Adaptability
Self-guided activities

Adaptability – General Description

Being adaptable to new and changing situations can be difficult as it involves challenging our preconceived ideas about how we think things should be done. We are naturally attracted to order and stability because it makes our world more predictable. However, learning is inherently about change – new insight, new skills, and new knowledge. Being able to adapt to changing situations is a great asset, but one that requires being self-reflective along with a willingness to challenge your preconceived thoughts, feelings, and actions. Below are a few activities to help you gain a greater understanding of your own adaptability. Remember that making changes in your life should be directed by you, and it is your own will and action that can assist you in making positive changes in life and learning.

Different ways of Understanding the Same Situation

One thing that can have a positive effect on adaptability is a capacity to understand things from more than just our own perspective. At the beginning of our life we remain fixed in our own perspective of the world and, hopefully, as we get older we can begin to see that not everyone sees things the way we do. Your perspective is formed by your experiences and is often self-serving and seeks to uphold your sense of who you are. However, seeing things from the perspective of another that differs from your own, can open us to new ways of understanding and doing things. A broader appreciation for different ways of seeing the same thing can help us to learn, grow, and adapt.

Please complete the following exercises about perspectives.

Take a moment and to think about your personal opinions or perspectives and also what has formed them.

Think about and write down a situation in which you have felt the need to strongly defend your perspective/opinion (e.g., argument with friend/family, disagreement about assignment etc.).

How did you feel when you were defending your perspective?
In your example from above were you able to understand and respects the other person’s perspective/opinion, even though you disagreed?

What was the outcome of this situation? Did you respectfully understand each other, or change each other’s point of view?

If you found that perhaps defending your perspective/opinion did not bring about a desired outcome (it often doesn't), please read the following statements about perspectives and answer the proceeding question.

1. In order to change perspectives you must first acknowledge the possibility of other perspectives, understanding that there is more than one way to look at something.
2. The emotion you bring to a situation plays a significant role in understanding someone, and them understanding you. When you are emotional it becomes very difficult to be open to other people’s perspectives, and it is very easy to defend your own.
3. Ask questions, respectfully. To better understand someone else’s perspective, ask them questions. If you can be respectful in your phrasing and tone, you will be more likely to get clearer answers than if you challenge them to defend their opinion against yours.
4. Finally, understanding someone else’s perspective/opinion does not mean you have to let go of your own, it just allows you to see things from multiple positions with which to make an informed decision. Ask yourself, what have you got to lose by letting go of defending your opinion/perspective?

Now, taking on board the points mentioned above, write down how you may have gone about the situation (or another difficult situation) differently. Dot points are fine.

Do not underestimate the importance of taking on others’ perspectives and being less defensive of your own. This quality can have a great impact in your life in areas such as schooling, vocation and relationships. Being adaptable and non-defensive is an appealing quality that is highly valued.
Moving Out of Your ‘Comfort Zone’

Your comfort zone represents a space in which you feel comfortable and not challenged; a place in
which you find the least amount of resistance. This may be an actual space like at home, but also
relates to specific situations. For example, if you know the answer to a question in class but choose
not to put your hand up, this might indicate that you are staying in your comfort zone, whereas
standing up and speaking in front of people might represent being out of your comfort zone.

Embracing change, challenging yourself, and moving beyond your comfort zone is an important
aspect of change, and one that has significant bearing on growth and development. The more you
push yourself, the more you grow and develop.

Please complete the following exercise.

Take a moment to think about how you view change and doing new things (are you
comfortable with change, do you try and avoid it) and what your comfort zones are. Answer
the following questions in the space provided.

1. What are some examples of your comfort zones (e.g., not interacting with new people,
   staying at home etc.)?
2. What do you think keeps you from moving outside of your comfort zones?
3. Please write about a time when you deliberately did something new and challenging,
   why did you do it? What was the outcome/reward?
4. Please write about a situation in which you feel you would benefit from pushing past
   your comfort zone. What is stopping you from doing this? What is the potential gain
   from doing this?
5. If you can, write down a commitment to doing something outside of your comfort zone
   in the next week.

Usually, it is fear of being uncomfortable or of something going wrong that prevents us from
moving beyond our comfort zone, however, this is the way we grow, learn and adapt. By
staying inside your comfort zone you limit the chance to adapt to new things and can
become rigid in your thinking, feeling and behaviour. Read your answers to question 4 and 5,
and try to push yourself to do it.
What do you Expect? – Removing Expectations

The expectations you place on people or from situations can strongly influence your reactions and responses to every encounter presented to you, including learning. Having fixed expectations can limit your adaptability and, when these expectations are not met, may cause you to become frustrated, angry, and defensive. We form expectations in many situations and often these expectation do not help us, especially when they are not met. For example, if you have an expectation that you will get a certain job, or that a person will act in a certain way towards you, when these expectations are not met, disappointment, anger, or defensiveness is likely to follow. Such negative reactions get in the way of your ability to adapt to these situations, and learn constructively from the encounter. Removing expectations can be difficult at first, but leads to greater adaptability and more openness to your experiences whatever they may be.

Please read and complete the following exercise on removing expectations.

Write a brief list of three significant expectations you currently have about yourself and your learning.

“I expect that…

How do you think you might feel if these expectations were not met?

Now, using the same examples listed above, try and remove any expectation on the outcome. Re-writing them might help. What is the immediate impact you can see when you remove expectations about outcomes? Do your statements now have a more positive appeal to you?

Hopefully, the answer to the last question indicated that removing expectations does not necessarily affect the outcome but allows you to be more open to the situation, no matter what might happen. Think about how taking it a step further and removing your expectations entirely might affect you.

Remember, removing expectations is different to not caring, you still hold opinions about what you would like, you just become more open to the situation, and you become less dependent on the outcome, allowing yourself to adapt more easily to whatever happens.
Research has shown that one of the things that can limit our ability to be adaptable is our levels of stress and anxiety. Change can seem overwhelming and too challenging when you are feeling stressed or anxious. The easiest thing to do is such circumstances might be to avoid change or defend against do it. One thing that can assist in dealing with your stress and anxiety levels is your level of self-care and well-being.

Self-care refers to things you do that align with looking after yourself, or making your well-being a priority (e.g., doing exercise, spending time with friends, reading a book, going for a walk, etc.). Due the pressures and responsibilities that can be present in our lives stress is often a common feature of many people’s lives. Engaging in self-care can provide you with balance, and assist you in feeling less stressed and anxious.

Please complete the following self-care exercise.

Write a list of the things do you do in your life that you think fall under the category of self-care (i.e., help reduce stress and anxiety in your life).

Now, write a list of the things that cause you stress and/or anxiety.

Looking at your answers above, which list has a greater impact on your well-being?

If your activities are causing you stress and are having a greater impact on your well-being, what holds you back from doing more self-care activities?

Take a moment and read your answers to the previous questions. Please write down what you most desire to change in your life so your self-care activities can balance the things that cause you stress (try to find something you believe is achievable). Talk to your trusted friends about making this change or seek some advice about it. What have you got to lose?

Remember that taking more time looking after yourself and making your well-being a priority helps you in a number of ways. It can reduce stress and anxiety, allow you to be more adaptable, to be more present in relationships, to work more effectively, and to learn!
How Flexible is Your Thinking?

One of the things that can make it difficult to adapt to change and uncertainty is seeing things in a rigid way and holding fixed ideas. When you are hold on uncompromisingly to your ideas and your thinking if more flexible you are more open to your ideas being challenged and discovering new ways of doing things. Becoming more flexible in relation to your thoughts, feelings, and actions can be challenging. However, being able to challenge your own beliefs and attitudes is a highly valued commodity when studying or in the workplace, and plays a crucial role in your ability to adapt to change and learn. For example, inflexible thinking such as “I’ve already decided and I’m not going back on that now!” not only limits any chance of you challenging pre-conceived ideas, but can limit the chance of adapting to new situations.

Please answer the following questions as honestly as you can.

Take a moment and write down a list of some of your inflexible beliefs/thoughts/attitudes. These should be beliefs/thoughts/attitudes that you are not prepared to negotiate on.

How does being fixed in these beliefs/thoughts/attitudes assist you? What is the benefit to you?

How do they limit you or hold you back?

Do you think there is a difference between believing in an idea or way of doing something, and being fixed and inflexible in an idea or way of doing something? – Remember flexibility doesn’t mean you have to change your ideas or beliefs

Thinking about your answers to the previous 4 questions, write a statement about how you may be more flexible in your views and thoughts in the future.

By being willing to challenge your own thoughts and beliefs you are more able to regulate them to the situation you are in. Although this can be hard, it is a very valuable quality and is worth it. Please contact one of the people below if you feel you need assistance with this aspect of your life.
**Swinburne Student Support Services**

*Academic Development Advisors* - Each faculty at Swinburne University has an Academic Development Advisor. The advisor in each faculty will be able to help you with your engagement with study and your motivation. They are also an excellent source of information about where you might get other types of help with your study need. Contacts are listed below.

- **Sean Tinker** – Faculty of Science, Engineering, and Technology (FSET)
  - Phone: 9214 5565
  - Email: sptinker@swin.edu.au

- **John Schwartz** – Faculty of Health, Arts, and Design (FHAD)
  - Phone: 9214 8377
  - Email: jschwartz@swin.edu.au

- **Julie Gerstman** – Faculty of Business and Law (FBL)
  - Phone: 9214 8408
  - Email: jgerstman@swin.edu.au

*Language and Academic Skills Support* - Free help to local and international students with academic language, maths, statistics, physics, chemistry, computing literacy, learning and academic skills.

  - Phone: 9214 5583
  - The George Building, level 2
  - Email: lashawthorn@swin.edu.au

*International Student Advisers* - Here to help you by providing advice on academic and personal needs. You can talk to an adviser about any concerns you may have – family, academic or personal. It's free and confidential.

  - Phone: 9214 6741
  - Email: isa@swin.edu.au
Health & Well-Being - The services include first aid, medical consultations, health counselling, health promotion and health information. These services are provided at low cost (medical consultations) or no cost, in a strictly confidential manner. Assistance is available from Campus Nurses on all campuses, and from General Practitioners at Hawthorn. All our staff are friendly, experienced and offer a highly professional service, respecting the confidentiality of patients regarding their medical, social and financial needs.

http://www.swinburne.edu.au/stuserv/health/about.html

Phone: 9214 8483

The George Building, level 4

Email: healthservice@swin.edu.au

Student Development and Counselling – Offering appointments, face to face counselling, online counselling, self-help guides, and workshops

http://www.swinburne.edu.au/stuserv/counselling/

Phone: 9214 8025

The George building, Level 4

Service hours are usually 9am - 5pm weekdays


Mental Health Online – Free online assessment and referral service

https://www.anxietyonline.org.au/

If you are experiencing a crisis and cannot contact a counsellor, and need help urgently phone Lifeline on 131 114 or the Suicide Help Line on 1300 651 251