The Age of Disruption: Beyond Innovation Theatre

Faculty Agency in the Interregnum

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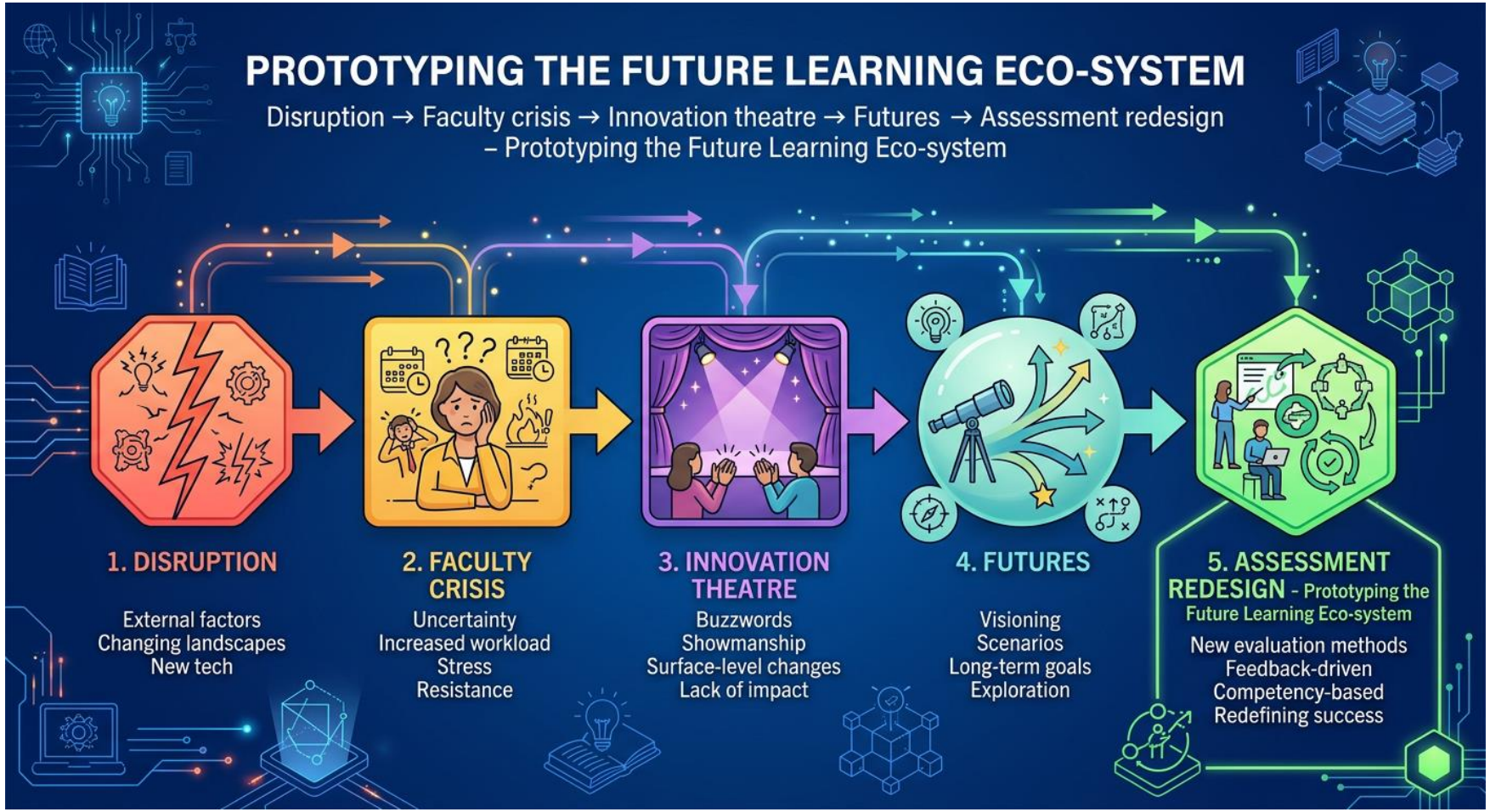
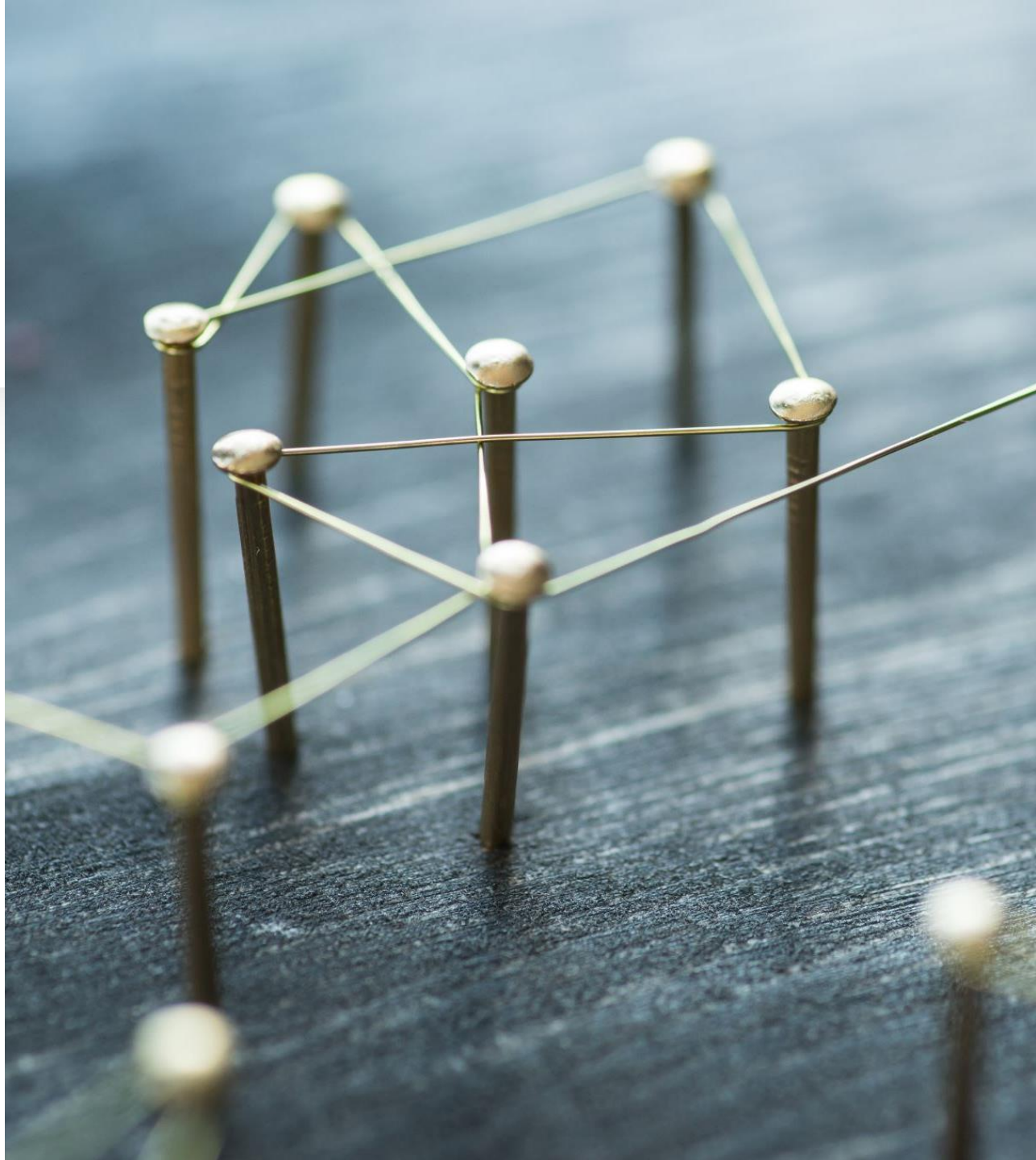


This Presentation: A Roadmap

The Interregnum (The In-Between Time)

- Old operating models are failing. New ones are not yet built.
    - AI acceleration
    - Trust erosion
    - Changing nature of work
    - New models of learning and assessment
    - Governance brittleness

Implication: **Waiting is no longer neutral; it's a leadership choice.**



This is Structural, Not Cyclical

- Demographic shifts
- Funding compression
- Platformization
- AI knowledge explosion
- A new focus on skills, competencies and capabilities – knowing is no longer enough, doing with what you know matters

Implication for faculty: This is not a downturn: It is a redesign moment.

The Knowledge Explosion

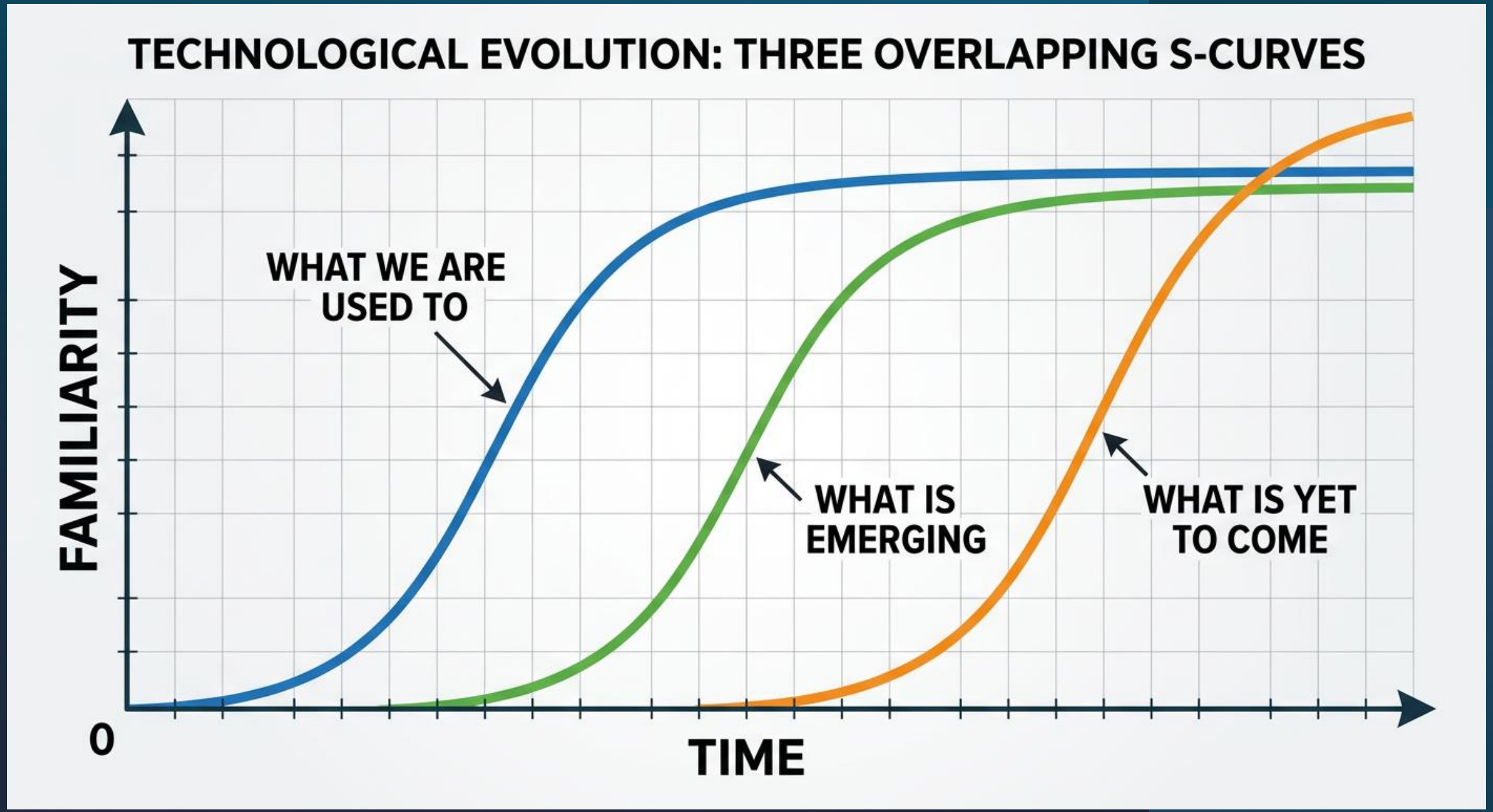
- 5+ million papers annually
- AI copilots everywhere
- Knowledge doubling measured in hours, not decades

The identity crisis: If knowledge is abundant, what is the professor for?

The Faculty Reality

- Contingent majority – precarity and surveillance
- Administrative creep
- Audit & surveillance culture
- Social media and reputation
- Student mental health surge
- Cancel culture and threats to academic freedom

Implication: Professional identity under strain.


TECHNOLOGICAL EVOLUTION: THREE OVERLAPPING S-CURVES
FAMILIARITY
0
TIME
WHAT WE ARE USED TO
WHAT IS EMERGING
WHAT IS YET TO COME

Why This Matters for Faculty Work

- A collapse of the idea of the Professor | Instructor having a knowledge monopoly
- Platformization changes how knowledge and learning are distributed
- Chatbots enable personalized tutoring 24x7
- Institutional governance no longer fit for purpose given the speed of technological change – built for reaction not anticipation

The result is that the identity of the faculty is being renegotiated, often without their involvement.

The Trap

Innovation Theatre

Innovation Theatre

- AI add-ons in LMS
- Detector tools to “catch” cheaters (sic)
- Pilot projects that never scale
- Micro-credentials that employers don’t recognize
- New programs with low intakes
- Strategic plans without design change

Definition: Optics change. Logic stays intact.

Real Change & Transformation

- Assessment redesign
- Learning architecture redesign
- Scalable prototypes
- Capability Pathways
- Governance Redesign

The Leadership Paradox

- Leaders talk the “innovation & change story”, but nothing really changes
- Governance is reactive not anticipatory
- Collective agreements inhibit possibilities
- Courage is missing and compromise rules
- Faculty are engaged in pockets of innovation, largely “under the radar”

For Faculty: Risk without Protection | Responsibility without Authority

Digital Layering ≠ Pedagogical Transformation

- We are layering in digital tools (AI enabled resources, AI supported audio and video, AR/VR simulations)
- But we are not fundamentally changing teaching, learning & assessment
- “The more we change, the more we stay the same!”
- We are at the horseless carriage stage of AI deployment – doing the wrong things better, faster, smarter.

Implication: We are focused on efficiency and maintenance of existing practices, not innovation & transformation

The Real Risk

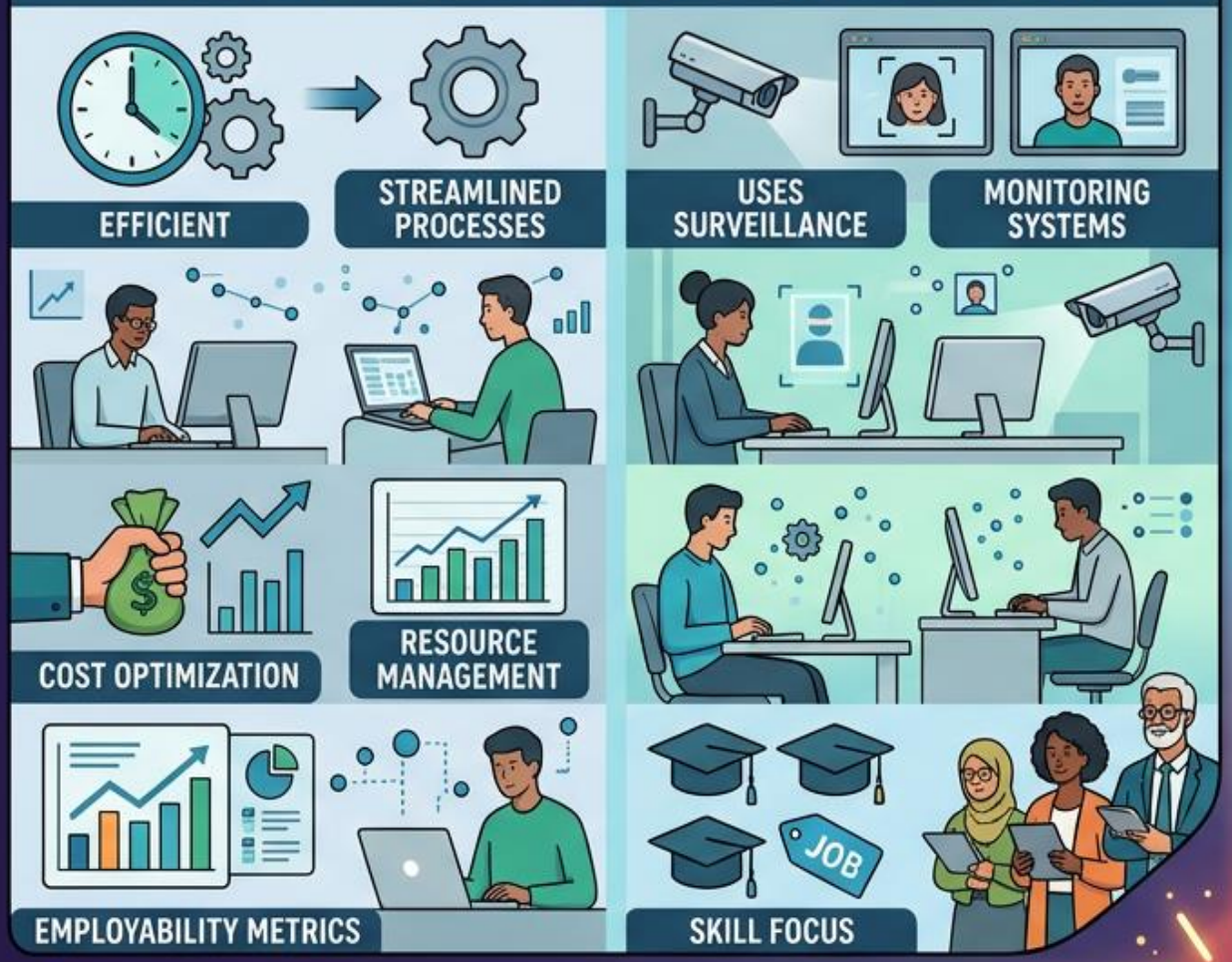
- If faculty don’t lead, we will see:
    - Unbundling accelerate
    - Platform extraction grow
    - Teaching becoming commodified and increasingly outsourced
    - Academic labour becoming modular
    - Assessment being undertaken by third parties

Implication: Faculty need to Take Ownership of their Future

The Contested Futures

TWO SOLITUDES

TECHNO-ECONOMIC UNIVERSITY



THE REGENERATIVE INSTITUTION

FACULTY WILL DETERMINE WHICH FUTURE EMERGES

One Test: Which version of this question preoccupies the faculty:

Version 1: How do we stop students cheating?

Version 2: What conditions produce deep and meaningful learning and how do we change our practices to make this happen ?

This is What the Two Solitudes Look Like:

Human Capital Techno:

- Efficiency
- Throughput and cost
- Compliance

Human Flourishing:

- Flourishing
- Agency
- Mastery
- Meaning

Why Faculty are the Leverage Point

- Strategy and change happens slowly and rarely works – 85%+ of change efforts fail
- Technology changes rapidly – we are close to AGI, quantum computing and empathic humanoid robots
- Learning designs and encounter happen in classrooms, not in the C-suite

Faculty are the ones that can translate strategy and

possibility into reality

Implications for Teaching, Learning & Assessment

The End of the Broadcast Model

- We still do a lot of “sage on the stage” – whether live or via Zoom
- Even within an LMS, we still do “sage on the stage”

- In the emerging models, we see Faculty ***teaching less so that students can learn more***:
  - Faculty design learning experiences
  - Faculty support differentiated learning
  - Faculty reimagine assessment as a learning experience
  - Faculty co-design learning options with their students

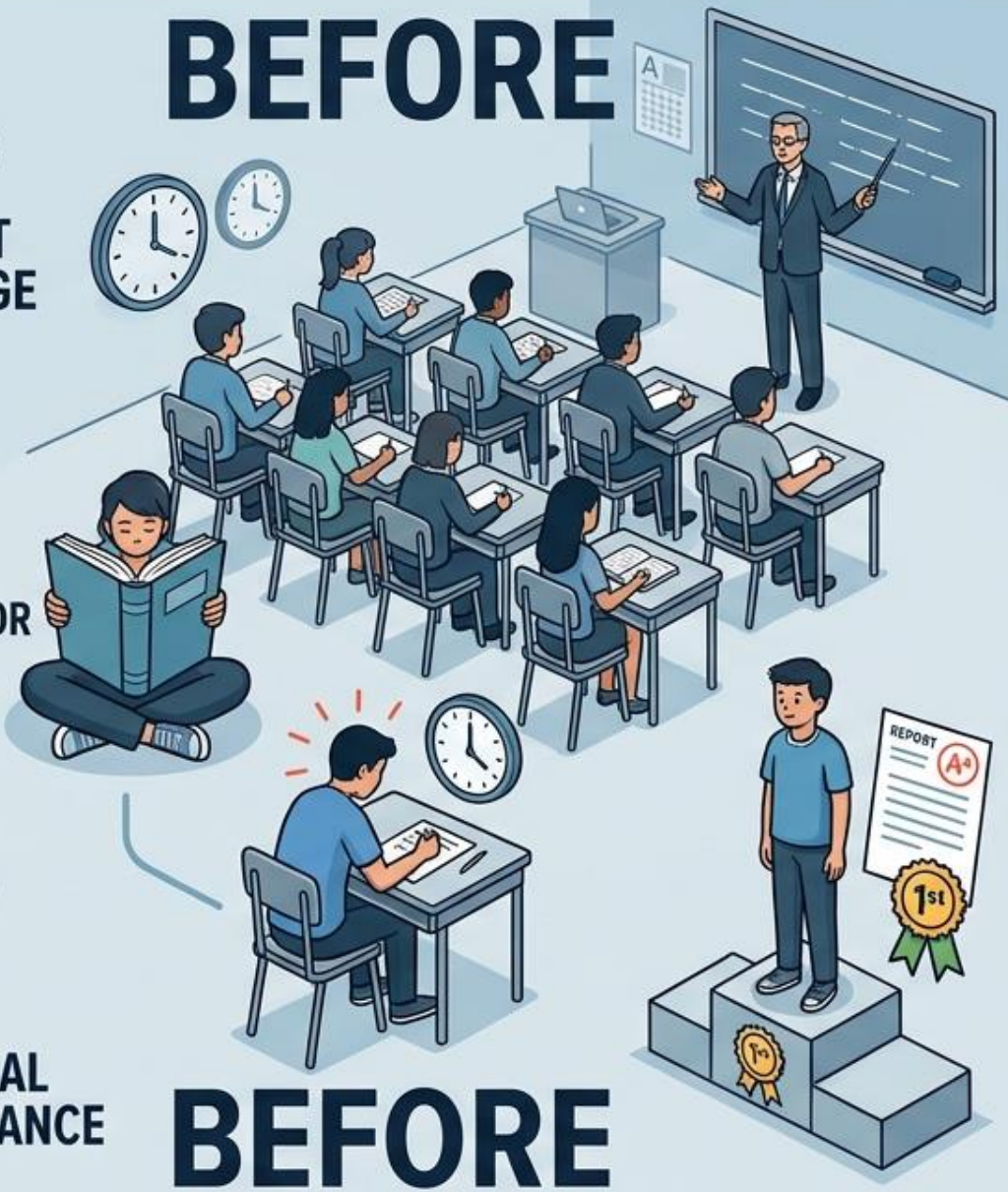
THE EVOLUTION OF EDUCATION: FROM CONTENT TO CAPABILITY

BEFORE

CONTENT COVERAGE

EXAMS FOR RECALL

INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE



BEFORE

AFTER

LEARNING ARCHITECTURE

CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING

AFTER

An Emerging Regenerative Pedagogy

- Based on regenerative thinking and frameworks:
  - Context-driven
  - Place-based
  - Circular (recursive learning)
  - Transdisciplinary
  - Impact is the intention, not just knowledge and learning

Faculty implication: Students are co-creators, not consumers.

Mental Health and Wellbeing a Reality: Deal with it

- **The Facts:**
  - **75% of post-secondary student's** report struggling with their mental health, and **61%** say they *developed new mental health challenges* in the past year.
  - **32% of students** rate their mental health as *"poor" or "very poor"*.
  - **Nearly half (46%) have experienced depression**, and **38% have had suicidal thoughts**.

The implications: Faculty need to embrace trauma informed pedagogies

Sources: ACHA NCHA; Healthy Minds Study; CASA

The Tyranny of Grades: Grades are Now Seen as More Important than Learning

Think about this logic:

Grades Have Become a High Stakes Feature for Students	Students game the system and use AI to help
Gaming the system with AI causes panic amongst faculty and admin	Enhanced surveillance and discipline
Surveillance failures (correct around 20% of the time) increases reputational risk	Return to pen and paper, invigilated exams and more surveillance

Witness a Design Failure in Action:
Cheating is a symptom – Design is the Cause

Reimagined Assessment

- Faculty are exploring new possibilities:
  - Competency-based assessment on demand
  - Authentic community or organizational problem-solving
  - Process demonstration and evidence – show what you can do
  - Reflective assessment
  - Peer assessment

A shift from time served and boxes ticked to skills demonstrated and knowledge in use

From Transcripts to Learning Passports

- Stackable capabilities
- Living records of knowledge, skills and capabilities
- Skills visibility – audio, video and multimedia capture of skills and capabilities
- Simulation performance & evaluation
- Peer assessments
- Work Integrated Learning assessment

The Platform College | University

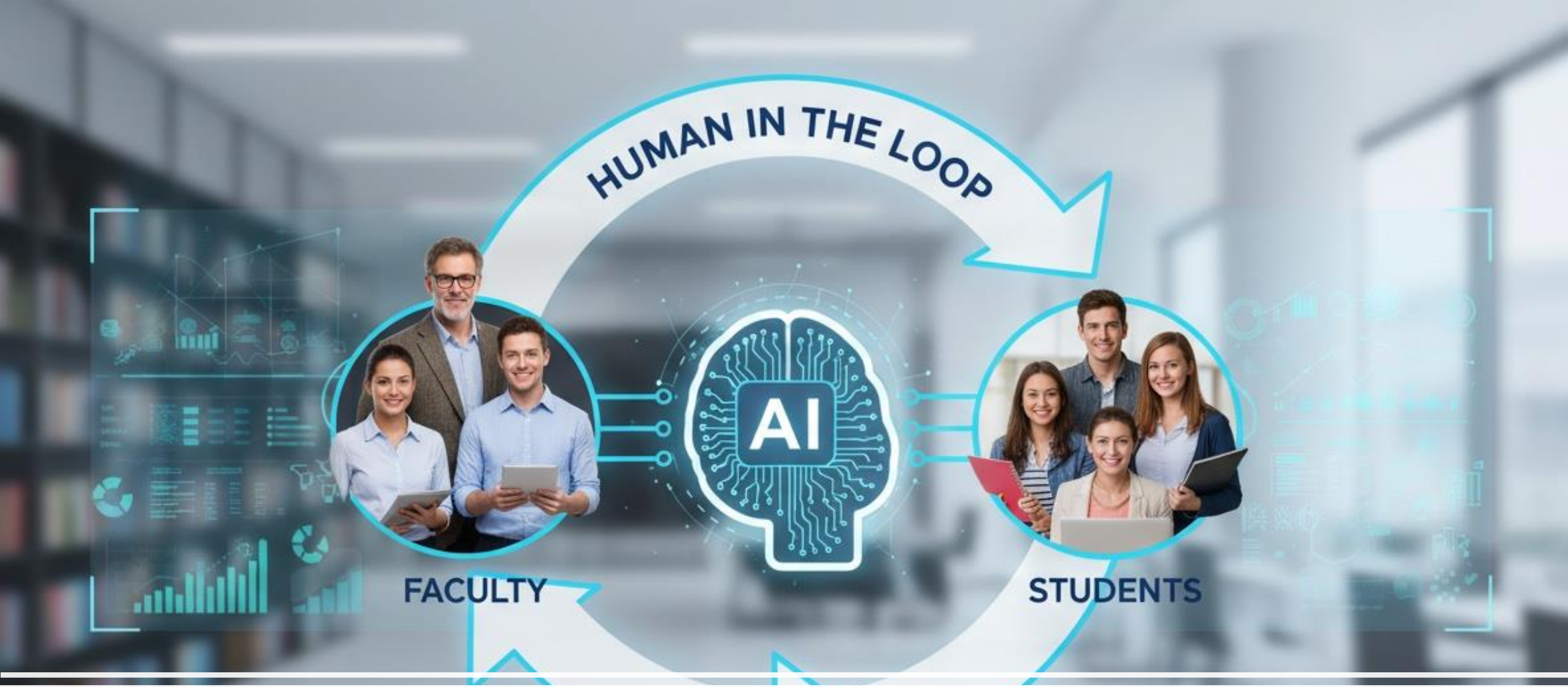
- Learning eco-systems are slowly replacing traditional college and universities:
  - Coursera degrees
  - Guild Education – e.g. City and Guilds international certifications
  - Company based skills credentials – Mechatronics (Siemens), Microsoft, Google, AWS Certification
  - Assessment only degrees, certificates and diplomas – e.g. University of Wisconsin
- Brainport Eindhoven is integrating community based, college and university level learning using competencies
- Competency assessment = to degrees and diplomas for many occupations

Universities & colleges are no longer the sole providers of learning. They are becoming nodes in a learning ecosystem.

The New Work of Faculty

AI Can Change the Focus for Our Work

- **AI can handle:**
  - Cognitive drudgery
  - Basic tutoring
  - Pattern recognition
  - Administrative burden
- **It will not replace:**
  - Meaning-making
  - Ethical discernment
  - Mentorship
  - Contextual judgment
  - Social-emotional connection



The Key Idea: Human in the Loop

Faculty Have Choices

Refuse:

- Surveillance capitalism
- Bias amplification
- Deskilling

Appropriate:

- Workload reduction
- Personalization
- Deep inquiry support
- Reimagined assessment
- Partnering with students for co-creation

The Identity Shift for Faculty

From:	To:
• Knowledge Master • Sage on the Stage • Arbiter	• **Cartographer** (mapping possibilities and the journey) • **Weaver** (connections) • **Gardener** (conditions for emergence) • **Steward** (anticipatory governance) • **Architect** (structural coherence)

Institutional Agency from Within

Given the Lack of Courageous Leadership Across Institutions

- Faculty are the “missing middle” – where change really happens.
  - Strategy lives in boardrooms and the C-suite
  - Reality lives in classrooms
  - Faculty are both the front line and the “middle” where change can happen
  - Transformation and strategy require translation

Adopt the mantra:

“Forgiveness is easier to get than permission!”

Working within Existing Structures

- If governance won’t redesign, Faculty can:
    - Redesign assessment
    - Pilot authentic curriculum
    - Partner with students to co-create authentic learning
    - Build cross-disciplinary networks
    - Influence through demonstration

The Message: Small architectural shifts → large structural effects.

Move Beyond “Pilots” and Prototype

- The difference

  Pilot = Contained, constrained and limited
  Prototype = Designed for scaling

- Design for diffusion from day one and see the work as pioneering, prototyping and reimagining possibilities.

‘Traditional Course Design: 300 Level Economic Policy Course (3 Credits)

Assessment Structure

- Exam: 70%
- Assignments: 30%

Teaching Method

- Lectures
- Course Material (Textbook, Course Reader)

Assignments

- Literature Reviews with some policy analysis

Student Experience

- Perform for grades
- Cram for exams
- Minimal authentic application
- AI used covertly (everyone knows)
- Little sense of value, application, meaning

REIMAGINED COURSE DESIGN: A DYNAMIC & ENGAGING STUDENT EXPERIENCE

POLICY LABS

Active problem-solving for complex, societal issues

POLICY LABS
Active problem-solving for complex, societal issues

CAPABILITY PORTFOLIO

Continuous evidence of skill acquisition and growth

MICRO-BRIEF REFLECTIONS

Just-in frequent check-ins throughout projects

MICRO-BRIEF REFLECTIONS
Just-in-time, self-assessment and feedback loops

PROJECT-BASED WORK

PROJECT-BASED WORK
Deep dives into sustained, inquiry-based projects

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT
Demonstrating mastery in real-world contexts

Empowering Future-Ready Graduates

OLD WORK OF FACULTY

CONTENT DELIVERY
Lectures, presentations, distributing information.

INDIVIDUAL GRADING
Assessing student work solo, providing feedback.

COURSE OWNERSHIP
Single authority over curriculum and content.

KNOWLEDGE AUTHORITY
The expert and primary source of information.

NEW WORK OF FACULTY

LEARNING ARCHITECTURE
Designing engaging learning experiences and pathways.

CAPABILITY EVALUATION
Assessing how students use knowledge in real-world contexts.

NETWORKED TEACHING & FACILITATION
Collaborating with others, guiding discussions, connecting resources.

SENSE-MAKING MENTOR
Helping students synthesize information and understand context.

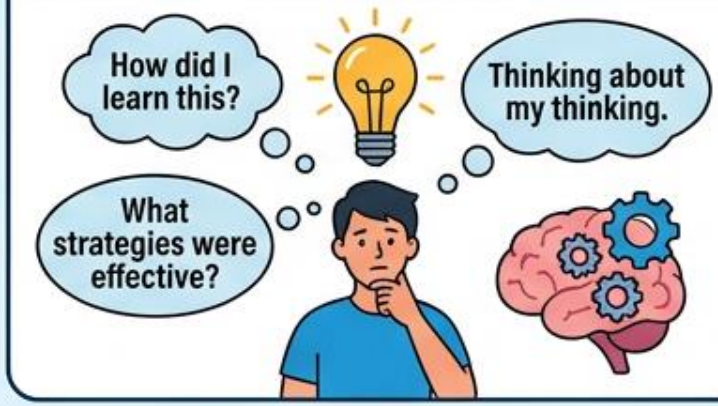
WHAT CAN I DO NEXT SEMESTER

1 REPLACE AN EXAM WITH AN AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

Move beyond multiple choice; use real-world tasks, practical projects, or simulations.

2 SHARE HOW TO USE AI AND WHEN NOT TO – SHOW WHAT DISCLOSURE LOOKS LIKE

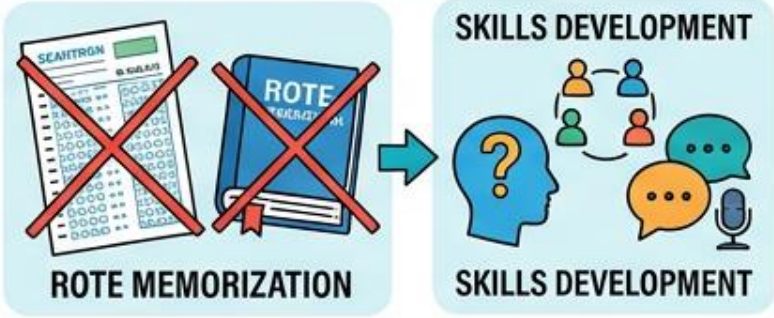
3 INTRODUCE REFLECTIVE META-COGNITION



4 PARTNER WITH A COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION FOR STUDENT-BASED PROJECT WORK

Engage students in real-world problem-solving for local impact.

5 DESIGN ASSESSMENTS FOR CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT, NOT RECALL



Assess high-level skills, not just memorized facts.

6 GET STUDENTS TO CREATE CASE VIGNETTES WHICH ARE SHAREABLE ASSETS

Develop short real-life scenarios that become valuable classroom tools.

ENHANCING TEACHING & LEARNING NEXT SEMESTER

THE POSSIBLE FUTURE

The future of higher education will not be secured by policy statements, think-tanks or pilots. It will be secured by **faculty who redesign learning in real time.** Faculty can lead or be designed around

My call to action:

- Redesign learning
- Prototype the future
- Lead from the middle.
- Waiting is no longer neutral

My Work

- Analysis here is based on the 2024 and 2026 book and related writing
- Also based on work with a reimaging learning team – see more at Learning City
- A lot of my work is posted on **Research Gate**

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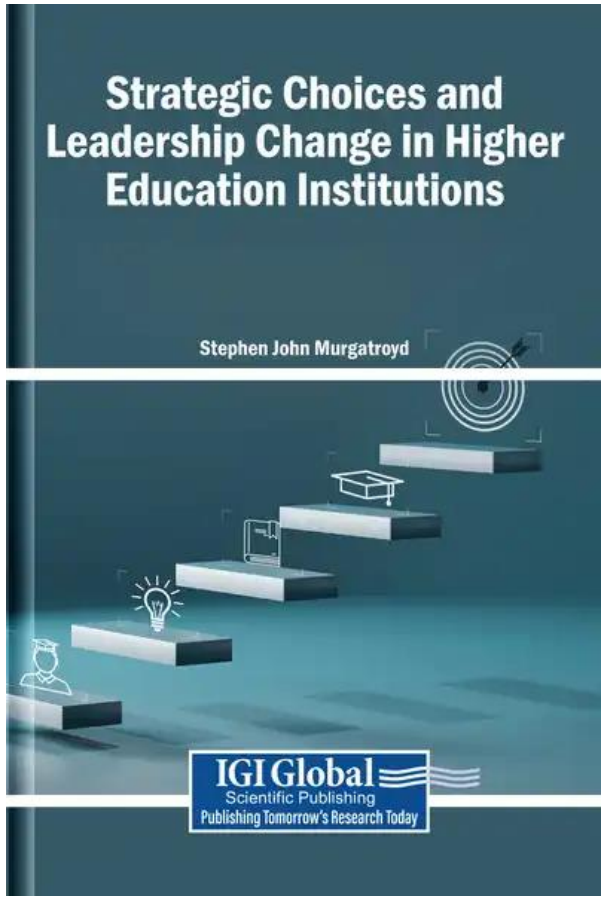

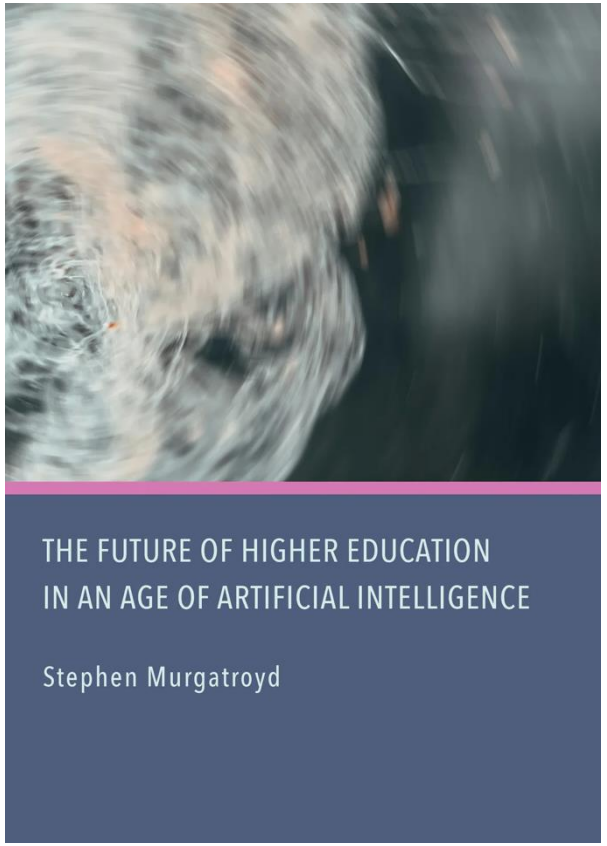

Thank You for Being Here!

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