

Tolerance of Ambiguity: A critical future fit skill for the evolved world of work

Dr Eric Albertini unpacks 'Tolerance of Ambiguity' as one of 15 future fit skills critical to being relevant and advanced in the future of work.

JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA, October 26, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- "[Tolerance of Ambiguity](#)" (TOA) refers to the extent to which individuals are naturally comfortable with ambiguous or uncertain situations and have an ability to operate effectively in an uncertain environment by considering a range of creative solutions or options. Embracing ambiguity allows people to seize opportunities, take calculated risks to tackle previously uncharted territories and back themselves when they do not have all the answers. The reality is that in many situations, complete information is not always readily available – just ask any entrepreneur! An obsession with having all the answers up front before making decisions can stymie any forward movement or progress.

In the workplace, TOA has been linked to improved employee engagement and job satisfaction, less absenteeism and talent churn, and improved mental health and well-being. TOA is also foundational to other critical leadership skills such as dealing with paradox; managing chaos, complexity and randomness; sensemaking and the ability to be resourceful and improvise. The increasing rate of change makes these behavioural outputs of TOA even more critical in business contexts.

What are the attributes of someone with a high TOA?

A model by Paul Skagg identifies the attributes in a person tolerant of ambiguity:

- They are not bound by categorisation or functional fixedness – they see the possibilities beyond their accepted grouping or 'role'.
- Comfortable with uncertainty and able to make intuitive decisions.
- A low fear response to the unfamiliar or change.
- Acceptance of novelty – they are curious and actively seek out new experiences.
- Tolerance for noticing and accepting fluctuating stimuli in the environment or context.
- Delaying selection from multiple solutions – this is about "resistance for closure" whilst seeking



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In the new world of work, Tolerance of Ambiguity is one of 15 critical skills needed in any industry, at every level. ”

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alternative ideas, information, solutions, or conclusions.

Another well-known measure is Budner’s Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale (1965) with three main measures each with sub-scales – and why individuals with TOA can be assets in the workplace:

1. Comfort with Ambiguity - indicates the ease individuals have with ambiguous situations at work, especially relating to relationships, unfamiliar situations, different ways of thinking or difficult problems. This is made up of:

- a. Comfort with difficult problems - even if there is uncertainty about the solution.
- b. Interpersonal Comfort - able to navigate relationships in the workplace.
- c. Multiple perspectives: The ability to view situations as not simply good or bad, right, or wrong, or through stereotypes, but from multiple perspectives.
- d. Comfort with Unfamiliarity: Comfortable in new situations and taking on different work rather than routine and habitual activities.

2. Desire for Challenging Work - an individual desires or embraces complexity and is eager to solve problems and to take risks in work situations. This is made up:

- a. Embracing Complexity: engage in complex work situations and problems in which there is a great number of cues to consider, as opposed to predictable or regular situations.
- b. Embracing Problem Solving Opportunities: embrace unclear or new work assignments with limited information and create structure to solve problems.
- c. Risk Taking Orientation: Attracted to opportunities to take risks and do things never done before, preferring to risk failing, over being bored.

3. Coping with Uncertainty: the mechanisms an individual might use to cope with ambiguity and uncertainty in the workplace including using communication, reasoning and plans to minimise ambiguity.

- a. Desire for Clarity: seeks clarity as a way of managing ambiguity, focusing on straightforward reasoning, communication and a shared understanding of goals.
- b. Comfort with Uncertainty: At ease with situations that are uncertain, open to new ideas, comfortable working with a range of individuals who do not necessarily have all the answers.

Can one be taught to tolerate ambiguity?

Much has been researched and written about how to develop tolerance of ambiguity. The following are eight habits to focus on to develop your TOA:

- Master Mindfulness: Mindfulness is a key trait of TOA, and being able to regulate and control emotions, manage stress and be in the present moment.
- Be Assertive: taking charge and not expecting others to lead are typical in someone with high levels of TOA. They influence others, present their opinions and have a say.
- Focus on What Matters: Minimise distractions and noise and identify and focus your attention

on important tasks.

- **Practice Agility:** the ability to be flexible when change or uncertainty is present in the workplace. Don't get up in small details and accept that perfection is not accessible nor a worthy endeavour.
- **Cultivate Curiosity:** interrelating with others and communicating and listening to co-workers when difficulties arise, asking questions that inspire curiosity and if challenged with resistance from others, asking questions that lead to identifying possible solutions. Collaboration is also important, inspiring participation from others, creating powerful professional relationships and networks for sharing and connecting the ideas of different individuals.
- **Act Courageously:** Courage is exhibited in people who are able to face their fears, step out of their comfort zone and back their own opinions and beliefs. They fight for others, speak the truth even when unpopular and speak their mind freely even if there might be negative consequences. Courageous people are happy with not knowing all the answers.
- **Let go and move on:** don't dwell on errors but to learn from them. People who can let go and move on are able to "unhook" themselves from the past and not dwell on missed opportunities or mistakes.
- **Think Differently:** Learn to think differently, critically and with a design-thinking mindset.

To learn more about the 15 [future fit skills](https://www.futurefitacademy.com/), visit <https://www.futurefitacademy.com/>

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