The Emerging Agile Workforce – Real Implications

Organizational leaders recognize their need for agile talent is growing. And, around the world, a generation of talented individuals in many fields are choosing an entrepreneurial, flexible or "agile" career.

In the U.S. alone, companies are engaging [roughly 6.4 million independent contractors](), freelancers, and other types of contingent workers. One of the most compelling findings in a Randstad US study highlighted that by the year 2025, most workers (70%) and employers (68%) agree a majority of the workforce will be employed in an agile capacity (i.e. contractor, consultant, temporary or freelance).

The speed of change has made agility in talent and workforce management an absolute necessity. For C-suite and HR executives, the reality of a changing workforce and the erosion of the traditional employment model are apparent, with most recognizing the need to both embrace a new talent management model and institutionalize the benefits of doing so.

Are you ready for the shift?

To remain competitive, firms rely on agile talent and other resourcing arrangements to quickly grow capability. The strategic agility to anticipate talent needs, adjust in real-time and utilize workers from a variety of employment arrangement is the revolutionary workforce trend. For example, Microsoft has nearly two-thirds as many contractors as full-time employees.

Even the simplest business structures, sole proprietorships, have increased their use of contract workers nearly two-fold since 2003. Data suggests that 87 percent of C-suite executives and HR leaders will be more committed to building an agile workforce. Expertise, innovation, and speed are also of great importance. And, the dependence of organizations on external expertise is growing for the following reasons:

- Leverage the increased availability of expertise
- Reduce severance and layoffs
- Avoid adding permanent headcount
- Increase speed of getting things done
- Challenge our thinking and assumptions with outside ideas

In addition, the study suggests that by 2019, agile workers could comprise as much as 50 percent of the workforce. Approximately half (46%) of workers surveyed said they

chose to become an agile worker, and another 28 percent said agile work was the best option for them. Many of the agile employment misconceptions are eroding with great reasons.

Motives for an Agile Career

According to the 'The Workplace 2025' study, 11 percent of today's workforce is made up of agile workers. Additionally, about 4 in 10 of permanent workers say they are likely to consider shifting to agile work within the next few years. The primary motivations include:

- 68 percent agree it better fits their lifestyle.
- 63 percent believe working as an agile employee will make them more qualified in the future workplace.
- 56 percent agree agile work makes them more money.
- 48 agree agile work offers them better career growth than working as a permanent employee.
- 38 percent agree they feel more job security working as an agile worker than they do as a permanent employee.

As worker attitudes continue to change, traditional work patterns look increasingly out-dated. Yet, until now, only a few companies have been developing a fully integrated approach to talent management – one that make the most of the employee trend for more flexibility and an entrepreneurial environment.

Workforce Partnerships

As the use of external talent increases, so does the need for more efficient ways to find, hire, and manage contingent workers as well as integrate them into the company's full-time employees and teams. Historically, organizations have treated externals as "separate, and not equal." Majority of managers would never consider treating externals like internals. As companies depend more on this agile talent for fulfilling strategic capabilities, that mind-set won't cut it anymore. "Separate, and not equal" is precisely what is causing the problems. Corporate external talent platforms — platforms that directly connect external talent with internal projects and teams — are emerging as the leading method for accomplishing these tasks.

'The Workplace 2025' study suggests that:

- 81 percent of employers agree that in order to build an agile workforce, they will need to rely on staffing, talent development and recruitment partners to provide direction and guidance;

- 82 percent of employers agree that by 2025, their reliance on staffing, talent development and recruiting partners will increase

According to research, investing in the development of existing talent, and the emerging agile workforce, is a cornerstone of a successful talent and workforce strategy. Specifically, enabling on-the-job training that is aligned to business needs, and ensuring commitment to coaching from all levels of the organization will create a culture that nurtures high-potential, agile talent.

In addition to establishing and nurturing a culture of talent development, HR leaders need to collaborate with training and recruiting providers to ensure their organizations have a sustainable pipeline of agile talent that meets fluctuating workforce needs. HR leaders have a vested interest in ensuring curricula are properly aligned to workforce needs, and the tools and experience to recognize where systemic changes are required to evolve workforce development.

By looking to the outside to identify and nurture emerging talent pools, HR leaders— who are increasingly stretched—may turn to external workforce solutions providers to help identify, attract, and retain critical talent. In an environment where each single hire is carefully considered, and every individual worker counts, partnering with an expert RPO (recruitment process outsourcing) provider can take the pressure off an organization's internal resources while putting the recruitment process in the hands of an expert who can help employers develop an agile workforce. A good provider also should be able to help extend your training reach. At a minimum, it can train managers to make smarter hiring decisions to reinforce your development objectives.

In this ever-evolving economic and business landscape, successful organizations are characterized by their ability to adapt to the latest trends in technology, innovation, and shifting consumer demands. An adaptable business requires an agile workforce, with the soft and hard skills to reflect the changing needs of employers.

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CMP is a talent and transition firm in the business of developing people and organizations across the full talent life cycle – from talent acquisition and leadership development, to organization development and career transition support.