

RQ Dimension – Flexible and Adaptable

About this Dimension

What is *Flexible and Adaptable* as a component of resilience?

The most resilient people are those who are keenly aware of and sensitive to the changes occurring in the world around them. With the help of this awareness, they are then able to shift gears and direction if necessary to accommodate the new reality while remaining true to their life purpose/vision. Resilient people adapt to the environment as both a survival mechanism but also as a vehicle for enabling them to continue the pursuit of their personal goals - which includes learning and personal and professional growth.

Flexibility and adaptability are evident in someone when they are able to quickly and easily change gears or direction in the face of changing circumstances. People who lack this characteristic may be either incapable of recognizing the need for changing their behaviors or approach or of not having the capacity for bending or flexing in a new direction when necessary.

Being adaptable does not mean, however, that the resilient person has no stable center or core sense of self. While resilient people are able to easily “go with the flow” and “roll with the punches,” they are still carried forward by an enduring personal vision. While they stay true to themselves, they are open as to *how* they make the journey of their life.

Why is this Dimension Important to Resilience?

Flexibility and adaptability enable a person to accommodate the emerging challenges of everyday life. Whereas those who adhere fanatically to only one way of engaging the world experience unending stress as they find that their personal behaviors and strategies are continually proven to be inadequate in response to life’s challenges, resilient people are more able to adjust for and accommodate each day’s realities.

When something doesn’t go as planned for a resilient person he or she is not set back by the turn of events but is able to swiftly and adeptly accommodate the new reality. Rather than hanging on to their anger about the surprising turn of events, resilient people accept things as they are (vs. what they’d *like* them to be) and then seek a way to make the best of the new situation. This typically involves the resilient person identifying and pursuing what he or she values most in a given situation and then *actively* pursuing what is most important to him or her by flexibly adopting behaviors and actions that move him or her toward the goal.

Without flexibility and adaptability a person is unable to learn or grow, tends to miss new and emerging opportunities, and becomes less effective in dealing with life’s challenges. With flexibility and adaptability a person remains open and receptive to whatever life throws at his or her feet.

Flexible and Adaptable Quotes

It's not the strongest that survive, nor the most intelligent - but the most responsive to change.

- Charles Darwin, British naturalist, explorer, and author of *The Origin of Species* (b. 1809, d. 1882)

Blessed are the flexible for they shall not be bent out of shape.

- Dr. Michael McGriffy, American physician

The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise to the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew.

- Abraham Lincoln, 2nd Annual Message to Congress
December 1, 1862 (b. 1809, d. 1865)

Strategies for Developing the Flexible and Adaptable Dimension

Because of its very nature, flexibility and adaptability require an individual to be first *aware* of the need to be flexible in a given situation, second it requires being open to the possibilities and opportunities of changing a behavior or belief, and then third it requires having the *capacity* of actually modifying this behavior or belief. As a result, helping others develop their adaptability might involve strategies to engage any and all three of these aspects of flexibility and adaptability.

Some ideas to encourage people to strengthen their flexibility and adaptability include:

On a personal, one-on-one basis . . .

- Ask the person to identify something that he or she is currently doing and is accustomed to doing on a regular basis - but where this routine behavior is no longer getting him or her the results that he or she wants, expects, or needs.
- Encourage the person to assess their personal vision and the extent to which his or her vision still speaks to what he or she considers important to his or her life. Guide the person in reflecting upon the changes to this personal vision that seem desirable given where the person is now in their life's journey.
- Ask the person to identify three changes that he or she could make in his or her life right now that would enhance the quality of his or her life.
- Ask the person to identify one thing that he or she could STOP doing and one thing that he or she could START doing to enable or strengthen his or her movement toward his or her personal vision.
- Ask the person to identify two or three significant and positive opportunities that might occur if he or she suddenly lost his or her job.
- If the person is facing the challenge of making some significant change in his or her life, invite the person to identify his or her personal assets or strengths that he or she could rely upon as he or she makes the transition to a new behavior.
- If a person is facing the need to make a significant change in his or her life, ask him or her to reflect back upon past times of change and transition and to identify personal skills and abilities that have enabled him or her to successfully navigate these previous changes.
- Invite the person to identify the single greatest obstacle that he or she sees to him or her following/demonstrating a new behavior and then identify what he or she will do to reduce or eliminate this obstacle to the new behavior.

- If someone is facing a significant challenge or crisis, guide this individual in reflecting upon his or her personal assets/strengths to guide him or her through the challenge. In addition, help the person to identify one or two changes that he or she could make in his or her life to better cope with, respond to, and proactively manage this challenging situation. These changes might include shifting attitudes, intentions, and beliefs; learning new methods and approaches for dealing with the challenge; and adjusting personal to better enable him or her to deal with the challenge.

Either on a one-on-one basis or when facilitating a group discussion . . .

- Use any of the activities from the one-on-one list above, inviting individuals to first work by themselves and then to partner with another person in the workshop and to share and gather feedback on their ideas for change.
- Lead workshop participants in an activity that requires them to identify something that they need to change to enable more successful job performance or greater satisfaction or effectiveness in their life. Have individuals partner up with another person in the workshop and to use their partners for feedback and other ideas.
- Guide workshop participants in developing a *Personal Action Plan* for a given area of personal behavior or performance. This Action Plan should identify a personal goal for the individual to achieve, identify why this goal is important to achieve, and then identify specific steps that the individual will take to move toward this goal. Following the workshop, the facilitator may want to check in with participants (via e-mail, phone call, or face-to-face interaction) to inquire as to the progress the person is making toward enacting and realizing his or her plan.