

FLEXIBILITY (FLX)

Flexibility is the ability and willingness to adapt to and work effectively within a variety of diverse situations, and diverse individuals or groups. Flexibility entails understanding and appreciating different and opposing perspectives on an issue, adapting one’s approach as situations change, and accepting changes within one’s own job or organization.

<i>This Means...</i>	<i>This Doesn't Mean...</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • finding alternatives that will meet the stakeholder’s underlying needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • believing your view is the only one
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accepting others’ points of view as valid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • believing that your opinion is the only correct one
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flexibly applying guidelines or procedures to get the job done and meet Organization objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rigorously adhering to Organization procedures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deciding what to do based on the situation and adapting to fit it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acting in ways that may have worked before, but not adapting for possible differences in situations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enthusiastically adopting new systems or procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wanting to do things the way you have always done them
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • changing your work plan when urgent problems arise even though changes may involve extra work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ignoring problems and sticking to your original work plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • making an effort to work effectively with others even though their preferred way of working is different from yours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disliking people who don’t do things your way
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintaining an open perspective on a stakeholder’s concern or problem; exploring different alternatives; displaying empathy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • refusing to look for alternatives to resolve a stakeholder’s concern or problem; “digging in your heels”

Developmental Activities

Level 1 Activities

Expose yourself to differing views.

- Look for opportunities in your working and non-working life to discuss topics which may have differing points of view.

- When someone expresses an opinion different from your own, resist expressing your point of view immediately. Instead, ask the person to “tell me more about why you think that”.
- Resist the temptation to try to convince them to change to your point of view.
- Think about your view in light of their views. Are there options you have not considered? If you had this conversation before you developed your views, would you have come to a different conclusion?

Reflection Tip:

- * Really try to focus on the underlying reasoning and supporting evidence for their point of view.

Respond to change enthusiastically.

- Suppress any desire to complain the next time you are asked to change your work plan.
- Practice adopting a positive attitude and you will find that the new demands on you will be less stressful.

Think about your own preferences.

- Think about the style of work you prefer, for example:
 - ⇒ A manager/team leader who leaves me alone / A manager/team leader who works closely with me
 - ⇒ A formal businesslike office / An informal office
 - ⇒ People who say what they mean / People who are very polite
 - ⇒ Working in a team / Working on my own
 - ⇒ After thinking about your preferences, consider why some people might prefer the opposite.
- What are the possible advantages of each option?
- This exercise will help you recognize the difference between “This is the best way” and “This is the way that I personally prefer”.

Reflection Tips:

- * What are the possible advantages of each perspective?
- * In what types of situations would each of your preferences be more or less appropriate?

Get feedback from your peers on your flexibility.

- Tell your peers that you are trying to improve your Flexibility. Ask them to give you immediate feedback when you are or are not being flexible.

- Resist the temptation to defend your point of view if your peers say you are not being flexible enough. Thank them for their feedback and consider the possibility that they may be right.

Reflection Tip:

- * Reflect on the situations where peers have indicated you've been less adaptable. Do you understand why they feel that way?

Review other management decisions imagining that you yourself made the decision.

- Think of at least one supporting rationale for the decision and the argument you (as the decision maker) would use to defend it.

Understand the background of the people you are working with.

- Spend some time talking to your co-workers about their backgrounds, their work preferences and concerns, their interests.
- Try to understand values so that you can adapt your behaviour to match. Observe the effects this change has on your group dynamics.

Avoid telling others something cannot be done because of a rule.

- Whenever a rule or procedure gets in the way of what you or a service partner need to achieve, do not say, "That's the rule. End of discussion." Instead, think of alternatives that will achieve the desired result.

Level 2 Activities

Question your own position.

- Review the methods by which you perform your more routine activities to identify new or better ways of performing them. Learn to play devil's advocate with yourself, particularly when you find yourself with a fixed commitment to a certain position.

Reflection Tip:

- * Ask yourself why you are so attached to this particular position. Are there emotional reasons why you are sticking to one position?

Learn from someone who is flexible.

- Identify a person who adapts to changing situations with ease. This could be your manager, a peer with whom you work, or someone in another area of the organization with whom you interact.
- Observe them at work and model your behaviour based on what you learn from them.

Reflection Tip:

- * Is there a pattern to the situations in which this person is most flexible?

When you find yourself faced with many competing demands on your time, ask your manager/team leader for ideas.

- Ask your manager/team leader for advice on the priorities and the implications of any trade off decisions you might take.
- The intent is not to ask the manager/team leader for direction, simply to “pick their brain” so that you know how best to adapt to the situation.
- Seek to understand how your manager/team leader makes decisions when faced with similar situations.

Reflection Tip:

- * What are the key factors that help your manager prioritize actions?

Discuss the underlying reasons behind rules and procedures with your manager.

- Do not bend rules unless you understand the implications of bending them. Learn more about the existing rules and talk to your manager about what would happen if certain procedures were changed.
- Ask your co-workers about times they have had to bend the rules to solve a problem for a customer and find out what occurred as a result.

Apply rules in a flexible manner when required.

- When a problem situation arises that the normal policies or practices will not solve, develop a plan of action that applies the “rules” more flexibly.
- Think of how you have seen others handle similar situations or ask them for their suggestions and interpretations of the situation.
- Think of alternatives that will achieve the desired result instead of simply following the rule.

Reflection Tip:

* How effective were each of the alternatives you identified? What would you do differently next time?

Discuss difficult cases to learn what alternatives are possible.

- Make a point of discussing difficult cases with your manager/team leader to learn what could have been done differently.
- By developing an understanding of the alternatives you will be better able to respond flexibly in the future.

Work with others who have strong opinions.

- Participate in assignments or projects in which you will be working with others who have strong opinions, styles that are different from yours, or who have more expertise in the project area than you have.
- Use these opportunities to practice being more flexible, using some of the techniques noted above.

Level 3-4 Activities

Seek opportunities or volunteer for an assignment where you know your viewpoint will be openly challenged.

- Talk to friends and family members who approach things differently than you do.
- Participate in assignments or projects in which you will be working with others who have strong opinions, styles that are different from yours, or who have more expertise in the project area than you have.
- Determine if approaches and techniques of others might be useful for you to use.
- Use these opportunities to practice demonstrating more Flexibility.

Reflection Tip:

* Reflect on the success that others achieve with their alternative approaches. Which approaches would be most appropriate in your branch?

Practice reaching a win-win solution.

- Think of any disagreements you have with others.
- Rather than trying to win the argument, develop your flexibility by thinking of a mutually satisfying outcome. Have a discussion with the other person with the explicit goal of exploring all options.

- If you do not have any disagreements now, think back to an earlier one. See if you can think of a win-win solution that might have worked in that situation.

Volunteer for projects and assignments that involve topics that are new and different from your normal work load or represent “ground-breaking” areas for your department.

- Ask for projects or assignments where existing policies and practices do not apply.
- Ask for feedback from others on their perception of your progress.
- Think of the rules or standard operating procedures that at times have got in the way of achieving business results.
- Note the issues and implications of bending the “rules”.
- Discuss with others under what circumstances it would be appropriate to “bend the rules”.

Reflection Tip:

- * Reflect on your comfort level with working on a project where policies and procedures don't apply.

Build islands of stability.

- Try and keep some things constant. This is sometimes called building islands of stability in a sea of change.
- For example: build little routines about how you start and end your work day and keep these up in the face of change. Another example would be to keep your desk organized a certain way.

Set a tough personal goal to regularly consider two or more reasonable alternative courses of action for every major decision.

- Keep a record of your thinking by noting the decision and the alternatives.
- Review this record occasionally and ask yourself how flexible are you being?
- Are the alternatives simply “straw persons” or are they realistic - would you ever implement them?
- How creative are your alternatives?
- Recognize that there is rarely only one solution to a problem.

Reflection Tip:

- * Review your record occasionally and reflect on your level of adaptability over time.

Keep abreast of any changes or updates in technology.

- Ask information technology specialists (internal and external) questions about how emerging technologies will impact (either positively and/or negatively) your department.
- Identify a new technology that has been recently implemented.
 - ⇒ Talk to the key individuals involved in the implementation (both systems specialists as well as the “customer”).
 - ⇒ Determine why the system was considered and the gains and costs associated with its implementation.
- Gain hands-on experience with a system you are not familiar with (e.g., a new piece of software, a recently implemented system within the department).

Reflection Tip:

- * How does this new information impact your existing approach or strategy?

Consider if your priorities need to be revised.

- Review your To-Do list or plan of action to see if anything you previously had decided should change based on new information.
- Try to find at least two things to change. The goal is to improve your comfort level with changing priorities, goals and methods.

Encourage and promote an effective balance between work and personal life.

- Identify someone in your organization who you admire for maintaining a balance between his or her work and personal life.
- Ask him or her to describe specific events where work or personal commitments had to take priority.
- Discuss the techniques he or she used and how you could apply them in your own situation.
- Be a role model for others. Visibly show others by your own personal actions that you consider balance between work and personal commitments a priority in your own life.
- Start a group for people who are attempting to achieve a balance between their work and personal life. Indicate that the purpose of the group is to share stories and provide mutual support.

Reflection Tip:

- * What changes will you need to make on your work style in order to achieve a better work – life balance?

Invest time in developing knowledge transfer in the procedures or systems used in your area.

- Take time to read manuals, talk to co-workers, and question your manager/team leader, etc., so that you develop knowledge transfer in your area.
- Maintain a list or file on knowledge transfer so you will have access to multiple ways of doing things, and know ways to adapt when there are problems.

Reflection Tip:

* How does this improved access to knowledge impact your current approaches?