

Career Resiliency Programs and The Company Bottom Line

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Companies are turning away from the old employer-employee system of employer paternalism and employee loyalty and are rapidly embracing the new employment contract: of career resiliency. Career resiliency, and the related concept of guaranteeing employability vs. guaranteed employment, addresses crucial modern Human Resources issues. Companies have discovered that it is more cost-effective to maintain a workforce with the skills to adapt and change with the corporation, than to lay off current workers and hire new ones. Companies are now providing the means by which an employee can improve his or her employability by offering educational and skill enhancement courses. Organizations with a multi-talented workforce can change more rapidly, and, at the same time, assimilate new corporate directions and related competencies more effectively. This makes the company more agile and cost-competitive in its marketplace.

Career management consultants and organizational development experts are now working with companies and employees to design and implement career resiliency programs. These can be defined as company-wide systems to develop employees who are dedicated to continuous learning and professional development; who can reinvent themselves constantly to keep pace with rapid change; and who are enthusiastic and dedicated members of the company's team. Employers in this model give employees "the power to assess, hone, redirect, and expand their skills so that they stay competitive in the job market. In return, they expect employees to make a bigger contribution to the company" say B. A. Collard, R.H. and J.A. Waterman in the article "Toward a Career-Resilient Work force," *Harvard Business Review*.

An effective career resilience program will include, first and foremost, senior management who offer honest information to the employee about the company's future plans. The employee then has the choice to invest his time in updating his skills to move ahead with the company, or to be left behind. These new ways of viewing company-employee loyalties have developed after a decade of downsizing, mergers, right sizing and rapid change. Technological advances dictate that companies must be creative and agile enough to meet the challenges of an extremely competitive market, according to Geoffrey Moore, author of *Inside the Tornado* and *Crossing the Chasm*. Both companies and employees benefit when employees are successful and independent but choose to stay with the company because they want to, not because their skills are outdated and they cannot get a job elsewhere.

Secondly, supervisors are learning to say "yes" to creative new ideas rather than react with the predictable "no" response. Management must view change as an opportunity to improve. Letting employees be creative and explore the effectiveness of a new plan will promote a natural pride and enthusiasm in the company.

New Employment Contract

David Noer, author of *Healing The Wounds*, uses the following matrix of assumptions, strategies, and outcomes to describe details required to change a company's employment contract from paternalistic to an enriched participative.

Assumption: **Employment relationship is situational.**

- Flexible and portable benefit plans
- Tenure-free recognition systems
- Blurred distinction between full-time, part-time, and contract employees

Outcome: Flexible work force

Assumption: **Reward for performance is an acknowledgment of contribution relevance.**

- Job enrichment and participation
- The philosophy of quality
- Self-directed work teams
- Nonhierarchical performance and reward system

Outcomes: Motivated work force

Task invested work force

Assumption: **Management is empowering.**

- Employee autonomy
- No “taking care” of employees
- No detailed long-term career planning
- Tough love

Outcome: Empowered work force

Assumption: **Explicit job contracting is offered.**

- Short-term job planning
- Not signing up for life
- No assumption of lifetime caretaking

Outcome: Employee and organizational bonded around good work

Assumption: **Loyalty means responsibility and good work.**

- Nontraditional career paths
- In/Out process
- Employee choice
- Accelerated diversity recruiting

Outcome: Responsible work force

Career resiliency, from an employee’s standpoint, means to take a proactive responsibility for being self-aware and self-directed regarding work and career. It can especially benefit employees who have been in the same job for a number of years. Often these employees feel stagnant and restless because they have exhausted the challenges of their current job. A career resiliency program provides the opportunity for ownership and the chance to find new excitement and meaning.

Few employees are born with the natural ability to constantly reinvent themselves. This aptitude to look at your job, your company, and your industry as a vendor would, and to constantly tune into its shifting needs and desires, is anathema to the skill set and personality of some individuals such as an introverted, persevering engineer, for example. The idea of Emotional Intelligence, as coined by Daniel Goldman in his book by the same name, implies that people naturally react emotionally and by habit to business situations as they always have. This is no longer good enough. Employees confront job-related dilemmas every day, and these now typically require a more reasoned and temperate approach to problem solving. Therefore, a company career resilience program must include learning, partnership, and the ability to adapt. This is necessary because emotional learning styles dramatically affect the depth and longevity of new skills and ideas learned.

The specifics of a career resiliency program, typically designed by HR, senior management, and a career consulting firm experienced in these programs, might include:

- A broad partnership to define clearly the company’s strategic goals, needs, core competencies and risks.

- A systematic method established for individuals to assess their skills, interests, values and temperaments, and to relate them to work. Some excellent, valid instruments to use include the FiroB, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and the Campbell Interest Inventory.
- A way to benchmark workers' skills and tie them back to the company, using a combination of interviews and perhaps the new Career Architect, which benchmarks 67 core competencies.
- The creation of a generative learning organization, which is continually expanding its capacity to create its future.
- Continuous learning goals tied in to the jobs descriptions of every employee and all supervisors.
- Training and professional development opportunities provided so that the employees stay motivated and enthusiastic about their work.
- Clear communication maintained with all employees about the company's direction and its markets.
- Employees who are allowed to explore job opportunities inside and outside the company, acknowledging that confident, competent employees will stay if the opportunity benefits them.
- No-blame exits supported with the same professionalism that the company used while interviewing and recruiting.

How can you best invest in your company and your work force?

Companies now see the benefit of spending their dollars on training and developing current employees. In fact, some progressive companies have developed programs to help key employees start their own businesses once they leave the company. These organizations find it beneficial to keep a good partnership with valuable professionals, so they can work together on future projects, or even rehire the individuals at a later date.

Supervisors have also started requesting communications skills enhancement training for key employees who need to upgrade their interpersonal skills or risk getting terminated. Companies in rapid growth cycles are investing in management training for new supervisors, to speed up their productivity. And finally, technical companies who depend heavily on the longevity of key researchers have started programs to identify key players and to provide them with the tools to stay challenged and committed. These programs may include sponsoring more scientific articles, increasing the travel budget for symposiums, or paying for challenging personal development courses or projects, such as foreign language lessons, a second Ph.D., or charity work.

Companies have found that an effective career resiliency program can result in up to a 300% return on investment per employee. This focus on bottom line aspects of training combines the needs to keep both the company and the employee competitive in their respective markets.

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