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## **Talent Management Perspectives**

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### **Part-Time Workers: A New Leadership Paradigm**

**Kellye Whitney**

The need for leadership talent is growing, and as some 77 million baby boomers approach retirement, with roughly 44 million behind them, it will continue to grow. As companies search for the right talent to ensure their critical business initiatives are completed, they may want to more carefully consider the part-time worker and project-based work arrangements.

Linda Stewart — president, CEO and founder of professional services firm EPOCH — said talent deployment and utilization needs are becoming more complex for today's companies seeking to remain competitive, in part because accomplished professionals and executives actively are looking for alternatives to traditional employment.

"It's actually broader than just executives," she said. "This big talent gap that's happening in the workplace is primarily driven by the baby boomers, but it's going to fundamentally create a real shift in power away from the employer and into the hands of the employee. That's something that companies really haven't dealt with in decades. That's going to be the motivator that forces corporations to start making the changes that people have been looking for for years. Flexible schedules and work arrangements were always nice to have, but it's going to be must-haves as soon as this talent gap really hits companies."

In order to deal with this shift, organizations will have to adopt a new model for talent management, and Stewart said using a project-based or contingent workforce is a powerful, growing trend.

"The contingent workforce is expected to grow at three to four times the rate of the traditional workforce and will make up probably 25 percent of the workforce in the next three to four years," she said. "It used to be you had employment and you had retirement, but there is this engagement model in the middle where companies bring in resources at all levels on a project basis either to meet seasonal volume fluctuations or to execute specific projects rather than thinking of hiring everyone as a full-time worker."


Stewart said bringing people into an organization on a project basis as business needs require them is obviously attractive to employees because it allows them to make certain work-life choices. But it's equally compelling for companies because the contingent workforce provides more variable cost resources. Essentially, the part-time workforce is more cost-effective. It can also be more productive because hiring people with specific skills right when those skills are needed means these targeted workers often can hit the ground running with little guidance or instruction.

"I think it was Daniel Pink who said it best — it used to be that the agreement between the employee and the employer was the employee gave loyalty in exchange for the employer giving them security," Stewart said. "The '90s changed all that with downsizing and re-engineering and offshoring. The bargain now is that the individual gives talent, and the organization provides opportunities. Rather than employ everyone that they need, companies can bring people in on a project-based mode and engage them rather than with full-time, traditional employment. You bring in the skill that you need, when you need it, for a price that you can afford."

Leading professionals want to be independently employed, Stewart said. They want to leverage the skills and talents they've accumulated during the course of their career for multiple organizations. However, they don't want all of the traditional things that come with employment. They just want to do good work and be free agents.

Thus, it's critical for companies examining the best way to structure their workforce in the future and/or assessing their current talent and business needs, to recognize that the four — or in some cases five — generations in the workforce have many different ways they want to work.

"Companies have always sort of had one traditional model of employment, and everybody was expected to comply," Stewart explained. "Now that you've got these four generations with different values and work ethics and ways that they need to be managed and motivated, companies need to recognize that they can't homogenize their workforce. They need to look for different ways to engage with each of those generations.

"The young generation coming out of school and entering into organizations, those people want to work in the more traditional way because they're accumulating their skills and building their careers," she said. "Later on they introduce families, and there's the need for flexibility. That's where companies have to get much more creative about the way they support that demographic. Instead of focusing all efforts on retention, they should be thinking about how to deploy and utilize talent on more of a project-based way. You have to understand the different generations and the different motivators for different people in the workforce." 

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Kellye Whitney is managing editor for Talent Management magazine.