

## **DRIVING PERFORMANCE IN AN AGILE FLEX WORK ENVIRONMENT WEBINAR – 7<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2020**

### **1. How would you define agility in the context of a business?**

- Ability to adapt, evolve, respond to circumstances that impact the business.
- This is most important in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) environment.
- It needs to be engrained in the organization's culture, so that it permeates everything and everyone.

### **2. Do you think organizations are ready to adopt the agile workforce model?**

- An agile workforce model implies that organizations **understand, accept and internalize** the opportunities available in utilizing the workforce in a variety of manners towards enhancing productivity and effectiveness of output and impact.
- Organizations need to consider the following variables:
  - Engagement of resources as and when they are needed, as there is ability to tap into them through specialized networks
  - Adaptability of resources so that they can be shifted wherever they are needed in real time without bureaucratic constraints
  - Productivity at its best as it focuses on value generation and impact, through defined skills sets and expertise that is required and its application through real collaboration
- Cost structure which is more flexible and which is based on a on-demand talent pool.
- Organizations struggle to let go of structure, hierarchy and order.
- Readiness is a factor of how readily available are the technical and critical roles within the organization and how easy or difficult has it been in the recent times to grow, nurture or acquire them through the traditional methods and channels.

### **3. What has the pandemic thought us about being agile?**

The pandemic has been a compressed practical MBA masterclass for everyone at every level and in every type of organization.

We can't say that some were better prepared than others, as it is something nobody had experienced before.

What it brought about in real / tangible terms was the need to stop going around the bush, finding excuses or reasons for not doing things and forced every individual / organization to deeply think about what is critical to business survival, what skills are essential to business

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continuity and growth and how should we apply a business continuity model that is flexible and practical, as there is no time to do prototype, test, adapt and launch. You are mainly repairing the plane as it is on air.

What the pandemic accelerated or uncovered was the cultural / operational / financial strength of some to withstand the intense stress and challenges and consider a shift or reinforcement of their business model and operations.

Agility is an innate characteristic of the human race. It is brought about as a survival instinct. And the past few months show that agility is a sleeping monster that when awakened brings about great opportunities and chances to reinvent and realign what otherwise may have not been realized.

**What matters is outcomes / impact** – not how many hours you are in the office. Organization need to become better at identifying what is expected, who is responsible and how should it be measured.

**Should we be bothered about where the work is done?** If we truly believe that what matters is output and impact, then it shouldn't matter where the individual does the work. This however is not applicable or possible for everyone. It requires thinking to ascertain what roles can be performed remotely, and what roles should or cant operate remotely.

**Some backend roles become critical to business continuity – like IT and Corporate communications.** As there is a need to be able to reach customers, employees and stakeholders in a variety of ways which may not have been thought through before.

Question everything! Nothing is sacrosanct.

4. What are some of the **characteristics of an agile workforce** that you have seen that has worked?

- Hiring of part timers, giggers, remote workers, on-assignment roles, older people.
- Break of discriminatory barriers that otherwise will prevent some members of society from participating in the labor market. Before this was considered CSR, now it is very much engrained in the philosophy of open opportunities.
- Identifying how to attract to the organization individuals who otherwise are reluctant to commit full time to a single organization.
- Remote working
- Re-engineering of the office space

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- It is not about the physical allocation of space that will drive culture. We have learnt how disruptive open spaces are for some people and functions. It is about how people behave and treat each other.
- Technological advancements
- Robots
- Distance learning
- Content can be delivered and learnt in many ways. Some succeed as they are willing to try new things and are comfortable with failure, as long as learning points and required improvements are discussed and implemented.

### **5. What are **key areas you think companies need to adopt to make an agile workforce model work?****

- Organizational culture is at the heart of being able to adopt an agile workforce model and I will break it down into 4 components or cornerstones so that a high performing culture is achieved through the agile model:
  - Common understanding of strategic direction and desired outcomes.
  - Clear expectations being communicated to everyone around what is expected of them towards achieving the strategic direction / desired outcomes.
  - Capability development to ensure that critical / required skills and knowledge are developed and nurtured throughout the organization so that people can do their job most effectively at all time.
  - Commitment instilled by an objective and fair rewards / consequence system that recognizes those who perform adequately and highlights / supports those who may need help in improving the way they are contributing / performing.

### **6. Who would be the **key players?** What would be their specific roles - CEO, CHRO, HOD**

- CEO – needs to drive and expect agility from everyone, starting from the top management and BOD members.
- CHRO – needs to define the model in collaboration with HODs and operational people. It is about every aspect of how people are managed, as policies and procedures drive behaviour, so if these matters are not looked at and evaluated, people will not really pay attention or change the way they work. I have seen organizations implement agile models using HR as a model. What best approach than to test it internally first, understand its strengths, limitations

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and challenges based on the industry, make relevant adjustments and then take it from there outwards towards other parts of the organization. It will take time, but better late than never.

- HODs – they are recipients and influencers. They may be operational or support in nature, but if their buy-in and participation is not achieved, then the model will not work or will not be possible to implement.
- Overall this is a significant transformation initiative. If it is treated as an organizational project with clear expected outcomes, reasoning for implementation, implications if things are not done, plans of execution, review cycles, accountability identification and celebration of progress, it will remain a very nice concept with very little adoption rates.

7. How would **companies increase their business performance** by deploying this agile workforce model?

I go back to the 4 cornerstones which I highlighted before. An agile workforce model is only relevant as long as it supports the organization's ability to improve its business results. So, any decision around making changes towards an agile workforce must be supported by the impact / outcomes that will be generated by the changes.

If the model is embedded from a culture perspective, you will then anchor every decision around one of the cornerstones.

Common understanding – clear communication / building the burning platform / leadership walkabouts

Clear expectations – performance planning sessions / one to one discussions about outcomes / impact expected from departments / individuals / regular performance discussions, not just paper filling exercises

Capability development – deploying of learning and development efforts that are tailored and timely for different groups. Classroom, virtual, experiential, project based, coaching.

Commitment – rewards programmes that focus on outcomes / impact. Focus on individual / team contribution. Performance improvement plans to support individuals to figure out if the issue is capability, role, attitude.

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8. How would companies **measure performance of their teams** in this agile workforce environment

There are shifts on the way organizations are measuring performance, and these shifts are not around how important it is, but more on how to do it so that it is relevant and useful.

The negative of performance measurement in the past revolves around the following:

- Inability to apply the strategy loop methodology by CEOs and Boards to ascertain if the strategic direction and tactical plans put in place are achieving desired outcomes, or if there is a need to finetune the plan along the way.
- Unclear KPIs that are not able to drive your behaviour towards achievement. If there is no clarity around what is being measured, people will not know what is important. If there are too many measures, the importance of what is being measured is diluted.
- The balance between individual and team performance needs to be considered. It is not just about what I do as an individual, but how do I contribute to a larger purpose. What are the interconnections and interdependencies that should be considered.
- Is it enough to set KPIs at the beginning of the year and focus on what was achieved at the end of the year? Or should regular conversations be held and finetuned KPIs derived throughout the year to account for what is happening in the business environment.
- Do we link measuring achievement of KPIs to rewards? Or should be delink both concepts. Focus of performance measurement is simply to help individuals understand how they are doing and how they can further grow and improve. And separately, rewards are given based on a more common achievement of organizational performance that distributes the rewards on an equitable manner. This will drive a different type of behaviour towards achieving KPIs and performance conversations. Suddenly, the focus is not on giving a good rating, but the focus is on helping / supporting employees to do better.

9. What are some of the **best practices** you have seen

- Open attitude towards change, uncertainty and failure – the startup mentality.
- Focus on incremental improvement rather than fool proof plans that never succeed – change, learn, adapt as we go along.
- Trust and compassion – we are all new to this, so let's give it a chance to succeed

10. What are the **real practical challenges**

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- There is no path to follow, so for those who are not used to being at the front it may be difficult to make timely decisions to drive the business in the right direction.
- Lack of monitoring mechanisms like attendance, fixed working hours mean that we are expected to trust our people, and this may not be something that leaders are used to. Some are more comfortable knowing that they can “see” and “feel” if people are doing what they are supposed to do, or if they need to intervene to drive performance.
- There are a variety of supporting policies / procedures that are not ready to drive agility, i.e. procurement processes, contractual clauses, performance measurements, so it is easier to revert back to what we are used to and comfortable with.

### **11. What are the *real solutions***

- Question every aspect of the business model in the context of the current circumstances
- Do this in the company of your business leaders / employees as a 360 degree perspective is key
- Do a loop evaluation of your strategy and plan so that you can constantly review and correct the course
- Keep constantly engaging and communicating with your people, they know best what is working and what is not
- Trust your instincts and your team
- Be brave to call out what is not working out / who is not working out
- Tough decisions may be needed, therefore being objective, methodical, compassionate and transparent is essential.

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 **Phone:** +6012 206 7758  
 **Email:** claudia@thread-advisory.com  
 **Website:** www.thread-advisory.com

