Flexibility
Competency Development Activities

Competency Definition
Is open to change and new information; adapts behavior and work methods in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles. Adjusts rapidly to new situations warranting attention and resolution.

Developmental Activity Levels

All (A)

Applies to all competency levels

Beginner-Basic Knowledge (B)

A person at the Beginner-Basic Knowledge level has limited experience applying the competency. He/she applies general knowledge in common situations but has limited practical experience in applying the competency in a work environment presenting more complex situations.

Mid-level (M)

A person with mid-level proficiency has applied the competency repeatedly and successfully in the performance of his/her job but still has much to learn about the advanced aspects or behaviors associated with the competency. A person at this level can usually apply the competency on his/her own.

High (H)

A person at the High level has extensive knowledge of and experience with this competency and can apply the competency exceptionally well on the job without assistance. At this level one is an expert and has enough experience to teach the competency to others.

Articles, Books, and Websites

A Abrahamson, Eric, Change Without Pain, Harvard Business Review, July 1, 2000 HBR 00401

Drawing on his research over ten years, the author suggests that companies alternate major change initiatives with carefully paced periods of smaller, organic change, using processes he calls tinkering and kludging (kludging is tinkering on a large scale). The result is dynamic stability, which allows change without fatal pain.

A Morgan, Nick, How to Overcome "Change Fatigue", Harvard Management Update, July 1, 2001.   HMU 0107A

Invert what you thought you knew about successful change efforts and begin to focus on quieter,

more evolutionary approaches to change that rely on employee motivation. The ideas in this article are based on a panel discussion that took place at the Burning Questions 2001 conference, a gathering of leading practitioners and management experts, sponsored by Harvard Business School Publishing.

A Johnson, Spencer and Blanchard, Ken, <u>Who Moved My Cheese? An Amazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work and Your Life</u>, Putnam Publishing Group, 1998.

A parable filled with insights designed to help readers manage change quickly and prevail in changing times. This story is about adjusting attitudes toward change in life, especially at work.

A Brookfield, Stephen D., <u>Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging Adults to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting</u>, Jossey-Bass, 1987.

This book offers a practical, straightforward guide to helping adults develop their critical thinking skills in four key arenas of adult life: in their personal relationships, in their workplaces, in their political involvements, and in their responses to the media.

A Bridge, William, <u>Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change</u>, Perseus Publishing, May, 2003.

This books explains in detail how successful organizational change takes place when employees have a purpose, a mental picture, a plan for, and a part to play in that change. The author provides step-by-step strategies for reaching change goals. Read about the emotional impact of change and what can be done to keep it from disrupting the entire organization.

A Conner, Daryl R., John Wiley & Sons, <u>Leading at the Edge of Chaos: How to Create the Nimble Organization</u>, September, 1998.

This book addresses the key question of how to prepare individuals for changes that have yet to occur and that are still unknown. The author's answers are the "nimble organization" and "human due diligence." Connor defines " nimbleness" as the ability to succeed consistently in unpredictable environments, and warns that it requires not just flexibility but "speed, grace, dexterity, and resourcefulness". "Human due diligence" addresses the human element of change and refers to the "extensive and comprehensive investigation" required to lay the groundwork for change.

Activities

B/M Analyze situations where you needed to adapt to change during the past year. Ask yourself how you dealt with those situations. Were you flexible and willing to change, or did you tend to continue to do business as usual?

B Observe or shadow other TSA managers who have a reputation for responding positively and flexibly to operational and

or personnel problems or changes. Discuss with them how they approach these situations.

B Focus on achieving "early wins" to demonstrate the viability of change efforts. There is nothing like success to foster momentum and commitment. The early victories can be pilots of the implementation or simply a "proof of concept" that reinforces the benefits of the change. Debrief the "win" with your group to generate "lessons learned".

B Make a concerted effort to learn what values and principles are behind your organization's rules, policies, and procedures. This knowledge will guide you in knowing when to be flexible regarding a rule, policy, or a procedure in order to get the desired results, but still align you with the organization's value system.

B Make a list of all the problems facing you. Rewrite each problem as an objective, then create plans and assemble resources for achieving each objective.

M The next time you experience a problem or issue that seems impossible to deal with, reframe it in cognitive rather than emotional terms. Sometimes the way we think about a change can lead us into a cycle of despair and hopelessness. Negative thoughts can often immobilize us. One technique for dealing with such self-defeating thinking is called reframing. Reframing involves challenging the assumption that the problem or issue has only negative impacts. In reframing, you focus on what is positive and controllable about the situation. For example, let's say that your organization is restructuring and you will no longer be a manager. Initially, you may feel you are losing status and control. By reframing your thinking, however, you may realize that you'll have more time and opportunity to increase your technical skills and be involved directly in the day-to-day work.

H The next time you face a major policy or procedure change, find a way to access a broad range of ideas. Pose difficult challenges and ask for others thoughts or related experience. Do not assume that only the people you know will know what you need. Borrow aspects of what others suggest to craft a situation specific solution for your needs.

H Explain the rationale for change in concrete business terms, including the implications for responsibilities and performance expectations. Do not pass the buck or continually refer to things that are beyond your control. Try to motivate the group to look for the opportunities the change presents as well the less desirable consequences. If most of your energy is around mitigating the downsides of change as opposed to exploiting the positives, your organization will respond in kind.

H Recognize that change is not a one-time proposition. The change you are a part of now will alter again with the advent of new technology, new policies, and new processes. If you are a change leader, you must prepare your staff or colleagues for a culture of continual change where their ability to respond swiftly and flexibly to new challenges will be the key to success. Remember, a healthy and evolving organization will regularly and systematically disrupt your routine, challenge your assumptions and put you in a position where your ability to learn is more important than what you know.

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H Volunteer for a temporary assignment in a work unit that is known to have a "pressure cooker" environment.

H The next time you need to plan a project or implement a new policy, develop multiple contingency plans so you are not locked into any single course of action.

Coaching Suggestions for Managers

M/H Assign a team member to a project or assignment in which the team member does not have technical expertise. Provide opportunities to learn from others' expertise and ideas; to figure out how to handle unfamiliar situations; and to practice collaborating with others in unfamiliar areas.

M Assign people to "pressure cooker" environments temporarily in order to stretch their experience and ability to handle situations quickly and flexibly. Debrief their experience afterward to identify what was most challenging or difficult for them and how they could handle those aspects more effectively.

M By your words and actions, offer a flexible model that is accessible to people. Show people through example how things can be done effectively in more than one way. By showing others how a little bending can help move things forward, and by exposing others to people who are able to be flexible in seemingly black and white situations, you are modeling a " can-do" attitude toward doing things differently than you thought possible.

M When change is required to meet a customer need, let those who must work on the change decide what to do and how. Encourage them to think through different ways to staff, schedule or accomplish what the customer wants. Be sure that their choice is customer focused and time sensitive. Be flexible in accepting atypical plans that are well thought out and doable.

H Recognize and reward team members who lead or actively contribute to change efforts in your group (e.g., increased efficiencies, new programs, new communication methods). Be specific about the contributions you are citing and articulate what they did in a way that others can emulate. If appropriate, ask them to give a brief report out to the rest of the group about how they got the idea to do what they did.

H Have your team members read articles describing innovative technical or collaborative procedures. Bring in outside experts to present new ideas and approaches.

H For a team member who is having difficulty adjusting to change, make specific suggestions about ways they could adapt more effectively. Instead of saying, "Try to communicate better with other members of the team," make a suggestion like, "Maybe you should write up a memo each week explaining the results of your investigation and your next steps." Make sure the individual understands your meaning by discussing your suggestion and asking them to come up with a potential action of their own to implement the suggestion.