

TEACHING TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Instructor Resource Guide

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THE VALUE OF ESSENTIAL SKILLS

Higher education is evolving to prepare students for an unpredictable and rapidly changing world. While content knowledge remains important, research consistently shows that students also need transferable skills – such as communication, critical thinking, and teamwork – to navigate professional and civic life successfully (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2021). The ten essential skills outlined in this resource guide equip students with the competencies they need to approach complex problems, collaborate effectively, and adapt to new challenges.

Employers emphasize these skills as crucial for career readiness. Surveys from the AAC&U and NACE highlight that strong communication, problem-solving, and teamwork abilities are among the most sought-after competencies in the workforce (AAC&U, 2022). Yet, many students and instructors alike struggle with how to explicitly teach and assess these skills in coursework. This guide provides practical strategies for integrating skill development into course design, ensuring students not only learn content but also gain the ability to apply it effectively.

Designing Courses with Skills in Mind

A crucial step in integrating essential skills into coursework is aligning them with course learning objectives. Well-written learning objectives help students see the relevance of skill development and provide clear expectations for how they will engage with and demonstrate these skills.

Prompts to Encourage Skill-Based Learning Design

- How can students practice applying this concept in a novel situation?
- In what ways can students demonstrate their understanding beyond traditional exams or papers?
- How can students reflect on their skill development and articulate their growth?

Guidelines for Writing Learning Objectives that Incorporate Skills

- Use Bloom's Taxonomy to frame objectives in terms of cognitive processes (e.g., analyze, evaluate, create).
- Be explicit about the skill being developed alongside the content.
- Use active verbs that align with measurable outcomes.
- Connect the skill to real-world applications or discipline-specific challenges.

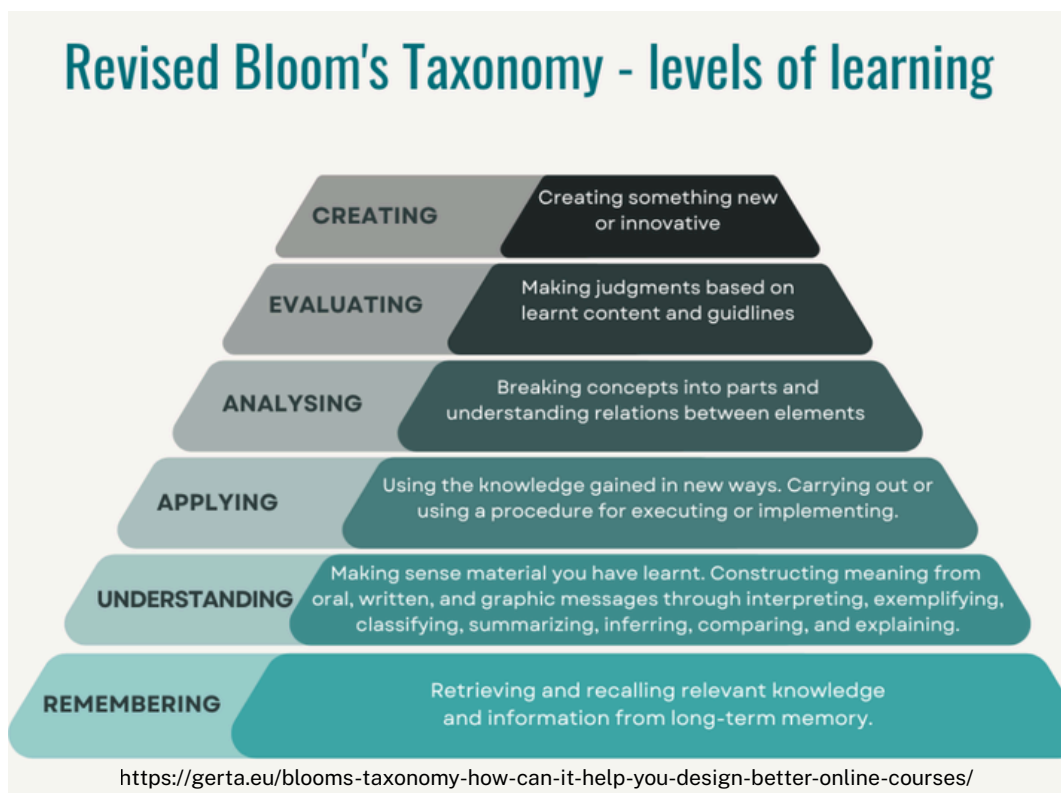
Instead of: *Students will understand research methods in sociology.*

Try: *Students will evaluate and communicate research findings through clear, structured written reports and oral presentations.*

Instead of: *Students will learn about ethical dilemmas in business.*

Try: *Students will analyze ethical dilemmas and articulate well-reasoned responses using professional and persuasive communication strategies.*

By intentionally crafting learning objectives that integrate essential skills, instructors can create a more meaningful and applied learning experience for students.



USING AI TO SUPPORT SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Why AI Matters in Skill Development

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming the way we learn, work, and communicate. While AI tools offer powerful ways to enhance problem-solving, streamline workflows, and support decision-making, they are most effective when used strategically and reflectively. Developing AI literacy is an essential component of career readiness, allowing students to use AI ethically, critically evaluate its outputs, and integrate AI-generated insights with human expertise (Mollick & Mollick, 2023).

Rather than viewing AI as a shortcut or replacement for essential skills, students should be encouraged to engage with AI as a cognitive partner, helping them build, refine, and reflect on their competencies. This section outlines how AI can support learning and skill development while reinforcing the importance of human judgment, creativity, and ethical reasoning in its use.

Approaches to AI Use as a Skill

Students and educators can leverage AI in three primary ways to support the development of essential skills:



Thought Partner

AI can help generate ideas, provide alternative perspectives, and refine arguments by offering structured prompts and insights



Research & Analysis Tool

AI can assist in finding patterns, summarizing complex information, and identifying trends across large datasets.



Skill Reflection & Improvement

AI can offer feedback on writing, communication, and critical thinking, helping students reflect on their work and refine their skills.



Essential Skill 5

ADAPT TO CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES WHILE LEADING AND SUPPORTING OTHERS

Graduates will have learned how to accept change and find effective ways to work and thrive in different settings. They will learn to motivate others in the pursuit of a common goal and to coach others in pursuit of this goal.

Essential Skill 5

ADAPTABILITY & LEADERSHIP

Why It Matters

Adaptability and leadership are essential for success in today's fast-changing world. The ability to adjust to new circumstances, navigate uncertainty, and guide others through change is crucial in both professional and personal settings. Research shows that adaptable individuals are more resilient, perform better in dynamic workplaces, and contribute positively to team environments (Pulakos et al., 2000).

Effective leadership goes beyond directing others. It involves motivating, coaching, and supporting teammates to overcome challenges together. Strong leaders are flexible problem-solvers who navigate ambiguity, model resilience, and help others build confidence in uncertain situations (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). By developing adaptability and leadership skills, students become well-equipped to take initiative, foster collaboration, and thrive in diverse environments.

Integrating This Skill into Your Course

Students benefit from structured opportunities to practice adaptability and leadership in real-world and simulated contexts. Consider the following strategies:

- **Encourage reflection on past challenges and changes.** Ask students to analyze times they adapted to change or supported others through uncertainty, helping them recognize their existing skills.
- **Use problem-based and scenario learning.** Present students with dynamic case studies, requiring them to adjust strategies in response to shifting conditions.
- **Foster leadership within group work.** Assign rotating leadership roles in teams, encouraging students to support and guide peers in collaborative projects.
- **Model adaptability in instruction.** Demonstrate flexibility in course structure, allowing students to navigate uncertainty while maintaining clear goals and expectations.
- **Encourage mentorship and coaching.** Provide opportunities for peer mentorship where students practice coaching and supporting one another through challenges.

By embedding adaptability and leadership development into coursework, instructors help students gain confidence in managing change while positively influencing others.

Addressing Student Buy-In

Some students may feel uncomfortable with ambiguity or unsure about their ability to lead and adapt. To encourage engagement:

- **Normalize uncertainty as a growth opportunity.** Emphasize that learning to navigate change is a skill that can be developed over time.
- **Highlight the real-world value.** Show how adaptability and leadership are among the top competencies employers seek (Pulakos et al., 2000).
- **Encourage a growth mindset.** Reinforce that effective leaders and adaptable individuals aren't born with these skills. Instead, they cultivate them through practice and reflection.
- **Provide low-stakes practice.** Help students build confidence by integrating small, manageable opportunities to lead and adapt before high-pressure situations arise.

By framing adaptability as an achievable and valuable skill, instructors can help students embrace change as an opportunity rather than a barrier.

Ways to Identify Adaptability & Leadership Skill Development in Your Courses

Instructors may already be fostering adaptability and leadership skills through various course elements. Look for:

- **Assignments requiring students to adjust to new information.** Do students revise work based on feedback or changing circumstances?
- **Opportunities for students to support their peers.** Are students coaching, mentoring, or guiding others through challenges?
- **Team projects with shifting roles.** Are students taking on leadership responsibilities within groups, navigating change collaboratively?
- **Engagement with real-world complexity.** Are students working on projects or case studies that require flexibility and problem-solving?

Making these skill-building opportunities explicit helps students recognize their progress in developing adaptability and leadership.

Example Scaffolded Skill Assignment Progression

A structured approach ensures that students build confidence in adapting to change and leading others over time.

Stage	Activity Example
Early Semester	Reflection on personal experiences with change, analyzing case studies of leaders navigating uncertainty.
Mid-Semester	Problem-based learning projects where students develop solutions in evolving scenarios, peer mentorship opportunities.
End of Semester	Capstone leadership experience—students lead a group project, coach peers through challenges, or present an adaptive strategy for a real-world issue.

By scaffolding opportunities for leadership and adaptability throughout a course, instructors help students build skills that will serve them in diverse professional and personal contexts.

References

Avolio, B. J., & Gardner, W. L. (2005). Authentic leadership development: Getting to the root of positive forms of leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16(3), 315-338. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.03.001>

Pulakos, E. D., Arad, S., Donovan, M. A., & Plamondon, K. E. (2000). Adaptability in the workplace: Development of a taxonomy of adaptive performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85(4), 612-624. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.85.4.612>



Essential Skill 5:

Adapt to changing circumstances while leading and supporting others.

Graduates will accept change and find effective ways to work and thrive in different settings. They will motivate others in the pursuit of a common goal and coach others in the pursuit of this goal.

Benchmark College entry	Milestone End of 2 years of college	Capstone Bachelor's degree completion
Describes how people can cooperate to reach a common goal.	Contributes toward achieving a common goal.	Overcomes barriers or obstacles to achieving a common goal, often by providing guidance and support to others.
Explains how new situations may require a change in the way things are done.	Adjusts to new situations by doing things differently and showing a positive mindset.	Responds to and anticipates change by practicing and modeling new strategies and tools to thrive in a dynamic environment.
Recognizes how people are motivated by others to achieve a goal.	Encourages others to persist in achieving goal(s) through changing situations.	Coaches others through changing situations.

Instructional Materials



*Explore adaptable
example activities,
assignments, and
assessments*

Activity

Adaptive Response Reflection

Objective

To help students recognize their own adaptive responses to change, identify internal tensions between flexibility and resolve, and begin building self-awareness about how they navigate uncertainty.

Context

Undergraduate students often experience an internal conflict between the need to adapt to changing circumstances and the desire to stay true to a chosen course of action (Collier & Rosch, 2016). This tension is a natural and productive part of developing adaptability. Research on emotional intelligence and graduate competencies shows that self-awareness is the foundational skill underlying adaptive capacity. Students who can name and reflect on their emotional responses to change are better equipped to navigate it constructively (Turner et al., 2024). This activity invites students to surface that tension through structured reflection before they encounter high-stakes change, establishing a baseline for growth.

Instructions

1. Introduce the Prompt

Present students with the following scenario: You are midway through a group project when a key team member withdraws. The timeline, roles, and deliverable all need to change. Describe a time in your own life when something similar happened, when a plan you were committed to had to change unexpectedly.

2. Individual Written Reflection

Students respond in writing (1–2 pages or a structured journal entry) addressing:

What changed, and what was your first reaction?

What did you do to adjust? What was hardest about adjusting?

Was there a moment where you wanted to stick to your original plan even when it was no longer working? What made it difficult to let go?

What did you learn about yourself in that moment?

3. Small Group Discussion

- In groups of 3–4, students share one insight from their reflection. The group identifies common themes: What made adapting easier? What made it harder?

Activity

Adaptive Response Reflection

4. Whole Class Debrief

Instructor facilitates a brief discussion connecting student experiences to the idea that adaptability is a learnable skill, not a fixed personality trait, and that noticing our resistance to change is actually the first step toward developing it (De Arment et al., 2013).

TIPS



- **Validate the tension.** Share examples like: “I really believed in my original plan and it was hard to let it go, but stepping back helped me see a better option.” Normalizing internal conflict is key at this level.
- **Connect to the real world.** Remind students that employers consistently cite adaptability as among the most valued professional competencies (Pulakos et al., 2000).
- **Use this as a diagnostic.** Students’ reflections will reveal a lot about where they are in their development, so look for opportunities to acknowledge growth without evaluating personal history.
- **Keep it low stakes.** This is a starting point. Emphasize that there are no right answers, only honest and sometimes vulnerable ones.

Activity

Example Assessment

Written Reflection and Discussion Participation

Written reflection and group discussion participation

Criteria	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing	Needs Improvement
Self-Awareness of Response to Change	Clearly articulates emotional and behavioral response to unexpected change with specific detail	Describes response to change with some specificity	Mentions change but with limited reflection on personal response	No meaningful reflection on personal response
Recognition of Internal Tension	Thoughtfully identifies the conflict between adapting and staying the course; connects to personal values or commitments	Acknowledges tension between flexibility and resolve	Mentions difficulty adapting but without depth	No recognition of internal tension
Insight and Growth Orientation	Draws clear lesson from experience; frames challenge as a learning opportunity	Identifies at least one takeaway from the experience	Reflection is present but surface-level	No evidence of learning orientation
Participation in Discussion	Actively contributes to group; engages with peers' experiences constructively	Shares at least one insight; responds to peers	Minimal engagement in group discussion	Does not participate

AI-Supported Activity

Simulating Adaptive Conversations

Objective

To help students practice recognizing and articulating their adaptive responses in a low-stakes simulated environment before applying those skills with real peers.

Context

Early skill development benefits enormously from repeated, varied practice, which is a core principle of adaptive expertise development (De Arment et al., 2013). AI tools can serve as a practice environment where students encounter change scenarios, experiment with different responses, and receive immediate feedback without the social stakes of peer interaction. This is particularly useful at the Benchmark level, where students may still feel uncertain about discussing their responses to change. The goal is not to replace human interaction but to build enough fluency and confidence that students can engage more meaningfully when they do.

Instructions

1. Scenario Selection

- Students choose a scenario from the following options (or the instructor may assign one discipline-specific scenario):
 - Your research project just lost its primary data source two weeks before the deadline.
 - You have been asked to lead a group for the first time, and the group is not responding to your approach.
 - A course requirement has significantly changed mid-semester.

2. AI Interaction

Using a chatbot (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity), students paste in the prompt template. They engage in at least 3 exchanges, practicing articulating what they would do and why.

AI-Supported Activity

Simulating Adaptive Conversations

3. Reflection Writing

After the AI interaction, students write a brief reflection:

What response did you first give, and how did the AI challenge or affirm it?

Did you find yourself wanting to resist the change in the scenario? What did that feel like?

What strategy felt most natural? What strategy felt hardest?

What will you try differently when a real unexpected change comes your way?

4. Peer Sharing

- In small groups, students share one surprising insight from their AI conversation.

TIPS



- Encourage students to try at least two different responses to the same scenario and compare what the AI says.
- Remind students that AI simulations are starting points, not perfect replications of real situations.
- Have students bring their most interesting AI exchange to class for discussion.

AI-Supported Activity

Prompt Template (for Student Use)

"I am practicing how to respond adaptively when plans change unexpectedly. Please role-play as a classmate or colleague presenting me with the following situation: [paste scenario]. After I respond, push back, ask me to explain my reasoning, suggest what might go wrong, or introduce a new complication. Help me practice thinking flexibly and staying constructive under pressure."

Follow-up Questions to Ask

After the AI provides an initial response, students should practice asking specific follow-up questions to gain deeper understanding and clarity about their adaptive response.

Adapting to Change

- What might go wrong with my plan if circumstances change again?
- What would a more experienced person do differently here?

Supporting Others

- How could I support a teammate who is struggling with this change?
- What's the biggest assumption I'm making in my response?

Flexibility vs. Resolve

- When is it right to stick to your original plan?
- How do you know when it's time to let go and try something different?

Mindset & Growth

- What does it look like to stay positive and constructive when things don't go as planned?
- How can you use this challenge as a learning opportunity?

Activity

Example Assessment

AI Conversation Transcript and Written Reflection

Reflection prompts:

What did the AI challenge you on that you hadn't considered?

What response felt most authentic to how you actually handle change?

What is one strategy you want to practice with a real person this semester?

Criteria	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing	Needs Improvement
Engagement with AI Scenario	Sustains at least 3 thoughtful exchanges that directly address the change scenario	Completes 3 exchanges; some are vague	Fewer than 3 exchanges or minimal depth	No meaningful engagement
Recognition of Adaptive Tension	Clearly identifies the pull between sticking with original plan and adapting; reflects on this honestly	Notes difficulty adapting in general terms	Mentions the scenario challenge but without personal connection	No reflection on internal tension
Reflection Quality	Insightful analysis of AI interaction; connects to real future situations	Identifies at least one useful takeaway	Reflection is vague or surface-level	No meaningful reflection submitted
Strategy Identification	Articulates at least two specific strategies for responding adaptively; evaluates their strengths	Identifies one strategy with some explanation	Names a strategy but without evaluation	No strategies identified

Activity

Rotating Leadership Under Uncertainty

Objective

To develop students' ability to adjust to changing conditions while actively supporting and motivating others, practicing the shift between leading and following as circumstances evolve.

Context

At the Milestone level, adaptability becomes relational. Students must not only adjust their own approach but help others do the same. Collier and Rosch (2016) found that students at this developmental stage wrestle with a core leadership tension of how to support others while also exercising appropriate direction. Peer mentorship research shows that structured opportunities to guide peers through challenges benefit both the mentor and the mentee, building confidence, communication skills, and mutual accountability on both sides (Jariwala et al., 2023). This activity puts students in rotating leadership roles within a scenario that deliberately shifts mid-activity, requiring them to practice both leading and following through change.

Instructions

1. Form Teams and Assign a Challenge

Place students in groups of 4–5. Assign a complex, ambiguous challenge relevant to your discipline (e.g., design a community response to a local issue; develop a revised plan for a failed project; create a proposal for an unexpected resource constraint). Each challenge should have enough complexity that there is no single obvious solution.

2. Establish Rotating Leadership Rounds

Divide the challenge into 3 rounds. Each round has a designated leader responsible for guiding the group's work. The other team members actively support and follow. Rotate the leader each round.

Activity

Rotating Leadership Under Uncertainty

3. Introduce a Mid-Activity Change

At the start of Round 2, the instructor introduces an unexpected change to the challenge (e.g., one constraint has been removed but a new one added; a key piece of information has changed; the deliverable format has shifted). The Round 2 leader must guide the team through this pivot while keeping them motivated and on track.

4. Debrief with Structured Peer Feedback

After all three rounds, each team holds a structured debrief using sentence stems:

- One strength you brought to the team when things changed was...
- One area where I saw you stretch yourself was...
- One thing I will do differently when I lead through change is...

5. Individual Reflection

Each student submits a short reflection addressing:

- When the change was introduced, what was your first instinct and did you act on it?
- How did you support your teammates when the ground shifted?
- What did you notice about how others responded to change that surprised you?

TIPS



- Brief the leaders before their round and remind them that guiding through change means keeping people's energy and focus intact, not just solving the problem yourself.
- Normalize struggle. If a team is visibly stuck when the change hits, that is the learning moment. Resist the urge to rescue them, and ask instead: "What does the leader need to do right now?"
- Revisit the debrief stems if the discussion becomes vague. Push for specificity: "Can you give an example of when you saw that?"
- Tie the activity to the real world. Research shows that adaptive, emotionally intelligent employees are among the most valuable in dynamic workplaces (Turner et al., 2024).

Activity

Example Assessment

Completed Peer Feedback Form and Individual Reflection

Peer feedback form and individual reflection

Criteria	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing	Needs Improvement
Adaptive Leadership in Role	Demonstrates clear ability to adjust approach mid-activity; keeps team focused and motivated through change	Adjusts approach when prompted; maintains team engagement with some consistency	Struggles to shift approach when change is introduced; limited awareness of team's needs	Resists change or disengages when scenario shifts
Support of Others Through Change	Actively encourages and supports teammates; recognizes when others are struggling and responds constructively	Offers support to peers in general terms; responds when asked	Minimal effort to support others during the transition	Does not support teammates through the change
Peer Feedback Quality	Provides specific, respectful, and constructive feedback with clear examples	Provides feedback with some specificity and respectful tone	Feedback is vague or general	Feedback missing or dismissive
Reflection Depth	Thoughtfully analyzes own leadership and followership responses; connects to future applications	Identifies at least one strength and one area for growth	Reflection is present but surface-level	No meaningful reflection submitted

AI-Supported Activity

AI-Facilitated Change Coaching Practice

Objective

To help students practice coaching a peer through an unexpected change, using AI to build fluency and confidence before applying the skill in a real team context.

Context

Coaching others through change is a distinct skill from adapting personally. It requires empathy, clear communication, and the ability to stay calm while helping someone else navigate uncertainty. Research on peer mentorship shows that students who practice coaching in structured, low-stakes environments develop stronger interpersonal leadership skills and are more confident in authentic mentoring interactions (Jariwala et al., 2023). AI can serve as a stand-in peer (one who may resist, deflect, or struggle) giving students repeated practice with a range of emotional responses before the higher stakes of real peer work.

Instructions

1. Draft an Initial Coaching Message

Each student writes a short coaching message to a fictional peer who is struggling with an unexpected change (e.g., Your team just lost a key member right before your final presentation. You can see your peer is panicking and wants to give up. What do you say?).

2. AI Role-Play Conversation

Using a chatbot, students paste in the prompt template. The AI responds as the struggling peer. Students must continue the dialogue through at least 3 exchanges, practicing how to motivate, refocus, and support without taking over.

3. Revise and Reflect

After the AI conversation, students revise their initial coaching message based on what they learned. They write a short reflection on what they adjusted and why.

4. Real Peer Application

Students bring their refined coaching strategies into the Lead the Pivot activity (or another team context), applying what they practiced with the AI to a real peer interaction.

AI-Supported Activity

Prompt Template (for Student Use)

"Please role-play as a student on my team who is feeling overwhelmed and discouraged because of an unexpected change to our project. Respond as someone who might resist my suggestions, express frustration, or doubt their ability to contribute. I will practice motivating and coaching you through this. After each of my responses, continue the role-play realistically (e.g. push back, ask questions, or gradually respond to what I'm offering)."

Follow-up Questions to Ask

After the AI provides an initial response, students should practice asking specific follow-up questions to deepen their coaching approach and test different strategies.

Motivating Others

- What would actually help you feel more confident right now?
- What part of the change feels hardest and what would make it feel more manageable?

Redistribution of Work

- What can I take off your plate so you can focus on what you do well?
- How can we restructure the work so everyone can still contribute?

Staying Constructive

- How can I acknowledge your frustration while still keeping us moving forward?
- What would a respectful way to reset our team expectations look like?

Building Confidence

- What do you need from me as a teammate right now?
- What's one small step you could take that would help you feel back on track?

TIPS



- Encourage students to try a directive approach and a supportive approach in separate conversations and compare the results.
- Remind students that real peers may respond differently than the AI. The goal is to build a toolkit of strategies, not a script.
- Have students share examples of coaching language that worked well, build a class resource of effective phrases.

Activity

Example Assessment

Initial Coaching Message, Revised Coaching Message, AI Transcript, and Reflection

Reflection prompts:

What did I learn about phrasing coaching responses constructively?

How did the AI's responses challenge me to adapt my tone or strategy?

What approach will I apply in real peer interactions this semester?

Criteria	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing	Needs Improvement
Coaching Message Quality	Initial and revised message are specific, empathetic, and actionable; clear improvement between drafts	Message is supportive with some specificity; revision shows some growth	Message is general or directive without empathy; limited revision	No meaningful coaching message produced
AI Engagement	Sustains 3+ thoughtful exchanges; adapts approach based on AI's responses	Completes 3 exchanges; limited adaptation	Fewer than 3 exchanges or shallow responses	No meaningful engagement
Reflection Quality	Insightful analysis of what changed between drafts and why; connects to real peer application	Identifies at least one useful adjustment and its rationale	Reflection is vague or incomplete	No reflection submitted
Transfer to Real Peer Context	Clearly describes how AI practice informed their approach in real team interactions	Notes at least one connection to real teamwork	Vague or incomplete connection	No evidence of transfer

Activity

Adaptive Leadership Plan

Objective

To assess students' ability to anticipate change, develop evidence-based adaptive strategies, and present a leadership plan that guides others through uncertainty toward a shared goal.

Context

At the Capstone level, adaptability and leadership are fully integrated. Students are expected not only to respond to change themselves but to design environments and processes that help others thrive through it. This reflects what Price et al. (2021) describe as nested leadership or the capacity to influence and enable others at multiple levels. The Master Adaptive Learner framework (Gisondi et al., 2020) describes the most sophisticated adaptive learners as those who plan proactively, assess continuously, and adjust deliberately, which are skills that define adaptive leadership in professional contexts. This capstone activity asks students to apply all of these capacities to a real challenge in their field, community, or institution.

Instructions

1. Identify a Real Change Challenge

Each student (or small team of 2–3) identifies a real, current challenge in their field, organization, campus community, or discipline that involves navigating significant uncertainty or change. Examples: a department restructuring, a policy shift affecting a student organization, a technology transition in a professional setting, or a community response to a new development.

2. Research and Analysis

Students research the context, stakeholders, and existing responses to the challenge. They identify what is known, what is uncertain, and where the greatest adaptive demands are for themselves and for others involved.

Activity

Adaptive Leadership Plan

3. Develop an Adaptive Leadership Plan

Each student/team produces a written Adaptive Leadership Plan that includes: a clear description of the change challenge and its stakes; an analysis of how different stakeholders are likely to respond; at least three specific evidence-based strategies for guiding others through the uncertainty; a personal leadership reflection; and an honest assessment of what could go wrong and how they would adapt.

4. Present, Receive Feedback, and Reflect

Students present their plans to the class (or a panel). Peers and the instructor provide structured feedback. Students then submit a final reflection on their growth across the semester.

TIPS



- Encourage students to choose challenges they genuinely care about, because investment impacts engagement at this level.
- Remind students that this plan does not need to be perfect. The quality of the thinking, not the outcome, is what is assessed.
- Connect to the professional world. Research consistently shows that the ability to lead adaptively through change is among the highest-value competencies in every sector (Pulakos et al., 2000; De Arment et al., 2013).
- Provide scaffolded check-in points (e.g. a one-page proposal, a rough draft, and a practice run before the final presentation) so students build iteratively rather than all at once.

Activity

Example Assessment

Written Adaptive Leadership Plan, Presentation, and Final Reflection

Criteria	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing	Needs Improvement
Challenge Analysis	Demonstrates nuanced, evidence-informed understanding of the change challenge and its adaptive demands	Analyzes the challenge with some evidence and stakeholder awareness	Description of challenge is present but lacks depth or evidence	Challenge is vague or poorly defined
Adaptive Strategy Development	Three or more strategies are specific, evidence-based, and clearly connected to the needs of others	At least two strategies with some evidence and connection to others	Strategies are present but general or not well-grounded	No clear strategies articulated
Leadership Self-Awareness	Thoughtfully reflects on personal strengths, growth edges, and potential failure points; demonstrates genuine self-knowledge	Identifies at least one strength and one challenge; some reflection on failure	Self-reflection is present but surface-level	No meaningful self-reflection
Presentation & Final Reflection	Communicates plan clearly and persuasively; engages with feedback; final reflection demonstrates meaningful growth	Presents plan with clarity; engages with some feedback; identifies growth in at least one area	Presentation present but lacks clarity or engagement; reflection is vague	Does not present or engage with feedback; no meaningful final reflection

AI-Supported Activity

AI-Assisted Scenario Planning for Adaptive Leadership

Objective

To help students stress-test their Adaptive Leadership Plan by using AI to generate alternative scenarios, challenge assumptions, and identify blind spots before their final presentation.

Context

Master adaptive learners are distinguished not just by their ability to respond to change but by their capacity to anticipate it — to plan under uncertainty, assess continuously, and adjust deliberately (Gisondi et al., 2020). Using AI as a scenario-planning partner helps students practice exactly this. Rather than treating AI as an answer generator, this activity positions it as a productive challenger — one that surfaces possibilities and complications students may not have considered, strengthening the evidence base and adaptability of their plans.

Instructions

1. Input the Challenge

Students paste a summary of their change challenge and proposed leadership plan into a chatbot.

2. Generate Alternative Scenarios

Using the prompt template below, students ask AI to generate at least 3 alternative scenarios or ways the situation could unfold differently than expected. For each scenario, the AI should identify what adaptive demands would change and what the leader would need to do differently.

3. Team Deliberation and Plan Revision

Students evaluate the AI-generated scenarios, identifying which assumptions in their original plan are most vulnerable. They revise at least one element of their plan in response.

4. Document and Reflect

Students document the AI scenarios, their deliberation process, and the specific revision they made. The final reflection addresses: Which scenario surprised you most and why? What assumption were you most reluctant to question? How did this process change how you think about preparing for change?

AI-Supported Activity

Prompt Template (for Student Use)

"I am developing an adaptive leadership plan for the following change challenge: [describe challenge and your proposed strategies]. Please generate at least 3 alternative scenarios for how this situation could unfold differently than I expect. For each scenario, describe what new adaptive demands it would create for a leader and what strategies would be most important. Then identify the two or three assumptions in my plan that seem most vulnerable."

Follow-up Questions to Ask

After the AI provides alternative scenarios, students should practice asking specific follow-up questions to probe their plan's assumptions and strengthen their adaptive strategies.

Alternative Scenarios	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would my plan look like if the timeline was cut in half? • What if a key stakeholder withdrew their support?
Vulnerable Assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What evidence would tell me early that my plan needs to change? • What am I assuming will stay the same that might not?
Stakeholder Responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What stakeholders might respond in ways I haven't planned for? • How would I adjust my approach if resistance was stronger than expected?
Blind Spots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What blind spots do leaders often have in situations like this? • If my primary strategy fails, what would be the next best option?

TIPS



- Remind students that the goal is not to have AI fix their plan but to strengthen their own thinking.
- Encourage them to push back on AI suggestions. If a scenario seems unlikely, make the case for why. That reasoning is itself valuable.
- Have students share the most challenging scenario the AI generated and discuss as a class: how would different leadership approaches hold up?

Activity

Example Assessment

AI Scenario Document, Plan Revision, and Reflection

- Reflection questions:
- Which AI-generated scenario did you find most challenging, and why?
- What did your team add, challenge, or change about the AI's output?
- How did the scenario planning process change your approach to your final presentation?

Criteria	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing	Needs Improvement
Engagement with AI Scenarios	Critically evaluates all 3 scenarios; identifies specific vulnerabilities in original plan	Engages with 2–3 scenarios; notes at least one vulnerability	Acknowledges scenarios but without critical engagement	Accepts AI output uncritically or does not engage
Plan Revision Quality	Revision is specific, well-reasoned, and clearly strengthened by the scenario exercise	At least one meaningful revision with some rationale	Revision is present but vague or minor	No revision made
Reflection Depth	Insightful analysis of assumptions challenged and growth in adaptive thinking	Identifies at least one useful shift in thinking	Reflection is vague or surface-level	No meaningful reflection
Evidence-Based Leadership	Final plan demonstrates strengthened evidence base and anticipatory thinking	Plan includes some evidence and forward-looking consideration	Limited evidence or foresight in plan	No evidence base or anticipatory thinking

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Additional Resources

Essential Skill 5: Adaptability & Leadership

Podcasts

“Learning in Uncertainty” Teaching in Higher Ed Podcast

<https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast/learning-in-uncertainty/>

“Designing for the Uncertain Fall” Teaching in Higher Ed Podcast

<https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast/designing-for-the-uncertain-fall/>

“The Transformative Power of Transversal Skills” Teaching in Higher Ed Podcast

<https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast/the-transformative-power-of-transversal-skills/>

“How — and When — to Adapt Your Leadership Style” HBR On Leadership Adaptive Leadership with Ron Heifetz” Harvard Kennedy School Podcast

<https://www.hks.harvard.edu/podcasts>

Web Resources & Articles

“Leadership” EDUCAUSE Review

<https://er.educause.edu/channels/leadership>

“Leadership for Digital Transformation” EDUCAUSE Review

<https://er.educause.edu/articles/2022/2/leadership-for-digital-transformation>

“Self-Efficacy in College Teaching” Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching

https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/59/vol15no7_self_efficacy.htm

“Seven Strategies to be an Adaptive Instructor” Faculty Focus

<https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/philosophy-of-teaching/embracing-change-without-breaking-stride-seven-strategies-to-be-an-adaptive-instructor/>

“Increase Faculty Resilience with Co-regulation Skills” Faculty Focus

<https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/philosophy-of-teaching/increase-faculty-resilience-with-co-regulation-skills/>

“How Leaders Get Through Tough Times: Six Strategies for Building Resilience” Faculty Focus

<https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/academic-leadership/how-leaders-get-through-tough-times-six-strategies-for-building-resilience/>

“Coaching People: 4 Skills for Leaders | How to Coach Others” Center for Creative Leadership

<https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/what-it-takes-to-coach-your-people/>

“The 6 Principles of Leadership Coaching, Based on Assessment” Center for Creative Leadership

<https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/the-six-principles-of-leadership-coaching/>