Chapter 5

Adaptive Performance: A Review of Managerial Interventions

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has prompted an urgent need for organisations to adapt to continuously changing circumstances. Given the unpredictable challenges, a traditional, tightly planned approach to managing episodic change is likely to be suboptimal. Based on the need to manage continuous change and ensure workplaces are prepared for further unexpected events, it is argued that developing employees' adaptive performance is a better approach. Drawing on the literature identified in Park and Park's recent review of adaptive performance and its antecedents, the authors conduct a parallel review of the managerial implications of these findings. Findings are organised into sections related to employee selection, training, work design, leader behaviour, and organisational climate. Each practical recommendation is reviewed in terms of its feasibility of implementation and likely effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has created an urgent need for organisations to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances under conditions of great uncertainty. These disruptions have affected organisations’ long-term plans, their business models, the size and composition of their workforce, and employees’ everyday working conditions. The ability to lead and implement change in such circumstances has never been more important. However, due to the ongoing unpredictable challenges posed by the disruptions, a tightly planned approach is less feasible. Based on the need to make continuous change, we conduct a review of proposed managerial interventions for supporting employee adaptive performance.

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Adaptive performance refers to employees’ capabilities to adapt to rapidly changing work situations (Neal & Hesketh, 1999), and it is thought to include dimensions of problem solving, dealing with uncertainty, learning new tasks and procedures, and interpersonal, cultural and physical adaptability (Pulakos et al., 2000). Adaptive performance has been distinguished from task proficiency and proactivity (Griffin et al., 2007), with the former describing behaviours that are not formalised nor embedded within a social context, and the latter with anticipatory, self-directed behaviours intended to achieve desired outcomes.

We argue that a focus on encouraging employee adaptive performance is likely to complement and enhance managerial change efforts. While prominent change management theories have provided important insights into how to lead change effectively (Beer & Nohria, 2000; Bridges, 2009; Goldratt, 1999; Kotter, 1996), they have traditionally emphasised a planned approach in which change is characterised as episodic, with a clear beginning, middle and end (Bouckenooghe, 2010). Such approaches have arguably been well-suited to dealing with the initial COVID-19 outbreak. The outbreak presents a clearly defined problem with profound negative consequences (a “burning platform”) if the organization fails to act quickly and decisively. However, the COVID-19 situation does not offer a clearly defined endpoint, making these models less suitable for managing an uncertain future. Even with the development of several promising vaccines, it is unlikely that the economic climate and workplace culture will snap back to “normal”. Alternatively, if treatments turn out to lack long-term effectiveness or a new vaccine-resistant strain of coronavirus emerges, organisations will need to make significant changes to adapt to this new, permanent situation. Hence, the COVID situation requires both leadership capable of managing ongoing changes, and employees prepared to embrace a state of continuous organisational change.

Managing ongoing change requires a different approach to episodic change. For episodic change, Weick and Quinn (1999) theorise a leader’s role is to initiate and drive changes with employees who are often resistant to that change. In contrast, when managing continuous change, a leader’s role may be described as that of a “sense maker” (Weick & Quinn, 1999, p. 366), where leaders help reframe opinions that employees may already hold, rather than imposing their own planned agenda on their team. If the COVID situation continues to evolve as a continuous, relatively unpredictable series of changes, such a perspective suggests that it may be incumbent on leaders to take on a notably different role in managing change than that propagated by prominent traditional theorists (Beer & Nohria, 2000; Bridges, 2009; Goldratt, 1999; Kotter, 1996).

From an employee perspective, embracing continuous organisational change may require adaptation to a variety of new stressors, along with a concurrent need to abandon established methods. A context of continuous change may require adoption of new roles or responsibilities, abandonment of important past accountabilities, major changes to an employee’s day-to-day working schedule, and layoffs of colleagues. In such an environment, an employee’s general attitude toward change may be more relevant than any specific attitude held towards any one component they are required to adapt to.

Not all employees are willing or able to accept change, and some researchers have theorised that employee resistance to change is a trait-like construct possessed in greater measure by some employees (e.g., Oreg, 2003; Saksvik & Hetland, 2009). As well as resistance to change, the preparedness of employees to adapt to changes has also been investigated through the lens of change readiness (e.g., Rafferty et al., 2012), which is assumed to be more state-like. Studies investigating both trait resistance and state readiness have tended to be cross-sectional with few studies investigating either construct over time. However, a recent study by Henricks et al. (2020) suggested that neither construct is completely trait-like or state-like. Although both constructs are relatively stable over time (as indicated by test-retest correlations of .50 for change readiness and .62 for resistance to change), they are nonetheless malleable.
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to the potential influence of leaders and other contextual factors. Michel et al. (2013) have also pointed towards the absence of a consistent moderation effect across workplace contexts, in questioning the trait-like status of resistance to change. Context may play a larger role in shaping general attitudes toward change than historically presumed (Caldwell, 2013; Michel et al., 2013).

For these reasons, rather than attempting to deal with the many unpredictable challenges posed by the COVID situation through a tightly planned process, we argue that a more fruitful approach is to explore how adaptive performance may be supported and developed in employees. Park and Park (2019) conducted a recent review of the literature on adaptive performance, which included 34 empirical studies that had studied its antecedents. Among these antecedents, the review identified individual characteristics (e.g., personality, self-efficacy, self-regulation), job characteristics (e.g., decision-making autonomy and job resources), group characteristics (e.g., supervisor support), and organizational characteristics (e.g., leader vision).

In this chapter, we conduct a parallel review of the managerial implications of these findings, which we source from the recommendations of the body of studies collected by Park and Park (2019). While none of these studies were conducted during the COVID era, we extrapolate relevant managerial implications from this research and explain how it may be applied to support employee adaptability during organisational disruptions. We include both explicit recommendations for interventions made in these studies, as well as implicit implications of their main findings. Based on the major outcomes described in this collection of studies, we organise these findings into sections related to employee selection, training and performance management, work design and job resources, leader behaviour, and organisational climate and culture. This structure also provides a framework for leaders to consider the different types of interventions that are available. We evaluate each recommendation in terms of its feasibility of implementation and likely effectiveness.

EMPLOYEE SELECTION

Several studies reviewed in Park and Park (2019) focused on employee characteristics as antecedents of adaptive performance. These included cognitive flexibility (Good, 2014), Big Five personality factors or more specific dispositional facets (Griffin & Hesketh, 2003; Griffin & Hesketh, 2005; Huang et al., 2014), as well as additional individual differences not covered by extant models of personality (Bartone et al., 2013; Hauschildt & Konradt, 2012; Zhang et al., 2016). Many such factors are considered either difficult or impossible to shift. Thus, these studies imply that during times of disruption—such as the COVID-19 pandemic—employee selection processes should place greater emphasis on these individual differences to bolster a workplace’s adaptive performance.

Personality Measures

Huang et al. (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of 71 independent samples (total N = 7,535) all collected using the Hogan Personality Inventory (Hogan & Hogan, 2007). They found that emotional stability and ambition were both significantly associated with adaptive performance. In relation to emotional stability, Huang et al. (2014) theorised that employees who were highly emotionally stable were more likely to tolerate and attempt potentially stressful workplace changes, whereas less emotionally stable employees were more likely to avoid such stressors by procrastinating or clinging to old policies and processes. In
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relation to ambition, Huang et al. (2014) theorised that highly ambitious employees were more likely to seize opportunities that presented themselves during periods of change, whereas less ambitious employees may be less motivated by such opportunities. Despite the limitations of their cross-sectional design, Huang et al. (2014) asserted that these personality traits were the two primary personality-related predictors of adaptive performance within the workplace and implied that measurement of both traits should be used for pre-employment screening purposes.

Over a century of research has consistently found that conscientiousness is a significant predictor of employee task performance across a wide range of occupations (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Wilmot & Ones, 2019). Zhang et al. (2012) investigated whether conscientiousness may have a similar association with adaptive performance. Specifically, Zhang et al. (2012) conducted two studies among full-time employees based in Beijing and their supervisors. They found that while the relationship between conscientiousness and job performance is best described as curvilinear (i.e., reaches a plateau), the positive association between conscientiousness and adaptive performance was best described as linear with a small effect size ($r = .17, p < .05$). Given the relatively pervasive use of conscientiousness in existing employee selection practices, Zhang et al.’s (2012) findings imply that maintaining this status quo is appropriate. However, Zhang et al. (2012) also cautioned that despite the potential utility of conscientiousness as a predictor of adaptive performance, empirical research to date has typically observed only small effect sizes. There are clearly other factors which shape an employee’s adaptive performance in the workplace.

Studies which examine the relationship between conscientiousness and adaptive performance have not always found a consistent association. In one early study, Griffin and Hesketh (2003) noted that conscientiousness was not a significant predictor of adaptive performance in either of the two organisations that they surveyed ($r_s = .06, -.04, p_s > .05$). However, in a follow-up study with a different sample, Griffin and Hesketh (2005) investigated personality correlates of adaptive performance at a facet level. Griffin and Hesketh (2005) observed that two sub-facets of conscientiousness were both significantly associated with adaptive performance, namely achievement-orientation and dependability. Specifically, employees who scored highly on the achievement scale were more likely to be adaptable, whereas those with high scores on the dependability facets were less likely to be adaptable. Such findings suggest a more subtle and nuanced association between conscientiousness and adaptive performance similar to that observed by Stewart and Nandkeolyar (2006). Stewart and Nandkeolyar (2006) observed that the association between conscientiousness and adaptive performance may differ by role. Specifically, they suggested that conscientiousness would only predict adaptive performance within positions which require employees to seize sales opportunities. In contrast, Stewart and Nandkeolyar (2006) suggested that openness to experience may be a better predictor of adaptive performance within other roles.

Considering the various recommendations reviewed, the case for pre-employment screening based on existing personality measures is mixed. There exists a degree of consensus that facet-level personality traits may be more useful in predicting adaptive performance than Big Five personality factors (Griffin & Hesketh, 2005; Huang et al., 2014). However, each of the studies which examined facet-level correlates of adaptive performance have identified slightly different facets. Furthermore, research also suggests the personality traits which predict adaptive performance may differ by role (Stewart & Nandkeolyar, 2006). Given the mixed evidence reviewed combined with a lack of replication studies across different contexts, it would be unwise to reweight the interpretation of pre-employment personality assessments away from a century of evidence predicting conventional / task performance (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Wilmot & Ones, 2019) toward the relatively scant and contradictory literature available on adaptive performance. As such, given the research available at the time of writing this chapter, both the feasibility and likeli-
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hood of success for personality-related pre-employment screening to boost adaptive performance must both be judged low.

Other Individual Differences

Given the success of employment screening based on personality is far from guaranteed, several studies have examined a range of other individual differences that may predict adaptive performance during employee selection processes. Bartone et al. (2013) conducted a longitudinal study in which they administered a survey to military cadets at Westpoint during the beginning of their training then again seven years later following their graduation. They found that two specific forms of psychological hardiness, as measured by the Dispositional Resilience Scale (Bartone, 1995), significantly predicted adaptability seven years later. Specifically, the Commitment subscale which purports to measure active engagement in life significantly predicted self-assessed adaptability ($r = .24, p < .01$), but not supervisor ratings of adaptability ($p > .05$). The Control subscale which purports to measure the belief that an individual can personally influence events predicted both self-assessments of adaptability ($r = .25, p < .01$) and supervisor ratings of adaptability ($r = .36, p < .01$) seven years later. Using hierarchical regression, Bartone et al. (2013) controlled for both scholastic aptitude and the composite candidate rating scales prior to admission into Westpoint, and found via hierarchical regression analysis that 9% of variance in self-assessed adaptability seven years later could be predicted using a model that included Commitment and Control sub-scales of the resilience measure ($F(5,628) = 13.23, p < .01$). In contrast, 18% of variance in later supervisor adaptability assessments could be predicted using a model that included only the Control sub-scale of the resilience measure ($F(5,118) = 5.23, p < .01$). Given the theorised temporal stability of dispositional resilience (Bartone, 1995), and its predictive association with adaptive performance, Bartone et al. (2013) implied that such a characteristic may be used as an effective pre-employment screening tool.

Cognitive flexibility has also been suggested as a useful predictor of adaptive performance. Good (2014) found that pre-task cognitive flexibility as measured by performance on a Stroop task (Stroop, 1935) predicted 11% of variance in adaptive performance within a computer simulated environment where participants play the role of a fire chief. Good (2014) cautioned that a self-reported measure of cognitive flexibility showed an inverse association with adaptive performance on the same task. Such a finding illustrates the importance of performance-based assessment versus self-report inventories. On the basis of Good’s (2014) findings, although pre-screening of cognitive flexibility may be a useful predictor of adaptive performance, any screening must be directly assessed using objective measures, rather than self-reports.

Hauschildt and Konradt (2012) explored employee self-regulation when engaged in work that is not naturally motivating. They labelled this form of self-regulation as self-leadership and theorised that it may be an antecedent of adaptive performance. Hauschildt and Konradt (2012) found a positive association between self-leadership and employee adaptive performance in a single cross-sectional study. However, they did not test the stability over time of self-leadership and instead asserted that these behaviours may be shaped via combination of leadership behaviour and training. As such, employee screening based on self-leadership would appear premature.
Personal and Organisational Goal Congruence

In contrast to the examination of individual differences, other researchers have advocated for selection based on individual attitudes that may be more dynamic. Zhang et al. (2016) found that motivation was higher among employees whose goals were congruent with their employer’s objectives. Building on this finding, they theorised that selecting employees whose personal goals and values aligned with that of their company would likely prompt higher adaptive performance during times of change. Zhang et al. (2016) did not examine the extent to which personal and workplace goal alignment may converge or diverge over time. As such, the predictive validity of using such an approach is difficult to assess, given that both personal and workplace goals are potentially dynamic constructs.

Age

It is a common assumption among HR professionals that older employees may become more set in their ways (Gostautaite & Bucuniene, 2015). Only one of the papers reviewed by Park and Park (2019) focused on testing the association between age and adaptive performance, but failed to detect a significant association ($r = -0.09, p > .05$) among employees of a retail bank in Lithuania. Gostautaite and Bucuniene (2015) further observed that under certain circumstances, specifically a high degree of work scheduling autonomy and low degree of decision-making autonomy, older workers are likely to present with higher adaptive performance. Another study by Ghitulescu (2013) among 621 special education teachers observed similar findings. Ghitulescu (2013) observed that those with more experience in their job tended to demonstrate higher levels of both adaptive and proactive behaviours. Both findings (Ghitulescu, 2013; Gostautaite & Bucuniene, 2015) contrast with the common assumption that older employees might be less flexible during times of change. In fact, Ghitulescu’s (2013) finding suggests quite the opposite possibility; as an employee gains more experience over time, they become equipped with a wider array of skills and knowledge to apply in solving novel problems. In many parts of the world, discriminating against employees based on their age is unlawful. These results suggest that in addition to being unlawful, selecting employees based on age does not make business sense, especially during the COVID period where adaptive performance is likely to become more important.

Selection Based on Adaptive Performance, Not Its Antecedents

Rather than selecting employees based on hypothesised antecedents of adaptive performance, others have suggested that pre-employment screening should consider direct measures of adaptive performance. Charbonnier-Voirin et al. (2012) developed a self-report adaptive performance scale to measure five distinct aspects of this employee characteristics. The resultant scale possessed a hierarchical structure including one overall adaptive performance scale, together with five sub-scales which were labelled as creativity, reactivity in the face of emergencies or unexpected circumstances, interpersonal adaptability, training and learning effort, and managing work stress. Charbonnier-Voirin et al. (2012) presented some preliminary evidence of the convergent validity of the scale by demonstrating modest to large correlations between their overall adaptive performance scale and both a measure of transformational leadership ($r = .41, p < .01$) a measure of contextual performance ($r = .60, p < .01$). Despite the absence of any predictive validity studies, Charbonnier-Voirin et al. (2012) asserted that the scale may be used for employee selection purposes.
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TRAINING AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Most of the articles reviewed in Park and Park (2019) imply that it is difficult to train adaptive performance directly. Instead, these studies imply that a more fruitful approach is to help employees develop relevant domain knowledge, improve the self-regulatory capabilities of individuals and teams, incorporating adaptive performance into performance appraisal systems, and retaining experienced employees. We argue that these strategies are likely to be particularly effective in preparing organisations for the impact of disruptions related to COVID-19.

Studies of adaptive performance have indicated that adaptivity tends to emerge from a person’s expertise within a knowledge domain; in other words, that it represents a higher level of functioning than basic task proficiency. For instance, Chen et al. (2005) found that individual knowledge and skill within a flight simulator task was associated with adaptive performance. In a study of international military personnel, Sahin and Gurbuz (2014) found that expertise in cultural intelligence was associated with greater adaptive performance in cross-cultural situations. Thus, these researchers suggest that adaptive performance can be enhanced through extensive training and/or experience in a domain, thereby allowing employees to acquire flexible knowledge schemas that can be applied in unfamiliar situations.

In addition to domain content knowledge, studies have focused on both individual and team regulatory processes as antecedents of adaptive performance. Hauschildt and Konradt’s (2012) study revealed a positive relationship between self-leadership and employee adaptive performance. Their measure of self-leadership encompassed a range of self-regulatory processes, including goal setting, self-reward and punishment, observation, self-cueing, and constructive self-talk. In a similar vein, Chen et al.’s (2005) study additionally focused on team coordination process (i.e., monitoring goal progress, systems monitoring, team monitoring and backup behaviour). Their findings revealed that these coordination processes were stronger antecedents of team performance than individual expertise. Thus, both studies imply that training, managerial support and encouragement for individual and team regulatory processes is likely to enhance adaptive performance.

Other researchers have recommended incorporating adaptive performance into HR systems, including applicant selection criteria, performance appraisal and position descriptions. In a study of sales representatives, Stewart and Nandkeolyar (2006) found that employees’ overall performance fluctuated according to situational opportunity (i.e., the number of sales referrals received); yet adaptive employees were better able to take advantage of such opportunities. For performance appraisals, they recommended accounting for variability in situational opportunity, as well as employees’ capabilities in seizing opportunities. In a similar vein, Charbonnier-Voirin and Roussel (2012) recommended including a measure of adaptive performance into formal performance appraisal, and suggested it could also be used as an employee selection tool. Moreover, Griffin et al. (2007; 2010) distinguish between task proficiency (i.e., performance on core job tasks), proactivity (i.e., self-directed action), and adaptivity (i.e., adapting to changes in a work system and work roles), and they argue that these categories should be incorporated into performance evaluation systems. Griffin et al. (2007) further suggested that job descriptions should not be regarded as static; rather, managers should recognise roles as flexible and emergent, and they should provide opportunities for employees to self-initiate new tasks and customise their roles.

Finally, at least two studies have reported a positive relationship between employees’ length of tenure in a role and adaptive performance (Ghitulescu, 2013; Sahin & Gurbuz, 2014). These findings imply that more experienced employees are likely to develop a broader repertoire of knowledge, thereby facilitating their adaptive performance. Alternatively, this relationship may signify a survivorship bias: that already...
Adaptable employees are more likely to have successfully navigated previous changes and remain employed. To build adaptivity within a workforce, these findings suggest that organisations should engage in employee retention strategies for longstanding workers, particularly those who have already successfully adapted to change. Pulakos et al. (2002) also argued for measuring past experience in adapting as an indicator of future adaptive performance. In order to enrich employee knowledge and maximise the benefits of experience, both Ghitulescu (2013) and Sahin and Gurbuz (2014) recommended exposing employees to diverse work experiences, such as job rotations, novel work environments, information about the larger organisational context, and greater interactions with colleagues. Although such intervention will impose a steeper learning curve, such diverse experiences should prepare a workforce for significant changes to everyday work tasks and roles brought about by major disruptions.

WORK DESIGN AND JOB RESOURCES

Research has also investigated how a range of work design aspects influence employees’ level of adaptive performance. These initiatives include providing greater autonomy to employees, supporting greater social connectedness among colleagues, providing workplace challenges to enhance employees’ self-efficacy, and improving self-regulation by supporting employees’ participation in goal setting.

With regard to autonomy, researchers have argued that it benefits employees in multiple ways (Gostautaite & Buciuniene, 2015), including providing greater work knowledge, providing greater flexibility to approach tasks in a different way when circumstances change, and instilling greater motivation through being trusted with additional responsibilities. These studies have drawn a distinction between decision-making autonomy (referring to discretion given to employees to make important decisions related to their job) and work-scheduling autonomy (referring to employee control over the sequence and timing of work tasks) (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006).

Although the benefits of autonomy appear obvious, results regarding its effects on adaptive performance have been mixed. Among a study of manufacturing employees, Sherehiy and Karwowski (2014) found that general job autonomy was not associated with adaptive performance. However, both Ghitulescu (2013) and Gostautaite and Buciuniene (2015) observed that employees with high decision-making autonomy generally demonstrated greater adaptive performance. Gostautaite and Buciuniene (2015) found that older workers benefitted from work-scheduling autonomy but not decision-making autonomy. In general, these authors recommend providing greater autonomy to workers to support adaptive performance, but doing so with consideration to employees’ circumstances, capabilities and goals. For instance, while some employees may perform capably while working at home during office shutdowns, other employees may need greater levels of direction and support from their manager and colleagues.

Research has also examined how interactions with other workers affect employees’ adaptive performance, including their task interdependence and social support. Task interdependence refers to the extent to which employees need to coordinate with colleagues and other stakeholders to perform their job. In a study of teachers, Ghitulescu (2013) reported a negative relationship between task interdependence and adaptive performance. She argued that interdependence reduces autonomy and increases reliance on others for information and resources. Thus, this finding implies that adaptive performance suffers if interdependences imposes excessive work demands and constraints on employees. In contrast, Ghitulescu (2013) found that an employee’s number of social ties increases adaptive performance. She interpreted this result as suggesting that social ties provide additional social support, information, and
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advice. Thus, she recommended facilitating interactions among colleagues, but not designing work that required co-workers to rely on each other excessively. This recommendation is likely to be especially relevant for employees who are required to socially distance themselves from their colleagues and those who work from home.

As a further motivational process, many of the studies reviewed by Park and Park (2019) have also investigated self-efficacy as a possible antecedent of adaptive performance. Self-efficacy refers to a person’s judgement that they possess the necessary capabilities to perform a task or obtain a desired outcome successfully (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy represents a source of motivation; highly efficacious employees are more likely to put more effort into a task, initiate actions to help them cope with a new situation and persist when faced with challenging and/or uncertain situations. This view has been supported by the study of Chen et al. (2005), who found that employees’ individual self-efficacy increases goal striving (allocating and sustaining effort), which itself is positively related to adaptive performance. Other findings regarding the relationship between self-efficacy and adaptive performance have been mixed. Although most of the reviewed studies reported a positive correlation between self-efficacy and adaptive performance (e.g., Griffin & Hesketh, 2003; Griffin et al., 2010; Pulakos, Schmitt, Dorsey, Arad, Borman, et al., 2002), this relationship often disappeared when additional predictors were investigated in more complex models. For instance, Griffin et al. (2010) found that self-efficacy no longer predicted adaptive performance when conscientiousness was entered into the model.

Nonetheless, several authors have recommended interventions for improving employees’ self-efficacy. For instance, both Chen et al. (2005) and Sahin and Gurbuz (2014) suggest that motivational interventions directed at increasing both individual and team self-efficacy is likely to increase adaptive performance, although these authors do not elaborate on what such interventions would entail. Traditionally, interventions for self-efficacy have included providing “mastery” experiences (i.e., facilitating success on a relevant task), vicarious experiences (i.e., observing the behaviour of role models similar to oneself), social persuasion (i.e., expressing a belief in an employee’s ability to succeed), and to reduce negative emotional states such as stress (Gallagher, 2012). Similar to the “mastery” intervention, both Bartone et al. (2013) and Griffin and Hesketh (2003) recommended providing challenging tasks and experiences to help employees develop a strong sense of self-efficacy, thereby preparing them for the need to demonstrate adaptive performance in the face of change. Most other authors, however, do not offer specific recommendations for increasing self-efficacy.

Studies by Hauschildt and Konradt (2012) and Zhang et al. (2016) also suggest ways in which goal setting techniques can be used to improve employees’ ability to self-regulate their behaviour and improve their adaptive performance. As previously described, Hauschildt and Konradt (2012) found that self-leadership was positively associated with adaptive performance. They therefore argued that self-leadership should be encouraged through supporting employee-directed goal setting, as well as by providing constructive feedback and emphasising shared purpose, vision and values. In the study of Zhang et al. (2016), the authors examined different forms of regulation, including external regulation (i.e., participating because of external demands or rewards), introjected (i.e., participating to maintain self-worth), identified (i.e., participating because a goal is valued), and intrinsic (i.e., participating because a task is interesting / enjoyable) regulation. They found that only identified regulation was associated with adaptive performance, and the other forms of self-regulation (even intrinsic regulation) did not influence performance. Thus, they recommended interventions for increasing identified regulation by encouraging employees to internalise the value and importance of the goals they set out to achieve.
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In the COVID era, leaders should make efforts to keep physically distant employees informed about the direction of the organisation and how their efforts contribute to its long-term success.

LEADER BEHAVIOUR AND LEADER DEVELOPMENT

Although leaders play a central role in selecting employees, training them, evaluating their performance, and designing their work, several studies reviewed by Park and Park (2019) suggested the importance of specific behaviours among leaders that were independent of their designated role within such processes. Such recommendations included behavioural role-modelling, specific training that may be advantageous for leaders, and social processes that leaders may instigate or encourage within their teams. These actions are likely to be especially important for virtual teams operating within a COVID environment, as physical disconnectedness makes it more difficult for teams to implement shared goals and build trust (Hertel et al., 2005).

Transformational Leadership

Two studies reviewed by Park and Park (2019) observed the apparent association between transformational leadership behaviour and adaptive performance among employees. In a survey among employees of a French aeronautical company, Charbonnier-Voirin et al. (2010) observed a significant medium association between transformational leadership and adaptive performance \((r = .44, p < .01)\). As employee assessments regarding their leaders’ behaviours become more positive, so did self-assessed adaptive performance. Using hierarchical linear modelling, Charbonnier-Voirin et al. (2010) further showed that an innovative organisational climate as assessed by leaders moderated the association between transformational leadership and adaptive performance. The moderating influence of organisational climate significantly dampened the association between transformational leadership and adaptive performance such that highly innovative teams demonstrated a stronger positive association between leadership assessments and adaptive performance, whereas this association, while still positive, was relatively weaker among relatively less innovative teams. Despite the cross-sectional nature of their study, Charbonnier-Voirin et al. (2010) nevertheless concluded that leadership behaviour was likely to have a causal influence on employee adaptive performance. Accordingly, they recommended leaders may shape adaptive behaviour among employees at both an individual and team-level. When working one-on-one with individuals, Charbonnier-Voirin et al. (2010) suggested that leaders should provide tailored support and development based on unique individual employee needs. Still at any individual-level, they further suggested that leaders may enable employees to achieve their individual potential by adjusting task assignment and performance feedback based on each individual’s reasoning ability and job-related skills. When working at a team-level, Charbonnier-Voirin et al. (2010) recommended that leaders articulate a clear and challenging vision, whilst encouraging a positive attitude regarding the team’s ability to achieve challenging goals.

Griffin et al. (2010) conducted a longitudinal study in which they tested the predictive association between transformational leadership vision and adaptive performance using two repeated survey administrations among public sector employees separated by one year. Griffin et al. (2010) failed to detect a correlation between the clear and compelling presentation of a vision by leaders at Time 1 and either self-assessed adaptivity among employees at Time 1 \((r = .09, p > .05)\) or twelve months later at Time 2, \((r = .02, p > .05)\). However, they did observe that leader vision interacted with employee openness to
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role changes to predict adaptivity. Specifically, those who observed leaders with a clear vision at Time 1 but were not open to a role change at Time 1 reported the lowest adaptivity at Time 2. In contrast, those who both assessed leaders with a clear vision at Time 1 and were open to a role change at Time 1 reported the highest level of adaptivity. Griffin et al. (2010) concluded that transformational visions presented by leaders may not be sufficient in isolation to prompt adaptive performance among employees. However, where employees are already predisposed to embrace the changes being suggested, a clear and compelling vision presented by leaders can act as a catalyst to disrupt the status quo and accelerate an employee’s adaptive performance.

Leadership Training and Social Processes

Other researchers have suggested that leaders may improve the adaptive performance of their teams by supporting effective team processes. Chen et al. (2005) demonstrated the importance of post-training regulation processes in shaping later adaptive performance among 156 individuals on a computerised flight simulator. They found that leaders may play a critical role, particularly in complex environments, in encouraging post-training regulation within their teams by providing transparent tools to measure performance and prompting reflective discussion among employees about those results. In a similar vein, Chiaburu et al. (2013) suggested the importance of supportive leadership to bring out the best in teams, particularly during times of change. Chiaburu et al. (2013) asserted that leadership training during organisational change should focus in equal measure on both change-oriented supportive leadership behaviours, such as being open to suggestions about the change, and involving employees in key-decisions during the change.

Schraub et al. (2011) examined a different process labelled as expressive suppression which they suggested leaders may use to prompt adaptive performance during organisational changes. Schraub et al. (2011) found that those employees who were more likely to suppress spontaneous emotions regarding proposed organisational changes, tended to report less tension associated with proposed changes, and ultimately higher adaptive performance. Schraub et al. (2011) theorised that negative emotions about proposed changes may prolong an employee’s cognitive focus on the unfavourable aspects of a proposed change, which in turn may prolong the emotional detachment that is necessary for adaptive performance. As such, Schraub et al. (2011) asserted that leaders should closely attend to their employee’s subjective experience of change and try where possible to encourage employees to talk in a constructive way about proposed changes. Such an approach would be consistent with promoting employee participation throughout large-scale changes, without allowing that participation to become an opportunity for employees to emotionally vent their frustration. In addition to reducing an individual’s personal adaptive performance, Schraub et al. (2011) suggested that expressing negative emotions regarding a change can also become contagious within work-teams. They suggested that leaders should therefore dissuade employees from reflecting openly on their negative feelings about a change lest they influence others, instead they suggested leaders promote constructive approaches to such conversations.

ORGANISATIONAL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

With many teams forced to work remotely due to COVID restrictions, a major challenge for leaders is to maintain a positive working culture that promotes adaptability. A small number of studies reviewed by
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Park and Park (2019) make recommendations regarding the optimal organisational context for employee adaptive performance to occur. Recommendations from these studies include promoting a team culture of learning, promoting an organisational climate for innovation and learning, and adopting an organic organisational structure.

Team norms appear to influence how individual team members engage in adaptive performance. In a study of service employees, Han and Williams (2008) investigated how their team’s learning climate influenced both individual and team performance. They characterized learning climate as norms relating to openness to change and new ideas, tolerance of mistakes, and high-performance expectations and accountability. They found that strong team norms were associated with individual (but not team) adaptive performance. Based on these results, they suggested selecting and developing employees who were likely to succeed in such an environment, and they also recommended fostering a learning climate within teams.

In a similar vein, Charbonnier-Voirin et al. (2010) discussed how a climate for innovation influenced adaptive performance. Similar to learning climate, they depicted a climate for innovation as one that comprised norms and practices that encouraged flexibility, the free expression of creative ideas, ongoing learning, and independence and empowerment to achieve the team’s goals. Although they failed to observe a direct benefit of innovation climate on adaptive performance, their findings revealed that transformational leaders were even more effective in facilitating adaptive performance amongst their employees when they worked in such a climate. They similarly recommended supporting a climate for innovation within organizations, although this study (nor the previous one) provided clear guidance about how such a climate might be achieved.

Other researchers have elaborated on this issue and made more specific recommendations. After observing a robust relationship between a learning climate and employee adaptive performance, Eldor and Harpaz (2016) outlined several recommendations. They suggested that leaders should encourage employees to learn, facilitate knowledge exchanges and collaborations, involve employees in crafting an organisational vision, and empower employees within their roles. These authors also observed that employee engagement mediated the relationship between learning climate and adaptivity. They therefore made recommendations for enhancing engagement, including leaders playing a role in facilitating (as opposed to managing) performance, and helping employees to re-craft their roles to accommodate externally driven changes.

Research has also examined how organizational structure influences an organization’s learning culture. Kanten et al. (2015) described learning culture as a type of organisation that encourages employees to engage in ongoing learning activities, and one that proactively develops strategies to encourage learning. They compared employees who reported working for organisations with a mechanistic structure (i.e., one that is highly formalised, standardised, hierarchical, and centralised, with inflexible job roles, policies, practices and procedures) versus those with an organic structure (i.e., one that is flat, flexible, adaptable and informal). They found that both types of structure had a positive influence on an organisation’s learning culture, which in turn facilitated employees’ adaptive performance. Thus, these authors recommended developing a structure (either mechanistic or organic) that best suited the relevant internal and external conditions faced by the organization, as well as taking steps to facilitate a learning culture.
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DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the context of COVID-19, there is no single intervention that will ensure the adaptability of a workforce. Instead, the collection of studies reviewed in Park and Park (2019) suggest that a multifaceted approach is needed, and that leaders should consider a range of interventions, including improvements to organisational systems, work design, leader behaviour, and organisational culture. We present a summary of these interventions in Table 1.

While the evidence from the studies reviewed in this chapter suggests that many of the interventions will increase adaptive performance, we urge practitioners to observe several cautions when considering each for implementation. First, none of the studies reviewed in this chapter were conducted in the context of COVID-19. Thus, it is unclear how contextual differences in each of the studies will influence the applicability of the managerial interventions in the context of COVID-related changes.

Second, contextual differences in the studies – particularly concerning the nature and scope of changes employees were required to adapt to – may limit generalisations about the effectiveness of each intervention. The studies covered a wide range of settings, as well as challenges that employees needed to adapt to. Some of the studies were experimental (e.g., Chen et al., 2005; LePine et al., 2000), requiring a short-term adaptation to changing circumstances. Other studies required employees to seize momentary opportunities (Stewart & Nandkeolyar, 2006). Some studies assessed adaptive performance in a much more general workplace context (e.g., Griffin & Hesketh, 2003), assessing employees’ ability to adapt to the daily changing requirements of their role. Thus, it is unclear precisely which aspects of adaptive performance are most important for managing these situations effectively.

As described by Pulakos et al. (2002), the construct of adaptive performance is quite broad, comprising aspects such as creative problem solving, dealing with uncertain situations, learning new procedures, interpersonal adaptability, handling work stress, and dealing with emergencies. In line with later conceptualisations of adaptive performance (e.g., Griffin et al., 2007), the studies we reviewed mainly focused on the more general, overarching adaptive performance construct. In reality, there may be specific facets of adaptive performance that are more important in some situations. For instance, opportunity seizing among new customers may require adaptability in interpersonal skills. Handling work stress is likely to be important when faced with multiple responsibilities. Thus, interventions to improve general adaptivity may be less useful when more specific characteristics are required to manage different types of disruptions.

Moreover, the body of studies on the antecedents of adaptive performance is relatively small compared to other forms of performance, such as task performance. There is a lack of consistent replication studies on the antecedents of adaptive performance, which means that it is difficult to assess how universally effective specific managerial interventions are likely to be, as well as determine any relevant boundary conditions that may limit their effectiveness.

The majority of studies were non-experimental, and as such, the levels of adaptive performance and antecedent factors were not randomly assigned. These study designs cast some doubt about the direction of causality in some of the findings. For instance, some of the studies reviewed described decision-making and task-scheduling autonomy as antecedents of adaptive performance (e.g., Gostautaite & Buciuniene, 2015). However, it is possible that already high-performing employees will be trusted with greater autonomy by their supervisors because of their adaptivity. Thus, we recommend that practitioners observe caution in applying interventions based on non-experimental research, such as conducting small-scale trials before implementing interventions more broadly.
# Adaptive Performance

In summary, our chapter points to a range of interventions that leaders may implement to support adaptive performance. Here is a summary of managerial interventions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Our Recommendation</th>
<th>Supporting References</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employee Selection</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Select employees based on facets of Conscientiousness (achievement orientation, dependability)</td>
<td>Consider these facets as secondary selection criteria after screening for more well-established measures (e.g., cognitive ability, personality) for specific roles.</td>
<td>Griffin and Hesketh (2005)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Select employees for facets of psychological hardiness, including commitment and (locus of) control</td>
<td>As above</td>
<td>Bartone et al. (2013)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Select employees for cognitive flexibility</td>
<td>As above; use objective measures of cognitive flexibility.</td>
<td>Good (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select employees based on goal congruence with organisational goals</td>
<td>Consider person-organisation fit as a secondary criterion; encourage employees to internalise the importance of organisational goals.</td>
<td>Hauschildt and Konradt (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select employees based on past adaptive performance</td>
<td>Include as a criterion, but assess using validated instruments and/or relevant real-life instances</td>
<td>Charbonnier-Voirin (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training and Performance Management</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop expertise and in-role performance</td>
<td>Provide a mix of formal and informal learning; provide ongoing employee development</td>
<td>Chen et al. (2005); Sahin and Gurbuz (2014)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support the development of individual and team self-regulatory processes</td>
<td>Provide formal training and/or support to help individuals and teams improve self-management</td>
<td>Chen et al. (2005); Hauschildt and Konradt (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modify performance appraisal to consider adaptive performance</td>
<td>Adopt long-term measures of performance; account for variability and situational opportunities / barriers</td>
<td>Charbonnier-Voirin (2012); Griffin et al. (2007; 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retain experienced employees, especially those that have already successfully adapted to change</td>
<td>Retain experienced employees, and enrich employees’ knowledge through diverse work experiences (e.g., job rotations)</td>
<td>Ghitulescu (2013); Sahin and Gurbuz (2014)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Work Design</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide employees with greater autonomy</td>
<td>Provide decision-making and work-scheduling autonomy with appropriate oversight, and when employees are capable of working independently</td>
<td>Ghitulescu (2013); Gostautaite and Buciumene (2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage worker interactions</td>
<td>Encourage and facilitate employee collaboration and social support, but reduce task interdependence</td>
<td>Ghitulescu (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help employees to develop greater self-efficacy</td>
<td>Increase employee capabilities through developmental challenges; develop self-efficacy as a by-product</td>
<td>Bartone et al. (2013); Griffin and Hesketh (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement interventions for encouraging employees to internalise organisational goals</td>
<td>Collaborate with employees to help them set appropriate work goals in line with their own values, long-term ambitions and capabilities</td>
<td>Hauschildt and Konradt (2012); Zhang, Zhang, Song and Gong (2016)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Leader Behaviour and Leader Development</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Adopt transformational leadership behaviours, including a vision and positive attitude towards team’s ability</td>
<td>Support the change readiness of teams, and then present a compelling vision</td>
<td>Charbonnier-Voirin et al. (2010); Griffin et al. (2010)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support team processes and interactions</td>
<td>Encourage post-task reflections, demonstrate support for team members, involve employees in key decisions</td>
<td>Chiaburu et al. (2013)</td>
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<td>Discourage negative expressions of emotions in response to changes</td>
<td>Encourage constructive discussions about change processes and promote employee participation in such discussions</td>
<td>Schraub et al. (2011)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Organisational Climate and Culture</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote a positive team climate for learning</td>
<td>Establish team norms related to openness to change and new ideas, tolerance of mistakes, and high-performance expectations</td>
<td>Han and Williams (2008)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote a climate for innovation</td>
<td>Encourage employees to learn, facilitate knowledge exchanges and collaborations, empower employees within their role, permit employees to re-craft their roles to accommodate change</td>
<td>Charbonnier-Voirin et al. (2010); Eldor and Harpaz (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopt a mechanistic or organic organisational structure to develop a learning culture</td>
<td>Choose the organizational structure that best suits the strategic needs of the organization; work within the structure to develop a learning culture</td>
<td>Kanten, Kanten and Gurlek (2015)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, our chapter points to a range of interventions that leaders may implement to support adaptive performance.
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employees’ adaptive performance during the COVID era. This chapter makes at least three useful contributions to both research and practice. First, as one of the intended audiences of this chapter is practitioners, the chapter should provide a useful overview of interventions for enhancing employee adaptive performance that can be adopted by organisational leaders. Second, our critical review of the managerial implications is likely to provide an impetus for future intervention studies designed to enhance adaptive performance. Finally, while managerial implications are often provided in research articles, they have seldom received critical attention. Our review should help researchers propose more considered interventions that are more likely to be effective.

REFERENCES


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**Adaptive Performance**


**KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

**Adaptive Performance**: Employees’ capabilities to adapt to rapidly changing work situations, which includes elements of problem solving, coping with uncertainty, learning new tasks and procedures, and interpersonal, cultural, and physical adaptability.

**Employee Selection**: The set of procedures and criteria used by employers to choose the optimal person (or people) for a role from a larger pool of candidates.

**Goal Congruence**: The extent to which an individual’s personal goals are consistent with the organization’s goals.

**Job Resources**: Physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job that support work goals, reduce job demands, or support personal and/or professional development.
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- **Organizational Climate:** Shared perceptions regarding the meaning attached to policies, practices, and procedures employees experience.
- **Organizational Culture:** The shared basic assumptions, values, and beliefs that characterize a workplace.
- **Work Design:** The content and organisation of an employee’s work tasks, activities, relationships, and responsibilities.