
Framework for organizational drivers of workforce agility

Mansi Makkar^{1*} and Neetu Rani²
IMSAR, Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak

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***Corresponding author e-mail:** mansimakkar1104.mm@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In this rapidly changing market, organizations have realized that they must be adaptable and change-oriented. This has highlighted how crucial agility is in the workforce. Even though workforce agility is essential, literature has largely concentrated on manufacturing and organizational agility, although it emphasizes the need for an agile workforce. By examining the available body of knowledge on workforce agility, we hope to offer important research insights. The available literature helped us to determine that workforce agility has three dimensions- proactivity, adaptability and resilience. These qualities can be acquired through strong leadership, collaboration, job autonomy, organizational learning, reward system, shared vision, information sharing, cross-training, management support and organization culture. By highlighting organizational drivers that influence workforce agility, this article provides a contextual understanding of the concept.

KEYWORDS: Workforce agility, Organizational drivers, Organizational practices, Agile workforce.

1. INTRODUCTION

Everything is changing quickly in this age of globalization. In the field of business, sudden shifts, instability and technological disruption have become a common characteristic. Big data, augmented reality, internet of things (IoT), artificial intelligence, and machine learning have risen to the top in business as well as academia. Businesses are struggling hard to adapt to the fast-paced, unpredictably shifting business climate. (Sherehiy et al., 2007) and are always battling to build a business strategy for their survival and growth to get a competitive edge. For this reason business entities must move to the "Age of Agility". According to Sherehiy et al., 2014 being agile means identifying and seizing opportunities while managing your time well. It also means responding to threats and strengths in the best possible ways (Zhang et al., 1999).

It is the ability of workers at a company to quickly adjust to changes in customer needs, technological advancements, and governmental regulations. Because an agile workforce exceeds a firm's dynamic capabilities, it has become an absolute necessity for organizations. (Teece et al., 2016). Further, an agile workforce is primarily made up of people who have a positive outlook on life, believe in self-improvement, are constantly eager to learn new things, are skilled at solving problems, are creative, and are always willing to take on new challenges. (Plonka 1997). Thus, in order to attain and maintain success, an organization needs to keep its workforce agile. (Chonko 2005) Positive attributes like flexibility, endurance, and perseverance that arise from strong individual employees will boost employees' agility. (Thomas et al., 1990). Additionally, it has to do with allocating authority on the tasks that have the most potential to foster the development and production of workforce agility, such as boosting effectiveness of training, innovation, multitasking, and teamwork (Hopp et al., 2004).

Hence, in general, workforce agility refers to two things: (1) the workforce's capacity to respond to changes in the environment in the best possible way at the best possible time, and (2) the workforce's ability to view challenges as opportunities (Kidd 1995) and to create an agile workforce it is very important to empowering autonomy and independence in decision making (Van et al., 2001). Because of the agile workforce, organizations can perform better and gain a competitive edge in the market. Accordingly, this study intends to explore the organizational drivers of workforce agility.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Workforce agility was explicitly recognized in the early 2000s as an innovative way to manage a business. Organizations are under pressure to improve their capacity for adaptation, resilience building, and quick decision-making. In no time agility of workforce emerged as a new approach to handle turbulent environment and also became an essential element for the success and growth of organizations. Two fundamental agility skills are required to drive professional agility: speed and flexibility. (Breu et al., 2002). Employee adaptability to changes in unpredictable market situations determines workforce agility. Workforce agility includes proactivity, adaptability, and resilience (Sherehiy, 2008). These concepts are shown in Figure 1, together with their individual explanations. Agile workforces are capable of finding solutions, offering creative suggestions, and being up for new challenges. They can also swiftly and effectively adjust to changes in the corporate environment (Cai et al., 2018). Any strategy for introducing new methods of working is bound to fail in the absence of a workforce that is both willing and able to adapt (Strome et al., 2020). According to (Gartside et al., 2014), an agile workforce makes decisions more quickly and is better able to adapt to changes, which helps to lessen reliance on upper management.

According to (Al-Faouri et al., 2014), employee flexibility is the capacity of personnel to use their varied business and technical expertise to change business needs, respond to uncertainty strategically, and solve problems on their own. According to (Storme et al., 2020) workforce agility has long been recognized as a foundation of organizational agility. In other words, employee agility is crucial for the creation of an agile organization as it depends on active workforce rather than systems. It is one of the most crucial elements impacting an organization's performance, ability to survive in a competitive business environment, and ability to achieve its goals.

Employee agility benefits the organization in countless ways. Innovation in product development and advancements in manufacturing processes lead to an improvement in an organization's financial capabilities. In a dynamic, competitive environment, the workforce must fully utilize its resources, and an agile workforce makes optimal use of its resources. Additionally, it strengthens strategic capabilities and enables organizations to use innovation to achieve their objectives. Thus, it is important to know the drivers of workforce agility. These drivers propel an organization to make its workforce agile.

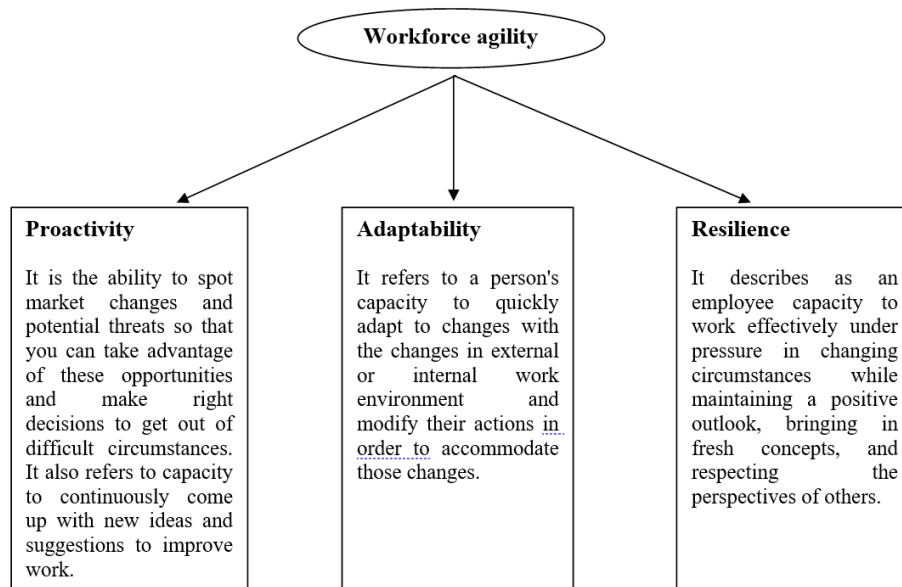


Figure 1. Constructs of workforce agility

3. METHODOLOGY

The study included a descriptive research design which includes data from multiple secondary sources. Terms like “workforce agility” and “agile workforce” is used as keywords to collect research articles for conducting the review.

Objectives

- Examine the Conceptual Framework of USR
- Analyse the Integral Role of Faculties in Advancing USR Initiatives

4. DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

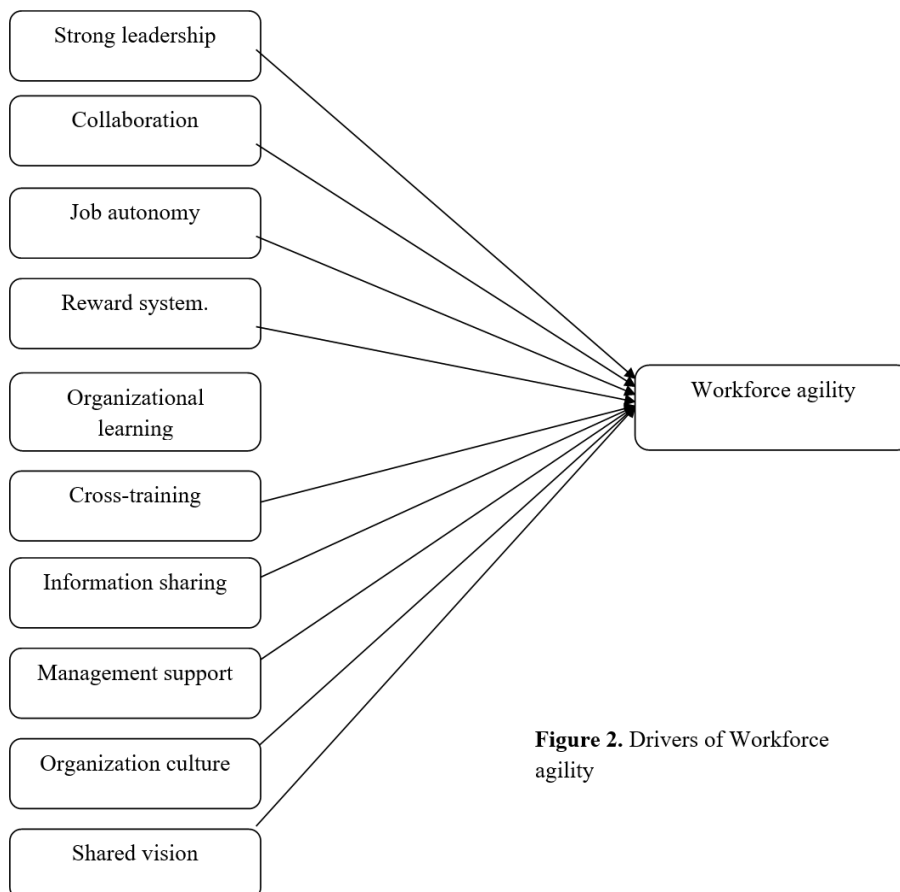


Figure 2. Drivers of Workforce agility

Organizational drivers represent strategies across all functional domains, the organizational structure, workforce practices, and work arrangement. Workforce agility is facilitated by practices such as job autonomy, job enrichment, employee participation, employee training, multitasking, and multiskilling (Gunasekaran, 1999). (Thayyib and Khan 2020) discovered four internal drivers of workforce agility. Among all four organizational learning is the main driver; other drivers that have a positive influence include data analytics and automation, workplace collaboration, and workforce upskilling. Likewise, (Menon and Suresh 2020) have qualitatively verified drivers of workforce agility in engineering education in the Indian context. They determined that reward structures, employee empowerment, and

"Management support" were the key facilitators of workforce agility. (Tamtam and Tourabi 2020) assessed the degree of workforce agility in a Moroccan setting using a fuzzy logic approach. The findings demonstrated that important workplace agility characteristics include knowledge sharing, self-motivation, employee engagement, and acceptance of change. In the Indian manufacturing as well as service context, (Muduli 2016) relates workforce agility to organizational practices such as organization learning and training rewards systems, involvement, teamwork, and information systems. The workforce's agility is greatly enhanced by a collaborative work environment followed by employee involvement, incentive programs, information systems, and organizational learning and training. According to an empirical study on SMEs of Iran by (Alavi et al., 2014), decision-making, decentralization, and organizational learning which is defined as "commitment to learning, open-mindedness, shared vision, and knowledge sharing" all positively correlate with workforce agility. A strong leadership shape and nurture workforce agility. (Sherehiy and Karwowski's 2014) empirical study reveals a connection between work characteristics, workforce agility, and strategies aimed at developing agility. They claim that workplace autonomy is one of the most significant predictors of workforce agility. According to the theoretical framework on workforce agility constructed by (Asari et al. 2014), the intention to be agile and subsequent agile behavior are thought to be influenced by attitudes toward agility, subjective norms, and perceived environmental control. The impact of individuals within an organization, such as managers and supervisors, fellow employees, subordinate workers, and labour groups, can affect an individual's intention to be agile and resulting in the portrayal of agile behavior. (Hopp and Oyen 2004) also explained the effect of strategies on the agility of the workforce.

Since, learning, motivation and communication are some essential components of workforce agility, they have selected cross-training policies as a facilitator. To determine the direct and indirect ways that cross-training can promote worker agility, they have created a strategy matrix. Employee involvement practices in the organization have been categorized by (Sumukadas and Sawhney 2004) into four categories: information sharing, training, reward, and power sharing. They have also discussed the effects of these practices on workforce agility. The human resources initiatives that the organization can pursue to instill agility in the workforce are listed by (Shafer et al. 2001). They are forming a shared goal, establishing the organization's core values, enriching the work, encouraging staff development, and yielding satisfactory results. Thus, organizations can implement these drivers, practices, and policies to encourage workforce agility in an appropriate manner.

Strong Leadership-

Strong leaders at the top-level can focus on the process of change, adjust to the ever-changing business environment, and develop a fresh vision for the organization. Leaders who are focused on bringing about change foster idealized influence, motivation that inspires, intellectual stimulation, and individual focus. (Bass, 1985). Leaders who exhibit idealized behaviours and attitudes promote integrity and tolerance in their subordinates. These leaders work tirelessly to persuade subordinates of their new vision and the benefits it will bring to all of them, as well as to alter their mindset regarding change management. Employees that are prepared for change management are more flexible. Leaders empower their staff to think critically and use creative solutions (Mainemelis et al., 2015; Shafi et al., 2020) to overcome

obstacles in a volatile work environment. (Muduli, 2017) in his study revealed that transformational leader fosters an atmosphere that encourages employee engagement and empowerment. He further stated that empowered employees are more flexible and nimbler. Effective leadership impacts personnel trust (Islam et al., 2021), and ethical behavior (Khan et al., 2020). (Shafi et al., 2020) stated that association between strong leadership and employee innovation is moderated by intrinsic motivation. Strong leadership and the development of human resources through organizational innovation strengthen competitive advantage of the organization (Banmairuroy et al., 2021). Effective leaders encourage creativity, learning and growth, collaborative decision-making, transparent dialogue, and their followers become productive members of the workforce (Barrick et al., 2015; Bass et al., 2003).

Collaboration-

The act of handshakes between various functional groups is called collaboration. Digital technologies have spurred new forms of cooperation both inside and outside of the organizations, particularly in the service sector (Manca and Kaulio, 2018). Furthermore, virtual organization and collaboration have been found to be important facilitators of workforce agility (Goldman and Nagel, 1993; Oyen et al., 2001; Sharifi et al., 2001). (Breu et al., 2001) stated that teamwork environment or collaborative setting is important for fostering employee agility and the term "teamwork environment" here refers to the conditions under which a team operates internally, externally, within a group, and across functional boundaries. Teamwork in the workplace facilitates information and knowledge sharing. Another study highlighted that employees that work in a positive and supportive team environment will have access to accurate, thorough, and insightful business information that will help them make wise business decisions and the organizations can benefit from the synergy created by cross-sector collaboration in completing their projects on time.

Job autonomy-

The degree of freedom an employee has to choose their own work schedules and strategies for when and how to complete a task is known as job autonomy (Sherehiy & Karwowski 2014). It acts as a key to unlock employee agility. Having the freedom to make decisions that impact the organization's strategic direction is regarded as one of the best approaches to develop an agile workforce. This is primarily because it enables quick planning and execution (Muduli 2016). Providing personnel a lot of control over the work they are assigned improves their understanding of the problems and helps them come up with more innovative, adaptable solutions. One example of this would be solving small-scale problems without the need for a chain of supervisors to monitor the process. Employees who have greater autonomy over what, when, and how they complete tasks are better able to adapt to unexpected changes and may even seize opportunities that could result in positive changes (Sherehiy & Karwowski 2014).

Reward system-

From the perspective of workforce agility, compensation systems are also crucial. (Sumukadas and Sawhney 2004) categorized pay systems into two broad groups: non-traditional (improvement-based incentives, non-monetary rewards, skill-based pay systems, etc.) and traditional (profit-sharing, gainsharing, and Employee Stock Ownership Plans [ESOPs]). They came to the conclusion that non-traditional strategies work better to foster workforce agility. They contend that task variability is emphasized by skill-based pay schemes. Workers are rewarded according to the quantity and quality of skills they have learned, which is in line with workforce agility. This is the only lower-order involvement strategy that both directly affects workforce agility and supports power sharing is the use of non-monetary incentives. (Muduli 2016) also confirmed in his study that after employee autonomy, reward system has the most influence in facilitating workforce agility.

Organizational learning-

Through the process of organizational learning, new knowledge and insights are generated from the experiences of individuals in the workplace (Naranjo Valencia, Sanz Valle, and Jimenez-Jimenez, 2010). Enhancing organizational knowledge and learning culture is the most prevalent internal resource for attaining sustainable achievement (Alavi et al., 2010). Shared vision, commitment learning, and open-mindedness are the three key variables that Sinkula (1994) identified while modelling organizational learning as a latent variable. Gunasekaran (2001) highlighted the importance of training in creating workforce agility as a continuous process, as employee learning never stops. Through learning and training programs, employees develop new skills. It also increases employee flexibility and their capacity to adapt to changing market conditions (Crocitto and Youssef 2003). Organizational learning is a push factor for the employees to be creative and open to new ideas.

Cross-Training-

The term "training" describes a planned and structured approach to learning and development with the goal of achieving and enhancing individual, team, and organizational effectiveness (Goldstein & Ford 2002). An effective strategy for creating and preserving multi-functionality and redundancy in an integrated way is cross-training. Redundancy is the number of people who are capable of performing a specific task, whereas multi-functionality is the number of different tasks that everyone is able to perform. According to Martin (2015), training is a crucial strategy for developing an agile workforce because, in addition to generating new knowledge, it matches employees' developmental needs with the organization's strategic objective. According to Nembhard (2015), there are three main reasons why training is conducted: 1) to provide employees with a diverse range of skills (known as cross-training); 2) to provide just-in-time skills that can adapt to sudden changes in the workplace; and 3) to support cognitive and motivational factors. Since cross-training equips workers with a wide range of skills and facilitates seamless transitions between tasks, it's a powerful tactic for guaranteeing workforce agility (Muduli 2017). This facilitates their easy allocation by the organization to locations that are advantageous to the company in the short and long term (Glinska, Carr & Halliday 2012).

Information or Knowledge sharing-

Workforce agility can be effectively promoted by integrating and optimizing information sharing procedures. This is because employees will have access to information in real time, which will inevitably make decision-making and threat and opportunity forecasting easier and faster. (Cai, Huang, Liu & Wang 2018) suggest Enterprise social media (ESM) as one such information system that facilitates the sharing of documents, ideas, and knowledge among employees and broadens their social networks. ESM accomplishes this with its features, which include open conversation, microblogging, enterprise web pages, and instant messaging. Employee knowledge development is facilitated through knowledge sharing, and knowledgeable workers are essential to the growth of an agile company (Alavi et al 2014).

Management Support-

A high degree of support from management is beneficial to employees' agility. Studies connect employees' adaptive behaviours to their supervisors' support (Griffin & Hesketh 2003). Manager support helps employees in aligning their individual goals with the strategic objectives of the organization. As a result of this alignment which comes from management's participatory approach, employees make decisions more quickly which increases their agility (Nijssen & Paauwe 2012). For managers to support their subordinates, they also need to be agile. There has been a significant change from the previous emphasis on people management and responsibility delegation. Managers are now expected to be flexible, possess strong technological leadership skills, and have intimate knowledge of the needs or domain of their clients (Ajgaonkar 2021).

Organization culture-

One of the factors that can be directly attributed to individuals is work culture. Thus, the first prerequisite for any organization is an organizational culture that is adaptable to new ideas, innovations, and technologies. (Breu et al., 2001; Goldman and Nagel, 1993; Muduli, 2016) and that establishes programs for employees' training and development to assist them to acquire the skills they need (Crocitto and Youssef, 2003; Gunasekaran and Yusuf, 2002). Organizations biggest challenge is to encourage workforce transformation along with a learning culture that promotes a learning and growth mindset of employees with the help of development of learning programmes (PWC, 2019d).

Shared vision-

A common goal ensures alignment across the company. According to (Verona 1999), employees of an organization are less likely to expect meaningful learning if there isn't a common vision. To put it simply, even if staff members are eager and willing to learn, it will be challenging to identify and comprehend what needs to be learned in the absence of a shared vision. Lack of unified direction is a common issue in organizations, preventing many creative ideas from ever being put into practice (Hult 1998). Workforce agility and a common vision are related to and dependent upon one another, according to (Gunasekaran 2001). A workforce lacking a cohesive vision is ill-equipped to adapt to learning tasks in a timely and efficient manner. (Brown and Eisenhardt, 1995) emphasizes that various organizational departments and units have distinct methods for obtaining and presenting information. As a result, information is understood differently by individuals in different functional domains. Therefore, a common vision unifies and integrates the priorities of different departments, enhancing the standard of learning.

5. CONCLUSION

Becoming a truly agile enterprise is today's goal for any business. In order to effectively respond to changing market conditions and lead an organization that is genuinely responsive to its customers, business leaders in the corporate world need to have a workforce that is proactive, adaptable, and resilient—that is, a workforce that continuously seeks out new ideas and approaches to enhance their offerings and profitability. Agility of workforce cannot be achieved by merely wanting it badly, even though it is a necessary objective in today's business environment. Organizational practices and policies such as cross-training, strong leadership, autonomy at work, reward systems, organizational learning, knowledge sharing, shared vision, management support, and organizational culture are acknowledged and verified as factors that facilitate the development of workforce agility within a company. This study is conceptual in nature because it is limited to reviewing the body of existing literature on workforce agility. Future researchers can test the proposed concepts and drivers by carrying out an empirical study.

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