

OUTCOMES OF WORKFORCE AGILITY: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY

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Abstract: Presently, emerging markets, globalisation, customer preferences, technology advancements and other factors all contribute to an environment that is continuously changing for organisations across the globe. In these rapidly changing circumstances, organisations have realised they must be adaptable and change-oriented. This has brought the importance of agility in the workforce. Agile workers are fast-moving, competitive workers who possess attributes like flexibility, adaptability and inventiveness. Workforce agility has been defined as a management approach that enables businesses to react swiftly and successfully to opportunities and threats that are caused by a volatile and competitive business environment. In the current literature, there is lack of studies which comprehensively describe results and outcomes of workforce agility. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to address this gap by extensively reviewing the literature on workforce agility and to find out its various outcomes which benefit the organisation.

Keywords: Workforce Agility, Agile Workforce, Workforce Agility Outcomes

INTRODUCTION

Change is the only constant in this fast-paced era we live in. Several changes have been brought about by Industry 4.0, which is pushing the organisation towards automation. Therefore, organisations must always exercise caution. Historically, the business environment has been impacted by well-known elements that could present opportunities or threats, such as emerging technologies, novel business strategies, innovative approaches to managing competition, digitalisation, market deregulation and fragmentation, economic fluctuations, shifting demographics and persistent social and political unrest (Felipe et al., 2020). Furthermore, consumers now participate actively in the production process rather than just being the recipients of goods (Yang & Liu, 2012). Consequently, businesses face the challenge of constantly, swiftly and exclusively adapting to their demands (Munteanu et al., 2020). Taking all of the above into consideration, the key question in the academic and professional settings is how to effectively manage and react to these elements (Appelbaum et al., 2017). In this regard, a variety of strategies and models, including flexible production, business networks, modular organisations, reengineering, and just-in-time workforces, have been put forth and put into practice over time (Sherehiy et al., 2007). The idea of agility is one of the latest tactics; it gained popularity among North American scholars in the early

1990s (Qin & Nembhard, 2015). Organisational agility is the utilisation of resources and practices to maximise speed, flexibility, proactivity, quality and profitability (Breu et al., 2002). The secret to organisational agility is workforce agility, which emphasises the special value of human resources as the only source of competitive advantage that businesses can rely on in this volatile market. Agility in the workforce aids in the establishment of an ideal workforce that contributes to organisational goals. It benefits all parties involved in the company. The impact of workforce agility on organisational performance can benefit employers through improved customer service, higher quality and strengthened strategic capabilities. It also promotes the adoption and transmission of technology. Personnel recognise the value of workforce agility because it increases job engagement and job satisfaction and also enhances productivity. This article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors result from workforce agility.

Workforce Agility

Agility is a skill and the term workforce refers to the members of the organisation. Together, agile workers are those that are well-organised, adaptable and provide the necessary information and abilities when the business needs them (Muduli, 2013). They proactively develop

and improve their skill set and leverage it when necessary (Breu et al., 2002). They take advantage of opportunities that benefit the organisation's interests and adjust swiftly to change. Workforce agility moves towards proactive behaviour by integrating an individual's aptitude and attitude. Adaptability, flexibility, a positive bias towards learning and development, speed, collaboration, competence and innovation are attributes of an agile workforce (Muduli 2016). Organisations now need to be agile in order to survive (Alavi & Wahab, 2013). Agile employees are regarded as a valuable long-term asset by the company (Goldman & Nagel, 1993).

Agility in the workforce benefits the organisation in countless ways. Innovative product development and improvements to the manufacturing process occur, enhancing an organisation's financial capabilities. In a dynamic, competitive environment, the workforce must fully utilise its resources and an agile workforce makes optimal use of its resources. Additionally, it strengthens strategic capabilities and enables organisations to use innovation to achieve their objectives. The confidence of customers is preserved. Furthermore, a key element of organisational agility is workforce agility. According to (Yusuf et al., 1999), "Agility is the successful exploration of competitive bases (speed, flexibility, innovation, proactivity, quality and profitability) through the integration of reconfigurable resources and best practices in a knowledge-rich environment to provide customer-driven products and services in a rapidly changing market environment." This is a comprehensive definition of agility. Implementing a three-pronged strategy—initiate, adapt and deliver—can help an organisation survive in a volatile environment. The fundamental characteristics of an agile workforce are responsive, committed, creative and resilient (Shafer et al., 2001). Research indicates that the workforce's ability to adjust to a changing environment is responsible for organizational outcomes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We carried out a literature review, which enables one to analyse the literature in-depth by focusing on a particular topic and guaranteeing a high level of transparency and reliability. In order to find peer-reviewed English-language articles, we manually searched Google Scholar for the larger body of business literature. The following search terms were used by us: "workforce agility" OR "employee agility" AND "outcomes" OR "consequences" OR "Impact", which came about as a result of an initial investigation in which we manually recognised significant contributions in the area of interest and then examined the titles, abstracts, and keywords in those contributions. Additionally, we searched Google

Scholar for additional relevant articles using the reference lists of the appropriate papers. The concept of agility was first introduced in the business context by the Iacocca Institute in 1991 (Nagel & Dove, 1991), so we included studies that are published after 1991 up until year 2023.

Outcomes of Workforce Agility

Workforce agility is extremely advantageous to the organisation as workforce is the greatest competitive advantage an organisation can vouch for. An organisation that is agile can quickly adjust to unanticipated changes in its people, technology, organisation and goals. We will review the key findings from the studies conducted by different researchers regarding the effects of workforce agility.

Organisational agility is impossible to achieve without an agile workforce (Sherehiy & Karwowski, 2014). (Breu et al., 2002) also stated that workforce agility is regarded as a crucial component of organisational agility. Agile approach in the organisation provides autonomy and control over work of the employees. Both the performance and well-being of the workforce are enhanced. The advantages of workforce agility are highlighted by (Sherehiy & Karwowski, 2014) in their article. These benefits include increased quality, improved customer service, a quicker learning curve and economy of scope and depth. Workforce Agility facilitates cooperation both inside and outside the company (Gunasekaran, 1999). An agile workforce will help businesses succeed by allowing them to adjust to changes in the market and produce cutting-edge products that will help the business succeed. Additionally, it strengthens an organisation's strategic capabilities while concurrently encouraging an environment that fosters workforce agility. (Muduli, 2009). It has been demonstrated that a carefully thought-out and implemented workforce agility strategy increases worker efficiency in numerous ways (Hopp & Oyen, 2004). While worker coordination enhances switching and multitasking efficiency, cross-training skill pattern-based strategy will lead to with increased training efficiency; and a well-designed team structure contributes to workforce collaboration efficiency. In order to adapt to future changes in markets and technology, the organisation must prioritize the variety and flexibility of skills. Workforce agility and organisational intelligence are found to have a strong and favourable relationship (Sohrabi et al., 2014). The ability of an organisation to mobilize and concentrate all of its mental resources towards accomplishing its goal is known as organisational intelligence. Empirical research by (Al-Faouri et al., 2014) indicates that workforce agility also affects organisational memory. It affects workers' job satisfaction as well (Nabatchian et al., 2014). It strengthens

employee engagement at work (Nafei, 2016). Agility leads to employees' commitment to the organisation (Chamanifard et al., 2015). The organisation's ability to successfully and satisfactorily implement technological change is determined by the employees' adoption of technology and their agility (Pawar & Meymandpour, 2017). Workforce strategy helps to improve the financial performance of the company by enhancing employee skills and behaviours for both anticipated and unforeseen future events (Bhattacharya et al., 2005). Workforce agility improves an organisation's effectiveness and efficiency, which has a substantial impact on its overall performance (Al-Kasasbeh et al., 2016). In a competitive market with constant and unexpected change, it is thought to boost productivity, profits and market shares. It also improves an organisation's chances of surviving in

an increasingly unstable and global business environment (Muduli, 2013). According to (Saptarini et al., 2023) workers who possess high workforce agility adjust to change quickly and effectively, and shows flexibility, competence and teamwork and will also feel more invested in their jobs. More specifically, workforce agility research has been linked in a large body of literature to a number of advantageous business outcomes for firms, including contextual and adaptive performance (Varshney & Varshney, 2020), innovative performance (Abrishamkar et al., 2021; Franco & Landini, 2022), firm performance (Das, Mukhopadhyay & Suar, 2022), crisis management (Raut et al., 2022), safety performance (Zhu et al., 2022), organisational memory (Al-Faouri, Al-Nsour & Al-Kasasbeh, 2014) and successful information systems (Milicevic et al., 2022).

Table 1: Outcomes of Workforce Agility

Outcome	Title	Author(s)
Strategic capabilities of an organization	Understanding the critical attributes of workforce agility and exploring it's determinants: an empirical study.	Muduli (2009)
Organisational memory (declarative memory, procedural memory)	The impact of workforce agility on organizational memory.	Al-Faouri et al. (2014)
Organisational intelligence	Relationship between workforce agility and organizational intelligence (case study: the companies of 'Iran high council of informatics').	Sohrabi et al. (2014)
Organisational commitment	Impact of organizational agility dimensions on employee's organizational commitment in Foreign Exchange Offices of Tejarat Bank, Iran.	Chamanifard et al. (2015)
Manufacturing flexibility	The influence of workforce agility on external manufacturing flexibility of Iranian SMEs.	Alavi (2016)
Organisational performance (effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation)	E-HRM, workforce agility and organizational performance: a review paper toward theoretical framework.	Al-Kasasbeh et al. (2016)
Job engagement	The role of organizational agility in reinforcing job engagement: A study on industrial companies in Egypt.	Nafei (2016)
Technology adoption	An exploration of enhancing adoption and agility in technological changes.	Pawar and Meymandpour (2017)
Technology diffusion	An exploration of enhancing adoption and agility in technological changes.	Pawar and Meymandpour (2017)
Employee performance	Workforce Agility: Improving Employee Performance from the perspective of a Competitive Work Environment.	Wahijunianto (2022)
Organizational performance (Service delivery, improved output, job satisfaction and efficiency)	Effect of employee agility on organizational performance (a case study of the state department for labour, Kenya).	Makori et al. (2022)
Organizational development agility	The Impact of Workforce Agility on Organizational Development Agility in the INGOs Working in the Gaza Strip.	Ross et al. (2022)
Corporate reputation	Enablers of workforce agility, firm performance, and corporate reputation.	Das (2023)
Firm performance	Enablers of workforce agility, firm performance, and corporate reputation.	Das (2023)
Adaptive performance	Workforce agility and adaptive performance in government institution: The mediating role of work engagement.	Saptarini et al. (2023)

CONCLUSION

This review on workforce agility would serve as a managerial guide for business excellence. The aim of every organisation would be usage and management of its resources to the optimum extent in achieving outstanding results by satisfying all its stakeholders. This focused thought can be brought in action through systematic and structured efforts by the organisation in the right direction. Organisations work in a turbulent environment and only an agile organisation can cope with the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguous nature of the environment. Workforce agility is the key for survival. To facilitate agility in the workforce, managers of the organisation can draw inputs about promoters and focus on those promoters, for achieving the outcomes of workforce agility. The strategies, practices, programs, activities, work system, etc. can be streamlined to encourage agile behaviour in the workforce. Agility which includes proactivity and adaptability is a key to organisational success. Human resource being a unique resource that can be developed forms the competitive advantage of firms. Management need to understand this and should work on agility of workforce so that they can leverage the benefits of agility. In order to improve employee performance in embracing and managing change, managers must design employee development programs aimed at boosting workforce agility. Training can be done in order to improve the workforce's agility. Lastly, we conclude that an agile workforce will result in improved organisational performance, technology adoption and diffusion, organisational commitment, job engagement, job satisfaction, organisational intelligence, organisational memory, corporate reputation and employee performance.

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