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Change in the workplace continues at a rapid pace, affecting careers and career development. Mergers, acquisitions, reengineering, and downsizing are influencing employment patterns and altering the career directions of many. No longer are individuals advised to think in terms of spending their entire careers in one organization. Rather, they are being led to recognize the temporary nature of all jobs and the need to

prepare themselves for redefined career paths that require resilience and an ability to be self-reliant. This Digest defines the concept of career resilience, including the characteristics of individuals who are career resilient and the characteristics of organizations that support career resilience.

DEFINITION OF CAREER RESILIENCE

Collard et al. (1996) present several definitions of career resilience. One of these is "the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, even when the circumstances are discouraging or disruptive" (p. 33). Another definition of career resilience is "the result or outcome of being career self-reliant" (p. 34). Although career self-reliance and career resilience have been used interchangeably, there is a slight difference in the focus of each term. Career self-reliance refers to individual career self-management--taking responsibility for one's own career and growth while maintaining commitment to the organization's success; career resilience refers to individual career development--developing the knowledge and skills required to make a visible and personally motivated contribution to the organization and its customers.

THE NEED FOR CAREER RESILIENCE

The emphasis on the self-management and self-development of one's career is a reflection of the shift in the unspoken employment agreement between employers and employees over the last 3 decades. In the 1960s, the employer-employee relationship was characterized as a parent-child relationship: The organization provided employment in jobs that were narrowly defined, status in the community, and job security in exchange for employee hard work, loyalty, and good performance. Thirty years later, the contract between employer and employee is a partnership. The emphasis in this new contract is on worker employability rather than job security. In this contract, employers provide the opportunities, tools, and support to help employees develop their skills and maintain their employability; the employees have the responsibility of managing their careers, taking advantage of the opportunities they are given. Thus, the employees must be career self-reliant. They must continually update their skills, looking ahead to the future and to market trends as well as to the current demands of the workplace (Collard et al. 1996). They must have a plan for "enhancing their performance and long-term employability" (Waterman, Waterman, and Collard 1994, p. 88). The new relationship between employee and employer is described as a contract through which individual needs and those of the organization are balanced.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CAREER RESILIENCE

The message of the new employer-employee relationship is clear: The company is not responsible for the job security of its workers. Its job is to keep the company alive. Thus, workers must be responsible for themselves (Fox 1996). Koonce (1995) promotes an attitude of self-employment. He advises that "the best way to stay employed today and in the future is to look upon yourself as being in business for yourself--even if you work

for someone else" (p. 20). This outlook offers two challenges: know yourself and know your organization. According to Koonce (1995), workers must know the skills they have, how those skills are marketable to other employers and industries, and how they can be updated to keep them in state-of-the-art condition. They must also know all aspects of the organization they work for as well as the new roles they might assume in the organization's future.

Taking charge of one's own career requires career resilience. "Individuals who are career resilient contribute skills aligned with business needs, are dedicated to continuous learning and committed to personal excellence, have an attitude that is focused but flexible, and deliver solid performance in support of organizational goals for as long as they are part of the organization" (Collard et al. 1996, p. 17).

The characteristics of those who are career resilient reflect the characteristics identified with employability. Teamwork, effective communication, adaptability to change, positive and flexible attitudes, continuous learning, self-confidence, willingness to take risks, and a commitment to personal excellence are all characteristics identified with employability--which in essence is what career resilience is all about.

Attitude has a great influence on the ability to become career resilient. Fox (1995) describes seven attitudes that reflect career self-reliance and are essential to building career insurance (pp. 62-64): I am either growing or decaying--there is no middle road; a chaotic organization is a great place to learn; I must be selective in what I learn; it is possible to align what I want, what the organization wants, and what the market wants; I must push to the outer limits and enjoy doing it; I am a unique business--Me, Inc.; and there are many different pathways to a professional vision.

Flexibility and autonomy are two characteristics of the new psychological contract between employer and employee that offer benefits of employee commitment to employers and job satisfaction to employees. Manifested in the "enlargement of career space," these characteristics fostered by career resilience offer workers the opportunity to create new work arrangements that acknowledge the individual's unique place and state in life, including midlife and beyond (Hall and Mirvis 1995). "You need to be thinking of the future all the time, about what you want out of your career in the long term, and about what you can do, each and every day, to help you get there" (Koonce 1995, p. 23).

ORGANIZATIONS THAT SUPPORT CAREER RESILIENCE

Organizations that support career resilience are committed to working in partnership with their employees. They offer opportunities for professional growth and engage their employees in challenging work. Such organizations foster open communication, including the transfer of both good and bad news. In the past, employers protected their

employees from bad news, such as declining sales revenue, loss of customers, or high operating expenses. Today, with many organizations adopting the total quality management process, employees are made aware of problems up front in the hope they will be part of the solution. Employees who have a self-employment attitude appreciate the opportunity to influence their career fates.

Employee growth and development are the primary focus of organizations that support career resilience. Such organizations "select business opportunities with growth potential, offer the opportunity to do challenging work, provide support for continuous learning, give access to development resources (career development and self-development), foster honest and open communication, and build an environment that integrates these values into the business strategy" (Collard et al. 1996, p. 17). Those organizations that are successful in promoting career resilience help employees regularly assess their skills, interests, values, and temperaments so that the employees have a better understanding of themselves and of the opportunities in the organization that offer them the greatest potential for fulfillment and meaningful contribution (Waterman, Waterman, and Collard 1994).

Despite concern that organizations that enable their employees to upgrade their skills and employability will lose them to their competition, employers who value highly skilled and motivated employees are more likely to retain them. When people are happy with their organization, they do not leave. "Any CEO who says he [sic] can't afford to train his employees because the competition might steal them away is admitting that people wouldn't work for his company if they had any other choice." (Filipczak 1995, p. 34).

Many companies are establishing career development programs to support and motivate their employees toward continuous, lifelong learning. At Rosenbluth Travel in Philadelphia, employees are encouraged to shadow other employees to learn what they are doing and to join a cross-functional team to find out what is happening in other departments (Filipczak 1995). Hewlett-Packard has career centers at some of their sites where employees can "research jobs that interest them or take assessments to help them discover potential interests" (ibid., p. 31). In a Cleveland suburb, TRW, Inc. suggests that workers consider lateral moves (Hequet 1995). "A lateral move is a sound strategy when an employee want to shift from a slow growing or peripheral part of an organization to a part poised for expansion" (Kaye and Farren 1996, p. 50).

Amoco Corp. has initiated a career management process to help employees look beyond the tasks of their jobs to reflect on the marketability of their skills both inside and outside the company (Hequet 1995). "Eastman Kodak Co. has tried to align its career development process with company strategy which involves an annual employee self-assessment and a worker-supervisor talk about how the worker's skills and experience fit into the big Kodak picture for the coming year" (ibid., p. 33). General Electric Company's aircraft engine manufacturing facility has brought its workers into direct competition with outside vendors. Teams of GE workers "weigh materials, costs, overhead, benefits, and pay as they compete with outsiders to produce parts." (ibid., p.

33).

FOSTERING CAREER RESILIENCE

Fostering career resilience is an important part of any career development effort. Career development professionals and counselors can facilitate growth toward career resilience. Collard et al. (1996) offer the following recommendations (p. 39): (1) communicate to clients how workplace changes require greater individual responsibility for managing one's career; reframe career development around learning; (2) adopt a wellness/fitness philosophy of career development; (3) include benchmarking of work content and work strategy skills as part of career assessments; (4) develop a future focus and continually scan the environment for emerging trends to be able to challenge clients' thinking; and (5) practice career self-reliance themselves by benchmarking their skills against standards of excellence in the field and personally committing to an ongoing learning and development plan.

The challenge of career self-reliance and career resilience can be frightening to workers who thrive on employer-provided job security and have high control needs. However, many of these fears may be allayed as workers see evidence of their own progress toward career independence. Through continuous learning, individuals can gain a new sense of control, a new confidence in the timeliness and utility of their newly acquired knowledge and skills. By benchmarking their skills and knowledge against the best practices in their field on an ongoing basis, individuals are better able to assess their employability and predict the effect general business and industry trends might have on them and their employing organizations (Collard et al. 1996). In a work world that is characterized by change, where the metaskills of identity development and heightened adaptability are in demand, continuous learning is the path to job security and career health.

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