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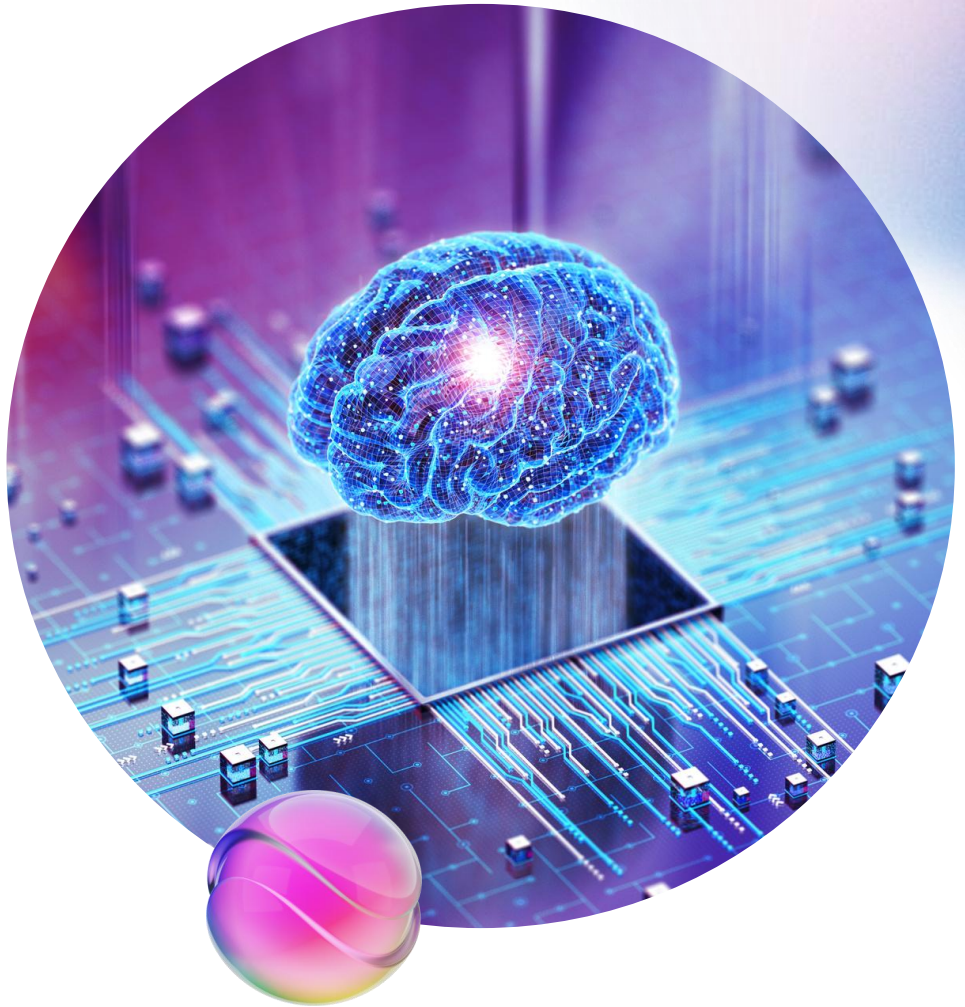
Roadmap for Today:

- Motivation & Project Overview
- Primary Learnings from …
  - Literature
  - Employer interviews
  - Student focus groups
  - Faculty perspectives from the CABS workshop
  - Curriculum mapping from AMBS data
- Implications & Discussion
- Next Steps



Why This Conversation Matters

1. **WHY?** Graduates need to apply knowledge across changing academic, professional and social contexts (Olesen et al., 2021; Tuononen et al., 2022).
2. **WHAT?** Core transferable skills include critical thinking, communication, collaboration, adaptability, digital literacy and ethical reasoning (García-Álvarez et al., 2022; WEF, 2025).
3. **HOW?** These skills are often assumed in the curriculum, rather than explicitly taught, evidenced and assessed (Barrie, 2006; Billing, 2007).
4. **NOW?** Gen-AI raises the stakes by changing how students learn, produce work and prepare for employment (Hutson & Ceballos, 2023; Wut et al., 2025).

Our Ongoing Scholarship Project

- The project explores how business education can better develop, evidence and assess transferable skills for lifelong employability.
- It also aligns with **the University of Manchester's 2035 Strategy.**

Our Ongoing Scholarship Project: Three Questions

1. What skills matter? Transferable skills valued by literature, employers, students and academics.

2. Where are they visible? How these skills appear across curriculum, teaching and assessment.

3. How can we best teach and assess them (for more authentic, reflective and workplace-relevant assessment practices in the age of Gen-AI?

Project Design

Design:

a mixed-method project combining literature synthesis, stakeholder engagement and curriculum mapping.

Data collection: data are drawn from literature, employer interviews, student focus groups, academic workshops discussions, and AMBS course unit specifications

Data analysis: we map learning outcomes, teaching activities and assessment against transferable skills frameworks, alongside thematic analysis of stakeholder perspectives.

Outcome: the project identifies gaps between valued, taught and assessed transferable skills, and develops an emerging evidence-informed framework for more authentic, reflective and workplace-relevant assessment.

What are transferrable skills? Which are the most important ones?

From the literature: Which transferrable skills are most important?

- **Transferable skills are valuable** because graduates face changing work and life contexts.
- There is agreement on a **recurring core of skills**.
- The literature increasingly **connects transferable skills to employability**, but not only to first employment. (Choi-Lundberg et al. 2024; Karaca-Atik et al. 2023).
- **Inconsistency in terminology**: “Transferable skills,” “generic skills,” “soft skills,” “transversal competencies,” “21st-century skills,” “core skills,” “graduate attributes,” and “employability skills” are often used interchangeably, but not always with the same assumptions.
- **Measurement is inconsistent and often weak.** lack of robust measures and longitudinal evidence, with many studies relying on self-report or perception-based data rather than direct assessment of demonstrated skill development (García-Álvarez et al. 2022; Tuononen et al. 2022).

Which transferrable skills are most important?

Theme 1: Communication & Collaboration

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Teamwork
- Networking
- Negotiation
- Influencing
- Active listening
- Visualisation
- Debate
- Networking
- Leadership
- Social influence
- Conflict management

Theme 2: Critical Thinking & Judgement

- Critical thinking
- Problem-solving
- Contextualisation
- Decision-making
- Critical judgement
- Process understanding
- Big picture thinking
- Curiosity/ Lifelong learning
- Analytical thinking
- Analytical thinking

Theme 3: Cognitive

- Emotional intelligence
- Empathy
- Cultural awareness
- Understanding people
- Motivation
- Self-awareness

Theme 4: Adaptability & Resilience

- Adaptability
- Change readiness
- Learning from Failure
- Resilience
- Being comfortable with the uncomfortable
- Willingness to fail
- Self-management
- Confidence

Theme 5: Creativity & AI Literacy

- Creativity
- Innovation
- AI literacy
- Digital skills
- Prompt engineering
- Networks & cybersecurity

From the literature: Which transferrable skills are most important?

CONSENSUS

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- There is agreement on a **recurring core of skills**.
- The literature increasingly **connects transferable skills to employability**, but not only to first employment. (Choi-Lundberg et al. 2024; Karaca-Atik et al. 2023)
- **higher education must teach and assess** these skills more deliberately. (Kemp and Seagraves 1995; García-Álvarez et al.2022)

RECURRING CORE SKILLS

- communication
- collaboration/teamwork
- problem solving, critical or analytical thinking
- self-management
- adaptability/flexibility
- lifelong learning
- increasingly digital/technology-related capabilities

(Olesen, Christensen, and O'Neill 2021; García-Álvarez et al. 2022; Tuononen et al. 2022)

From the literature: Debates and gaps

- **Inconsistency in terminology**: “Transferable skills,” “generic skills,” “soft skills,” “transversal competencies,” “21st-century skills,” “core skills,” “graduate attributes,” and “employability skills” are often used interchangeably, but not always with the same assumptions.
- **A key theoretical debate: transferable skills vs. transferring skills**
  - whether skills are genuinely transferable or context-bound, e.g., the higher-order capacities that allow a person to select, adapt, adjust, and apply those skills in a new situation.
  - “skills as portable possessions” vs. “skills as situated performances” (Bridges 1993). E.g., problem solving in A vs. knowing how to transfer problem solving from A to B
  - Near transfer and far transfer. (Olesen, Christensen, and O’Neill 2021)
- **Measurement is inconsistent and often weak.** lack of robust measures and longitudinal evidence, with many studies relying on self-report or perception-based data rather than direct assessment of demonstrated skill development (García-Álvarez et al. 2022; Tuononen et al. 2022).

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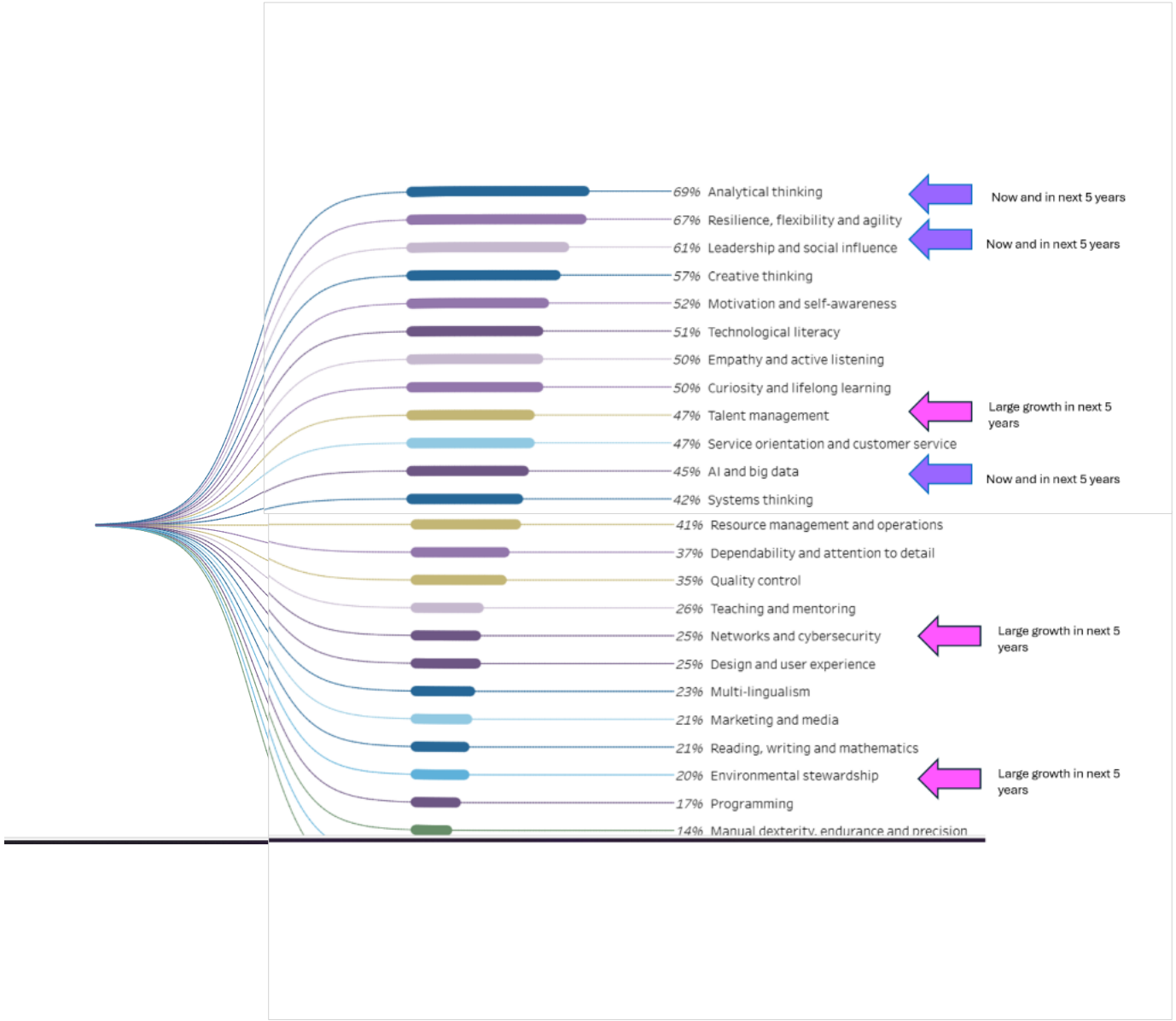
Share of employers who consider skills to be core skills for their workforce



Future of jobs - core skills | Tableau Public

An employer perspective

1. Resilience, flexibility and agility	2. Motivation and self-awareness	3. Curiosity and lifelong learning	4. Empathy and active listening, Leadership and social influence
Responding to a rapidly changing workplace; handling ambiguity; hybrid working	Knowing self; understanding own competencies and strengths	Asking questions; ambition; pursuing opportunities; emphasis on continual learning.	Building relationships; emotional intelligence; facilitation, not all about leadership… working with others.

*Analytical skills were assumed rather than mentioned explicitly, e.g. understanding the context, “breaking work down”, “using Kitchen English”, “being able to use factual information to maybe tell a story”, “not making assumptions, not ‘boiling the ocean’.

An employer perspective

Communication	Self management	Confidence
Translating complex information into accessible language; storytelling; clarity; “knowing your audience”; often specified communication skills, often linked to analytical skills, working with others, influencing.	Repetition of time management, ownership, preparation, taking initiative – potentially related to the increase in hybrid working, though also attributed to attitude.	Contributing, asking questions, presenting ideas, thinking ahead, being able to use initiative - requires confidence. Two interviewees believed AI had a role to play in reducing confidence.

An employer perspective

Employers value technical knowledge matters, dependent on the job role. Graduate competencies and skills distinguish graduates, and this is reflected in the recruitment process.

“it's all (about) people skills…ability to work with people, the ambiguity, the speed, all that, because everything moves like that now”

“ a team player, someone that brings people together…gets involved, brings ideas to the table”

“agility, being able to come in and kind of pick it…do that forward thinking…ask questions.. literally come in and hit the ground running”

“time management and that whole ownership piece around time management… in an operational environment there is a level of structure you’ve got to put on yourself”

“Make your manager's life easier”

“Breaking things down to be understandable”

“(what is important is) the interpretation, it's the opinion. And that's formed by organic thought processes, not by artificial processes”

“we can’t cheat code our way to experiencing life”

“bringing a graduate to join the team, would AI be on the list? Things that I was zooming in on? Absolutely not. But then would there be an expectation when they join that they had some kind of knowledge and could adapt to using it”

I think it's very, very easy just to go and ask a question these days without actually thinking”

“just because Sandra in accounts uses ChatGPT to write her emails doesn’t mean to say you’ve got an AI strategy as a business”

“if you’re interested in innovation and where the world’s going and anything is possible, boom, love it”

“the art of the possible is kind of a bit lost because we’ve been given too many handouts”

“ I do think the transferable skills are going to be more important as we go, because AI can replace tasks, it can't replace human connection.”

“Some of the best people that I've been involved in employing have been people who tell me they're non-technical”

An academic perspective: CABS Workshop Which transferable skills are most important in an AI-enabled workplace?

Theme 1: Communication & Collaboration

Communication
Collaboration
Teamwork
Networking
Negotiation
Influencing
Active listening
Visualisation
Debate
Networking

Theme 2: Critical Thinking & Judgement

Critical thinking
Problem-solving
Contextualisation
Decision-making
Critical judgement
Understanding process
Big picture thinking

Theme 3: Cognitive

Emotional intelligence
Empathy
Cultural awareness
Understanding people

Theme 4: Adaptability & Resilience

Adaptability
Change readiness
Learning from Failure
Resilience
Being comfortable with uncomfortable
Willingness to fail

Theme 5: Creativity & AI Literacy

Creativity
Innovation
AI literacy
Digital skills
Prompt engineering

A student perspective: how transferrable skills were defined

Definitions	Illustrative Quotes
Both UG and PG students agreed that transferable skills are practical abilities learned in an academic setting that can be transitioned into the job market and the “real world”	“… something that I can actually use in a job that I've applied and (…) that's actually useful in the real world rather than just being academic”
Both groups highlighted that these skills are not limited to one specific academic discipline or job role, but can be applied to different areas, industries, and tasks, also varying in importance.	“I usually think of it as like a less technical skill and more like something that can kind of, like you said, be applied to anything” “…it would also vary based on the job role”

A student perspective: which transferrable skills are most important

Theme 1: Communication & Collaboration

- **Communication** was most cited.
- For *UG students*, special focus on **written communication**.
- **Teamwork** also heavily cited.
- **Leadership**.
- For *PG students*: **conflict management**.

Theme 2: Self-management

- **Time-management**.
- *PG focus*: **adaptability** and **resilience**.
- *UG focus*: **confidence**, **patience**, **proactivity**, **curiosity**.

Theme 3: Cognitive

- Both groups cited **thinking skills** but with different emphasis.
- *PG focus*: **critical thinking**, **analytical thinking**, **research skills**.
- *UG focus*: **problem-solving**.

Theme 4: Digital Literacy

- Both groups cited **technical skills** and **AI skills**.
- *UG students* emphasised that this also involved being taught alternatives to AI use (when not to use it because it's better).

How could we teach and assess transferrable skills? Any examples?

From the literature: How do we teach transferrable skills?

- ❑ **Make skills explicit**: name them, define them, and align them with learning outcomes. (Olesen et al., 2021; Mello & Wattret, 2021).
- ❑ **Use authentic, student-centered pedagogies**: projects, problem-based learning (PBL), work-integrated learning, experiential learning, internships, simulations, reflection, and e-portfolios. (Carvalho, 2016; Tuononen et al., 2022; Choi-Lundberg et al., 2024).
- ❑ **Embed skills in discipline learning across a degree program**, not as isolated "add-ons" module or single-year level. (Chadha, 2006; Valero et al., 2000; Mello & Wattret, 2021; Choi-Lundberg et al., 2024).
- ❑ Give students **repeated practice across different contexts** so they learn how to transfer and adapt skills. (Bridges, 1993; Olesen et al., 2021).
- ❑ **Reflection and metacognition** are central to transfer. Students must recognize, name, evaluate, and articulate the skills they are developing. (Billing 2007; Mello & Wattret, 2021; Gouda-Vossos et al., 2023).

From the literature: How do we teach transferrable skills?

- ❑ **Assessment and feedback shape student engagement**. Students are assessment-driven, so transferable skills need to be assessed in meaningful ways. (Shah 2013; Mello & Wattret, 2021).
- ❑ **Use authentic tasks**: employer briefs, case studies, presentations, portfolios, group projects, and reflective evidence (Choi-Lundberg et al., 2024).
- ❑ Combine **formative feedback**, self-, peer-, tutor-, and, where possible, **employer assessment** (Choi-Lundberg et al., 2024).
- ❑ Assess demonstrated performance, not only self-reported confidence (Tuononen et al., 2022).
- ❑ Key gap: limited longitudinal and performance-based evidence on what works best (Olesen et al., 2021; Tuononen et al., 2022).

Curriculum mapping (1)

MSc level course unit data (24-25 academic year) for 144 units within AMBS.

Preliminary findings: some skills are highly visible, others remain largely implicit.

Out of 144 units, 73 units (51%) explicitly refer to transferable skills using wording and 56 units (39%) use the TS coding structure (new template).

Across these MSc units:

- ✓ Communication is the most consistently assessed transferable skill.
- ✓ Reports are the dominant mechanism for assessing transferable skills.
- ✓ Exams assess analytical and reasoning skills, but less frequently collaboration.
- ✓ There is partial alignment between embedded and assessed transferable skills, but assessment focuses more heavily on cognitive-demonstrable competencies.

Curriculum mapping (2)

Are transferable skills visible in the curriculum?

- Out of 144 units, 73 units (51%) explicitly refer to transferable skills using wording and 56 units (39%) use the TS coding structure
- The distribution of transferrable skills is summarised below (categories are not mutually exclusive).

Transferrable skills	Number of Units
Communication Skills	34
Teamwork & Collaboration	29
Leadership & Management	29
Problem Solving & Decision Making	28
Research & Information Handling	26
Critical Thinking & Analysis	25
Self-Management & Independent Learning	19
Digital & Technical Skills	18
Professionalism & Ethics	15

Curriculum mapping (3)

Are transferable skills being assessed? If so, what are they?

- 38 units (26.4%) explicitly mention TS-coded transferable skills in the summative assessment section.

Transferrable skills	Number of TS Statements	Characteristic Wordings
Communication Skills	26	communicate, effectively, complex, articulate, presentation
Problem Solving & Decision Making	24	problem, solving, decision-making, solutions, strategic
Research & Information Handling	20	research, data, analysis, evidence, synthesis
Leadership & Management	19	management, lead, coordinate, independently
Teamwork & Collaboration	18	teamwork, collaboration, group, develop
Critical Thinking & Analysis	15	critical, evaluate, thinking, judgement
Digital & Technical Skills	14	digital, analytics, technical, specialist
Professionalism & Ethics	9	professional, ethical, responsibility
Self-Management & Independent Learning	8	independently, organise, synthesise

Curriculum mapping (4)

How are transferable Skills being assessed?

The units use several dominant assessment formats:

- Reports
- Exams
- Presentations
- Projects / Consultancy
- Coursework (general)
- Mixed formats

Assessment Type	Skill Emphasis
Reports	Communication + Analytical reasoning
Exams	Cognitive reasoning + Critical thinking
Presentations	Communication + Clarity
Projects	Integrated application (less formally coded)

A student perspective: are transferable skills taught well?

- **Too theoretical:** frustration that course units focus heavily on academic theory and repetitive frameworks (like SWOT or PESTLE) rather than practical, real-world application.
- **“Practicing” vs. “Teaching”:** general agreement that the university only provides environments to use these skills (like assigning a group project) without actually providing guidance, frameworks, or feedback on how to execute them.
- **Extracurriculars:** consensus that students gained the majority of their transferable skills from outside the classroom (e.g. jobs, internships, society committees, or volunteering).
- **Insufficient technical training**: PG students were frustrated by the superficial depth of their technical training. UG students, conversely, were frustrated by the lack of foundational technical training and the use of outdated tools.
- **AI integration**: PG students were more positive about this than UG students.
- **Creative assignments**: lecturers who engaged in alternative assignments that genuinely tested students’ skills were the exception, not the norm.

A student perspective: how are transferable skills assessed?

- **Focus on “end result” vs the “process”:** students observed that assessments grade the final submitted output rather than the process of getting there. This facilitates AI cheating.
- **Group work penalty:** heavy consensus that current grading structure of group work is broken and there is zero individual accountability. Attempts at this were flawed and ineffective (e.g. peer assessment).
- **Lack of formative feedback:** desire for continuous formative feedback (e.g. observation of teamwork communication throughout the semester and actionable guidance).
- **Lack of real world consequences**: PG students specifically observed that academic assessments fail to assess soft skills accurately because the “consequences” are too low. In the real world, poor communication loses you a job or client trust; in academia, poor communication in a group project just means someone else covers for you so the group can pass.

Preliminary Conclusions

Defining transferrable skills

No single definition. This study gives indication of how we should frame it.

Ranking transferrable skills

Significant consensus on which are most important across literature and different stakeholders.

GenAI as a transferrable skill

Significant consensus that this is a required skill specially given current market forces.

Teaching transferrable skills

Significant consensus on importance of teaching key skills given competitive market and changing business requirements

How actively are we currently teaching?

Mixed results. Data indicates there is room for improvement (mostly missing from LOs).

How should we teach it?

Data gives some direction.

Next steps?

Let's Keep the Discussion Going...

We invite you to:

- Contribute ideas, questions, and reflections
- Add thoughts from your station discussion
- Respond to other participants' perspectives
- Share examples from your own teaching and assessment practice

Access our Padlet via the QR code.

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