

## Module 8. Flexibility.

Introduction Video Transcript	<p>Hi! Welcome to Module 1 – Flexibility.</p> <p>If there’s anything that life in a pandemic has shown us, it’s how important it is (and how difficult it can be) to adapt to unexpected change. As every aspect of life turned upside down for everyone, it quickly became apparent the areas where we all knew and didn’t know how to pivot and demonstrate flexibility. Among all the skills needed to function properly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, flexibility is the one we rely on the most especially when the going gets tough and unpredictable. Today, the only consistency from year to year is change and our ability to adapt and change is a very crucial skill to survive constant change.</p>
Lecture Video Transcript	<p>What Is Flexibility?</p> <p>While there’s no set definition of flexibility as a skill, we generally consider flexibility to be the behavior of switching between tasks and demands in response to changes in the environment. In essence, it’s our ability to change our behavior to different contexts or stimuli in our world. Other terms researchers might use to describe flexibility include cognitive flexibility, shift, task switching, and mental flexibility.</p> <p>Individuals who struggle with flexibility have difficulty discriminating between different environments or can’t shift focus between various tasks or relevant information. When we’re inflexible, we may get ‘stuck’ or keep trying the same response over and over even though it’s not working.</p> <p>Examples of Cognitive or Behavioral Flexibility</p> <p>Here are some sample behaviors you might use to define flexibility:</p> <p>Categorizing or classifying objects in different ways (e.g., sorting a set of items first by color and then sorting the same things by shape or function).</p> <p>Transitioning between activities, including ending a preferred activity to begin a non-preferred activity.</p> <p>Perspective-taking (e.g., monitoring one’s own verbal and nonverbal behavior as others respond to it)</p> <p>Recognizing a problem or a “glitch” and adjusting behavior accordingly.</p>

Trying a new strategy after an initial approach failed.

Accepting another's idea or view as better than one's own.

Revising communication or rephrasing when a listener doesn't understand.

Adapt when plans change or when unexpected events occur.

### Importance of Flexibility

Today's social life, markets, and industry are capable of changing at a moment's notice. Societies are now regularly disrupted with new ideas and industries are every changing under new methodologies. Those industries that haven't been disrupted aren't immune though. They just haven't been disrupted yet.

With that in mind, the world has entered an era where nothing is guaranteed. As a result, adults, as well and young people, need to learn to guide the change that'll inundate their lives. At the very least, they need to learn how to react to it.

Otherwise, they'll be left behind.

This is especially true as customer demand accelerates in all industries along with expectations for newer features, higher-level capabilities, and lower prices. In today's marketplace, falling behind means becoming obsolete. Only your ability to change and adapt will help you keep pace with the ever changing environment.

### Developing Flexibility Skills

We begin to learn flexibility and to develop flexible thinking early in childhood. Toddlers and young children complete simple puzzles, games, and play requiring shifting between one behavior and another. As young children learn to shift from activity to activity, they begin to manage transitions and unexpected changes without upset behaviors. Then, as adolescents grow and their social networks continue to expand, they encounter more and more situations where problems and unpredictable events occur. Adults are nearby, however, to support and teach children to adjust dynamically.

As our children grow into teenagers and young adults, we expect them to now manage unpredictable changes to routines, meet the changing demands school, work, and family, and take difficult situations in stride. Our children may need additional support at occasional points, but with well-developed executive functioning skills, they're able to pivot and recover quickly when the unexpected happens.

## Why Is Flexibility Necessary?

There are some real-world benefits to developing flexibility. Coping with unexpected changes and adapting to new information are associated with a wide range of positive outcomes in children and adults, including:

Better reading abilities

Improved responding to adverse life events

Higher ability to respond to stress in adulthood

Improved creativity

Flexibility and coping with change help adults avoid some of the common problem behaviors we frequently encounter in all walks of life. Improvements in flexibility can help avoid common pitfalls at home and work related to:

Getting frustrated when little things happen

Repeating the same mistake

Difficulty adapting to changes in schedules

Switching between activities or leaving activities

Arguing the same point over and over

Tantrums or meltdowns when rules or circumstances change.

## Shift/Tolerance of Change

Tolerating unexpected changes requires adjusting to changes and unpredictability. If there is a lack of flexibility, one might stall out, stop working, or have emotional or aggressive outbursts when changes happen. Lack of flexibility also leads to struggles in making in-the-moment decisions. If a person creates complex systems or is always 'on edge' to avoid sudden changes or unpredictability, this might be a sign of lack of flexibility.

## How to Improve Flexibility (Tolerance of Change) and Reduce Related Behaviors

Increasing tolerance helps us move forward in jobs rather than stalling out, helps us more quickly complete tasks, and encounter fewer unwanted consequences.

Improvements in shift and tolerance of change can encompass a wide range of skill areas. Consider these types of goals to work on

	<p>developing your flexibility and tolerance to unpredictability:</p> <p>Understanding and articulating why shift is important and what it means to be flexible.</p> <p>Completing several transitions—both predictable and unpredictable—between activities throughout the day.</p> <p>Switching or alternating attention between preferred and non-preferred topics/activities.</p> <p>Tolerating changes in routine or unpredictable circumstances without problem behaviors.</p> <p>Avoiding ‘rigid’ thinking that may disrupt completing a task.</p>
<p>Gamification-Based Interactive Tasks</p>	<p><u>Interactive task 1.</u></p> <p>Identify four simple but distinct tasks. In a span of 8 minutes, switch between the tasks and start each task with the kind of focus the task requires.</p> <p><u>Interactive task 2.</u></p> <p>Have another adult work with you on this. Similar to interactive task 1, identify several simple but distinct tasks, have your friend/mentor/aide randomly choose a task for you and focus on the assigned task. At any random point in time, have your friend/mentor/aide ask you to shift to another task. Observe your feelings, make notes if necessary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you feel when you are asked to switch tasks?</li> <li>• How easy is it to switch tasks for you?</li> </ul> <p><u>Interactive task 3.</u></p> <p>As a continuation of the previous task, identify several complex (a complex task would involve several steps to complete) tasks, this time, before selecting and starting a task, prioritize the tasks and discuss with your friend/mentor/aide, which task to prioritize and why. Identify priority criteria such as urgency, potential gain, easiness, time for completion, etc.</p> <p>Consider the following issues when identifying priorities for tasks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and communicate the most critical step in a task.</li> <li>• Identify and communicate the initial step to complete a task.</li> <li>• Understand the sequence and order to complete multi-part</li> </ul>

tasks.

- Understand and communicate how much time tasks typically take.
- Discuss deadlines for completing a task and try to meet them.

Interactive task 4.

Start changing several constant things in your daily routine, these changes might range from very simple things to more radical changes such as moving your desk to another part of the room or starting to go to the local library on foot every day and reading for at least an hour.

Reading

**Are You Ready for Change?**

These sample questions come from one of several tools that are used in assessment and development programs. The focus of this particular tool is on flexibility. Each of the questions represent different types of actions you must take in your career and/or job and relates to the situation you might use. Within each section (A, B, C, and D), read the questions and choose the one response which most closely describes your behavior. To receive results, you must respond to every section (a total of four sections). Your feedback results will be more accurate and helpful if you are as truthful as possible.

**Maximum score of 20: (4 sections) X (5 points *per section*)**

SECTION A: Willingness and Ability to Change your Position on Issues	
Points	
1	I am usually willing to change my mind when the majority of the group disagrees with me.
2	I modify my stance on issues when doing so would benefit others with whom I am associated.
3	I stay informed of various positions and scenarios and make changes as they are needed.
4	I quickly modify my stance when there is new and valid information.
5	I maintain or alter my position by considering how information and resources apply to situations.

  

SECTION B: Willingness and Ability to Initiate Action	
Points	
1	In most situations I seek additional information before choosing a course of action.
2	I insist on finishing all currently scheduled tasks before initiating action on additional work.
3	In unfamiliar situations, I readily seek assistance before taking action.
4	In most situations, I initiate action with just the immediately available information and resources.
5	I willingly consider and examine different methods to accomplish objectives.

Self-evaluation test  
(PERSONAL FLEXIBILITY SKILLS TEST)

**SECTION C: Willingness and Ability to Make Decisions**

**Points**

1	In unfamiliar situations I reach conclusions only after thoroughly studying the available information and resources.
2	I reanalyze all available information when presented with new, valid perspectives.
3	In new situations, I act only after considering possible outcomes and preparing to deal with contingencies.
4	I readily seek alternatives to ensure that I can make valid decisions.
5	I maintain or alter decisions by considering how information and resources apply to situations.

**SECTION D: Willingness and Ability to Work with Others**

**Points**

1	In difficult situations I almost always find that it is best to take the path of least resistance.
2	I consider others' views once they can provide me with all possible information and resources.
3	I seek others' input to support my decisions or suggested changes.
4	I actively seek opportunities to neutralize or turnaround difficult challenges.
5	I frequently offer effective ideas to others despite possible resistance or risks.

**TOTAL POINTS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Based on your responses, your current readiness for change appears to be:**

**17-20:** Congratulations! You are ready now to deal with all expected and most unexpected changes. This score places you at the **Expert Level** meaning that you are extremely effective at managing change and leading individual, team, and organizational change processes. At this level you are quite capable of helping individuals and teams effectively respond to change. Although you have few development needs, you will benefit from efforts to find additional opportunities to extend your Personal Flexibility strengths. We hope that you will continue your self-guiding and learning process.

**12-16:** Solid Performance. You are ready now to deal with routine, expected changes. This score places you at the **Experienced Level** meaning that you are good at managing change and working effectively with individuals and teams to incorporate new processes within your area of responsibility or expertise. At this level you work confidently with others to adjust to new situations and to improve individual and team performance. You have some development needs but, with a persistent and focused developmental effort, you will see marked improvement and you will be ready to advance to the next level when the opportunity arises.

**4-11:** Significant Development Needs. You are ready now to learn more about dealing with expected and unexpected changes. This score places you at the **Entry Level** meaning that you have a ways to go before you are considered effective at managing change and working effectively with individuals, teams, and organizations in new programs and situations. At this level you work hard and focus on ensuring current work procedures are followed. However, you are more reactive than proactive in dealing with your work environment and market changes. Although you have many development needs, you will benefit from pinpointing one or two areas for development which will help you focus and achieve better results faster.

	<p>Being ready for change or being flexible is a <b>CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTOR</b> and is recognized as important for success in today's challenging and re-engineered work environment.</p>
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