In A Fast-Paced World, Only One Trait Matters: Agility
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- *In the digital age, building workplace agility for growth goes beyond adopting the latest technologies*

During a recent interview, I was asked a simple question, "What is your passion at work?"

The answer has remained the same throughout my years of working in Human Resources and Development. My passion at work is to create environments and cultures through which employees are able to grow and thrive.

While my passions and objectives for work have remained constant, the drivers of a work environment that encourages growth have continously changed! As new technologies and tools emerge, industry and customer requirements change, and simultaneously our employees' needs evolve: our workplaces need to continuously adapt to accommodate these shifts.

This decade, however, presents an entirely different challenge to address in the workplace- the scale of change has now **accelerated** to breakneck speeds. Frontier technologies such as AI, IoT, and cloud computing have been integrated deeply into the workplace, accelerating the pace of work to a point that would have been unimaginable just a few years ago.

To cope with this acceleration, superficial policies no longer work when used to encourage growth and employee productivity. Bean bags, foosball tables and unlimited snacks are great to have, but these features do very little in helping companies and employees cope with the large scale, flurry of rapid changes within their industries today. Companies now need to delve much deeper into their work culture and identity - because to keep up with today's rate of acceleration, and to stay relevant and competitive - only one trait matters: agility.

WHAT IS WORKPLACE AGILITY?

Today's workplace needs to exemplify and live and breathe the very definition of 'agility' - that is: to be highly flexible, and have the capacity to move quickly and easily.

Agility is the innate ability to adapt and adopt positively to any change, no matter how rapid or sudden (*flexibility*). It includes the on-the-ground employees' ability and efficiency to complete tasks, wherever they are, whenever needed (*the ability to respond and deliver quickly and easily*).

Agility goes beyond merely adopting the latest software that supposedly enhances efficiency. At its core, every person, process, tool or structure used within a business must be chosen for its ability to quickly and efficiently adopt and adapt to *newness*. Agility is a trait that needs to encompass all facets of an organisation, to create that quality of resilience in the face of rapid change, arising from the leadership, to product delivery, to internal processes, right down to the management of every single employee.

[HBR](#) in 2018 highlighted how 'transparency in decision-making is also becoming more important. Executives want their employees to understand the "why" behind strategic decisions, and employees want to know that as well. It's not about how these topics have changed, as much as it's about who needs to better understand them - and why.'

HOW TO BUILD WORKPLACE AGILITY?

While agility is relatively easy to define, effectively creating an agile culture in the workplace is a different matter entirely.

1. CREATING AGILITY STARTS FROM THE TOP

Agile organisations fundamentally require a different kind of leadership to be effective. Traditional hierarchies with superior-subordinate relationships are today the antithesis of agility, as it fosters a culture of "waiting and seeing what the boss says".

In agile organisations, the role of the leader must evolve from telling employees what to do and shift to distilling and disseminating a clear, shared and compelling purpose for their organisation – acting as the *compass of the organisation*, rather than its captain. In doing so, mindsets shift from 'waiting for permission from the captain' to 'completing tasks to make sure the ship is on course'.

2. AGILE EXECUTION COMES FROM TEAMS

- *Enabling autonomous teams:* Who is the captain then, if leaders are the compass that guides the ship? Believe it or not, there is no single captain.

  Agility requires autonomy to make fast decisions in the interest of the organisation's purpose, rather than waiting for approvals from layers of management. *Autonomous* small teams with well-defined goals are much better at adapting to rapid change than traditionally structured teams based on hierarchy.

- *Creating collaborative and communicative teams:* Agility cannot come from siloes. While autonomous teams can make quicker decisions, all decisions need to be made towards a *collective purpose*. To ensure this, agile organisations need to enable a *culture of collaboration and communication*.

- Collaboration between teams allows for a better understanding of each team's goals while fostering a 'win-win' mindset in helping each other achieve those goals. Communication ensures that each team's progress develops in tandem and keeps an organisation on track toward the golden purpose outlined by its leaders. Together, collaboration and communication build the magic sauce of resilience by orienting teams towards problem-solving in unison rather than waiting for each other to catch up.

3. CHOOSING THE RIGHT TOOLS

Although fast evolving technologies are often the driving force behind every organisation's pursuit of agility, they are also our biggest friends in nurturing this much-sought after trait. Several tools now exist to help teams create and maintain that culture of collaboration and communication that further enables agile teams.

- *VR and AR:* The integration of VR and AR into the workplace has provided organizations with opportunities for even more streamlined efficiency and encouraging productivity in employees by providing the flexibility to connect from anywhere, transforming the way employees train each other, interact, engage and organize workflows.

- *SaaS and the Cloud:* Organisations worldwide are using these tools to facilitate collaborative work, regardless of distance, by enabling access to resources and communication anytime, from anywhere. By unlocking access to resources and opening

up more avenues of communication, teams will be able to execute more consistently and effectively. Furthermore, these tools are highly effective enablers of flexibility by cutting down the barriers to task completion, which is another cornerstone attribute of an agile organisation.

New technologies do indeed bring with them rapid changes. These may temporarily upend our way of doing things, and we may feel uncomfortable for a time, uncertain of when and how we'll find a foothold in a world that never seems to sit still. Nevertheless, we must continue to build resilience, and a culture that is ready to adapt, and open to taking on any change. This mindset is what will take us even beyond resilience.

We must welcome agility because it will push us to grow and innovate in ways that were once unimaginable. When we are agile, we'll be ready for anything and benefit from everything the world has to offer.

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