

Lesson outcome

Learners can use vocabulary related to mindset.

Lead-in

1 Work in pairs. Discuss the questions.

- 1 What do you think you will be doing for work in 2050?
- 2 Where do you think you will be living in 2050?
- 3 What things about the future do you worry about? Why?
- 4 What things do you look forward to in the future? Why?

Reading

2 Match the sentence halves to create ideas from the text. Then read the text to check your answers.

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|---|--|
| 1 Junior staff lack initiative and | a you might miss an opportunity. |
| 2 Companies would be wise | b rely on authority figures to tackle work problems. |
| 3 They can also bolster decision-making | c to support employees in a world of rapid change. |
| 4 If you do not take a decision, | d face both positive and negative possibilities. |
| 5 Individuals must | e by encouraging more diversity of ideas. |

3 Read the article again. Are the sentences **true (T)**, **false (F)** or **doesn't say (DS)**?

- 1 The writer advises us to get over disappointing or challenging events and situations and get used to the unpleasant reality of uncertainty.
- 2 One of the writer's clients complains that young people still depend on their parents to come up with solutions to life's problems.
- 3 Focussing too much on staff resilience reduces the responsibility of companies to foster an environment where employees can learn from trial and error.
- 4 Research shows that cultures that accept uncertainty are more flexible and better at crisis management.
- 5 According to Prof Tuckett, uncertainty can be seen as an opportunity to imagine positive outcomes, although we should be careful not to take the wrong decision.
- 6 When we are over-anxious, we tend to simplify things but learning to deal with complexity is essential.
- 7 The writer says it's best to adopt a realistic attitude and focus on the negative possibilities.

4 Discuss the questions in pairs or small groups.

- 1 Do you agree with this statement in the article? Why / Why not?
'Some worry that practices intended to protect youthful sensitivities, such as "helicopter", or overprotective parenting and "safe spaces", do not equip individuals with the emotional muscle necessary to survive the strong feelings inherent in a harsh future.'
- 2 Which other qualities do you think are essential for professionals if they are to be successful in the future?

Vocabulary

5 What do the words in bold mean in the text? Write the words and choose the best option.

- 1 _____
a the state of feeling anxious or stressed after a difficult situation/event
b ability to become strong, happy, or successful again after a difficult situation/event
- 2 _____
a problems that delay or prevent progress, or make things worse
b events or situations that help progress and make things better
- 3 _____
a when an event or situation doesn't have the outcome that was hoped for
b when a particular event or situation actually happens
- 4 _____
a when someone gradually makes you feel less strong or effective and you lose self-confidence.
b when someone encourages and supports you and bolsters your self-confidence

6 Complete the definitions using the words and phrases in bold in the text. Write 1-2 words in each gap.

- 1 If someone is under _____ from something, there is a strong possibility that something very bad will happen to them.
- 2 When a person _____ the _____ on somebody else, they avoid taking responsibility for what they did.
- 3 The term _____ refers to avoiding situations or events you are not sure about because you do not know what will happen.
- 4 If a situation or event _____ in someone, they start feeling very worried and uncertain.
- 5 A _____ is something that people believe will be frightened of in a way that makes them feel less confident.
- 6 To be under _____ means being worried because of having to deal with a problem or having to work too hard over a long period of time.

7 Complete the sentences using 1-2 words from Exercises 5 and 6. Then discuss them in pairs or small groups.

- 1 Do you prefer to act quickly in a crisis, or do you wait to see how things will _____?
- 2 When was the last time you recovered from an unexpected _____ at work or in your studies? How did you solve the problem?
- 3 Think back to a challenging time in your life. How did it help you to develop _____ and become stronger?
- 4 In what kind of situations are employees under a great deal of psychological _____?
- 5 If you could avoid the _____ prospect of a challenging event in the near future, what would it be?
- 6 'The only certainty is _____.' Does your organisation tend to avoid or accept _____? Think of examples.

Speaking

9A Work in groups of four. You are in charge of a start-up. Decide on the kind of working environment you want to cultivate in your workplace. Chose five most important items from the list:

- adopt a culture of diversity, creativity and innovation
- develop a culture of cooperation and trust
- encourage a culture of uncertainty acceptance
- encourage a culture of uncertainty avoidance

- foster positive thinking and lessen anxiety
- help employees to develop employability skills
- help employees to develop resilience and recover from setbacks
- improve decision-making
- make sure staff are not put under psychological strain
- your own idea(s)

B Discuss and decide on the strategies you will implement to create the working environment you have chosen. Present your ideas.

FT

Resilience is essential to thrive in an unpredictable future

Uncertainty puts humans under psychological strain.

It is impossible to predict the future, but it seems reasonable to assume that disruption will continue apace. This puts humans under huge **psychological strain**: we must accept that failure is always a possibility, decisions are often flawed, errors inevitable and the only certainty is uncertainty.

Such **daunting prospects** can **trigger anxiety** and feelings of inadequacy — as well as fear, disappointment and loss. An ability to make the best possible decisions in this climate, develop resilience to face new realities, recover from **setbacks** and tolerate these uncomfortable emotions will be essential for professionals if they are to be successful in 2050 and beyond.

Some worry that practices intended to protect youthful sensitivities, such as ‘helicopter’, or overprotective parenting and ‘safe spaces’, do not equip individuals with the emotional muscle necessary to survive the strong feelings inherent in a harsh future.

A client of mine in his thirties who founded a successful start-up has such concerns after observing junior staff, who, he argues, lack initiative and rely on authority figures to tackle work problems. ‘People are waiting for things to happen to them rather than saying, “This is my career, I’m going to chart my own course”,’ he says. ‘You’re never going to get a level of innovation when it comes to problem solving because your mindset isn’t pushing you forward.’

Companies would be wise, however, to support employees in a world of rapid change. An overemphasis on personal resilience can deflect from a company’s responsibility to create cultures that allow staff to try and fail. They can also bolster decision-making by encouraging more diversity of ideas.

This was foreshadowed in 1980 by Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede in his book, *Culture’s Consequences*. Hofstede distinguishes between ‘**uncertainty avoidance**’ cultures and ‘uncertainty acceptance’ ones. The former are characterised by highly anxious and emotive individuals who react as if under **constant threat**, are intolerant of differences and rely heavily on regulations. In contrast, ‘uncertainty acceptance’ cultures are open to diversity, allow flexibility and are quicker to accept innovations and new technologies.

Uncertainty can be embraced as an opportunity, says Professor David Tuckett, a psychoanalyst and director of the Centre for the Study of Decision-Making Uncertainty at University College London. He believes individuals can best

prepare for the future by recognising that what they are doing is developing ‘imaginaries’ — stories that people create of which they cannot be certain.

Prof Tuckett says: ‘Most decisions of any importance are made in a climate of radical uncertainty. That is to say, they are decisions made about something that has got to play out in a certain amount of time, and at the time you take the decision you have no way of knowing how it will play out.’

When you make any of these decisions, he says, you will have to bear in mind that the decision might go wrong. But if you do not take a decision, you might miss an opportunity, he adds. He warns that reliance on artificial intelligence in decision-making is likely to be unreliable.

Computers lack basic human qualities such as common sense, intuition, imagination, cooperation and trust, he argues. Humans apply rules flexibly and can improvise robustly, whereas computers are essentially rules-based and fragile.

Uncertainty breeds anxiety. In order to lessen anxiety many people attempt to simplify situations, but this only leads to a distortion of reality and bad decisions. Learning to tolerate complexity, therefore, is crucial in facing an uncertain future.

To prepare for this unpredictability, individuals must face both positive and negative possibilities and remember that feelings can be misleading. Although the prospect of success breeds excitement, failure often results in despair. Allowing either extreme to take over can be risky.

For example, while cultivating optimism promotes creativity, too much might obscure potential obstacles. Pessimism alone, however, risks killing ideas before they reach fruition. Maintaining ambitions while having an awareness of pitfalls is the most advantageous position to adopt.

Individuals need to be honest about their part in setbacks. **Pushing all the blame** on to outside forces avoids recognising **blind spots**. Conversely, seeing all the fault in ourselves can leave us devastated. Avoid black-and-white explanations and recognise there are multiple factors that contribute to outcomes. It is often our own internal voices rather than external realities that **undermine** our ambitions.

Work on curbing overly self-critical thoughts, be more compassionate to yourself and remember your accomplishments. The uncertain and challenging times ahead require imagination, resilience and trust in oneself.