mentoring, internal continuous training programs and multiple career paths

- A vision for resource allocation (people, money, time, etc.) to engender workforce agility

- Understanding of what motivates agile workers[11]

3. Sustain Career Evolution; Prevent Stagnation

There is nothing more disheartening and damaging to retention than the perception of a "dead end" job. The need for career evolution applies across the entire workforce. To avoid career stasis and stagnation, an agility-enabling organization needs to embrace the notion of career trajectory and commit to remediating tradition shortcomings, by:

"
Sustain career evolution; prevent stagnation"

- Providing access to professional development resources and activities – training, coaching, outside education, job shadowing, new project assignment, etc.

- Encouraging team members to upskill and reskill in their specialties and beyond

- Helping stalled individuals find the right fit with an organization (or without)

- Stimulating movement, even if it's lateral – new titles and growth opportunities. Many tech companies, for example, provide advancement vectors for individual contributors outside of traditional management paths.

4. Nurture a Culture of Learning

Think back to your first job out of college. Did your degree truly prepare you to face your first year on the job? The next ten years? Learning on the job, through direct experience and through mentoring is how we all shape our careers. But imagine how much further and faster careers could evolve when augmented by training, directed for both specialization and for workplace skills development (a.k.a. agility)?

And let's not forget that training includes emotional intelligence skills.

Millennials want training! Findings from the *Career Agility Research Project* revealed that 98% of employees expect internally provided training (vs. training outside of work). Internal training provides opportunities for employees to apply existing skills in new ways and contexts, and to acquire new skills based on their passions.

And, given the increasingly dynamic nature of the modern workplace, continuous learning, even in the midst of change, is critical to every individual's success, satisfaction and happiness.

Some straightforward steps towards a culture of learning include:

- Offering a catalogue, not a mandatory curriculum. Provide options that let team members upskill and expand their perspectives across both technical and vocational domains.
- Embracing outside education in the learning cultural mix. Encourage and fund attendance at conferences, seminars and line-of-business ecosystem events. Let employees set aside uninterrupted time for webinars and other online activities. Allow team members to expense tuition and other costs at university extensions and junior colleges.
- Encouraging all types of self-direct learning. Companies of all sizes can use community service and volunteering as opportunities to develop skills while paying it forward.
- Helping employees make learning choices based on a mix of personal and department needs.
- Building education into compensation packages and terms of employment, as a reward more than a requirement. And do reward workers for completion of training programs and other educational activities, as part of an MBO (management by objectives) package or in hard cash.
- Teaching accountability, explicitly through curriculum, and implicitly as part of management.

5. Promote Mentorship and Coaching

Mentoring, while natural to some workers and leaders, does not happen spontaneously. Certainly, employees and managers will look to one another for help and advice informally, but many team members can be reluctant to set aside time not strictly accounted for in project schedules and terms of employment.

The *Career Agility Project* reveals a strong correlation between an agile mindset and mentoring: 60% of workers with an agile mindset actively seek mentoring and career guidance vs. 37% steadfast careerist.

Here is a short checklist of actions organizations can take to promote and support mentoring:

- Cultivate a talent pool of willing and able mentors and catalogue their abilities and expertise

- Establish policies regarding time spent mentoring (vs. existing/regular work activities) and normalize mentoring as an office activity

- Reward and/or compensate mentors for their coaching and support of other team members

- Remove barriers / encourage team members to seek mentoring and reward them for progress made

- Use mentoring feedback and outcomes to better match employees to projects vs. limiting them to pre-defined job titles and roles

- Consider building an experience/age blended workforce – invite retirees back as interns/coaches/mentors

AGILE

60%

STEADFAST

37%
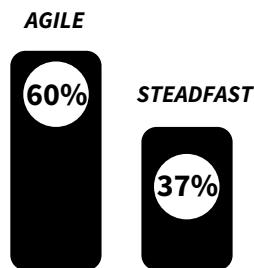
The Career Agility Project reveals 60% of workers with an agile mindset actively seek mentoring and career guidance vs. 37% of steadfast careerists.

ACTIVELY SEEK MENTORSHIP

Under the rubric of mentorship, coaching can be a powerful management tool[12] and agility enabler. Access to coaching, from managers, peers and outside sources is key to developing workforce agility, improving leadership skills, competitiveness, self-confidence, team-level trust, life-work balance and career trajectory[13].

6. Supporting Workplace Experimentation

The Nike trademark phrase "Just Do It" can cut two ways in the workplace. The traditional management imperative of "do as I say and do it now" is clearly no facilitator of agility. By contrast, giving team members freedom and flexibility in how they implement tasks and execute projects fosters both individual and organizational agility.

In an agile setting, *Just Do It* means:

"

If your CEO has a coach, maybe you deserve one too!"

- Making experimentation part of mentoring and training activities. Not everyone is a born "scientist" or has the courage to deviate from existing norms and practices.

- Assigning "lab partners" to workers tasked with new roles and projects.

- Rewarding workers for innovation – new approaches and processes can enhance efficiency, productivity and profitability.

- Not punishing employees for "failed" experiments. Not every experiment yields the anticipated results but can still be a learning opportunity and/or reinforce the validity of existing practices.

- Analyzing outcomes of experimentation for unexpected results.

- Embracing experimentation as part of job descriptions and corporate culture overall.

7. Facilitate Personal Brand Growth

Commoditization of team members is one of the greatest risks in a pre-agile workplace. Companies spend millions annually on corporate and product branding but never give a thought to the personal brands of the workers that enable market success. For their part, only the most agile-minded employees pause to consider their personal brands.

Following are some hints for helping workers understand and realize their personal branding potential:

99

Personal, corporate, and employer branding are better together"

- Support optimization of personal brand in mentoring, training and evaluation. The first step in all types of branding is cataloguing attributes, perceptions and aspiration.

- Encourage team members to weave together personal, corporate, and employer branding. A great employer brand builds on the virtues of its employees, and individuals should be able to stand on the brand "shoulders" of their employers.

- Make employees visible and accessible to your ecosystem. Encourage publication, contributions to conferences and attendance at industry event. Feature workers at all levels in promotional and education videos and webinars.

Personal, corporate, and employer branding are actually better together. Just as collaborative teams yield a more noticeable and timely result than one person working solo, a personal brand increases in value when combined with employer or corporate brands (e.g., when speaking in public and/or publishing with company titles). When amplifying the corporate and employers brands at an industry conference, the employee can stimulate innovation thinking when sharing what they learned with fellow employees.

Conversely, employer and corporate brands expand their worth when integrated with smart personal brands. Companies with agile leadership benefit from hiring industry luminaries with pre-existing personal brands – a win-win. Best practice is to harmonize branding efforts for greater impact: the attraction between individual and corporate brands yields mutual benefit[14].

Agility ROI

In perusing this white paper, readers may worry that:

1. Finding a clear path to agility requires a pre-existing agile mindset
2. Agility is too abstract or "mushy" to present to existing corporate management
3. Career agility risk outweighs its benefit to organizations
4. There is no clear ROI for workforce agility

By defining career agility and providing real-world examples, this white paper has shown an agile mindset can be a work in progress. Achieving personal and workforce agility is a stepwise process. By providing examples of how to cultivate agility, we have concretized career agility for purposes of internal evangelism and operational guidance.

But risk and return require additional consideration.

OVERCOMING RISK, REAL AND PERCEIVED

Risk from implementing career agility is twofold – risk from embracing agility and risk from not embracing it.

Most risk from career agility lies in challenging the status quo:

- Agile employees are harder to manage – they have a will of their own and a vision beyond the corporate lobby.
- Managers will rebel at imperatives to cultivate agility.
- Cultivating agility as detailed in the previous section will be costly and distracting from business operations.

Simply put, these risks are very real.

However, our research and other industry data shows embracing the status quo and attempting to sidestep career agility carries even greater risk:

- Stagnation of employee morale and declines in productivity
- Lackluster corporate performance and falling off of innovation
- Employee and customer flight from an organization not perceived as sufficiently agile: career and workforce

So, if your organization is not inherently receptive to the concept of agility, they are certain to respond to the consequences of its opposite.

RETURN ON AGILITY INVESTMENT

The returns on investing in career agility for both individuals and organizations are many and varied:

Avoiding career failure

People fail because they are mismatched to their working life. By fostering agility, leadership can help individuals find their sweet spots within an organization and along their career trajectories. Mentorship and career/executive coaching are key to identifying career stumbling blocks and preempting burnout and helping workers adopt an agile mindset.

"

The best way to retain workers
is by preparing them to leave"

— Marti Konstant

Attracting talent

 Agile organizations are by definition porous. Companies that embrace agility broadcast their culture implicitly through employee and ecosystem interaction (word of mouth and visible practices) and explicitly via corporate marketing and recruitment promotion. Agility is further engendered in the hiring process from interviewing style and from openness and response to reverse interviewing.

Improving retention

Our mantra is "The best way to retain workers is by preparing them to leave". Practically speaking, you can improve retention with more projects, more mentoring, more career coaching, and more opportunities for personal branding. There must be a perceived investment in their careers. Ultimately, agility serves to "activate" individuals during their tenure at a company, avoiding frustration and loss of momentum.

Organizational flexibility

Agile leadership recognizes that workforce agility can encompass both full-time employees (FTEs) and contractors. Embracing agility includes recognizing the reality of the "gig economy" and integrating part-time workers and consultants, inhouse and remote, into the workforce mix on an ongoing basis.

HAPPY PROFITABLE EMPLOYEES

The Happy Profitable Employees Project™ (HPE)* focuses on factors that help keep people motivated and happy in the workplace. The central tenet of the project is employers and workers exist in synergy and both need profit from their relationship, financially, logistically, intellectually and emotionally.

This win-win approach is exemplified by companies adapting to employee preferences, like remote working and flexible work schedules, and thereby increasing retention and being able to attract talent in a tight labor market.

"

Workplace agility enables you to cultivate happy profitable employees benefitting the individual and the organization"

HPE ATTRIBUTES	COMPANIES WITH HPEs	HPE BENEFITS
Agile	Cultivate workforce agility	Thrive in dynamic marketplaces
Engaged and motivated	Align talents and roles	
Employer brand ambassadors	Offer fair compensation	Realize greater growth and profitability
Growth mindset	Develop, train, nurture, coach, mentor	Enjoy higher productivity
Drive company profitability	Foster a positive digital employee experience (across worker life-cycle)	Recruit and retain in tight labor markets
Contribute to positive culture		

If you are interested in being part of this project as an interview participant, please contact Marti Konstant.. Looking for: talent development professionals, recruiters, HR leaders, HR consultants, learning and development professionals , workplace culture leaders, career coaches, and organizational development professionals.

CONCLUSION

Cultivating career and workforce agility is the central challenge of the modern workplace. It cannot be sidestepped and treated as a nicety or as an afterthought to building and operating a successful company. Corporate leadership, hiring managers and individual contributors must all integrate agile thinking into their worldview if companies are to succeed in today's dynamic and often tumultuous marketplaces.

A very accessible metaphor for embracing agility comes from one of today's most agile industries – IT and software development: successful companies must update the operating system of workforce development, because the workplace of tomorrow will not be "backward compatible" with existing practices and structures.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

If you remember nothing else from this white paper,

- Individual agility complements workplace agility.

- Leadership agility and learning agility are key to the growth of companies.

- Agility is not the enemy of employee retention; rather its presence serves to attract engaged and productive employees.

- Workforce agility is the result of leaders and employees working together to grow the company.

- Cultivate an agile, adaptable workforce or face the consequences tomorrow.

- Go Agile or Risk Stagnation.

APPENDIX –
THE CAREER AGILITY RESEARCH PROJECT

Why do some people respond to change, while others ignore the signs in front of them? This was the first of many questions driving my research.

Furthermore, I became curious about what actions organizations could take to advance their own interests, while cultivating individual employees. How should organizations, leaders, and the people who help companies grow respond to rapid change while facing an uncertain future?

I wanted to find the best way to help organizations—and the people who build them—thrive, while adapting to change.

RESEARCH METHODS

Primary research: 120 1:1 interviews with employees, freelancers, and consultants. My findings helped me understand how Millennials, GenXers and boomers navigate their careers in an era of change and uncertainty.

Survey research: Researchscape International conducted survey research and analyzed data from 165 mid-career professionals.

CAREER AGILITY MODEL

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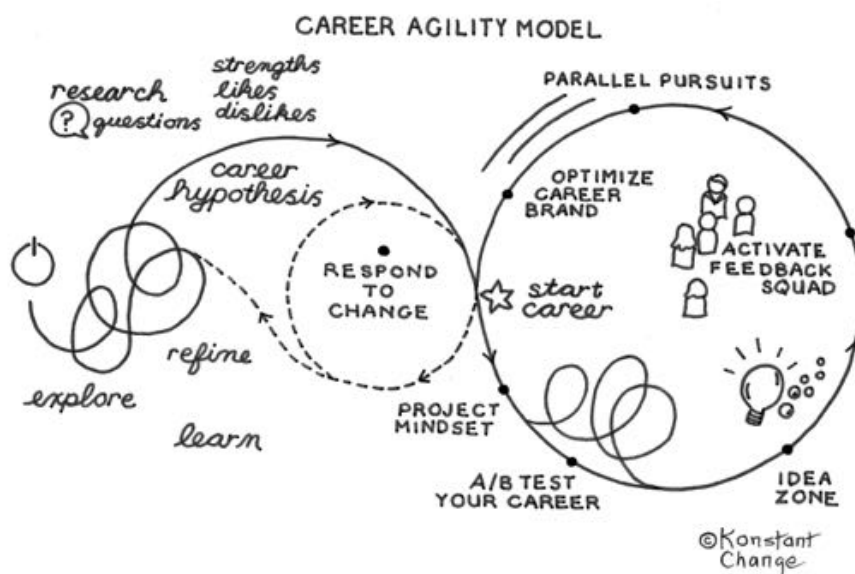
KEY FINDINGS

A career of projects
When asked about their career approach, 42% of agile careerists said they regularly approach career as a series of projects vs. 25% of steadfast careerists.

Commitment to learning
Agile thinkers are more than 2X more committed to learning (54%) vs. steadfast careerists (24%).

The role of mentorship
Agility thinkers are eager for mentorship and career guidance. 60% actively seek mentorship and career guidance vs. 37% of steadfast careerists. However, when asked, "Do you currently have a mentor at work?" the vast majority of respondents (80%) reported not having one.

EXPERIMENTATION

60% of agile thinkers preferred experimentation vs. 4% of steadfast careerists. Over the next two years as career agility evolves, we expect a larger percentage of employees will embrace experimentation, in particular as a result of advances in and access to new technology.

Currently, 23% of professionals felt experimentation was more important than focusing: 60% of agile careerists did so, however, compared to 4% of steadfast careerists.

This preference for experimentation correlates with seven principles of agility that influence behavior. Findings from the research shows employees rated these principles when responding to the question, "How would you describe your career?"

RANK	OPTION	RESPONSE%
1	Adapt to changes in the workplace	65%
2	Assess your skills and abilities	54%
3	Pursue interests outside work	50%
4	Keep track of ideas for work and projects to pursue	33%
5	Approach your career as a series of projects	31%
6	Solicit feedback about your work	30%
7	Develop a personal brand	11%
8	None of the above	7%

These responses correlate to the list of seven principles of agility as described in the book *Activate Your Agile Career.*

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Don't Fight It

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