



# Individual Talent Will Reshape the New Workforce

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**"If a window of opportunity appears, don't pull down the shade."**

**Tom Peters**

### Using Flexible Talent

Our executive coaching practice for corporations assists leadership and staff in integrating flexible talent effectively to benefit both individual contributors and the organization.

**W**hile much uncertainty remains in the post-recession economy, one trend is clear. Many previous jobs will not exist again as companies resist returning to "what was" and, instead, invest in flexible staffing approaches to optimize productivity. They are augmenting core fulltime staff with special just-in-time expertise at lower costs and leveraging technology to limit staff expansion.

Both for-profit and non-profit organizations are responding to the significant expansion in the "contingent workforce" – positions that can be quickly added or cut to meet fluctuations in business demands. And this group is larger than ever – as much as 30% of the workforce today, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

This significant trend prizes individual talent – especially the proven, experienced professional who brings extensive expertise and a strong track record of delivering results. Of particular importance to employers will be the multi-skill capabilities of these experienced professionals. Future positions will require not only technical and analytical skills, but a blending of the softer capacities such as strategy development, people management and marketing. Those who have this range of capabilities will be the most attractive to employers.

New technologies are also smoothing the way for adaptive leadership styles and structural changes inherent in these shifting dynamics. Using "individual contributors" with industry-specific knowledge to fill skill gaps in critical areas allows organizations to bring in knowledge workers to move a project forward, mentor a talented younger employee, contribute fresh perspectives and engage collaboratively and efficiently without adding to fixed costs.

Many companies have tremendous needs for workers with higher skills and credentials. Yet, because they are only recently leveling from a period of economic upheavals, many early innovators are just beginning to ramp up such new thinking and strategies. As a result, they lack the training programs to on-board these professionals most strategically and efficiently, and they are only beginning to manage the issues of an intergenerational workforce.

In our whitepaper, *Rethinking Volunteerism as a Workforce Growth Strategy*, available on our website, we wrote about how demographic and economic changes are leading to greater reliance on volunteer talent for critical jobs once held by staff in non-profit organizations. Now it's time to build on a parallel development – the large inventory of professionals who can

Hiring individual talent can be ideal in the following situations:

- A merger, acquisition, IPO or reorganization that requires specific skills
- Certain expertise is not available internally
- Senior talent could provide wisdom or stability in an uncertain or new arena
- A key manager departs abruptly
- An extra set of hands is needed for a special project
- Critical projects must move ahead faster than fulltime recruitment activities can accommodate
- Specialized resources are necessary to accelerate progress

contribute valuable expertise in short-term positions and then move on to the next opportunity. The huge potential of this flexible workforce is a win-win for the individuals and the companies who employ them if approached thoughtfully and with the appropriate level of front-end management by both parties.

## Baby Boomers Are Part of the Solution

More than 76 million Baby Boomers were born between 1946 and 1964, and many are beginning to retire. Their departure from fulltime jobs will create significant gaps in the workforce as they take their considerable talent, expertise in multiple areas and leadership with them. This group is not only the best-educated generation in recent history; it is larger than the two next generations that follow.

At more than 40% of today's workforce, Baby Boomers have been leaders in for-profit corporations and non-profit associations, and as they retire, they will collectively take decades of knowledge and deep experience with them. We noted in *Rethinking Volunteerism* that as many as 500 of the largest companies can expect to lose half of their senior management in the next few years.

Today's Boomers view retirement as a chance to continue learning, contributing and staying productive. In fact, 70% of them want to include work in retirement as a way to do this, as well as help pay the bills, according to a May 2009 study by Age Wave and Harris Interactive. The study also predicted that more companies would introduce new policies and strategies to "recruit, retain, and engage talented, experienced, and knowledgeable older workers."<sup>1</sup> Baby Boomers look at retirement differently from previous generations. Their ambition is to enter a dynamic new phase of life. For them, "encore careers," flexible part-time work and/or volunteering will facilitate personal meaning, social impact, more control over their time and compensation. They are prime candidates for this newly flexible workforce, particularly if they are self-aware, flexible and can commit to the team's success – and if the companies hiring them have strategies to ensure successful selection and on-boarding.

## The Shape of Things to Come

Distributed networks, remote access and onsite project teams have reshaped the global workplace in the past two decades, facilitated to a large extent by the Internet, diverse software platforms, social media and mobile technologies. Such advances also allowed tech companies to keep leaner, more cost-effective core staff and flex up or down through project-based contracting. Today's workers who contribute to a knowledge economy accentuate how professional know-how has become a measurable part of the supply chain. The recession intensified the "war for talent" as organizations with agile human resources management attempted to maintain their competitive advantage and others considered doing business differently. About 52% of the respondents in a study of 175 U.S.-based companies worldwide said they are

<sup>1</sup> "Retirement at the Tipping Point: The Year That Changed Everything." By Age Wave. Conducted by Harris Interactive, May 2009.

“The next new economy, the one rising from the ashes of this latest meltdown, will favor small...‘Involuntary entrepreneurship’ is now creating tens of thousands of small businesses and a huge market of contract and freelance labor.”

*Chris Anderson, Wired Magazine*<sup>3</sup>

more concerned about attrition of critical-skill or top-performing employees as the economy recovers than they were before the downturn.

Non-profit organizations are also aware that they must respond to generational shifts, new technology tools, workforce changes and an evolving marketplace that calls for new approaches to leadership, structures and collaboration. “The sector is only as strong as its workforce,” noted a recent study sponsored by The James Irvine Foundation. “To attract and develop the leadership, ingenuity, and commitment needed to do this important work, nonprofits will need resources and information about recruitment, retention, mobilizing non-traditional workers, succession planning, and new models of shared leadership and management.”<sup>2</sup> Smart investments in specialized talent in short-term or interim roles enable non-profit organizations to advance their mission while planning for longer-term service and financial stability.

## Redefining and Repositioning Individual Value

Making the transition to this new workforce model is not a simple “plug and play.” It’s a big challenge for senior professionals to move from influential executive roles into consulting positions, collaborative teams and even line responsibilities, let alone the junior managers who often supervise them.

Here’s what we’ve found among our clients:

- Individual contributors bring specialized skills suited for particular areas of the business, but not necessarily the ability to articulate a broader vision of their capabilities or position themselves for strategic value to a specific team, company or nonprofit organization. This becomes more complicated as they move from position to position without the tools to navigate in different organizational cultures.
- Organizations typically lack the orientation and training programs necessary to integrate these professionals into the culture effectively and quickly. Not only that, but shorter-term thinking may prevent integrating or measuring their contributions beyond a given project for more permanent value.

When individuals with talent understand their own personalities and how to navigate among the diverse styles of co-workers, and when organizations recognize how to truly tap into and leverage their talents, the flexible workplace will become more productive, with measurable satisfaction and ROI.

## Incorporating Individual Talent Effectively

For more than 25 years, The Napa Group has been counseling organizations and individuals on the change dynamics that implement timely strategies, leadership and growth. Today we firmly believe that these substantial workforce shifts call for new thinking and new behaviors. That means reshaping structures and systems to incorporate the considerable individual talent that will allow for-profit businesses and non-profit organizations to grow and

<sup>2</sup> “Convergence: How Five Trends Will Reshape the Social Sector.” By LaPiana Consulting and The James Irvine Foundation, November 2009.

<sup>3</sup> “The New Economy: More Startups, Fewer Giants, Infinite Opportunity,” *Wired Magazine*, May 22, 2009.

## The workforce of the next decade:

- There will be a continued and increased demand for top talent.
- Firms will become adept at engaging talent around short-term needs.
- Employees will expect flexible employment options, both short-term and long-term.
- Workers will put themselves up for bid for specific jobs, hours, duration, minimum price, benefits and perks, and employers will contract with each worker for the job to be delivered.
- “Agile” organizations will be the survivors.

flourish in the post-recession economy. Failure to do so will at best maintain the status quo while others are shaking up their internal dynamics with creative, often out-of-the-box approaches.

We assist our client organizations in assessing their current circumstances against the possibilities and in taking a more comprehensive approach – deciding where and how to invest, developing strategies for managing their talent and productivity, building collaboration and teamwork, supporting leadership growth and devising methods of ensuring mutual satisfaction. Today, this means developing an organization-wide vision that not only relies on a core full-time staff, but also encourages and supports the value of individual contributors and creating formal approaches to recruiting and managing contract talent. Some organizations already do this very well, but many do not invest in critical areas of success, such as helping line managers strategically integrate individual contributors into their units, teams and organizational culture.

For individuals, whether you are inside in an existing job or seeking new opportunities, positioning yourself as a successful contributor in this new workforce is not a path for the insecure. Through a combination of proven methodologies, our executive coaching program will direct you toward really knowing yourself – your capabilities, strengths, weaknesses, and strategic value – as the first step to reframing your job skills, potential contributions and workplace savvy. This often requires a new awareness that, in reality, your success will depend on the success of the business outcomes; in other words, it’s not about you, it’s about them.

Identifying and articulating your individual value proposition and how and where to leverage it will open many new doors, whether you interact with clients as an external consultant, work on onsite teams for the short term or engage with them virtually. These capabilities also will help you adapt your personal business marketing to various situations and move successfully from organization to organization. The workforce is changing. It’s flexible, and the value of experienced individual talent ready and willing to reinvest skills to reinvigorate the economy is one of the brightest spots on the horizon.

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RJ Valentino executive coaching practice has assisted numerous individuals in attaining success in their desired fields through greater self-awareness, increased self-confidence and situational analysis to leverage their strengths and capabilities. His consulting to corporations, higher education and other large organizations equips leadership and staff to maximize the use of flexible and volunteer talent.



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