

# Finding adaptive employees important to organizations, says study

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	Mean ( <i>sd</i> )		$\alpha$	
	Study 1	Study 2	Study 1	Study 2
Cognition skills judged for cognition category	4.31 (.72)	4.16 (.62)	.83	.77
Motivation skills judged for cognition category	3.15 (.88)	3.42 (.76)	.82	.78
Action skills judged for cognition category	3.44 (.74)	3.61 (.69)	.73	.74
Connection skills judged for cognition category	3.21 (.79)	3.22 (.80)	.77	.82
Cognition skills judged for motivation category	3.03 (.87)	3.31 (.87)	.82	.83
Motivation skills judged for motivation category	4.17 (.72)	4.06 (.70)	.74	.76
Action skills judged for motivation category	3.58 (.79)	3.68 (.72)	.77	.76
Connection skills judged for motivation category	2.73 (.90)	2.96 (.88)	.84	.85
Cognition skills judged for action category	3.10 (.93)	3.32 (.84)	.82	.80
Motivation skills judged for action category	3.51 (.76)	3.64 (.74)	.72	.77
Action skills judged for action category	3.94 (.63)	3.81 (.65)	.64	.67
Connection skills judged for action category	2.71 (.88)	3.06 (.86)	.83	.82
Cognition skills judged for connection category	2.29 (1.00)	2.67 (.98)	.88	.86
Motivation skills judged for connection category	2.43 (.97)	2.79 (.96)	.83	.86
Action skills judged for connection category	2.98 (.68)	3.22 (.74)	.60	.69
Connection skills judged for connection category	4.45 (.67)	4.31 (.73)	.83	.86

Higher scores indicate higher judged fit with that category.

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Judgments of fit between the different skills with the four different categories in Studies 1 & 2. Credit: *PLOS ONE* (2023). DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0282074

As more employers nationwide seek to fill vacancies, potential applicants will need to show they have the skills to adapt to the

company's needs.

Employees who have those [skills](#)—cognition, motivation, action and connection—are capable of meeting project demands and responding to change, according to a new University of Michigan study.

The research suggests that the nature of employee skills matters because of the many events that create turbulence—ranging from technological advances, economic changes, and unanticipated events (pandemic, recession)—all requiring employees and companies to effectively respond to a more uncertain and competitive work environment.

"To be nimble and adaptive, organizations now more than ever need their [building blocks](#)—the [employees](#) who are at the heart of the transformation process—to be adaptive," said study author Oscar Ybarra, professor emeritus of psychology and management and organizations.

An ability to adapt involves being engaged in, and responsive to, change in several different tasks spread across different projects that may involve various collaborators, technologies and time frames. This requires that individuals possess and use various broad skills. Many times, though, employers focus on narrow experience and expertise suited to a specific task or job, but have a harder time defining what these broad, adaptive skills are.

In the research, Ybarra asked about 230 participants in two studies to think about 24 different skills that any person can possess. He wanted to know if participants could understand what the skills meant and how different skills went together.

Through their responses, Ybarra was able to organize the skills into a four-category framework that facilitated a better understanding of how

individuals engage within organizations to get their work done—i.e., how they are able to adapt.

The findings appear in *PLOS ONE*.

**More information:** Oscar Ybarra et al, The skills that help employees adapt: Empirical validation of a four-category framework, *PLOS ONE* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0282074](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0282074)

Provided by University of Michigan

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