

The Appriser

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Antifragile and the 29ers

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Reading across a variety of disciplines tends to help the organizational leader make connections and potential leaps in insight. Insight leaps can generate ideas that help an enterprise create processes that reduce expense, increase income or both. Insight leaps also lead to products and services that disrupt the standard way of doing things and advance the organization as a leader in its industry.

Do you disagree? Point out an innovation that came from doing the same thing in the same way. Even a master craftsman—who appears to be doing the same thing in the same way—finds methods and tweaks that advance their skill and makes them a master at what they do. Truthfully, they are not doing the same thing in the same way as when they started.

My recent reading connected Nicholas Taleb's book *Antifragile* with a Wall Street Journal editorial entitled *ObamaCare and the '29ers'* (23 February 2012). Taleb's thesis is that building *antifragility* into one's life and enterprise is central to surviving what cannot be predicted. Since what cannot be predicted is what largely makes history, the ability to learn and morph and build upon disaster, unpredicted circumstance, or failure (Taleb's definition of being antifragile) is a critical measure of long-term success.

The WSJ article focuses on businesses facing the demands of ObamaCare and the benefit requirements that kick in when people are employed at 30 hours a week and above and when businesses reach 50 employees or more. Businesses—especially small ones—are adjusting jobs to 29 hours and limiting themselves to 49 employees in order to remain cost-effective. The article even reports that some businesses are striking agreements to share employees at 20 hours a week each--essentially making full-time work for employees who previously would have been employed just part time--without having to ramp up the requisite benefit packages. "Foul play!" cry the critics. "Don't have a choice!" exclaim the business owners.

According to Taleb's thesis, leaders committed to building antifragility do not engage issues like these via economic or political arguments. Instead, they focus on the resiliency of the business and the resilience of the people for whom employment is provided, and for whom living a productive and meaningful life is important. In the end, building resilience is a far simpler approach than arguing policy. One simply focuses energy on adapting to survive and thrive another day, while other, more sophisticated wonks get lost in non-productive legislation and litigation.

How are you building and measuring antifragility in your life and workplace?

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