THE AGILE
IMPERATIVE

HR Agility: Need Of The Hour!

The capability of the HR function to respond more quickly and effectively to changing employee expectations, workplace disruptions, and business demands is 'HR Agility'.

BY **DR. MOORTHY K. UPPALURI**

In an era of Digital Disruption and Technology Transformation, agility in and by itself could be a competitive advantage. Here is a quick snapshot of the disruption experienced by several Industries, out of which only a few have adopted newer strategies with much required agility, leading to successful and positive outcomes. Evidently, technology has remained as the mainstay during such a transformation process. Clearly, those companies that have either not made technology their ally, nor have executed with agility, have lost out in this disruption.

Examples of all those industries which were disrupted, which lead to the creation of a new concept with the help of of technology and Agility are as mentioned: -

1. The music industry was grappled with Piracy during the Disc era. But services like iTunes and instant radio led to the disruptive nature in the market.

2. The internet movie streaming companies like Netflix and Amazon Prime threatens the movie theatres and media industry.

3. Cameras were disrupted by smartphones

4. Media and communications industry were disrupted by web news aggregators, social media platforms, social communication platforms

5. Educations industry was disrupted by E-books, self-publishing books, blogs and much more

An overview of those Organisations that disrupted the market by adopting new Agile strategies have been mentioned below:-

- Netflix and Streaming has disrupted Blockbuster

- Amazon led to the bankruptcy of Borders and Barnes and Noble

- Digital Cameras led to the bankruptcy of Kodak

- PCs and Servers threatened the very existence of IBM's mainframes business until it focused and executed its powerful Services strategy

- Marginalised PC maker Apple evolved to be a successful consumer products company with an outstanding revenue growth and a huge market capitalisation through the launch of iDevices

- Wireless, Internet, and Skype disrupted Verizon until it adopted a fibre-optic internet, TV, Phone strategy

- Internet, email, and express carriers have disrupted the business of the US Postal Services

5 Organisational Values That Drive Agility

Organisations with deeply rooted and visible commitment to one or more of these values are 2x times more likely to be effective at agility than those without them. Highly agile organisations are 10x more likely to indicate that all five values are embedded into the culture of their organisations.
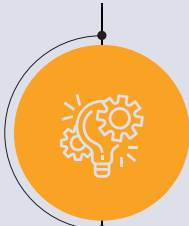
Innovation

Highly agile organisations are **5x more likely** to have cultures that **encourage innovation** and **foster trust.**
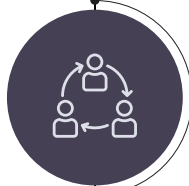
Transparency

Highly agile organisations are **2.5x more likely** to **promote transparency,** the value most highly correlated to market performance.
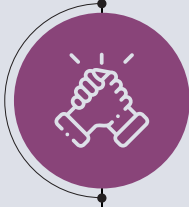
Creativity

Highly agile organisations value creativity **4x more** and are **10x more likely** to **support risk taking** and **embrace failure.**

Diversity

Highly agile organisations are **42% more likely** to **value diversity.** Though not enough alone, **lack of diversity is impediment.**

Collaboration

Highly agile organisations are **45% more likely** to value **collaboration.** They are also more likely to **engage employees at all levels.**

Image credit i4cp

A comparison can be drawn between Agile methodology and the Scrum methodology in software development. In Scrum methodology, teams divide their work into goals that must be completed inside of time boxed iterations, called *Sprints.* And Sprints can take anywhere between a fortnight or a month to be completed. The progress made by the team is closely watched, and revised planning, if any, is normally carried out during daily scrums- a 15-minute stand-up meeting. The Scrum framework is lightweight, iterative, and incremental, and used for managing intricate tasks. It challenges the suppositions held by the traditional, sequential approach to product development, and enables teams to self-organise by encouraging physical co-location or close online collaboration of all team members, as well as daily facetoface communication among all team members and disciplines involved.

A key principle of Scrum is the two-fold recognition that customers will alter their mindsets about their wants and needs (also termed as the *requirements volatility*), and that there are bound to be unpredictable challenges—and hence a predictive or planned approach is not the best suited.

Scrum is framed on an evidence-based empirical approach—ceding to the fact that the problem is not completely comprehensible or defined upfront, and instead, keeping one's thoughts cantered over maximising the capabilities of the team to: -

- Deliver quickly
- Respond to emerging requirements
- Adapt to evolving technologies and changes in market conditions

These conditions also apply to the VUCA world in which today's businesses and organisations are

thriving in. Agile methodology helps in slashing cycle-times of the programme/project execution, deriving faster results, failing quickly through smart experiment-ation so that businesses can focus on potential and a few viable options rather quickly. By way of taking calculated risks, learning fast from intelligent iterations, and focusing on the vital few is the short cut to success with agility.

More and more companies are evaluating newer options for talent acquisition and development by applying technology to various stages of the talent acquisition process, potentially eliminating a few redundant steps and varying a few others to improve the overall efficacy. In today's job market, hiring the right talent at the right time at the right cost/value is an imperative for success. Currently, candidates have multiple options,

SUDHIR DHAR
Executive Director-HR & Administration, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Limited

"HR is in the process of transforming its practices to a fast moving environment. Through AI and digitalisation, HR is having a real-time pulse check on employee connect and engagement, and is hence more proactive. Building gamifications, micro-learning bytes are working as tools for learning and engagement, changing the approach to learning and development . It is also imperative for HR to clearly identify the elements and practices which will retain the 'human touch' and not transform as digital, since Human Resources must remain 'human' "

ANIMESH KUMAR
HR Head, DocsApp

"In the VUCA world in which we live now, it has become all the more significant to rehaul HR practices and adopt an organisational mindset that fuels the agile business model. To begin with, the DNA of 'being comfortable with constant change' has to be deeply ingrained in the ethos of the organisation. It must then reflect in the actual practices implemented across the complete employee lifecycle. Some such practices are - using actuarial science for workforce planning, forecasting models to control attrition, re-skilling talent for tomorrow's business needs & creating a workplace culture that thrives on collaboration. "

and it is critical not only to have a compelling Employee Value Proposition, but also to have the agility in the recruitment process to respond back quickly to facilitate the right decision, both by the company and the candidate.

"**It is critical to have a compelling Employee Value Proposition, and the agility in the recruitment process to respond back quickly to facilitate the right decision, both by the company and the candidate.** "

Empowerment of both the remote and regional teams to act independently and swiftly, by

doing away with permissions and approvals from the corporate headquarters would be a key enabler to foster the culture that promotes agility. In doing so, it is essential to ensure that all such teams are aligned with the business vision and strategy. The key is to enhance the pace of execution without compromising the quality of the desired outcomes. And this can be achieved only through agility that is enabled through robust frameworks, process discipline, role clarity, and appropriate infusion of technology.

FATHIMA FAROUK
HR Head, AMD India

"Keeping up with the changing business landscape, HR needs to be agile and collaborative to succeed. We need to be in sync with technological advancements like AI, chatbots, and data intelligence, to improve efficiency and create a strong talent structure. HR partners need to consult with business stakeholders, study best practices and design policies in line with today's business dynamics that address the millennial mindset. For instance, talent acquisition teams collaborate with hiring managers to improvise the hiring process based on project milestones and needs. Similarly, talent management teams meet employees regularly to analyze their value propositions that are key to driving the company's culture. "

DEVIKA THORAT
Manager- Human Resources,
IDeaS Revenue Solutions

"The future of work is pushing the human resource function towards agility, with jobs moving from being well-defined to ambiguity. Talent acquisition teams must think creatively and hire people who are talented in their own unique ways and look or opportunities to nurture, build and value their uniqueness. While the L&D function should create a talent pool of multi-skilled teams that can move fast in any direction. It needs to be creative in designing development plans in consultation with business heads, where knowledge can be imparted quickly through job rotation, shadowing, cross functional projects, etc. Further, the organisational structure will need to be more fluid to facilitate agility. A top-down approach will slowly diminish, and self-managed teams will emerge. To enable and support this new formation, HR professionals would need a deeper understanding of the business and focus on hiring and developing leaders to be mentors, coaches, and enablers and not instruction-givers."

Onboarding and empowering employees with reliable and relevant information wherever required, with optimal governance will only promote HR agility. Further, it enables efficiency and enriched employee satisfaction to facilitate realisation of the aspired business outcomes. Several companies have leveraged the agility to stem attrition by offering more meaningful career options and growth paths with fulfilling

career aspirations to their committed and capable employees by mapping them to new skills and new-jobs. Agile culture has helped organisations to identify emerging technologies and the associated skills needed to convert such opportunities to revenues. Agile organisations have upskilled capable and interested Talent to take on new challenges. Thus, it has assisted them in realising their career ambitions. Organisations that are not agile, not only risk losing their talent, but also get left behind from riding the opportunity wave.

JAYATI ROY
Director-HR, Barco India

"An agile business model ensures that an enterprise becomes more adaptive and responsive when dealing with customers, and HR is following the same spirit for all its internal and external customers. The advancement in employee-centric work culture is making HR to become more agile and providing employees better opportunities towards continuous development of their personal and professional skills. HR can adopt agile methods and mindset by being open to innovative and adaptive techniques aimed at improving employee onboarding and transition, real-time employee interactions and feedback, training, upskilling, and talent management, enabling HR to thrive in today's fast-moving and complex times - moving from being an administrative function to the enabler of change for key assets of organisations - its talent function."

"**It is essential that all the teams are aligned with the business vision and strategy. The key is to enhance the pace of execution without compromising the quality of the desired outcomes.**"

Learning platforms also have to be agile extending the learning content and experiences to the targeted employees anytime and anywhere, on-demand. Workforce plans have to be dynamically designed to cater to the business needs with utmost agility. Such plans may need to be revised on a quarterly basis, if not on a monthly basis. Executing the workforce plans with a clear sense of prioritisation, and having the ability to steer dynamically is important to engage and leverage the emerging opportunities.

It is important to drive a sense of urgency that is deep and all-pervasive across businesses, and the organisation plays a key role in fostering and rewarding agility. Agile is a proven way to solve complex business problems in a simple and efficient manner with the available resources. 🅗🅒

About the Author

Dr. Moorthy K. Uppaluri is former CEO and MD - Randstad India, a global business leader, an angel investor and advisor to early-stage startups. With vast domestic and international experience across diverse sectors like IT, manufacturing, and professional services, Moorthy is credited with evolving business strategy, building brands, growing market share, improving operational excellence, driving innovation and fostering a people-centric culture. He is also a featured author and an eminent speaker.