

Career Agility in the 21st Century

By Ann Rolfe

We are 17 years into the 21st century and the waves of change keep coming, huge and powerful. We have to ride them, or drown in uncertainty. As managers and mentors we need to lead by example to show other people how to develop and manage careers.

Technological, economic, environmental, political, and social change will continue to dramatically impact on each of us. It means that regardless of our age, or stage of career we must be agile – strong and flexible.

University of Sydney professor of data science and machine learning, Hugh Durrant-Whyte says "All jobs that are primarily analysis are capable of automation," It's not all bad news, because of course there will be new jobs, just not as we know them. Some of the disappearing jobs may surprise you. They include doctors, lawyers and public servants. A global workforce, outsourcing and computerization means there will be a polarization between low-skill and high-skill jobs.

Change has stripped a whole raft of mid-level jobs from organisations. With up to 5 generations in the workplace, younger, mature and older workers will compete for fewer mid-level roles. Traditional progress "through the ranks" is no more. You need to leap the gaps. That can be dangerous, because without a solid breadth and depth of experience you are vulnerable to failure.

Career agility means:

Building Capabilities aligned with your natural talents
Giving yourself a competitive edge with deep and broad experience
Being able to adapt to changing requirements and market yourself

Building Capability

It is more than a buzz-word. In the public sector, the Capability Framework makes the requirements for any role transparent. It also makes it easy to align professional development with career goals. Developing capabilities in areas of natural talent is quicker and easier. So consider using a reliable and valid self-assessment to discover your strengths and build them into capabilities.

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Competitive Edge

Capability is what you have to offer now, but those who get hired or promoted have experience and potential as well. You need to bring the complete package: past experience, present capabilities and future potential. A variety of roles and projects, in-depth experience in areas you enjoy and proven success, make you a more attractive employee and more likely to become a rising star. Adaptability, ongoing learning and an open mind are symptoms of potential. Taking challenge and change in your stride shows you are fit for the future.

Market Yourself

No matter how great a candidate you are you'll have to market yourself. That means finding people who need/want and will pay for what you offer and convincing them you bring outstanding value. This means researching the organisation, understanding the role, having evidence of your prowess and communicating, succinctly, why they should choose you. Mastering the application process, a tailored key-worded resume and interview skills are essential. So is having a portfolio of anecdotal and actual evidence of your accomplishments to draw from.

If you can communicate with and satisfy people who will pay for your experience, capability and potential, you will always have career agility.

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