Adapt or Fail:
How Managers Can Enable Everyone to Thrive at Work

Authors: Kathrina Robotham, PhD, and Tara Van Bommel, PhD
Summary

A Catalyst survey of 5,494 employees in 11 countries across the globe reveals that adaptability is a key leadership skill that managers must have for their employees and businesses to thrive now and into the future of work. For example, adaptability helps leaders harness the benefits of team racial diversity for innovation. We found that manager adaptability in conjunction with empathy drives employee outcomes such as inclusion, well-being, and intent to stay, and it decreases experiences of burnout. But nearly seven out of ten employees say their managers fail to adapt.

With unpredictable and unprecedented global challenges, managers who can effectively and flexibly respond to new situations and information will come out on top and lead their teams to success. This report tells you why and how to be adaptable so you and your team can succeed through the uncertainty and volatility that is still to come.
Employees and Businesses Need Adaptable Managers

The dramatic shifts in the way we work and the expectations between employees and employers—turbocharged by the Covid-19 pandemic—demonstrate that leaders have a critical choice: Adapt and thrive—or fall by the wayside. In this new landscape of work, defined by uncertainty and disruption, being able to quickly adjust and create new solutions to unprecedented and often unpredictable problems is paramount. And yet 69% of employees say their manager is too rigid to meet new business challenges with an open and flexible mindset.

The numbers are even worse for men (72%), 1 employees with disabilities (77%), 2 lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or asexual employees (74%), 3 and employees with caregiving responsibilities (72%). 4 Further, employees from marginalized racial and ethnic groups (66%) were more likely than White employees (58%) to report that their managers were not adaptable. 5 This is concerning as employees stressed by the volatility of the last few years continue to call on their managers to find new ways of working and show that diversity, equity, and inclusion are valued. 6 For companies worried about attracting and retaining women and others from marginalized demographic groups, fostering manager adaptability is a strategic business imperative.

Our data backs this up. Through a survey of 5,494 employees in 11 countries across the globe, we found that manager adaptability is linked to employee well-being, performance, and organizational success. Importantly, it must be deployed in conjunction with empathy so that managers are both listening to employee challenges (empathizing) and taking steps to address them (adapting). With a positive attitude toward learning about and acting on difficult situations—even when they are highly uncertain, unstable, and unusual—managers can lead teams to success.
Key Findings

Overall, 69% of employees report that their managers are not adaptable with even higher rates among:

- Men (72%).
- Employees with disabilities (77%).
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or asexual employees (74%).
- Employees with caregiving responsibilities (72%).

Employees from marginalized racial and ethnic groups (66%) were more likely than White employees (58%) to report that their managers were not adaptable.

When managers have high empathy and high adaptability skills, employees tend to have more positive experiences, such as increased:

- Experiences of inclusion at work.
- Well-being.
- Intent to stay in their workplace.

When managers have high empathy and high adaptability skills, employees tend to have fewer negative experiences, such as decreased:

- General work, Covid-19, and personal burnout.
- Sleep problems.
- Work withdrawal.

Manager adaptability is an essential skill for managing diverse teams.

- Racially and ethnically diverse teams are more innovative when they have adaptable leaders.
- Adaptable leaders boost inclusion for racially and ethnically marginalized employees who work on diverse teams.

Why do men experience less adaptability from their managers than women?

Patriarchy and ideal worker norms may hold the answer. Patriarchy is a social system in which men hold more power than women and use that power to dominate and oppress women. A key feature of patriarchy is rigid gender roles, including the idea that men should be the breadwinner and women should be the caretaker. These roles have shaped expectations of the ideal worker, “whose life centers on his full-time, lifelong job, while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and children.” In other words, the ideal worker is a man who is expected to put work first and not let family obligations interfere. Although our ideas of work have evolved to include work-life balance and more equitable gender roles, these biases still exist and are pervasive. Thus, men may experience less adaptability from their managers in the form of resistance to their use of remote and flexible working arrangements, especially to accommodate caregiving responsibilities—a behavior that contradicts masculine gender norms. Importantly, not only does a lack of adaptability harm men, but the downstream consequences reinforce gendered norms for caretaking, perpetuating the unequal burden and unpaid labor expected from women.
What is Adaptability?

Adaptability can be broadly defined as the ability to effectively adjust to new circumstances. In the workplace, adaptability can look like learning new skills because of a change in personal responsibilities or considering a different approach to solving a challenging problem. Although many people may think that adaptability is an innate character trait, it is a skill that can be learned and practiced, and it is an essential skill for success in the future of work.

Adaptability, flexibility, and resilience are related yet distinct concepts. All three skills are necessary to successfully navigate new challenges that arise on the job. In the workplace, individual level flexibility (as opposed to workplace flexibility, which refers to time and place of work) refers to a person’s ability to compromise with others. Although being flexible is necessary to be adaptable, adaptability also includes being able to tolerate ambiguity and being open to change.

Resilience is “the continued pursuit of goals despite adversity.” Resilience is primarily about how people respond after difficulty, whereas adaptability describes how people respond in the moment when working under new conditions, regardless of adversity. Thus, flexibility and resilience are like adaptability, however they are not interchangeable with the skill of adaptability.

There are three components to adaptability:

- **Cognitive Flexibility:**
  The capacity to respond effectively and flexibly to new situations and information.

- **Ambiguity Tolerance:**
  The dexterity to see problems from several different perspectives and tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty.

- **Openness to Change:**
  The ability to view change and challenges as opportunities to learn and improve.
In Uncertain Times, Adaptable Managers are Key

There is perhaps only one certainty in the future of work, and that is that disruption, change, and uncertainty will continue to accelerate and pervade workplaces. Cultivating adaptability skills will be the keystone of performance and success for individuals, teams, and ultimately organizations. Indeed, C-suite leaders identified adaptability as one of the top five skills they needed to succeed in the future.11 Other research has shown that adaptability accrues financial benefits for organizations as well as psychological benefits for employees, such as learning ability, coping skills, and mental well-being.12

If you are a leader, the skill of adaptability is especially important because as you rise through the ranks, the problems you are solving become less straightforward (i.e., the goal may be clear, but the way to reach that goal is not). You need to have a positive attitude toward change and a healthy tolerance for ambiguity, especially when trying to forecast what the business landscape will look like in the next 6, 12, or 24 months amid myriad and unpredictable forces. With worsened gender inequality due to Covid-19, the Great Resignation, and a workforce that is reexamining what it wants and expects from employers, solutions that worked in the past are no longer acceptable or effective. These novel problems require novel solutions—and adaptable managers will find them.

Our data show that leaders who are adaptable may be more open to new ways of working that are critical to success in the future of work.13 For example, employees with adaptable managers were more likely to say that their organization’s plans for post-pandemic working support their work and life needs.14

Although all employees benefit from flexible work arrangements, women are more likely to prefer flexible work.15 Thus, manager adaptability is a key skill for supporting women, especially those balancing caregiving responsibilities.
The Positive Effects of Manager Adaptability Plus Empathy

The volatility of the past few years has resulted in palpable fatigue, and a growing intolerance for workplace cultures and leaders who do not foster a caring, equitable, and purposeful work experience. This is a paradigm shift in the world of work, and leaders must adapt to this new reality.

Previous Catalyst research has shown that empathy—the skill of demonstrating understanding, care, and concern for others—is a strategic business imperative and critical leadership skill in today’s business climate, and in times of crisis and disruption. When managers leverage their empathy skills, they are able to understand the needs and perspectives of their employees deeply and accurately. And when these learnings require taking action, considering multiple perspectives, and/or tolerating ambiguity, adaptability skills will also be critical to navigating new circumstances effectively. Thus, empathy and adaptability are two complementary skills for success during times of change and disruption.

Our data show that adaptable and empathic leaders are likely to be rewarded with improvement on three employee experiences that are especially important in today’s environment. When managers are high in both empathy and adaptability, employees have the greatest amount of inclusion, well-being, and intent to stay.

Compared to employees with managers who are low in both skills, employees who perceive that their manager has high adaptability and high empathy are:

- More likely to feel included
- More likely to have high well-being
- More likely to intend to stay
We also found that when managers are high in both empathy and adaptability, employees have the lowest amount of burnout.\textsuperscript{26}

Compared to employees with managers who are low in both skills, employees who perceive that their manager has high adaptability and high empathy are:

- **43% less likely** to experience high levels of **general work burnout**\textsuperscript{27}
- **49% less likely** to experience high levels of **COVID-19 work burnout**\textsuperscript{28}
- **42% less likely** to experience high levels of **personal burnout**\textsuperscript{29}
How Manager Adaptability and Empathy Can Make a Difference in Women’s Burnout and Inclusion

Lucy is an editor and mom of three young children. She has been struggling to balance life and work responsibilities on a typical 9-to-5 work schedule because it clashes with her children’s school schedule. Although Lucy can work one or two days per week from home, many of her co-workers feel their managers prefer they work onsite every day because of networking and how career opportunities are assigned. Indeed, Lucy is missing out on important networking time with her boss and colleagues who frequently go to “happy hour” at the end of the workday to discuss books that they are editing. Lucy is a diligent employee and mother, so she tries to do both to the best of her ability, but she is overworked, burned out, and exhausted.

One day, in a virtual meeting with her manager, she explains that she feels left out because she is unable to attend “happy hour” events and that she struggles with getting work done in the late afternoon when her children are home from school. Lucy’s manager listens intently and makes her feel heard by summarizing her problem and feelings. After some discussion, Lucy’s manager proposes a modified work schedule on the days she works from home so that Lucy can start her day earlier and be finished with work once her kids get home from school.

Upon reflection, Lucy’s manager notices that most of the people who attend the “happy hours” are men or employees without young children. To be more inclusive of team members with caretaking responsibilities, her manager invites everyone, whether they are in the office or on video, to eat lunch together on a regular basis to discuss the new books they are working on.

Thanks to her manager’s empathy and adaptability, Lucy is now able to avoid burnout and feels more included at work since she can attend the lunch networking sessions from her home office.
Adaptability Is Empathy in Action

When we look at employee work withdrawal and sleep problems, we see an interesting pattern. As with inclusion, well-being, retention, and burnout, employees who perceive their managers to have high empathy coupled with high adaptability report the best outcomes: they are the least likely to report work withdrawal and sleep problems. Interestingly, the employees who report the highest levels of work withdrawal and sleep problems are not the ones with managers who have low adaptability and low empathy, but the ones whose managers have low adaptability and high empathy.

Work Withdrawal

Work withdrawal occurs when employees are not engaged at work and manifests as avoidant behaviors that include arriving to work late, taking long breaks, leaving early, not showing up, putting little effort into tasks, and not completing tasks on time.

Empathy Without Adaptability Results in Work Withdrawal

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empathic and adaptable manager</th>
<th>Empathic but not adaptable manager</th>
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<tr>
<td>% Reporting high levels of work withdrawal</td>
<td>2%</td>
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Empathy Without Adaptability Results in Sleep Problems

<table>
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<th>Empathic and adaptable manager</th>
<th>Empathic but not adaptable manager</th>
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<td>% Reporting high levels of sleep problems</td>
<td>12%</td>
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When managers have this mismatch in skills, we see that high levels of empathy can backfire. It is likely that employees interpret high amounts of empathy without adaptability as words without supportive actions. **So, it’s not enough for a manager simply to listen to what employees are struggling with; managers must also adjust policies, processes, and other work conditions as a behavioral demonstration of their care and concern for employee well-being and engagement.** In other words, cognitive and emotional empathy are important first steps, but employees may perceive the absence of managerial action as insincerity—or a lack of behavioral integrity—and therefore respond by withdrawing from their work and experiencing greater sleep disturbance.

This is especially important in the context of significant employee turnover and burnout. Extensive research on behavioral integrity, or the (mis)alignment between leader words and actions, has documented that a lack of behavioral integrity negatively impacts employees' task performance. Indeed, research has shown that leader hypocrisy—when leaders fail to "walk the talk"—predicts increased turnover intentions.

Catalyst research has demonstrated that empathy is critical in supporting employees during times of crisis. Yet empathy is but one tool in a leader’s toolbelt. Adaptability coupled with empathy allows leaders to better understand their employees and use those learnings to implement new ways of working to better support employee needs. It also allows them to hold space for alternate perspectives and to be able to make the best decision possible amid many unknowns.
When Mismatched Manager Adaptability and Empathy Can Lead to Work Withdrawal

Kara is a data scientist who started working for a large corporation a year ago. Initially, she was excited about her new job, the projects she would work on, and the brilliant people she would meet and get to learn from. That excitement slowly faded and turned into frustration as she struggled to work with the company’s archaic software and computer systems.

After a few weeks of being slowed down, she decided to meet with her manager to talk about the issues she’d encountered working with the current software. In the meeting, she discussed how the features of the software make it more difficult to do her job and to be innovative. She suggested a newer software that would allow her and the data science team to conduct more robust statistical analyses and create more user-friendly data visualizations.

Her manager demonstrated empathy by putting himself in her shoes and imagining what it is like to work with outdated software. Although he could understand and empathize with her frustration, he was concerned about learning how to use new software. Ultimately, her manager decided not to purchase the new software and instead showed her a few tips to work with the current software. While his suggestions helped some, the software still creates barriers to her ability to do her job and causes undue stress.

Now, she is starting to disengage from her work by taking long lunch breaks and doing just enough work to get by. She is also planning to apply for a job at a startup medical technology company with leaders who aren’t afraid to take risks and try something new for the sake of innovation.
As businesses worldwide faced the many challenges brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, including the large number of women—especially women from marginalized racial and ethnic groups—who left the workforce, many have realized that DEI work is more critical than ever. Diverse, equitable, and inclusive work environments provide the support and connection that are critical to employees navigating a crisis, and when employees feel heard and supported, they are more engaged and innovative in their work.

Implementing an effective DEI strategy is often associated with creating change in workplace cultures, policies, procedures, and norms. Thus, adaptability is necessary both for implementing and adopting these changes, regardless of where a person or organization is on the DEI journey. In addition, adaptability is an essential leadership skill for managing a culturally diverse team and supporting new and flexible ways of working.

While adaptability supports DEI work, DEI work also helps foster the conditions necessary for agile and adaptive responses to crisis. DEI work can help foster a growth mindset and openness to new and different ideas, which is a key component of adaptability. This virtuous cycle of adaptability and DEI work strengthening one another is another reason to invest in both.

Importantly, adaptability helps leaders harness the benefits of diverse identities, thoughts, and perspectives for innovation. Our data show that when leaders are adaptable, the more racially diverse a team is, the more innovative it is. However, when leaders are not adaptable, the results flip: the more racially diverse a team is, the less innovative it is. Previous research on the link between diversity and innovation has been mixed, and our results show that you cannot simply hire a racially diverse team of employees and expect to experience greater innovation. The story is more complex: Leader adaptability is a key ingredient that enables racially diverse teams to create innovative solutions to challenging problems.
In addition to boosting innovation, adaptable leaders improve the experiences of employees from marginalized racial and ethnic groups on racially diverse teams. Employees from marginalized racial and ethnic groups experience greater inclusion when they have adaptable leaders compared to when they do not, and this effect grows stronger as a team’s racial diversity increases.45 Due to their lived experiences, employees from marginalized racial and ethnic groups may bring unique perspectives that are better received by adaptable leaders, leading to greater feelings of being heard and included. Overall, the data show that adaptability is necessary for diverse teams to thrive.

How to Become More Adaptable

The future of work will be characterized by rapid change marked by new and difficult challenges and shifting expectations. These characteristics make adaptability an essential leadership skill for succeeding in the workplace of the future. How can leaders stop falling back on the same old solutions and instead cultivate the skill of adaptability to approach problems with a fresh perspective?

Cultivate self-awareness for and reflect on your ability to cope with uncertainty and change.

- Think about how well you handle uncertainty and change. For example, do you feel stressed when plans are changed with little warning? Do you dislike dealing with ambiguous situations? Why do you think you react this way? In what areas do you have strengths? In what areas could you improve?
- Regularly reflect on these questions and ask for and incorporate others’ feedback about how you handle change.
- Being mindful of your own thinking processes, emotions, and behaviors around change can help you become more aware of why you think and behave the way you do. Greater self-awareness is the first step in figuring out how to change your behavior to become more adaptable.

Develop a growth mindset.46

- Your mindset, or the set of beliefs you hold, can help or hinder you in becoming more adaptable. People with a growth mindset believe that their talents, abilities, and skills can be improved and developed, whereas those with a fixed mindset believe that their talents are innate and static. A growth mindset is important for increasing adaptability because it facilitates viewing challenges that come with change as learning opportunities to practice new skills and help you grow. On the other hand, a fixed mindset hinders adaptability because it can make you less inclined to try new things in response to changing circumstances.
- Embrace setbacks and failures as learning opportunities: Reflect on any setbacks you have had in the last six months. Think about what these experiences taught you and how they helped you to improve. The next time you face a challenge, focus on what you can learn from the experience rather than whether you are succeeding or failing.
• Don’t focus exclusively on fixed skills or goals; emphasize development individually and collectively. In addition to assessing the status of your goals, reflect on what you’ve learned in the process of pursuing those goals. Thinking through how you have developed skills or learned new knowledge can help you see you’ve adapted to new situations even when you don’t succeed.

Create a climate of psychological safety that fosters expressions of differences.

• A climate of psychological safety describes the shared belief that team members won’t be punished for taking risks, expressing differing viewpoints, or making mistakes, rather this is an encouraged and valuable part of the team dynamic.47 If employees are punished for taking risks, then they may be unlikely to practice being adaptable or reap the benefits of having a growth mindset.

• Model vulnerability and humility by openly discussing your failures and mistakes with your team. Share your learnings from these setbacks, how you adapted, and frame these instances as opportunities for learning, growth, and innovation.

• Encourage employees to share different viewpoints and perspectives. Regularly ask employees for their input and frame questions to solicit differing and alternate perspectives. Employ cognitive empathy skills to really listen, and then express gratitude for what was shared. The ability to suggest new ideas during times of change, crisis, and disruption will differentiate successful teams from unsuccessful ones.

• Praise employees for their efforts rather than the outcome.48 People will be more likely to suggest and try innovative ideas, which is especially important for success in uncertain and unprecedented circumstances.

Be curious about what you know and what you don’t know.

• Step out of the role of the “expert” and let go of the idea that you should already know everything. Unnecessary pressure on yourself will make it harder for you to perform to the best of your ability and stymies employee innovation and psychological safety. Instead, practice curiosity by asking questions to discover new perspectives or gain a greater understanding of the problem.49

• Be curious about what you don’t know and consider what is not being considered. Just because one way of doing something has worked well in the past doesn’t mean it’s the best way to do it going forward.
About the Authors

Kathrina Robotham, PhD, is an organizational psychologist whose research aims to understand the experiences, perceptions, and consequences of workplace mistreatment for marginalized groups and discover individual and organizational factors that foster diversity, equity, and inclusion. At Catalyst, Kathy is a Senior Research Associate where she uses her expertise in DEI, research methods, and statistics to conduct rigorous research on DEI in a rapidly changing world of work.

Tara Van Bommel, PhD, is a social psychologist who studies nonconscious bias and the role of nonverbal behavior in interracial interactions. At Catalyst, Tara leads the Women and the Future of Work research initiative and brings her background in stereotyping and prejudice to advance an intersectional approach to creating an equitable future of work.

About the Study

We surveyed 5,494 employees in 11 countries for our Leveraging Disruption for Equity series, which comes from Catalyst’s Women and the Future of Work research initiative. The series examines the impact of disruptions intrinsic to the future of work and identifies the key individual, team, and organizational factors necessary to leverage these disruptions to reimagine and create equitable workplaces of the future where everyone can belong, contribute, and thrive. This report is the fourth in the series. Sample demographics are provided below. The percentages provided for race and ethnicity come from 4 out of the 11 countries where collection of race and ethnicity is allowed: Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
Methodology

For this report, we draw on global survey data collected through the Future of Work tracker, a survey that measures and monitors trends in the future of work.

**Recruitment and Sample:** Respondents were recruited through a panel service company. At the time of the survey, all respondents were full-time workers.

**Procedure:** After obtaining informed consent, respondents completed an online survey about “technology and work-life experiences.” The survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete and included questions about their experiences at work and a demographics section.

**Analysis:** We used a variety of statistical analyses to understand the relationships between manager adaptability, manager empathy, team racial diversity, and employee outcomes. We conducted linear multiple regression analyses to examine the combined effect of manager adaptability and manager empathy on job outcomes and the combined effect on manager adaptability and team racial diversity on outcomes. Linear multiple regression tests whether the combination or presence of two predictor variables (e.g., high manager adaptability and high manager empathy) results in higher scores on a given outcome than when only one of the predictor variables is present (e.g., low manager adaptability and high manager empathy). All descriptive statistics, linear multiple regression, and chi-square analyses were conducted in IBM SPSS version 25. Due to a large sample size, we used a stricter p-value ($p < .01$) to determine statistical significance.

**Country Demographics:** The demographic breakdowns for gender in all 11 countries are presented below. We also provide breakdowns by race or ethnicity and gender for Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States; in these four White-majority countries, it is legal to collect racial and/or ethnic demographic data, and we had sufficient sample size.
Demographics for Gender by Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Trans and Nonbinary Employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>&gt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Total percentages for each country may exceed 100 due to rounding.
Demographics for Race or Ethnicity by Gender in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States

Women and Men From Marginalized Racial or Ethnic Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Women (%)</th>
<th>Men (%)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

White Women and Men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Women (%)</th>
<th>Men (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Who Do Not Perceive Their Manager as Adaptable by</td>
<td>Trans and Nonbinary Employees</td>
<td>75%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td><strong>Employees From Marginalized Racial or Ethnic Groups</strong></td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability</td>
<td><strong>White Employees</strong></td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caregiver Status</td>
<td><strong>People with Disabilities</strong></td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>People Who Are Able-bodied</strong></td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Caregiver</strong></td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Non-caregiver</strong></td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td><strong>Identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Pansexual, or Asexual</strong></td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Do not Identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Pansexual, or Asexual</strong></td>
<td>68%</td>
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Acknowledgments

We thank our Women and the Future of Work donors for their generous support of our work in this area.

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Endnotes

1. A univariate ANOVA revealed a significant effect of gender on perceptions of manager adaptability, $F(2,5475) = 7.72, p < .001$. Compared to women ($M = 3.54, SD = .89$), men ($M = 3.44, SD = .88$) perceived significantly less adaptability from their managers. There was no significant difference in perceptions of manager adaptability by gender between men and trans/non-binary people ($M = 3.39, SD = .81$) or between women and trans/non-binary people. A chi-square test was conducted to provide the percentages reporting high vs. low manager adaptability depending on employee gender (women vs men vs trans and non-binary employees). The observed values were significantly different than expected values, $\chi^2 (2) = 17.35, p < .001$.

2. An independent samples t-test revealed that compared to able-bodied employees ($M = 3.52, SD = .88$) disabled employees ($M = 3.30, SD = .88$) perceived significantly less adaptability from their managers, $t(5313) = 6.37, p < .001$. A chi-square test was conducted to provide the percentages reporting high vs. low manager adaptability depending on employee disability status (abled vs disabled). The observed values were significantly different than expected values, $\chi^2 (1) = 29.11, p < .001$.

3. An independent samples t-test revealed that compared to straight employees ($M = 3.52, SD = .88$), lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and asexual employees ($M = 3.33, SD = .93$) perceived significantly less adaptability from their managers, $t(1215) = 5.57, p < .001$. A chi-square test was conducted to provide the percentages reporting high vs. low manager adaptability depending on employee sexual orientation (LGBQA vs. not LGBQA). The observed values were significantly different than expected values, $\chi^2 (1) = 11.85, p < .01$.

4. An independent samples t-test revealed that compared to employees who are not caregivers ($M = 3.60, SD = .87$), employees who are caregivers ($M = 3.39, SD = .89$) perceived significantly less adaptability from their managers, $t(5492) = 8.81, p < .001$. A chi-square test was conducted to provide the percentages reporting high vs. low manager adaptability depending on employee caregiving status, (caregiver vs. not a caregiver). The observed values were significantly different than expected values, $\chi^2 (1) = 29.84, p < .001$.

5. An independent samples t-test revealed that compared to White employees ($M = 3.70, SD = .94$), employees from marginalized racial and ethnic groups ($M = 3.51, SD = .93$) perceived significantly less adaptability from their managers, $t(2572) = 4.65, p < .001$. A chi-square test was conducted to provide the percentages reporting high vs. low manager adaptability depending on employee race, (racially or ethnically marginalized vs. White). The observed values were significantly different than expected values, $\chi^2 (1) = 17.45, p < .001$.


14. On a 1 (not at all) to 5 (completely) Likert scale, employees responded to an item, “To what degree do your organization’s plans for post-pandemic working support your work and life needs?”. A one-way-between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to examine the impact of manager adaptability ($0 = low manager adaptability and $1 = high manager adaptability) on employees’ agreement that their organization’s post-pandemic working plans supported their work and life needs. There was a significant effect of manager adaptability, $F(1,5492) = 52.71, p < .001$; employees with adaptable managers are more likely to say their organization’s post-pandemic working plans supported their work and life needs ($M = 3.39$) than did those whose managers are not adaptable ($M = 3.17$).

15. Their, J. (2022, February 3). 95% of knowledge workers want flexible hours more than hybrid work, and managers should pay attention. Fortune.


18. Manager adaptability was measured with 9 items drawn from several existing scales (Dennis, J.P. & Vander Wal, J. S. (2010). The cognitive flexibility inventory: Instrument development and estimates of reliability and validity. Cognitive Therapy & Research, 34(3), 241-253; McLain, D. L. (2009). Evidence of the properties of an ambiguity tolerance measure: The multiple stimulus types ambiguity tolerance scale–II (MSTAT–II). Cognitive Therapy & Research, 33(4), 680-693) to create a measure aligned with our conceptualization of adaptability as a future work skill that encompasses a positive orientation toward change, ability to tolerate ambiguity, and the ability to consider multiple different perspectives to solutions to novel problems. The scale was measured on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) Likert scale and showed excellent internal reliability, $\alpha = .94$. Next, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis utilizing a principal axis factoring extraction and a promax rotation to allow correlation among the items. The findings indicated that the scale measures a single construct of adaptability, as theorized. All items loaded onto a single factor at .62 or higher, and this single factor had a total variance explained of 58%. Secondly, the Kaser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .94, above the commonly recommended value of .6, and Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(36) = 25863.38, p < .001$). The items were averaged to make a composite, and these scores were dichotomized into high manager adaptability (a score of 4 or higher, i.e., slightly agree, agree, and strongly agree) and low manager adaptability (a score of 3 or less, or lower, i.e., slightly disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree).

19. Manager empathy was measured with a scale adapted from the medical literature that assesses patients’ experiences of empathy in interactions with their doctor: the consultation and relational empathy measure; Mercer, S. W., Maxwell, M., Heaney, D., & Watt, G. C. (2004). The consultation and relational empathy (CARE) measure: Development and preliminary validation and reliability of an empathy-based consultation process measure. Family Practice, 21(6), 699-705; This scale was chosen because it reflects empathy experienced in interactions; many other available scales tap an individual’s level of empathy as they engage with others, (i.e., first-person vs second-person empathy). The 10-item scale was adapted for interactions with direct managers with an additional seven items drawn from Catalyst’s conceptualization of empathy (e.g., Pasquarella Daley, L., Van Bommel, T., & Brasser, S. (2020). Why empathy is a superpower in the future of work. Catalyst). Resulting in a total of 16 items. Participants responded on a 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) scale. The scale showed excellent internal reliability, $\alpha = .97$. Manager empathy was dichotomized such that responses of poor or fair were categorized as low levels of empathy and responses of good, very good, and excellent were categorized as high levels of empathy.

20. Employee inclusion is measured with a short-form scale adapted from the Catalyst Inclusion Accelerator and Travis, D. J., Shaffer, E., & Thorpe-Moscon, J.
26. Burnout was assessed on a 10-point scale (1 = not at all burned out, 10 = extremely burned out) using the single-item burnout measure: Hansen, V. & Pit, S. (2016). The single item burnout measure is a psychometrically sound tool for screening occupational burnout. Hayes PROCESS macro was utilized to test a multiple linear regression assessing the impact of manager adaptability, manager empathy, and their interaction on employees' experiences of inclusion. The overall model was significant, \( R^2 = .32, F(3,5490) = 864.81, p < .0001 \). The main effect of manager adaptability was significant, \( b = .12, t(5490) = 12.67, p < .0001 \). The main effect of manager empathy was also significant, \( b = .43, t(5490) = 48.65, p < .0001 \). These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction, \( b = .03, t(5490) = 3.30, p < .01 \). Simple slopes indicated that the positive relationship between manager adaptability and inclusion is strongest at high levels of manager empathy, \( b = .15, t(5490) = 14.40, p < .0001 \); at low levels of manager empathy, the impact of manager adaptability is still significant, but smaller, \( b = .10, t(5490) = 6.65, p < .0001 \).  

27. In validation of the Single-Item Burnout scale (Hansen & Pit, 2016), a cut-off of five or higher was determined to align with previous measures of burnout and to accurately characterize "high burnout"; thus, high burnout was characterized as five or higher in the current data. Employee general work burnout, general work burnout 1 and burnout 2 were dichotomized for entry into a binary logistic regression which examined the impact of manager adaptability (0 = low manager adaptability and 1 = high manager adaptability), manager empathy (0 = low manager empathy and 1 = high manager empathy), and their interaction on self-reported intent to stay (0 = often, always, sometimes and 1 = rarely, never [think of leaving]). The model significantly predicted employees' intent to stay (i.e., always thinking of leaving). Hayes PROCESS macro was utilized to test a multiple linear regression assessing the impact of manager adaptability, manager empathy, and their interaction on employees' psychological well-being. The overall model was significant, \( R^2 = .26, F(3,5490) = 633.33, p < .0001 \). The main effect of manager adaptability was significant, \( b = .33, t(5490) = 30.74, p < .0001 \). The main effect of manager empathy was also significant, \( b = .17, t(5490) = 17.11, p < .0001 \). These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction, \( b = .14, t(5490) = 15.05, p < .0001 \). Simple slopes indicated that the positive relationship between manager adaptability and well-being is strongest at high levels of manager empathy and well-being, \( b = .46, t(5490) = 40.45, p < .0001 \); at low levels of manager empathy, the impact of manager adaptability is still significant, but smaller, \( b = .20, t(5490) = 12.83, p < .0001 \).  

23. Employee inclusion composites were dichotomized for entry into a binary logistic regression which examined the impact of manager adaptability (0 = low manager adaptability and 1 = high manager adaptability), manager empathy (0 = low manager empathy and 1 = high manager empathy), and their interaction on self-reported inclusion (0 = never, rarely, or sometimes 1 = often or always). The model significantly predicted employees' experiences of inclusion, Nagelkerke \( R^2 = .20, \chi^2(3) = 796.53, p < .0001 \). Employees with managers high in empathy and high in adaptability are 4.5 times more likely to have high levels of well-being (Wald \( df = 1, N = 5494 \) = 127.17, \( OR = 4.50, p < .001 \)) compared to employees with managers who are low in empathy and low in adaptability.

24. Employee psychological well-being composites were dichotomized for entry into a binary logistic regression which examined the impact of manager adaptability (0 = low manager adaptability and 1 = high manager adaptability), manager empathy (0 = low manager empathy and 1 = high manager empathy), and their interaction on self-reported well-being (0 = strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree and 1 = slightly agree, agree, strongly agree). The model significantly predicted employees' well-being, Nagelkerke \( R^2 = .17, \chi^2(3) = 710.68, p < .0001 \). Employees with managers high in empathy and high in adaptability are 4.5 times more likely to have high levels of well-being (Wald \( df = 1, N = 5494 \) = 127.17, \( OR = 4.50, p < .001 \)) compared to employees with managers who are low in empathy and low in adaptability.

25. Employee intent to stay composites were dichotomized for entry into a binary logistic regression which examined the impact of manager adaptability (0 = low manager adaptability and 1 = high manager adaptability), manager empathy (0 = low manager empathy and 1 = high manager empathy), and their interaction on self-reported intent to stay (0 = often, always, sometimes and 1 = rarely, never [think of leaving]). The model significantly predicted employees' experiences of inclusion, Nagelkerke \( R^2 = .10, \chi^2(3) = 441.19, p < .001 \). Employees with managers high in empathy and high in adaptability are 2.26 times more likely to never or rarely think of leaving their company (Wald \( df = 1, N = 5494 \) = 39.39, \( OR = 2.26, p < .001 \)) compared to employees with managers who are low in empathy and low in adaptability.

21. Employee well-being was measured with an adapted form of Ryff's Psychological Well-Being scale: Ryff, C. D. & Keyes, C. L. M. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being. The overall model was significant, \( R^2 = .51, F(4,5486) = 631.43, p < .0001 \). The main effect of manager adaptability was significant, \( b = .33, t(5485) = 30.74, p < .0001 \). The main effect of manager empathy was also significant, \( b = .17, t(5485) = 17.11, p < .0001 \). These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction, \( b = .15, t(5485) = 15.05, p < .0001 \). Simple slopes indicated that the positive relationship between manager adaptability and well-being is strongest at high levels of manager empathy, 4.5 times more likely to have high levels of well-being (Wald \( df = 1, N = 5494 \) = 127.17, \( OR = 4.50, p < .001 \)) compared to employees with managers who are low in empathy and low in adaptability.
Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.08, \chi^2(3) = 329.49, p < .001$. Employees with managers high in empathy and high in adaptability are 43% less likely to have high levels of general work burnout ($Wald (df = 1, N = 5494) = 19.10, OR = 0.57, p < .001$) compared to employees with managers who are low in empathy and low in adaptability.

28. Employee Covid-19 work burnout composites were dichotomized for entry into a binary logistic regression which examined the impact of manager adaptability ($0 = \text{low manager adaptability}, 1 = \text{high manager adaptability}$), manager empathy ($0 = \text{low manager empathy}, 1 = \text{high manager empathy}$), and their interaction on self-reported Covid-19 work burnout ($0 = \text{low levels of burnout}, 1 = \text{high levels of burnout}$). The model significantly predicted employees' Covid-19 work burnout, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .06, \chi^2(3) = 268.43, p < .001$. Employees with managers high in empathy and high in adaptability are 49% less likely to have high levels of Covid-19 work burnout ($Wald (df = 1, N = 5494) = 26.92, OR = 0.51, p < .001$) compared to employees with managers who are low in empathy and low in adaptability.

29. Employee personal burnout composites were dichotomized for entry into a binary logistic regression which examined the impact of manager adaptability ($0 = \text{low manager adaptability}, 1 = \text{high manager adaptability}$), manager empathy ($0 = \text{low manager empathy}, 1 = \text{high manager empathy}$), and their interaction on self-reported personal burnout ($0 = \text{low levels of burnout}, 1 = \text{high levels of burnout}$). The model significantly predicted employees' personal burnout, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .06, \chi^2(3) = 252.33, p < .001$. Employees with managers high in empathy and high in adaptability are 42% less likely to have high levels of personal burnout ($Wald (df = 1, N = 5494) = 18.76, OR = 0.58, p < .001$) compared to employees with managers who are low in empathy and low in adaptability.

30. Lucy is a fictional character whose story is meant to illustrate employee experiences with manager adaptability and empathy. Work withdrawal was measured with five items on a 1 (never) to 5 (always) scale drawn from: Hanisch, K. A. & Hulin, C. L. (1991). General attitudes and organizational withdrawal: An examination of a causal model. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 39, 110-128; Hanisch, K. A. & Hulin, C. L. (1990). Job attitudes and organizational withdrawal: An examination of retirement and other voluntary withdrawal behaviors. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 37(1), 60-78. Our adapted scale demonstrated excellent internal reliability ($\chi^2 = 90$), thus the items were averaged to create a composite, where higher values indicate greater amounts of withdrawal behaviors at work. Hayes PROCESS macro was utilized to test a multiple linear regression assessing the impact of manager adaptability, manager empathy, and their interaction on employees' work withdrawal. The overall model was significant, $R^2 = .30, (F(3,5490) = 792.58, p < .0001$. The main effect of manager adaptability was significant, $b = -.51, (t(5490) = -35.52, p < .0001$. The main effect of manager empathy was also significant, $b = 14, (t(5490) = 10.48, p < .0001$. These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction, $b = -.22, (t(5490) = 17.71, p < .0001$. Simple slopes indicated a full cross-over pattern, such that the negative relationship between manager adaptability and work withdrawal is strongest at high levels of manager empathy, $b = -.72, (t(5490) = -.4698, p < .0001$, and employees with managers high in adaptability and high in empathy report the lowest mean levels of withdrawal ($M = 1.84$); at low levels of manager empathy, the impact of manager adaptability on work withdrawal is still significant, but smaller, $b = -.31, (t(5490) = -14.66, p < .0001$, but employees with managers high in empathy, but low in adaptability report the highest levels of withdrawal ($M = 3.20$).

31. To illustrate the cross-over pattern found in the above multiple regression at high levels of manager empathy (endnote 22), a chi-square test was conducted among employees with managers high in empathy to provide the percentages reporting high vs low sleep problems at high and low levels of manager adaptability.

Endnotes
This analysis only included employees from marginalized racial and ethnic groups in four White-majority countries: Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Including only employees who indicated they worked on a team, Hayes PROCESS macro model 1 was used to conduct a multiple linear regression assessing the impact of manager adaptability, team racial diversity, and their interaction on employees’ inclusion. The overall model was significant, $R^2 = .07$, $F(3,1594) = 37.74$, $p < .0001$. The main effect of manager adaptability was significant, $b = .10$, $t(1594) = 5.45$, $p < .0001$. The main effect of team racial diversity was also significant, $b = .11$, $t(1594) = 4.64$, $p < .0001$. The interaction between manager adaptability and team racial diversity was significant, $b = .17$, $t(1594) = 7.08$, $p < .0001$. Simple slopes indicated that at low levels of manager adaptability greater team racial diversity was not significantly associated with inclusion for employees from marginalized racial and ethnic groups, $b = -.05$, $t(1594) = -1.57$, $p = .116$; at high levels of manager adaptability, greater team racial diversity was associated with increased inclusion for employees from marginalized racial and ethnic groups, $b = .30$, $t(1594) = 7.98$, $p < .0001$.


Travis, Shaffer, & Thorpe-Moscon (2019).


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