



## Why Adaptability?

As a protective factor against burnout, developing your capability to be adaptable will support you through stressful work situations, including: organizational changes, work tasks or projects that require you to adjust your approach, and identifying alternate solutions to a problem.

## How Adaptable Are You?

Your survey responses indicate you have an adaptable perspective and approach to work. Others likely see you as someone able to easily adjust methods or approach to best fit a problem, often proactively and with a positive attitude.

## Leaning into Your Natural Strength of Adaptability

Although your high score indicates adaptable behaviors come naturally to you, here are some supporting practices that require low effort and can further reduce stress.

**Maintain an Optimistic Attitude:** Change can be uncomfortable, but maintaining a positive attitude can make it easier. Simply choosing to view change as an opportunity for growth rather than a threat shifts your brain into a resourceful, problem-solving state.

**Be a Continuous Learner:** With change often comes the need to learn new skills or tools. Embrace lifelong learning, stay curious, and be open to upskilling and reskilling.

**Stay Connected:** Adaptability requires alternative points of view. Seek support from your colleagues, superiors, or mentors. They might be able to provide guidance, share their experiences, or offer new perspectives.

**Seek Support and Foster Collaboration:** Remember to reach out for support when facing challenging situations. Engage in open communication with colleagues, supervisors, or mentors. Collaborate with others to share the workload, seek different perspectives, and benefit from the collective wisdom of the team.

Additionally, engaging in cross-functional projects allows you to gain exposure to different perspectives, approaches, and ways of working. It provides an opportunity to develop your adaptability skills by adapting to diverse working styles and finding common ground.

**Practice Open-Mindedness:** Actively seeking out different perspectives, challenging our own assumptions, and being receptive to new ideas and approaches can help your growth in adaptability. During conversation with colleagues, try “active listening” in order to suspend judgment and understand their viewpoints. Engaging in constructive discussions, which encourage the exchange of ideas also fosters adaptability, as well as openness and collaboration. Finally, cultivate your curiosity! Ask questions and seek out new information.

## Continue to Develop Your Problem-Solving Skills

When tried-and-true methods fail us, adaptability involves finding creative solutions to challenges. Some general tips include breaking down complex problems into smaller manageable tasks, seeking out different perspectives, and thinking creatively about potential solutions. You may also want to consider practicing flexible problem-solving.

## Flexible Problem-Solving

Problems can interrupt our forward progress. Unforeseen hurdles have the potential to derail our plans and often leave us feeling stressed and stuck. Flexible problem-solving skills help us reduce our stress and find our way to one or more viable solutions.

Here are some tips on applying your adaptability in flexible problem-solving:

- 1. Clearly and Narrowly Define the Problem:** Focus is key to effective problem solving. This helps prioritize potential solutions that may be interesting but do not address the core issue that needs to be resolved.
- 2. Brainstorm to Generate Multiple Possible Solutions:** Turn the pressure down and give yourself space to be flexible, open, and creative. Instead of settling on the first plausible (usually the most familiar or logical) explanation or solution, generate several possible solutions. Generating possible solutions can take different forms, including having conversations with others (see the next step) or by allowing yourself to “journal” about it. Try writing freely and creatively on the problem and potential solutions for 20-30 minutes.
- 3. Diversify Your Thinking:** Seek out different perspectives and approaches to the problem. Engage with people from different backgrounds, read widely, and consider alternative ways to address the issue. Also, as we are introduced to new perspectives, we become more flexible in our thinking, and this improves our creativity in problem-solving.
- 4. Ask Many Questions:** Problem-solving involves thinking critically. Probe assumptions, explore potential consequences, and ask multiple “What if’s?” Don’t be afraid to question your own understanding and ask others for their perspectives.

5. **Let it Go:** Incorporate “combinatory play” into your flexible problem solving. Take a break, occupy your mind with something else, preferably something you enjoy. This can spark creativity for potential solutions. Albert Einstein solved many tough mathematical problems by taking a break from them and playing his violin. He coined this practice “combinatory play,” and defined it as “the act of opening up one mental channel by dabbling in another.” Einstein asserted combinatory play was essential to his problem-solving.
6. **Maintain Patience and Persistence:** Problem-solving often requires time, patience, and persistence. Don’t expect instant results, and don’t give up when things get tough.

## Watch Out for Overuse

It’s important to strike a balance between adaptability and stability in order to keep adaptability working for us (reducing stress), rather than against us. Highly adaptable individuals may face challenges related to prioritization, overcommitment, lack of boundaries, continuous pressure to adapt, and inadequate support systems.

Adaptability does not mean constantly pushing yourself beyond your limits. Set realistic expectations for yourself, taking into account your capacity and well-being. Be kind to yourself and allow room for rest and recuperation.

**Focus on Priorities and Essential Tasks:** In times of change and uncertainty, it’s important to focus on priorities and essential tasks. Identify what truly matters and allocate your time and energy accordingly. Let go of non-essential tasks or delegate them, when possible, to reduce overwhelm.

**Overcommitment:** Adaptable individuals may find themselves constantly taking on new tasks, roles, or responsibilities due to their openness to change. While this can be beneficial in many cases, it can also lead to overcommitment. By continually adapting and taking on more without considering their own limits, individuals may become overwhelmed and experience burnout.

**Lack of Boundaries:** Adaptable individuals may struggle with setting and maintaining boundaries. Their willingness to accommodate new situations and approaches can sometimes result in blurred lines between work and personal life. Without clear boundaries, they may find it challenging to disconnect from work, leading to chronic stress and burnout.

**Continuous Pressure:** Adaptable employees often face ongoing pressure to adjust to new circumstances and meet changing demands. This can create a constant state of high stress, as they feel the need to adapt quickly and frequently. Over time, this chronic pressure can contribute to burnout if they are unable to find relief or establish a sense of stability.

**Inadequate Support Systems:** Adaptable individuals may be less likely to seek or receive support when facing challenges or stress. Their tendency to adapt independently and find solutions on their own may result in a reluctance to seek help, leading to a lack of support networks. This lack of support can increase stress levels and contribute to burnout when individuals feel overwhelmed and unsupported.



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