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## **PERSONAL BRANDING IN CONDITIONS OF UNCERTAINTY AND CAREER INSTABILITY**

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The modern world of work is increasingly shaped by instability. The traditional model in which a person entered one organization, gradually advanced within it, and remained in relatively predictable employment for many years has weakened. In its place, more fluid forms of professional development have appeared. Contemporary careers often cross organizational boundaries, require repeated adaptation, and place greater responsibility on the individual rather than on the employer [5; 6]. At the same time, the digital environment has expanded the importance of visibility, reputation, and professional differentiation. Under such conditions, personal branding becomes an important response to instability because it allows individuals to present themselves as recognizable and valuable professionals regardless of whether their position, employer, or field changes. This logic is central to the literature on the boundaryless career, the protean career, and career adaptability.

Personal branding entered management and career discourse most visibly through the argument that every professional must think of themselves as “a brand” [1]. Later research developed this idea and showed that personal branding is not merely a slogan or a marketing technique. It is a social, communicative, and strategic process through which people shape how their professional identity is perceived by others [2; 4]. In unstable career environments, this process becomes especially important because employers and clients increasingly rely on visible signals of competence, consistency, and trustworthiness when making decisions.

Personal branding may be defined as the deliberate formation and communication of a professional identity that reflects a person’s competencies, values, experience, and distinctive contribution [3; 4]. This definition is broader than simple self-promotion. A true personal brand is not only what a person says about themselves, but also what professional communities, employers, colleagues, and audiences consistently associate with them. For that reason, a personal brand includes credibility, emotional impression, ethical style, and the individual’s capacity to solve problems in a recognizable way [2; 4].

In conditions of career instability, the role of personal branding becomes more significant. When a professional repeatedly changes employers, projects, or even fields, their formal biography may appear fragmented. Personal branding helps convert this fragmentation into a coherent story. Instead of being seen as unstable, the individual may be understood as adaptable, interdisciplinary, and capable of growth. This is particularly important in labor markets where employers seek not only technical ability but also clear professional positioning. Personal branding therefore performs a stabilizing function in unstable environments: it creates continuity where institutions no longer guarantee it [4; 5; 6].

At the same time, personal branding should not be reduced to image construction detached from substance. Research on authentic personal branding emphasizes that long-term value emerges only when public communication is grounded in real competence, ethical consistency, and self-awareness [3]. In other words, effective personal branding is sustainable only when it is rooted in genuine strengths rather than artificial performance. Otherwise, it becomes fragile and may collapse under the pressures of uncertainty.

The spread of personal branding is directly connected with structural changes in employment. The literature links its rise to temporary employment systems, project-based work, digital communication environments, and the transfer of career responsibility from organizations to individuals [4]. The concept of the boundaryless career describes professional movement that transcends one employer or one organizational structure [5]. The protean career extends this logic further by emphasizing that career management becomes self-directed and guided by personal values rather than organizational rules [6]. These ideas explain why personal branding is becoming increasingly important in unstable professional contexts.

Career instability may take many forms. It may include layoffs, temporary contracts, weak internal promotion systems, rapid skill obsolescence, professional reorientation, or hybrid work identities that combine salaried work with independent projects. In such conditions, employability depends not only on formal qualifications but also on how clearly a person communicates relevance. A visible and coherent professional identity helps reduce uncertainty for others. It allows employers, clients, and collaborators to understand what a person stands for and what they can reliably contribute [4; 7].

**Table 1.**  
Connection between labor market uncertainty and personal branding

Dimension of uncertainty	Manifestation in professional life	Function of personal branding
Economic instability	layoffs, reduced hiring, short-term contracts	supports visibility and access to alternative opportunities
Technological change	rapid skill obsolescence, reskilling pressure	signals relevance, flexibility, and learning ability
1	2	3

Continuation of Table 1.

Organizational restructuring	role ambiguity, downsizing, unstable promotion	preserves identity beyond a single employer
Project and freelance work	irregular income, temporary teams, repeated entry into new networks	builds trust across short-term collaborations
Digital competition	information overload and weak differentiation	clarifies value and strengthens recognizability
1	2	3

This table shows that personal branding is not simply a communication trend. It acts as a response to structural insecurity. It cannot eliminate labor market risk, but it can reduce professional vulnerability by strengthening recognition and trust [4; 5; 6].

A strong personal brand in unstable career conditions is built on several interconnected dimensions. The first is professional clarity. A person should be able to explain what they do, what value they create, and what differentiates them from others. Without clarity, even a highly qualified professional may remain invisible or misunderstood. The second dimension is credibility. Reputation depends on evidence of competence, real achievements, recommendations, and consistent ethical behavior. In uncertain contexts, credibility becomes especially important because decisions are often made with limited information [2; 3; 4].

The third dimension is adaptability. Career instability requires the ability to evolve without losing one's core identity. This point connects personal branding with the theory of career adaptability, which describes readiness to cope with both predictable career tasks and unpredictable changes in work conditions [7]. The fourth dimension is visibility. Competence that is not visible is less likely to create opportunities. Yet visibility should not mean constant self-advertising. It should mean meaningful participation in professional dialogue, publication of useful ideas, professional contribution, and reputation-building through substance. Finally, consistency is crucial [3; 4; 7].

Table 2.  
Main elements of a resilient personal brand

Component	Meaning	Career effect under instability
Professional clarity	clear articulation of expertise and contribution	reduces ambiguity and improves positioning
Credibility	evidence-based trust, competence, reliability	increases employability and confidence of others
Adaptability	ability to reposition while preserving core identity	supports transitions and reskilling
Visibility	presence in relevant professional spaces	expands networks and opportunity access
Consistency	alignment of message, values, and behavior	creates long-term reputational stability

Thus, a resilient personal brand combines inner self-understanding with outward communication. It is both reflective and strategic. It helps the individual understand who they are professionally, and it helps others understand why that identity matters [3; 4; 6].

Career resilience is usually understood as the capacity to sustain professional development despite disruption, transition, and uncertainty. Personal branding contributes to such resilience in several ways. First, it gives a person narrative continuity. Even when job roles change, a coherent brand enables the person to explain that movement as purposeful development rather than instability. Second, it improves access to opportunities because professionals who are visible and clearly positioned are easier to remember and recommend. Third, it strengthens network-based career mobility, which is increasingly important in non-linear careers [4; 5; 6].

The theory of the protean career is especially relevant here. It argues that in modern work life, the individual rather than the organization must take responsibility for career direction, while success is defined not only objectively but also psychologically and value-wise [6]. Personal branding fits this logic because it is an instrument of self-directed career management. Likewise, the theory of career adaptability highlights readiness to manage changing professional tasks and unexpected transitions [7]. A strong personal brand supports that readiness by making the person's identity more transferable across settings.

Although personal branding has important advantages, it also contains risks. One of the main concerns is commodification of the self. Scholars have noted that personal branding may encourage individuals to treat their personality and identity as market products, which can create pressure, emotional strain, and the blurring of boundaries between personal and professional life [2; 4]. Another problem is the temptation to privilege image over substance. In highly competitive digital environments, strong presentation may sometimes overshadow actual competence. This creates ethical and professional dangers because short-term visibility can be achieved without long-term credibility.

There is also the risk of excessive rigidity. If a person defines their brand too narrowly, they may later struggle to reposition themselves when professional circumstances change. For this reason, a sustainable personal brand should be specific enough to be memorable, but flexible enough to remain relevant across changing contexts. Authenticity is therefore not a decorative quality but a practical necessity. It allows the brand to develop without becoming artificial or internally contradictory [3; 4].

Personal branding in conditions of uncertainty and career instability should be understood as an important mechanism of professional adaptation. It helps individuals preserve continuity when institutions become unstable, communicate value in competitive environments, and strengthen trust across changing roles and contexts. The contemporary career increasingly requires self-direction, adaptability, and visibility, and personal branding integrates these demands into a single strategic practice [4; 5; 6; 7].

At the same time, personal branding is most effective when it is based on competence, evidence, and authenticity rather than superficial promotion. A strong personal brand does not replace professional development, but it makes that development legible to others. For this reason, in a labor market characterized by uncertainty, instability, and repeated transition, personal branding becomes not an optional addition to career building, but one of its central conditions [1; 3; 4].

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