



Breaking
the Ceiling



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COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY

FLEXIBILITY TRAINING MODULE



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1. Introduction



Flexibility skills is a concept that has emerged from the study and understanding of human behaviour in various fields. The concept aligns with broader theories and concepts such as adaptability, resilience, growth mindset, and **cognitive flexibility**. The skill refers to the ability to adapt, adjust, and respond effectively to changing circumstances, situations, and demands. It encompasses various cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal abilities that enable individuals to navigate and thrive in a dynamic and complex world. These skills are not limited to one specific area but can be applied in personal relationships, work settings, decision-making, problem-solving, and various other aspects of life.

As mentioned above, cognitive flexibility is a specific aspect of flexibility that refers to the mental ability to switch between different tasks, thoughts, or strategies in response to changing demands or stimuli. It involves the capacity to adapt one's thinking and behaviour in order to solve problems, handle new situations, and process information from multiple perspectives. Some characteristics of cognitive flexibility include:

- Encourage creativity, as the generation of new ideas, connections, and possibilities allows individuals to think outside the box and explore unconventional solutions.
- Foster adaptation to support effective learning and the quality of being able to adjust to new information or situations.
- Mental agility involves quick and efficient mental processing, allowing individuals to rapidly adapt their thinking and behaviour as new information or circumstances arise
- Problem-solving plays a crucial role to consider different strategies and approaches. It helps in overcoming mental rigidity and finding effective solutions to complex problems.
- Shifting attention allows individuals to shift their focus and attention between different tasks, concepts, or stimuli.
- Switching perspectives enables individuals to consider multiple perspectives or viewpoints.

It is possible to improve cognitive flexibility through a variety of strategies, including engaging in activities that challenge traditional thinking patterns and learning and exploring new subjects or perspectives, exposing oneself to diverse experiences, practising mindfulness and self-reflection.

2. The module in the professional environment



A high intelligence quotient (IQ) is often viewed as an important component of success, particularly in the fields of science, technology, and innovation. In the book 'Emotional Intelligence - Why it Can Matter More Than IQ', the author, D. Goleman focuses on the fact that emotional intelligence, rather than IQ, can be a determining factor in people's lives. The fact is, some of the humans' greatest achievements are largely owed to creative, imaginative, curious, and empathic qualities. Several of these traits are embedded in what scientists call "cognitive flexibility", which is defined as a skill that enables us to switch between different concepts or to adapt behaviour to achieve goals in a novel or changing environment.

In her book "Mindset: The Attitude for Success", author Carol S. Dweck offers strategies for exploring your potential through a change in the way you deal with situations, i.e. a change of mindset. Cognitive flexibility enables us to see when something is not working for us and to make the necessary changes to achieve success. In this sense, flexible people adapt to the unexpected event and try to find a solution.

In today's fast-paced business world, ambiguity and uncertainty are common, but cognitive flexibility can help professional women thrive in such environments by being comfortable with ambiguity, thinking on their feet, and adapting their approaches as new information emerges. It is a valuable skill that enables professional women to appreciate and respect diverse perspectives and work effectively in diverse teams, which is essential for **effective leadership**.



According to D. Goleman, successful leaders don't just stick to one leadership style; they're well-versed in multiple styles and know-how and when to alternate between them depending on their circumstances. Women who possess cognitive flexibility can adapt their leadership styles to different situations, inspire and influence others, and navigate complex organizational dynamics.

3. Impacts recognized through gender stereotypes



Cognitive or flexible thinking is linked to creativity and supports personal skills and overall well-being. It can also help protect against several biases, such as acceptance bias, which means that cognitively flexible people are better able to recognise possible failures in themselves and use strategies to overcome them. This skill is also associated with higher resilience to negative life events, as well as better quality of life. It can even be beneficial in emotional and social cognition because studies have shown that cognitive flexibility has a strong link to the ability to understand the emotions, thoughts and intentions of others.

In the professional environment, cognitive flexibility can offer several benefits for professional women, such as effective problem-solving, adaptability to changing environments, collaboration, resilience, creativity and innovation, leadership development and advancement. However, it is worth noting that women may face unique challenges and biases in the workplace that can impact their professional experiences and opportunities. These challenges can include gender stereotypes, unconscious biases, limited access to leadership positions, and workplace cultures that may not fully support their growth and development.



Despite these challenges, women have consistently demonstrated their abilities in various professional fields, showcasing high levels of cognitive flexibility and contributing to organizational success.

Efforts to foster gender equality in the workplace, such as promoting diversity and inclusion, providing equal opportunities for growth and advancement, and addressing biases and barriers, are crucial in ensuring that women can fully utilize their cognitive flexibility and other skills in the professional environment.

4. Good practices and tips



By incorporating these practices, you can enhance your cognitive flexibility and position yourself for success in a rapidly changing and complex work environment.

Below are some good practices and tips to enhance cognitive flexibility in the professional realm:

- **Cognitive Flexibility Exercises:** Engage in activities that specifically target cognitive flexibility, such as puzzles, brain teasers, or mind-mapping exercises. These activities can help strengthen your ability to switch between different tasks, perspectives, and problem-solving strategies. The process of mental flexibility or cognitive flexibility can be accurately assessed and measured through a comprehensive neuropsychological assessment. The standardised tests offered by CogniFit also allow a wide range of cognitive skills to be assessed reliably and computerised, including Mental or Cognitive Flexibility.
- **Mindfulness:** Cultivate mindfulness practices to increase self-awareness and improve cognitive flexibility. Mindfulness can help you become more present, observe your thoughts without judgment, and respond to situations with greater adaptability and clarity. The blog featured in the QR code contains a variety of content, including informative articles on the benefits of mindfulness, practical tips for cultivating mindfulness, meditation guides, interviews with leading practitioners and much more!
- **Growth Mindset:** Cultivate a growth mindset, which is the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed through effort and practice. Embrace challenges, view failures as opportunities for growth, and embrace a "learn from setbacks" mentality. The Mindset Kit is a free set of online lessons and practices designed to help you teach and foster adaptive beliefs about learning.



5. Conclusions

Professional women need to practice their cognitive flexibility to cope in complex work environments, adapt to change and take advantage of new opportunities, as they may be better equipped to face challenges and excel in their careers. Cognitive flexibility can be affected by gender norms and social expectations, as traditional gender roles and social expectations may place different demands on women, but overcoming these social barriers and adopting a growth mindset is a key element that provides them with more tools and opportunities to develop and improve your career and well-being.

Professional women from diverse backgrounds could bring unique perspectives and cognitive skills, including cognitive flexibility, which can contribute to innovation and problem-solving within teams. Mindfulness practices, such as meditation and self-reflection, have been shown to improve cognitive flexibility and can benefit women by incorporating mindfulness into their daily routines, as it can help reduce stress, increase self-awareness, and improve cognitive abilities.



Cognitive flexibility is not a fixed trait and can be developed and strengthened over time. To enhance their cognitive flexibility and adaptability in an ever-changing work environment, professional women should prioritize continuous learning, seeking new challenges, and acquiring new skills.

By engaging in collaborative work and building diverse professional networks, cognitive flexibility can be enhanced because interacting with individuals from various backgrounds and perspectives increases cognitive adaptability, expands thinking patterns, and encourages innovative problem-solving. A variety of measures can contribute to increased cognitive flexibility among professional women, including overcoming societal barriers, fostering diversity, practising mindfulness, embracing continuous learning, and fostering collaborative environments.

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