

Networking, Adaptability And Resilience As Some Of Agility Dimensions

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Abstract: This article focuses on searching for relationships between employees' behavior and the environment of an organization. The study of the concept of agility allowed the authors to form the following research questions: How may the adaptability, proactivity and resilience be characterized? What attributes determine employees' behavior? What inter-organizational relationships influence workers? What are the characteristic features of an agile enterprise and which of them leads to achieving high level of agility of the company? The purpose of this article is to analyze inter-organizational and labor relations in the context of adaptability, proactivity and resilience as the main dimensions of agility. It is, therefore, necessary to specify the attributes of employees who can adapt to changes and embed these qualities in the functioning of employees' agility model developed by the authors. In this article empirical research carried out among SMEs operating in Podkarpacie was used, that helped authors to specify attributes of an agile organization.

Keywords: networking, agility, enterprise, adaptability, proactivity

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I. Introduction

An inherent attribute of employees achieving success at work is a high level of agility that allows them to adapt to unpredictable changes in the market environment and to inter organizational environment. Therefore, it can be said that the basic dimension of employee's agility is adaptability, understood as ability to adjust to different organizational conditions and competence to cope with these changes. An agile employee should also be characterized by proactivity, i.e the capacity to identify transformations in an organization and its surrounding and to respond quickly to them. A proactive employee treats each shift as a potential opportunity. Such an employee develops coping skills that make him flow into unpredictable working environment and survive despite all threats.

Apart from these attributes, the employees' agility is also connected with the ability to work under pressure and in stressful situations, that is, with resilience. A resilient employee is keen to realize tasks despite stress at work and is able to complete planned goals and actions as quickly as possible irrespective of the pressure. Such an employee may function well in completely new business environment and survive in unfavorable conditions at work.

II. The essence of agility

Employees' agility is such an attitude that puts learning and self-development at the heart of working in organization. Nowadays, this phenomenon is defined as not only the ability of an employee to solve difficult problems at work but also to be innovative. This means having new ideas and use new technologies well. IT solutions are for agile workers a tool that enable them to take on new responsibilities fast and to be flexible in terms of having new responsibilities [1]. Gunasekaran characterized an agile worker as a multi-functional person keen on different working aspects. Such an employee is able to cooperate with people in terms of sharing knowledge in many fields, for example in production strategies or using technology. He shares new ideas and capabilities well, and has no communication problems especially with using foreign languages [2].

In literature on organizational management Breu and others have defined attributes that determine the agility of employees. Among them they have enumerated: speed of response to external changes, development of own skills, assessment of own skills, speed of adaptation to new working conditions, speed of access to information; use of mobile technology; work in virtual teams, workplace independence; speed of change, mobile access to information, technologies that focus on cooperation, knowledge sharing [3]. On the other hand, Kidd has set the foundations on which the employees' agility is based. Among them he enumerated: constant identification of changes, rapid response, social responsibility, total customer focus. Agile employees constantly enrich their intellectual potential, and this, in turn, becomes an important factor of being competitive on the

market[4]. Agility is also recognized as the ability to cope with changes by developing certain features of character that help a person to survive in unfavorable situations at work [5]. Agile employee intelligently and quickly uses these features to his advantage and this makes him easier to give a response in a correct way, exploiting, and taking into account the pros and cons of a given situation [6]. Where are some opinions that reacting to changes in a proper way, exploitation and taking into accounts the benefits are main factors that define agility[7].

To sum this up, employee agility can be understood as the ability to quickly respond to changes in internal and external market environment and to make effective use of these changes to create new opportunities arising from them.

III. Adaptability As An Attribute Of An Agile Employee

Employee agility remains a derivative of adaptive behavior. Adaptability is understood as "the process of conscious and subconscious social modification of acquired features so that they are consistent with the pattern of features recognized in a given environment as normal and desired that could help a person to solve problems of coexistence in a way that is most middle-ground"[8]. This attitude can also be considered as the ability to perform many functions simultaneously and it means adaptability to new groups of employees and culture they present. Such an ability is extremely important, especially in the situation when during realization of a project an employee has to move from one role to another. Agile employees should have the ability to work efficiently in different situations. They can also use their competences and learn through active sharing of knowledge as well as being able to undertake new risks [9].

In-depth analysis of the literature allows to determine seven adaptive dimensions of achievements. They include [10]:

- 1) creative problem solving (problem solving for poorly defined tasks, complex tasks);
- 2) coping with uncertain and unpredictable professional situations (dealing with uncertainty);
- 3) learning about employee tasks, technologies and procedures (learning about new ways of doing work, tasks, learning new skills so that they could be helpful with work or getting to the top);
- 4) interpersonal adaptability;
- 5) coping with stress at work;
- 6) cultural adaptability;
- 7) dealing with emergency or crisis situations.

These definitions undoubtedly stress the ability to respond quickly to external changes and to stimuli coming from the inside of the organization. There is a phenomenon of speed in action, which also manifests itself in instant adaptability to new working conditions, speed of access to information and speed of change. An employee with has such skills is able to respond if for example a new working equipment has been introduced at work or if there is a need to work with a new team of people. A new way of doing things is implemented, such a way that to helps a person to work simultaneously on several lanes and to adapt to new working procedures.

IV. Profile Of A Proactive Worker

You can define a proactive employee as a person who initiates actions that have a positive effect on the changed work environment. A proactive worker can use the latest IT solutions, be able to collaborate in the team and have extensive knowledge of the application of advanced production strategies [11]. Therefore, an agile proactive worker is a „multifunctional unit”, highly qualified, with innovative ideas and skills. A proactive worker has the ability to respond promptly to stimuli, both from the inside of organization and from the market environment, and is capable of making non-standard solutions. His decisions are based on action and reaction law. An active worker in able to solve a problem that appear suddenly, he is considering various options and verifies strategies, maintains calm in stressful circumstances. At work he can solve new and complex problems by adopting non-standard solutions. He may be characterized as an independent and self reliable person. He acts wisely [12]. A proactive worker can jump from one project to the next, is able to change plans and his efficiency won't suffer. He looks for opportunities to make improvements at work and to find new ways to acquire or use new resources if standard resources are not available at the moment. He tries out new methods of performing tasks.

V. Resilient Attitude Of Agile Worker

Resilience is also a dimension of agility understood as successful functioning of an employee at work under changing working conditions when known strategies and solutions have failed or under stressful or unknown working ground. A resilient employee is a positive one that presents an open approach towards change, new ideas or technology and is able to deal with uncertain and unexpected situations and stress. In literature there are terms related to this concept and they have been named as resilience and resiliency. The first term is a feature which means an effective overcoming negative events and phenomena. In turn, the second term

concerns more personality properties and belongs to abstract nouns formed from adjectives that follow the same pattern. It means a behavior that is commonly referred to as elastic or flexible. Resilience may can be defined in two ways: as a process and as personality feature. According to the first interpretation, "resilience refers to the process of dynamic and positive adaptation to adverse conditions"[13]. „It is a dimensional construct, a quick process associated with effective adaptation to stressful events"[14].

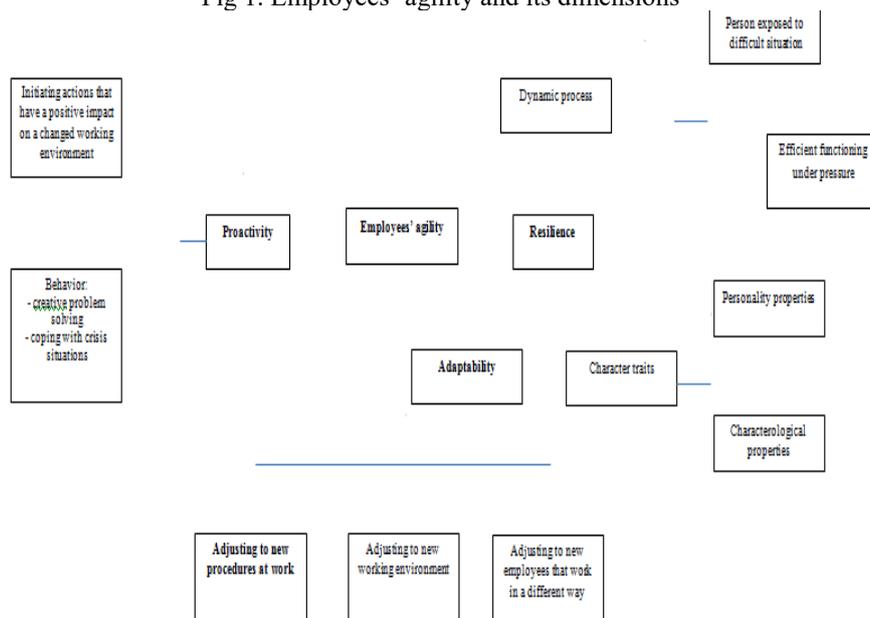
Resilience is a unique feature as an individual under stressful or vulnerable situation shows no signs of panic, withdrawal, or impossibility to act. On the contrary, a person adapts to new situation, and increases his competence, carrying out tasks well showing no emotional disturbance or negative behavior[15]. Resilience may also be considered in the category of personality features which remain crucial in the process of struggling with the problems that arise at work. Thus, resilience is understood as the basic property of personality regulatory processes, indicating the functioning of a specific set of character traits [16]. Resilience at work strengthens the employee's sense of satisfaction, correlates with such psychological constructs such as self-esteem, optimism, internal sense of control, and self-efficacy and self-esteem [17]. A strong employee's resilience is associated with such attributes as self-confidence, the ability to reconcile other employees, goal-orientation, ability to work in stressful situations, inner peace and self-control and self-efficacy, even in very difficult situations. A resilient employee is thus able to adequately perform his or her duties in difficult or daunting situations.

Some former research on dimensions of employee resilience does not characterizes all its aspects. Clarification requires motives of resilient behavior. The deeper analysis of this problem would allow to show the relationship between conditions and development of attributes of agility.

VI. Dimensions Of Employees Agility

In addition to analyzing the dimensions of employees' agility, authors of this article attempted to create a model of agility dimensions and their correlation. These reflections were shown on a scheme below. In that scheme we can see dimensions shaping the agility of employees that were discussed in detail in this article, namely: adaptability, proactivity and resilience. The behavior of an adaptive worker indicates his ability to adjust to new working procedures, adapt quickly to new environment at work and people who work in a different way. Proactive behavior occurs when a person initiates actions that have a positive effect on a changed environment which is reflected in creative problem solving and crisis management. Fig. 1 also depicts two interpretations of the process of dynamics and personality traits. This model was based on Griffin and Hesketh's reflections [18]. These researchers identified the key dimensions of employee agility, to which they included adaptability, proactivity and resilience. They also wrote about how employees behave if they represent these features. However, this problem was only signaled. The authors only grouped some aspects of employees' agility. However, this problem was not analyzed more thoroughly. Authors of this article elaborated on this issue by developing a model that shows dimensions of employees' agility, employees behavior and description of such behavior. This model is shown in Figure 1.

Fig 1. Employees' agility and its dimensions



Source: own study

VII. Relations, Adaptability, Proactivity And Resilience In Empirical Research

The research was conducted among enterprises of the SME sector, which operate in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship¹. They took the form of surveys conducted among 100 companies. Random statistical sample was used. The survey questionnaire was addressed to companies of different legal nature, mainly, these companies were privately owned. Respondent's particulars included the size of the surveyed company, the sector in which it operates, the period of operation on the market, the number of people employed, and the type of market it operates on (local, domestic or foreign).

The authors of this article have shown that the employees of Podkarpackie companies are characterized by high level of adaptability, proactivity and resilience. The first one is proved by the fact that relationships between organizations are positive and companies easily adapt. Almost half of the respondents, that is entrepreneurs of Podkarpackie voivodeship emphasizes easiness in adjusting to the requirements of new equipment. 28.2% of respondents claim that it „was very easy”. Difficulties in this area was shown only by 12.4% of respondents. A slight number of respondents (2%) claim adjusting as a „very big problem”. 7.9% respondents gave no specific answer [19].

Furthermore, more than half of the respondents (53.5%) readily adapt to working in a team that practices other methods of concluding tasks. Almost one in five respondents claim that they may switch „easily” to other forms of work. Only 14.9% of respondents named such activities as “difficult” and two described as „very difficult”. Every tenth of the respondents gave no specific answer to this problem. Moreover, adaptability has been proved by two next problems, that is adapting to new procedures and changing own methods of work. More than half of respondents „easily” adapt to new working procedures. 15.3% of the respondents „very easily”. Not many respondents, that is 14.4% claim to have „difficulties” in this area and 3% claim it to be „very difficult”. 16.3% of the respondents gave no specific answer to this question. As far as changing methods of work are concerned. 57.4% of respondents „quickly” change their way of doing things, one in ten, change it „very quickly”. 12.9% of respondents admitted that they are doing it „slowly” and 2.5% who have chosen an answer „very slowly”.

In addition, more than half of respondents (55.9%) is able to quickly change plans for current work when the resources they need are suddenly unreachable. One in ten respondents claimed that this comes „very quickly”. 8.4% of the respondents are able to cope with such situation but adjusting is „very slow”. Almost a quarter of the respondents gave no specific answer. Authors wanted also to check whether the surveyed companies deal with difficult problem at work and what people generally think about their work duties. Study has proved that 38.1% of respondents often encounter very difficult problem at work. (Difficult means that employees do know the solution and the problem is new to deal with). Every fourth claims to have no such problem at work at all. 14.4% of respondents claim to have such problem „always”, while 4.5% of respondents claim to have it „rarely”. Nearly every fifth respondent did not give a specific answer to this question.

As far as work duties are concerned. Four out of ten respondents believe that their workload is high and they have too many duties on a daily basis to deal with. In turn, every fourth respondent is of the opinion that this situation is a standard one and they have to deal with all duties every day. Only 13.4% of respondents claimed impossible to deal with all duties at work and only 5.4% respondent did not face work overloading problem. Answers provided above prove that the respondents face surprising and unpredictable situations at work. It may be stated that four in ten respondents deal with such situations. However, 20.8% of the respondents consider them to be rare. Moreover, the survey showed that almost half of the respondents prove that when an unpredictable situation occurs they have to make decisions quickly. As we can see, this pressure to take decision is strong. Every fourth respondent claims to feel the necessity to make decision fast. 11.9% of the respondents claim that despite such situation occurs rarely they also do not like the necessity to take quick decisions at work and the constraint related to it. 14.9% respondents avoided providing an answer to this questions.

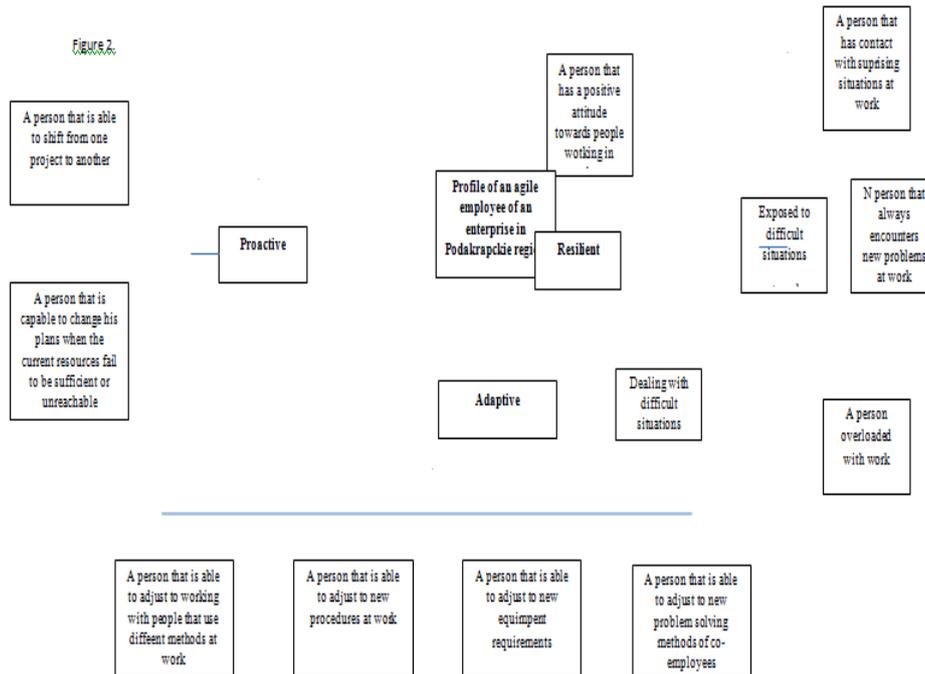
39.1% of people have to deal with problem solving but almost every fourth respondent claim that it happens rarely. The most opposing answers include "always" and "never" (15.3% and 1.5% answers respectively). One in five respondents abstained from giving a specific answer. Despite the existence of difficult situations, authors managed to make conclusions concerning resilience. It turned out that every tenth respondent claims that it is „very easy” for him to solve difficult problems. 47.5% of the respondents claim that it is „easy” and 17.3% of respondents find it „hard”. Only 4% of respondents claim it to be „very hard”.

As far as proactivity is concerned, the survey focused on asking about realizing multi- projects and cooperating with other people. More than 3/4 respondents claim realizing multi tasking projects and working in a group an „easy” thing. The remaining responses did not exceed range between 4.5% and 9.9%.

¹ The research was conducted by the authors between X 2016 - I 2017. The research was conducted using questionnaire and interview in over 200 enterprises in the Podkarpackie Voivodship. The choice was determined by the availability of data. Respondents ncluded members of the management boards or high level managers.

On the basis of the survey answers, the authors managed to create a profile of an agile employee. Such an employee definitely has the agile attributes that were shown in figure 2.

Figure 2. A profile of an agile employee based on survey carried out in Podkarpackie region



Source: own study

IX. Conclusions

Contemporary companies have to operate in turbulent market conditions. Organizations have to face such challenges as: increasing competition, high customer demands, changes in social and political environments, increase in pace of innovation implementation, shorter life cycles of products and services and, above all, changes in value systems and structure of education and qualifications of employees. However, each company has to undertake such actions that would increase its position, resources and value [20].

Success of an organization largely depends on employees, their skills and abilities, and, above all, their agility. The outcome of research presented in this article leads to the following conclusions:

1. Adaptability is an inherent feature of agility. An employee endowed with this attribute is capable of modifying the social traits and acquired habits to achieve a desired behavioral pattern in a given situation at work. In addition, he is able to adapt quickly to new working conditions and environment, react immediately to external stimuli, and quickly make changes. The research showed that employees of Podkarpackie companies developed this attribute. It is optimistic as the easiness to adapt to new working environment certainly leads to increased productivity of a company [21].
2. The second attribute of agility is proactivity connected with initiating activities that have a positive effect on changed working conditions. On the basis of empirical research, it can be stated that employees of Podkarpackie companies are generally proactive. As a result, they face problems and they are not afraid of occurrence of a change. In addition, they are endowed with the ability to solve problems effectively in respect of a given change, and they can also implement innovative ideas. It would also be necessary to analyze whether proactivity is an innate personality trait or whether it is an attribute that could be learned in a course of work. This definitely requires further examinations. However, it is obvious that an employee who is capable of making no standard solutions will be more likely to adapt to new equipment requirements and to work with a new team. Dynamics of a change, and changeable working conditions force employees to solve problems related to changes.
3. Resilience is another vital part of agility. Here, this attribute turns out useful in situations when instructions on how to complete a task are inappropriate or wrong. Such employees will work even under stress, they will form proper conclusions and even be able to propose new procedures or processes to be implemented for their field of work.
4. In a globalizing world, cooperation and relationships, both among individuals and groups of employees are very important. Some organizational structures limit employees freedom of action and choices they have at

work. The autonomy of the individuals and groups is strong whereas the creativity and innovation as a whole is hindered. Sometimes the vertical dominance is useful but in a broader perspective it doesn't get any better for the organization as a whole.

Sometimes only changes on the market may develop and force people to behave in a different way. However, this article has proved that all the agility determinants lead to positive changes in organizations. Agile employees are extremely useful and desirable. Such employees act well in unfavorable internal and external working conditions and especially when an unpredictable situation or difficult problem occurs. It would be advisable for organizations to organize trainings for employees in terms of undertaking decisions fast, dealing with hard task, working with new software or equipment. The necessity to work under stress and to work fast is not a novelty and becomes a thing people are used to. Education and development of agility skills would definitely lead to positive changes in organizations as only by eliminating uncertainty, doubt and habits people may move forward.

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