



FLEXIBILITY– ADAPTABILITY

The capacity to demonstrate flexibility in accepting change and new ideas and adapting to the changing requirements that work environments may pose. Changes course when situations, data or customer input dictate that a change is necessary.



Behavioural Indicators

- Actively seeks opportunities for change, creating a climate in which flexible and innovative thinking is recognised and encouraged
- Continually evaluates practices and systems to identify better methods, finding different paths that satisfy short-term requirements yet pave the way for longer term goals a year or more ahead
- Uses trade-offs to maintain progress (eg, deploying and redeploying resources among units)
- Adjusts effectively in line with changing organisational priorities



Improving Flexibility/ Adaptability

The world of work is changing at an ever increasing pace so employers actively seek out people who can adapt to changing circumstances and environments, and embrace new ideas, who are enterprising, resourceful and adaptable.

Some people thrive on change and the unexpected and enjoy alteration to their routines: they are naturally adaptable.

If you are the kind of person who always has a 'to do' list and doesn't like it when something arises which isn't on your list, then you probably aren't naturally adaptable.

You can learn to become more adaptable and to develop your ability to cope effectively with change. You can learn how to become adaptable through experience and self-development.

WHY DO EMPLOYERS WANT FLEXIBLE EMPLOYEES?



Employers need flexible workers as they need staff who can adapt to new work situations and changing circumstances. Most businesses will face periods of difficulties and will need a workforce who can perform under pressure in roles that might not be the best fit for their skills.

Flexible employees are also useful for when a company is short-staffed or needs to restructure – the more skills and areas in which you can work or provide cover, the more likely an employer is to hire you.

STEPS TO DEVELOP THE COMPETENCY

Here are 4 simple steps to help you develop your adaptability:



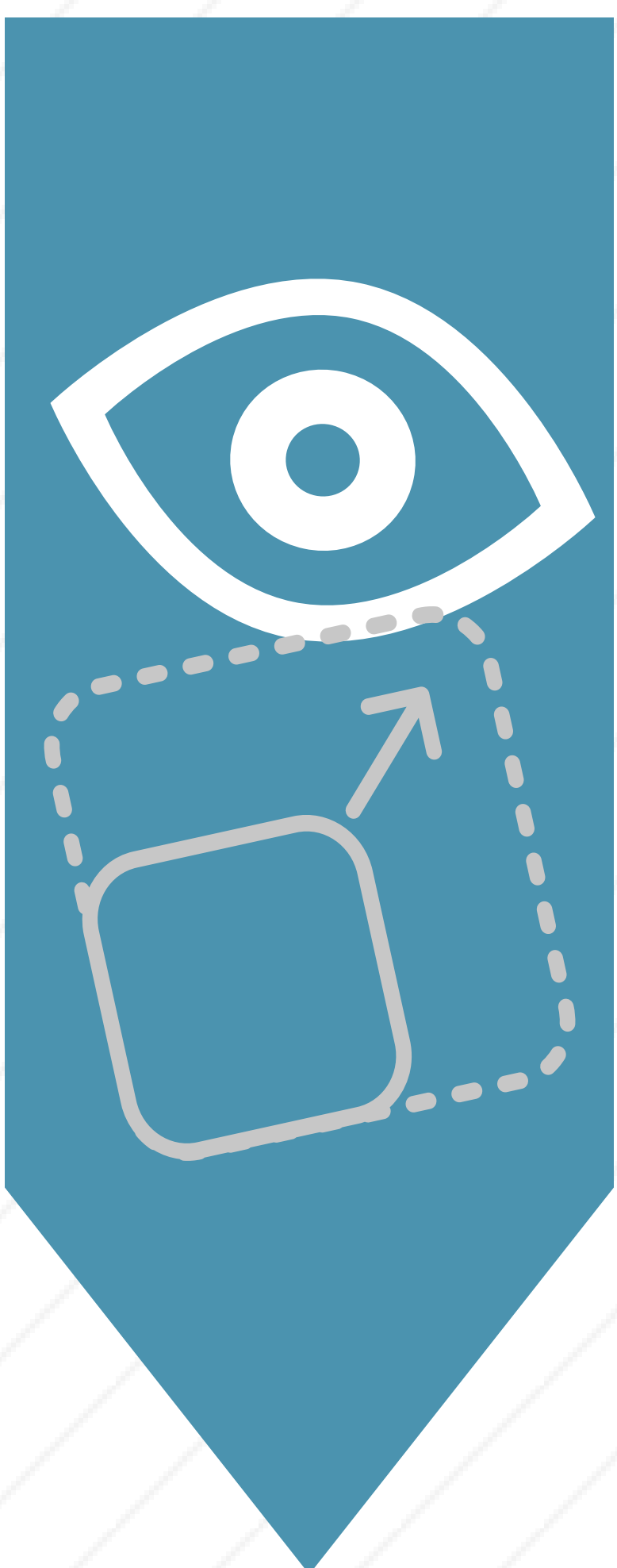
1. Ask Different Questions

The questions you usually ask will get you the sort of answers you usually get, which is not so helpful when you need new ideas. For a twist, try asking a new question.

Most of us naturally ask questions that narrow and push to a solution. In complexity, being open to different possibilities is key. In a situation with lots of moving parts, narrowing is too likely to leave you attached to a solution that used to be reasonable but isn't anymore.

Push yourself to ask questions like: "What is most surprising in this situation?" "What is at the edges of what seems possible today?" "What data am I ignoring because I don't happen to like what they tell me?"

Different questions open you up to new possibilities and create a more flexible, agile mind-set.



2. Accept Multiple Perspectives

We often think we have taken a wide variety of perspectives into consideration when really we have mostly just asked the people whose ideas we already knew about. Our natural habits are to crave alignment and to work to convince those whose opinions really differ (or ignore them).

When you're dealing with a complex situation, each person's perspective is too small—and a group that's aligned with a single perspective is collectively missing important pieces. We need to get out of our own way.

You can do this by seeking out perspectives that are different and—here's the key—not trying to convince anyone (especially ourselves) that we're right.

You can tell you're not taking someone's perspective into consideration if you think of him as a moron or not getting it; this means there's no way to learn from what his perspective might teach you.

Try holding back on forming an opinion and instead actively listen to the person you have written off as a lost cause, the group of people at work who seem so different from you that you don't even know their names, or even the one who has seemed close to you but now seems to have a bee in her bonnet about something. Keep asking yourself, "In what ways could I be wrong or missing something?"



3. Consider The Bigger Picture

Our inclination is to pull things apart and solve the little bits one at a time. In complexity, the system is moving too fast and has too many interrelated parts for us to use this more comfortable approach with success for long.

Instead, when things are really moving fast, it's time to look at the interactions. It's like watching a game of soccer: If you follow the ball with your eyes, you'll be lost. If you zoom out and look at the patterns of the players on the field, you'll see the game.

When you find yourself being drawn to the minutiae, see if you can find the patterns. When you feel yourself bouncing back and forth between two details, instead of thinking of them as opposites, see what balance you can strike between the two sides.



4. Experiment And Learn

When it's time to act, complexity calls for a series of safe-to-fail experiments—little bets that we can use to nudge the system in the desired direction. Instead of picking a final destination and trying to close the gaps, try finding places for experimentation and learning.

For example, if you decide there's something not quite right about your culture, avoid the typical solution of measuring the culture and then rolling out a culture change program.

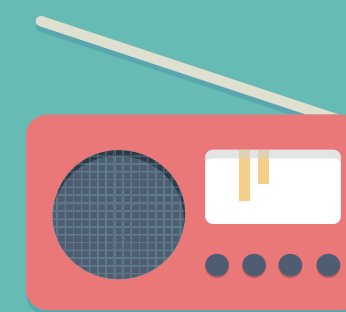
Instead, look for unexpected places where the culture is trending in a better direction and design little experiments to see if you can encourage some of those trends elsewhere. The experiments should be small, inexpensive, and most importantly they should be things you can learn from.



Exercise Tips

Tip 1 | Tune in

To really understand what's going on with people in a given situation, you need to tune in to what's going on beneath the surface. Take control of the situation by adapting your style and behaviour and by responding in a way that eases the transaction and promotes a productive outcome.



Tip 2 | Think about the consequences

Use mental rehearsal to think about different ways you could engage. Picture the response. Try to see yourself acting in opposing ways to get to the same outcome. Identify which approach will likely yield the best outcome.



Tip 3 | Press pause

When your emotions and fears are triggered, it can cause an initial anxious response. Practice holding back your first response long enough to think of a second and third. Research shows that, generally, somewhere between the second and third thing you think to say or do is the best option. Rather than reacting, adapt and thoughtfully respond to the situation instead. Stay in control.



Tip 4 | Listen more

When you listen, you're suspending judgement. You're taking in information that will allow you to select the best response to the situation. Elicit and listen to as much information as you can about what's going on. Use that information to adapt your behaviour as needed.



Tip 5 | Go for more variety

Get out of your comfort zone. Put yourself into very different situations than those you typically encounter. Operating in a variety of situations and roles will help you become more flexible and adaptable.



Tip 6 | Get feedback

Research shows that people who reflect on their performance are more likely to be flexible in adapting to changes in their environment. And therefore better able to identify alternative ways of behaving to be more effective in given situations.



Tip 7 | Laugh at yourself

Having a sense of humour about yourself only serves to humanize you. When you fail, reflect on what went wrong, adjust course, and don't repeat the same mistake next time. Learning and improving your adaptability along the way is the goal, not perfection.



Tip 8 | Pull back on overused skills

Strengths become overused skills when you use them, regardless of the situation. Be more precise and adjust to the specific need.



Tip 9 | Get comfortable walking someone else's talk

Having to support someone else's program or idea when you don't really think that way or agree is a common paradox. You have to be a member of the loyal opposition. Don't let it be known to others that you are not fully on board. Your role is to manage this vision and mission, not your personal one. If you have strong contrary views, be sure to demand a voice next time around.



Tip 10 | Redress the balance

Don't stick rigidly to one way of operating. Pay attention to what the situation requires of you and adjust accordingly.



Suggested Reading

ARTICLE

How to Develop Adaptability - One of the Top 10 21st Century Skills for Graduates - <http://oysterconnect.com/blog/how-develop-adaptability-one-top-10-21st-century-skills-graduates>

BOOKS

Adaptability - The Art of Winning in an Age of Uncertainty- Max McKeown



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