

FSI REFERENCE PUBLICATION

Future Skills Competency Atlas

24 Future Skills, 96 subskills and five descriptive orientation levels

Future Skills Institut | May 2026

future-skills-institut.de | My Future Skills App

A framework for reflection and development - not a test or psychometric assessment.

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What this atlas is about

The Future Skills Competency Atlas translates the framework of the Future Skills Institut into a differentiated structure grounded in everyday life. Six competency categories encompass 24 Future Skills. Each Future Skill is made concrete through four subskills; five descriptive orientation levels are provided for each of the 96 subskills.

The atlas also provides the conceptual foundation for the My Future Skills App. It aims to help people understand abilities more precisely, choose development priorities more consciously and formulate realistic next steps.

Important for interpretation

The levels are descriptive orientation anchors. They are not school grades, objective measurements or evidence of a person's worth or capability.

How to read the orientation levels

- The descriptions refer to observable experience and behaviour, not fixed personality traits.
- A person's current level may vary by life domain, situation, role and degree of pressure.
- Development is not necessarily linear. People may make progress, temporarily move backwards or show different patterns in different contexts.
- Level 5 is not required for every skill or at every point in time. What matters is which ability can make the greatest difference in the current life situation.
- Wherever possible, self-assessments should be checked against concrete situations and, where appropriate, feedback from others.

Methodological context and limitations

The Competency Atlas is a conceptual synthesis of existing Future Skills frameworks, findings from life satisfaction and development research, and future scenarios. The level descriptions support orientation and reflection. They have not been validated as a psychometric scale and must not be used as a diagnostic instrument or as a basis for automated personnel decisions.

There are deliberate overlaps between categories and skills: self-management, for example, influences learning, relationships and the handling of uncertainty. Such interactions are not flaws in the framework but expressions of real development processes.

Editorial note for this edition: Two sets of level descriptions that had clearly been duplicated in the working file were reformulated to fit the definitions of 'Naming and making sense of emotional states' and 'Accepting one's own limitations'. All other skill, subskill and level descriptions retain the substance of the underlying overview.

Recommended use

First choose a Future Skill and then a subskill. Use concrete situations to consider which description currently fits best. Then formulate a small, observable development step, rather than trying to reach as many levels or skills as possible at once.

The six categories at a glance

01 Learning and Development

Learning awareness & self-reflection • Motivation to learn & curiosity • Learning strategies & self-management • Learning transfer & application

02 Self-management

Self-awareness & emotional self-regulation • Self-acceptance & inner stability • Managing pressure & resilience • Meaning & values

03 Social and Relationship Skills

Relationship skills & building trust • Empathy & perspective-taking • Communication & dialogue • Constructive conflict & managing tensions

04 Thinking and Problem-solving

Analytical thinking & identifying problems • Systems thinking & navigating complexity • Critical thinking & judgement • Creative problem-solving & shifting perspectives

05 Innovation and Transformation

Openness to change & adaptability • Futures thinking & exploring possibilities • Creativity & innovation • Navigating ambiguity & uncertainty

06 Digital and Technological Skills

Digital literacy & confident use of technology • Data & AI literacy for users • Understanding automation & processes • Digital ethics & responsibility

01 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Learning awareness & self-reflection

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Awareness of one's own experience

The ability to notice thoughts, feelings, physical reactions and inner tensions, particularly in challenging or emotionally charged situations.

LEVEL 1	Feelings are usually noticed only when they escalate strongly.
LEVEL 2	Emotions are occasionally recognised, often afterwards.
LEVEL 3	Feelings are noticed in calm situations, less so under stress.
LEVEL 4	Emotions and physical signals are recognised early.
LEVEL 5	One's inner states are continuously perceived in a differentiated way.

2. Making sense of experiences

The ability to go beyond judging experiences as 'good' or 'bad' and recognise connections: What happened? In what context? What might have contributed?

LEVEL 1	Experiences are quickly judged as good or bad.
LEVEL 2	Initial causes are recognised, but understanding remains superficial.
LEVEL 3	Connections are reflected on when time is available.
LEVEL 4	Situations are regularly considered from several dimensions.
LEVEL 5	Complex causes and patterns are systematically recognised.

3. Reflecting on one's own contribution

The ability to look honestly at one's own contribution to situations, without blame, but also without avoidance or rationalisation.

LEVEL 1	Responsibility is largely attributed to external factors.
LEVEL 2	One's own part is rarely acknowledged.
LEVEL 3	One's contribution is reflected on when explicitly prompted.
LEVEL 4	Responsibility is actively taken.
LEVEL 5	Personal patterns are recognised early and consciously regulated.

4. Identifying opportunities for learning

The ability to draw realistic conclusions from reflection: What would I like to do differently next time, or deliberately retain?

LEVEL 1	Experiences rarely lead to concrete changes.
LEVEL 2	Intentions emerge but remain vague.
LEVEL 3	Individual concrete adjustments are made.
LEVEL 4	Learning steps are planned and implemented.
LEVEL 5	A continuous improvement process is established.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Learning awareness & self-reflection” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

02 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Motivation to learn & curiosity

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Inner readiness to learn

The ability to engage mentally with learning processes, even without immediate external pressure or clear prospects of success.

LEVEL 1	New things tend to be avoided.
LEVEL 2	Learning happens primarily under external pressure.
LEVEL 3	Readiness to learn exists when there is interest.
LEVEL 4	There is active openness to development.
LEVEL 5	Development is consciously sought.

2. Curiosity about connections

The ability to ask questions beyond obvious answers: Why is something like this? How does it relate to other things?

LEVEL 1	There is little interest in underlying reasons.
LEVEL 2	Questions arise in particular situations.
LEVEL 3	Explanations are sought regularly.
LEVEL 4	Complex connections are actively explored.
LEVEL 5	Systems thinking shapes learning.

3. Managing reluctance and resistance

The ability to notice resistance to learning and remain able to act, without forcing or blocking oneself.

LEVEL 1	Tasks are frequently avoided.
LEVEL 2	Resistance often leads to postponement.
LEVEL 3	Tasks are completed despite reluctance.
LEVEL 4	Strategies for overcoming resistance are used.
LEVEL 5	Self-discipline is well established.

4. Finding meaning in learning

The ability to recognise personal meaning or benefit in learning, even when it is not immediately visible.

LEVEL 1	Learning seems meaningless.
LEVEL 2	Meaning is seen only in immediate benefits.
LEVEL 3	Relevance is partly recognised.
LEVEL 4	Learning is linked to long-term goals.
LEVEL 5	There is a strong intrinsic orientation towards meaning.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Motivation to learn & curiosity” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

03 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Learning strategies & self-management

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Clarity of learning goals

The ability to formulate realistic and meaningful learning goals: What do I want to learn now, and why?

LEVEL 1	There is no clear learning goal.
LEVEL 2	Goals are short term.
LEVEL 3	A medium-term direction is present.
LEVEL 4	Learning priorities are clear.
LEVEL 5	Development planning is strategically oriented.

2. Choosing suitable learning approaches

The ability to use and appropriately select different forms of learning: reading, trying things out, discussion and reflection.

LEVEL 1	A single learning strategy is used.
LEVEL 2	Occasional adjustments are made.
LEVEL 3	Several methods are used.
LEVEL 4	Methods are consciously chosen to suit the purpose.
LEVEL 5	Learning strategies are systematically optimised.

3. Managing attention and energy

The ability to adapt learning periods to concentration, day-to-day condition and demands, rather than working against oneself.

LEVEL 1	Distractibility is high.
LEVEL 2	Periods of focus are unstable.
LEVEL 3	Structured work periods are possible.
LEVEL 4	Energy is planned consciously.
LEVEL 5	Self-management is highly effective.

4. Managing interruptions and setbacks

The ability to see interrupted learning, breaks or delays as part of the process rather than as failure.

LEVEL 1	Setbacks frequently lead to giving up.
LEVEL 2	Motivation drops sharply.
LEVEL 3	A fresh attempt is made after a break.
LEVEL 4	Setbacks are processed constructively.
LEVEL 5	Setbacks are actively used as a source of learning.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Learning strategies & self-management” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

04 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Learning transfer & application

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Recognising opportunities for application

The ability to identify everyday moments in which what has been learned could become relevant.

LEVEL 1	Knowledge remains isolated.
LEVEL 2	Transfer rarely succeeds.
LEVEL 3	Similar situations are recognised.
LEVEL 4	Transfer is consciously sought.
LEVEL 5	There is a strong ability to transfer learning across contexts.

2. Translating insights into action

The ability to turn abstract insights into small, realistic changes in behaviour.

LEVEL 1	Insights remain theoretical.
LEVEL 2	Implementation is sporadic.
LEVEL 3	Individual deliberate implementation steps are taken.
LEVEL 4	Implementation is systematic.
LEVEL 5	There is a strong ability to put learning into practice.

3. Experimenting in everyday life

The ability to try something new without expecting perfection, as a learning experiment rather than a final solution.

LEVEL 1	There is little willingness to try things out.
LEVEL 2	Experiments are attempted only at low risk.
LEVEL 3	New approaches are tested regularly.
LEVEL 4	Active learning experiments are undertaken.
LEVEL 5	Development behaviour is deliberate and iterative.

4. Integrating learning into routines

The ability to stabilise helpful new behaviours gradually without overloading them.

LEVEL 1	New behaviours quickly fade away.
LEVEL 2	Implementation lasts only briefly.
LEVEL 3	Some habits take root.
LEVEL 4	Integration is sustainable.
LEVEL 5	New competencies become a stable part of identity.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Learning transfer & application” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

05 SELF-MANAGEMENT

Self-awareness & emotional self-regulation

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Awareness of one's own emotions

The ability to recognise one's own feelings early, even when they are vague, contradictory or unpleasant.

LEVEL 1	Feelings are usually noticed only when escalation is strong.
LEVEL 2	Emotions are recognised afterwards.
LEVEL 3	Feelings are noticed in calm situations, less so under stress.
LEVEL 4	Emotions are recognised early, including physical signals.
LEVEL 5	Inner states are perceived with considerable nuance and continuity.

2. Naming and making sense of emotional states

The ability to distinguish feelings verbally or internally: Am I angry, disappointed, overwhelmed or hurt?

LEVEL 1	Feelings are rarely named or described only vaguely as 'good' or 'bad'.
LEVEL 2	Basic feelings can usually be named only afterwards.
LEVEL 3	Common emotional states are distinguished in calm situations.
LEVEL 4	Even complex or contradictory feelings are named promptly and understood in context.
LEVEL 5	Emotional states are understood with nuance, sensitivity to context and without premature judgement.

3. Creating space between feeling and action

The ability to create an inner moment of choice before feelings turn into impulsive action.

LEVEL 1	Impulsive reactions dominate.
LEVEL 2	Pausing rarely succeeds.
LEVEL 3	Pausing is possible in some situations.
LEVEL 4	A conscious choice of response is usually possible.
LEVEL 5	Actions remain reflective even under stress.

4. Regulation under pressure

The ability to remain able to act in situations of stress, conflict or uncertainty.

LEVEL 1	Emotional flooding leads to loss of control.
LEVEL 2	Calming down is possible only with outside help.
LEVEL 3	Individual strategies are used.
LEVEL 4	Proven self-regulation strategies are actively applied.
LEVEL 5	Emotional self-management is strong even under pressure.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Self-awareness & emotional self-regulation” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

06 SELF-MANAGEMENT

Self-acceptance & inner stability

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Accepting one's own limitations

The ability to acknowledge personal limits, weaknesses or dependencies without devaluing oneself.

LEVEL 1	Personal limits are ignored or dismissed as personal failure.
LEVEL 2	Limitations are acknowledged only after significant overload.
LEVEL 3	Personal limits are noticed in some situations but not yet reliably respected.
LEVEL 4	Limitations are realistically accepted and included in decisions.
LEVEL 5	Personal possibilities and limits are integrated flexibly, appropriately to the situation and in ways that protect self-worth.

2. Managing self-doubt

The ability to notice inner doubts without believing them completely or being controlled by them.

LEVEL 1	Self-doubt quickly leads to withdrawal.
LEVEL 2	Doubts dominate for extended periods.
LEVEL 3	Doubts are recognised but are difficult to regulate.
LEVEL 4	Doubts are reflected on constructively.
LEVEL 5	Doubts provide an impetus to learn rather than becoming a barrier.

3. Inner self-support

The ability to treat oneself kindly in difficult situations rather than creating internal pressure or self-devaluation.

LEVEL 1	Inner self-criticism is strong.
LEVEL 2	Self-support rarely succeeds.
LEVEL 3	The inner dialogue is partly benevolent.
LEVEL 4	Self-talk is deliberately encouraging.
LEVEL 5	Inner support is stable and constructive.

4. Stability beyond external approval

The ability to avoid linking one's self-worth exclusively to performance, success or recognition.

LEVEL 1	Dependence on praise or recognition is strong.
LEVEL 2	Mood fluctuates considerably with feedback.
LEVEL 3	Self-evaluation is partly independent.
LEVEL 4	Personal standards gain importance.
LEVEL 5	Inner independence is strong while openness to feedback is retained.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Self-acceptance & inner stability” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

07 SELF-MANAGEMENT

Managing pressure & resilience

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Recognising overload early

The ability to notice physical, emotional or mental warning signals in good time.

LEVEL 1	Overload is recognised only at the point of exhaustion.
LEVEL 2	Warning signs are noticed late.
LEVEL 3	Initial early indicators are noticed.
LEVEL 4	Personal patterns of strain are known.
LEVEL 5	Proactive adjustments are made before overload becomes critical.

2. Actively regulating pressure

The ability to influence pressure consciously through breaks, prioritisation or boundaries.

LEVEL 1	Pressure is simply endured.
LEVEL 2	Relief happens by chance.
LEVEL 3	Individual relief strategies are used.
LEVEL 4	Conscious management of pressure is established.
LEVEL 5	Regulation is flexible and adapted to the situation.

3. Managing setbacks

The ability to process failures or losses without becoming permanently unable to act.

LEVEL 1	Setbacks lead to giving up.
LEVEL 2	Demotivation lasts a long time.
LEVEL 3	Recovery is possible after a break.
LEVEL 4	Setbacks are analysed.
LEVEL 5	Setbacks strengthen long-term development.

4. Recovering after strain

The ability to regenerate deliberately after demanding periods, both physically and mentally.

LEVEL 1	Recovery takes a long time.
LEVEL 2	Recovery is sometimes rapid.
LEVEL 3	Recovery strategies are known.
LEVEL 4	Deliberate regeneration is scheduled.
LEVEL 5	Psychological capacity for recovery is high.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Managing pressure & resilience” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

08 SELF-MANAGEMENT

Meaning & values

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Awareness of one's own values

The ability to notice one's values, beliefs and attitudes, even when they are not always explicitly formulated.

LEVEL 1	Personal values are unclear.
LEVEL 2	Values are adopted situationally.
LEVEL 3	An initial conscious orientation towards values emerges.
LEVEL 4	A clear personal structure of values exists.
LEVEL 5	Decisions are consistently based on values.

2. Finding meaning in everyday life

The ability to place activities, relationships or life phases in a context of personal meaning.

LEVEL 1	Everyday life often seems meaningless.
LEVEL 2	Meaning is seen only in major events.
LEVEL 3	Individual activities are experienced as meaningful.
LEVEL 4	Meaning is consciously identified on a regular basis.
LEVEL 5	There is strong inner coherence between everyday life and life goals.

3. Managing conflicting goals

The ability to tolerate and consciously balance tensions between different values, such as achievement and relationships or security and freedom.

LEVEL 1	Conflicting goals lead to avoidance.
LEVEL 2	Decisions are postponed.
LEVEL 3	Weighing up alternatives sometimes succeeds.
LEVEL 4	Conflicting goals are consciously prioritised.
LEVEL 5	There is a strong ability to integrate contradictory goals.

4. Giving direction to decisions

The ability to make decisions based on long-term coherence rather than only short-term benefit.

LEVEL 1	Decisions are impulsive or externally driven.
LEVEL 2	Decisions focus on the short term.
LEVEL 3	A medium-term orientation is present.
LEVEL 4	Decisions are strategic and values-based.
LEVEL 5	Values, goals and actions are highly consistent.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Meaning & values” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

09 SOCIAL AND RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Relationship skills & building trust

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Building closeness and contact

The ability to approach other people, show interest and establish an initial connection, verbally and non-verbally.

LEVEL 1	Initiating contact is difficult; distance dominates.
LEVEL 2	Closeness usually develops only through strong initiative from others.
LEVEL 3	Contact succeeds in familiar contexts.
LEVEL 4	Contact is shaped actively and authentically.
LEVEL 5	There is a strong ability to establish trusting connections quickly.

2. Reliability and consistency

The ability to keep commitments, make expectations transparent and act predictably.

LEVEL 1	Commitments are frequently not kept.
LEVEL 2	Reliability depends on the situation.
LEVEL 3	Reliability is generally present but fluctuates under stress.
LEVEL 4	Commitment is strong even under pressure.
LEVEL 5	A highly consistent, predictable basis of trust exists.

3. Managing vulnerability

The ability to show one's insecurities or limits without overexposing oneself or becoming dependent.

LEVEL 1	Vulnerability is avoided or rejected.
LEVEL 2	Personal insecurity is shown reluctantly.
LEVEL 3	There is some openness in safe relationships.
LEVEL 4	Personal vulnerability is handled consciously.
LEVEL 5	Vulnerability is integrated as a strength.

4. Sustaining relationships over time

The ability to nurture relationships actively beyond immediate occasions or shared tasks.

LEVEL 1	Relationships are maintained passively.
LEVEL 2	Contact is maintained irregularly.
LEVEL 3	Important contacts are consciously sustained.
LEVEL 4	Relationships are actively nurtured across life stages.
LEVEL 5	Relationships are stable and well established over the long term.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Relationship skills & building trust” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

10 SOCIAL AND RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Empathy & perspective-taking

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Emotional resonance

The ability to perceive other people's emotional states even when they are not explicitly expressed.

LEVEL 1	Other people's feelings are barely noticed.
LEVEL 2	Emotions are noticed only late.
LEVEL 3	The emotional mood is recognised.
LEVEL 4	There is sensitive resonance with emotional states.
LEVEL 5	Emotional attunement with others is high.

2. Cognitive perspective-taking

The ability to imagine other people's perspectives, interests or backgrounds.

LEVEL 1	One's own perspective strongly dominates.
LEVEL 2	Other perspectives are difficult to understand.
LEVEL 3	Changing perspective succeeds with effort.
LEVEL 4	Different viewpoints are consciously integrated.
LEVEL 5	There is a strong ability to hold complex perspectives simultaneously.

3. Distinguishing self from others

The ability to feel compassion without losing one's own feelings, boundaries or judgements.

LEVEL 1	Other people's feelings become mixed with one's own.
LEVEL 2	Boundaries are difficult to maintain around strong emotions.
LEVEL 3	Basic differentiation is possible.
LEVEL 4	Emotional boundaries between self and others are clear.
LEVEL 5	Empathy coexists with stable personal boundaries.

4. Acting with empathy

The ability to make understanding visible in behaviour, through language, attitude or decisions.

LEVEL 1	Compassion remains at the level of thought.
LEVEL 2	Support is offered irregularly.
LEVEL 3	Supportive behaviour occurs in some situations.
LEVEL 4	There is a conscious willingness to help in everyday life.
LEVEL 5	Support is proactive and sensitively attuned.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Empathy & perspective-taking” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

11 SOCIAL AND RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Communication & dialogue

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Clarity of expression

The ability to formulate one's thoughts, concerns and feelings understandably, with structure and in a way that suits the situation.

LEVEL 1	Thoughts remain unclear or indirect.
LEVEL 2	Statements are frequently ambiguous.
LEVEL 3	Communication is generally understandable.
LEVEL 4	Expression is precise and appropriate to the situation.
LEVEL 5	Clarity is high even on complex topics.

2. Active listening

The ability to listen attentively to others, to understand rather than to respond.

LEVEL 1	Listening is superficial or interrupted.
LEVEL 2	Attention fluctuates considerably.
LEVEL 3	Listening succeeds in calm situations.
LEVEL 4	Listening is deliberate and reflective.
LEVEL 5	Content and emotions are deeply understood and reflected back.

3. Managing misunderstandings

The ability to raise uncertainties, ask questions and clarify meanings together.

LEVEL 1	Misunderstandings lead to withdrawal or attack.
LEVEL 2	Clarification is avoided.
LEVEL 3	Clarification occurs when requested.
LEVEL 4	Uncertainties are actively clarified.
LEVEL 5	Misunderstandings are used constructively as opportunities to learn.

4. Dialogue under tension

The ability to stay in conversation even during disagreements or emotional intensity.

LEVEL 1	Conversations escalate quickly.
LEVEL 2	Tension is avoided.
LEVEL 3	Dialogue under pressure is partly possible.
LEVEL 4	Conflict conversations are structured.
LEVEL 5	The ability to engage in dialogue remains high even with strong emotions.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Communication & dialogue” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

12 SOCIAL AND RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Constructive conflict & managing tensions

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Noticing tensions

The ability to recognise conflict and underlying tensions early, even when they are not openly expressed.

LEVEL 1	Tensions are ignored.
LEVEL 2	Conflicts are noticed only late.
LEVEL 3	Tensions are recognised but rarely named.
LEVEL 4	Tensions are perceived and understood early.
LEVEL 5	Sensitivity to conflict dynamics is highly developed.

2. Managing one's own conflict patterns

The ability to recognise one's typical responses to conflict, such as withdrawal, attack or accommodation.

LEVEL 1	Old patterns are repeated unconsciously.
LEVEL 2	Patterns are rarely reflected on.
LEVEL 3	Initial conscious reflection begins.
LEVEL 4	Personal reaction patterns are actively changed.
LEVEL 5	Self-management during conflict is strong.

3. Addressing conflict constructively

The ability to raise tensions without escalating or causing hurt.

LEVEL 1	Conflicts are raised aggressively or passively.
LEVEL 2	Concerns are difficult to articulate clearly.
LEVEL 3	Basic 'I' statements are possible.
LEVEL 4	Conflicts are addressed clearly and respectfully.
LEVEL 5	Addressing conflict strengthens the relationship rather than escalating it.

4. Tolerating unresolved conflicts

The ability to tolerate tensions when no quick solution is possible, without damaging the relationship or self-worth.

LEVEL 1	Unresolved conflicts cause strong inner unease.
LEVEL 2	There is an urge for a quick solution or avoidance.
LEVEL 3	Short-term tolerance is possible.
LEVEL 4	Ambivalence is consciously tolerated.
LEVEL 5	Unresolved tensions can be tolerated well without damaging relationships.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Constructive conflict & managing tensions” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

13 THINKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING

Analytical thinking & identifying problems

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Structuring situations

The ability to organise complex or vague situations mentally: What belongs together? What is essential? What is background noise?

LEVEL 1	Situations quickly seem chaotic or overwhelming.
LEVEL 2	Initial order is possible only with external help.
LEVEL 3	Basic structuring is possible in manageable contexts.
LEVEL 4	Even more complex situations are clearly structured.
LEVEL 5	Structuring is quick and precise even under pressure.

2. Distinguishing symptoms from causes

The ability to distinguish visible effects from underlying problems.

LEVEL 1	Reactions focus primarily on visible symptoms.
LEVEL 2	Causes are rarely questioned.
LEVEL 3	An initial distinction is made through conscious reflection.
LEVEL 4	Causes are analysed systematically.
LEVEL 5	There is a deep understanding of causal relationships.

3. Recognising patterns and connections

The ability to recognise repetitions, dependencies or dynamics beyond individual events.

LEVEL 1	Events are considered in isolation.
LEVEL 2	Patterns are recognised only in retrospect.
LEVEL 3	Recurring connections are identified.
LEVEL 4	Systematic patterns are actively recognised.
LEVEL 5	Pattern recognition is strong across contexts.

4. Formulating relevant questions

The ability to ask the 'right question' rather than rushing to seek answers.

LEVEL 1	Questions remain superficial.
LEVEL 2	Questions are frequently imprecise.
LEVEL 3	Questions are useful in some situations.
LEVEL 4	Core questions are precise and structured.
LEVEL 5	Strategic questions open up new perspectives.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Analytical thinking & identifying problems” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

14 THINKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING

Systems thinking & navigating complexity

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Thinking in interactions

The ability to recognise connections between actors, factors and levels rather than thinking in simple chains of cause and effect.

LEVEL 1	Connections are viewed linearly.
LEVEL 2	Interactions are rarely considered.
LEVEL 3	There is a basic understanding of mutual influences.
LEVEL 4	Feedback loops are actively included.
LEVEL 5	Complex system dynamics are handled confidently.

2. Managing non-linearity

The ability to acknowledge that small changes can have large effects and vice versa.

LEVEL 1	Linear cause-and-effect relationships are expected.
LEVEL 2	Unexpected effects cause confusion.
LEVEL 3	Non-linear developments are accepted.
LEVEL 4	Planning assumes non-linear dynamics.
LEVEL 5	Non-linearity is used strategically.

3. Considering effects over time

The ability to take account of delays, long-term consequences and path dependencies.

LEVEL 1	The focus is on short-term effects.
LEVEL 2	Long-term consequences are rarely considered.
LEVEL 3	Medium-term effects are considered.
LEVEL 4	Long-term consequences are systematically included in planning.
LEVEL 5	Thinking encompasses time horizons and development phases.

4. Managing uncertainty and incomplete information

The ability to make decisions even when information is limited, contradictory or provisional.

LEVEL 1	Missing information blocks action.
LEVEL 2	Decision-making uncertainty is high.
LEVEL 3	Action is possible despite limited data.
LEVEL 4	Decisions under uncertainty are structured.
LEVEL 5	Tolerance of ambiguity is high.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Systems thinking & navigating complexity” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

15 THINKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING

Critical thinking & judgement

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Assessing information and sources

The ability to assess the origin, quality and interests behind information.

LEVEL 1	Information is accepted without checking.
LEVEL 2	Initial scepticism exists, but checking is not systematic.
LEVEL 3	Sources are assessed at a basic level.
LEVEL 4	Information is actively validated.
LEVEL 5	Media and information literacy are high.

2. Recognising assumptions and reasoning errors

The ability to recognise implicit assumptions, simplifications or cognitive biases in others and oneself.

LEVEL 1	Personal assumptions are rarely questioned.
LEVEL 2	Reasoning errors are usually recognised only when pointed out.
LEVEL 3	Initial conscious reflection on personal biases occurs.
LEVEL 4	Cognitive biases are actively identified.
LEVEL 5	Bias is systematically checked.

3. Weighing arguments and perspectives

The ability to consider different viewpoints fairly without judging them prematurely.

LEVEL 1	One-sided views are preferred.
LEVEL 2	Other perspectives are judged emotionally.
LEVEL 3	Basic weighing of alternatives is possible.
LEVEL 4	Arguments are analysed in a structured way.
LEVEL 5	Contradictory positions are integrated confidently.

4. Forming a considered judgement

The ability to make a provisional, reasoned decision on limited information and adapt it as new insights emerge.

LEVEL 1	Judgements are impulsive.
LEVEL 2	Opinions vary strongly with the situation.
LEVEL 3	Judgements are partly supported by reasons.
LEVEL 4	Judgements are clear and nuanced.
LEVEL 5	Decision-making is reflective and consistent.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Critical thinking & judgement” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

16 THINKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING

Creative problem-solving & shifting perspectives

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Moving beyond existing assumptions

The ability to question personal assumptions, routines and implicit rules.

LEVEL 1	Familiar thinking patterns are strongly retained.
LEVEL 2	New approaches generate resistance.
LEVEL 3	There is occasional openness to new perspectives.
LEVEL 4	Existing mental frameworks are consciously questioned.
LEVEL 5	Cognitive flexibility is high.

2. Adopting alternative perspectives

The ability to view situations from unfamiliar angles, for example through other people, roles or time horizons.

LEVEL 1	One's own view dominates.
LEVEL 2	Perspective changes require guidance.
LEVEL 3	Perspective is changed occasionally.
LEVEL 4	Alternative viewpoints are actively sought.
LEVEL 5	Perspectives are rotated systematically.

3. Generating possible solutions

The ability to develop several possible solutions without settling too early on one option.

LEVEL 1	There is fixation on one solution.
LEVEL 2	Few alternatives are considered.
LEVEL 3	Several options are developed.
LEVEL 4	A creative variety of solutions emerges.
LEVEL 5	Capacity for innovation and idea generation is high.

4. Experimenting and trying things out

The ability to test new ideas in small, low-risk steps without expecting immediate perfection.

LEVEL 1	Experiments are avoided.
LEVEL 2	New approaches are tested hesitantly.
LEVEL 3	Things are tried out in some situations.
LEVEL 4	Experimentation is actively used as a learning strategy.
LEVEL 5	Testing is iterative and systematically evaluated.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Creative problem-solving & shifting perspectives” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

17 INNOVATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Openness to change & adaptability

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Accepting change

The ability to acknowledge change as a reality even when it is unwanted, inconvenient or involves loss.

LEVEL 1	Change is experienced primarily as a threat.
LEVEL 2	Resistance dominates; adaptation occurs only under pressure.
LEVEL 3	Changes are accepted after initial scepticism.
LEVEL 4	There is a generally open attitude to change.
LEVEL 5	Change is understood as a natural part of development.

2. Letting go of the familiar

The ability to question and, where appropriate, relinquish routines, role expectations or self-conceptions.

LEVEL 1	Routines and familiar structures are strongly retained.
LEVEL 2	Letting go is emotionally difficult.
LEVEL 3	The familiar can be relinquished gradually.
LEVEL 4	What still makes sense is consciously examined.
LEVEL 5	The ability to leave outdated things behind is high.

3. Flexibility in thought and action

The ability to adjust approaches, plans or expectations when circumstances change.

LEVEL 1	Thinking is highly rigid.
LEVEL 2	Adaptation occurs only under external pressure.
LEVEL 3	Flexibility is situational.
LEVEL 4	Adaptability is active.
LEVEL 5	Mental flexibility is high even under stress.

4. Actively shaping transitions

The ability to structure transitional periods consciously rather than feeling passively at their mercy.

LEVEL 1	Transitions are experienced passively.
LEVEL 2	Adaptation is reactive.
LEVEL 3	Initial active preparation for new phases occurs.
LEVEL 4	Transitions are shaped consciously.
LEVEL 5	Transitions are planned proactively.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Openness to change & adaptability” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

18 INNOVATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Futures thinking & exploring possibilities

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Imagining alternative futures

The ability to imagine different paths of development beyond wishful thinking or fear.

LEVEL 1	There is strong fixation on the present or past.
LEVEL 2	The future is imagined only as an extension of the familiar.
LEVEL 3	Initial scenario-building is possible.
LEVEL 4	Several possible futures are considered.
LEVEL 5	Scenario thinking is nuanced.

2. Managing uncertainty and openness

The ability to understand the future as open without becoming paralysed or directionless.

LEVEL 1	The need for clarity and control is strong.
LEVEL 2	Uncertainty inhibits action.
LEVEL 3	Ambivalence is partly tolerated.
LEVEL 4	There is openness to open-ended processes.
LEVEL 5	Tolerance of ambiguity is high.

3. Interpreting trends and signals

The ability to notice and interpret technological, social or personal developments.

LEVEL 1	Changes are noticed late.
LEVEL 2	Individual trends are considered in isolation.
LEVEL 3	Basic trend analysis is possible.
LEVEL 4	Developments are observed systematically.
LEVEL 5	Patterns are recognised early.

4. Identifying options for action

The ability to derive meaningful steps for today from possible futures without committing prematurely.

LEVEL 1	Change blocks action.
LEVEL 2	There are few, reactive options.
LEVEL 3	Several possible actions are developed.
LEVEL 4	Realistic options are developed systematically.
LEVEL 5	Possible courses of action are prioritised strategically.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Futures thinking & exploring possibilities” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

19 INNOVATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Creativity & innovation

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Generating ideas

The ability to develop new thoughts, approaches or combinations, including beyond the obvious.

LEVEL 1	There is little variety in ideas.
LEVEL 2	Ideas emerge only with guidance.
LEVEL 3	Creativity is situational.
LEVEL 4	Ideas are generated regularly.
LEVEL 5	Creative productivity is high.

2. Connecting the existing and the new

The ability to combine existing knowledge, experiences or resources in new ways.

LEVEL 1	New things are considered in isolation.
LEVEL 2	Connections arise by chance.
LEVEL 3	Initial deliberate combinations are made.
LEVEL 4	Different elements are synthesised systematically.
LEVEL 5	Old and new are integrated innovatively.

3. Implementation capability

The ability to develop ideas further, make them concrete and translate them into initial steps.

LEVEL 1	Ideas remain theoretical.
LEVEL 2	Implementation fails at the planning stage.
LEVEL 3	Some realisation is possible.
LEVEL 4	Implementation is structured.
LEVEL 5	The ability to implement is strong even in the face of resistance.

4. Managing imperfection and feedback

The ability to show unfinished ideas, incorporate feedback and continue learning.

LEVEL 1	Perfectionism or avoidance dominates.
LEVEL 2	Feedback is received defensively.
LEVEL 3	Feedback is partly used constructively.
LEVEL 4	Feedback is actively sought.
LEVEL 5	Iterative improvement is normal practice.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Creativity & innovation” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

20 INNOVATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Navigating ambiguity & uncertainty

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Tolerating contradictions

The ability to allow several perspectives, including opposing ones, to coexist.

LEVEL 1	There is a need for unambiguous answers.
LEVEL 2	Contradictions create unease.
LEVEL 3	Ambivalence is partly accepted.
LEVEL 4	Contradictions are integrated.
LEVEL 5	The ability to think dialectically is high.

2. Emotional self-regulation under uncertainty

The ability to notice inner unrest, fear or loss of control without being driven by it.

LEVEL 1	Emotional reactivity is strong.
LEVEL 2	Uncertainty triggers stress reactions.
LEVEL 3	Some regulation is possible.
LEVEL 4	Emotions are managed consciously.
LEVEL 5	Stability is maintained even during prolonged uncertainty.

3. Acting without complete clarity

The ability to make decisions even when information is incomplete or contradictory.

LEVEL 1	Action occurs only with complete information.
LEVEL 2	Decisions are hesitant.
LEVEL 3	Decisions are made when clarity is sufficient.
LEVEL 4	Action is possible with 60-70% clarity.
LEVEL 5	There is courage to act iteratively.

4. Openness to course correction

The ability to see decisions as provisional and adjust them as new insights emerge.

LEVEL 1	Past decisions are strongly retained.
LEVEL 2	Course changes occur only under pressure.
LEVEL 3	There is some willingness to adapt.
LEVEL 4	Strategies are reviewed regularly.
LEVEL 5	Iterative navigation is a guiding principle.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Navigating ambiguity & uncertainty” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

21 DIGITAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL SKILLS

Digital literacy & confident use of technology

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Basic understanding of digital systems

The ability to understand broadly how digital applications, platforms and systems work, without technical detail.

LEVEL 1	Digital systems are experienced as a 'black box'.
LEVEL 2	Basic operation is possible, but how systems work is unclear.
LEVEL 3	Basic principles, such as data and algorithms, are understood.
LEVEL 4	Connections between system components can be followed.
LEVEL 5	Digital logic is understood deeply and reflected on.

2. Purposeful use of digital tools

The ability to use digital tools deliberately to make tasks easier rather than create additional complexity.

LEVEL 1	Use is mainly impulsive or externally driven.
LEVEL 2	Tools are used inefficiently.
LEVEL 3	Suitable tools are selected consciously.
LEVEL 4	Digital use has a clear purpose.
LEVEL 5	Digital tools are deployed strategically.

3. Self-management in digital environments

The ability to regulate attention, time and digital media use consciously.

LEVEL 1	Distractibility is high.
LEVEL 2	Digital use is difficult to regulate.
LEVEL 3	Self-control is situational.
LEVEL 4	Time and attention are consciously managed.
LEVEL 5	Digital autonomy is supported by clear boundaries.

4. Managing digital risks

The ability to recognise and assess risks such as dependence, distraction, privacy problems or overload.

LEVEL 1	Risk awareness is low.
LEVEL 2	Caution is reactive.
LEVEL 3	Basic security measures are taken.
LEVEL 4	Risk management, including privacy, is active.
LEVEL 5	Risks are handled reflectively and preventively.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Digital literacy & confident use of technology” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

22 DIGITAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL SKILLS

Data & AI literacy for users

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Basic understanding of AI and data-based systems

The ability to understand broadly how AI systems work, what they are based on and where their limits lie.

LEVEL 1	AI is mystified or demonised.
LEVEL 2	Understanding is superficial.
LEVEL 3	Basic principles are known.
LEVEL 4	Limits and potential are assessed with nuance.
LEVEL 5	AI systems are critically reflected on.

2. Meaningful interaction with AI systems

The ability to formulate tasks clearly, assess results and work iteratively with AI.

LEVEL 1	Use is minimal or outputs are accepted uncritically.
LEVEL 2	Prompts are simple and unstructured.
LEVEL 3	AI is used deliberately for defined tasks.
LEVEL 4	Work with AI is iterative.
LEVEL 5	Human-AI collaboration is strategic.

3. Assessing results and biases

The ability to review AI results critically, recognise errors and question biases.

LEVEL 1	Results are accepted without checking.
LEVEL 2	Occasional doubts arise.
LEVEL 3	Basic plausibility checks are performed.
LEVEL 4	Bias is consciously identified.
LEVEL 5	Sources and biases are analysed systematically.

4. Integrating AI into work and life processes

The ability to use AI deliberately to improve time use, quality or room for decision-making.

LEVEL 1	There is no integration.
LEVEL 2	Use is occasional.
LEVEL 3	AI supports parts of processes.
LEVEL 4	AI is consciously integrated into routines.
LEVEL 5	Processes are optimised through AI.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Data & AI literacy for users” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

23 DIGITAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL SKILLS

Understanding automation & processes

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Recognising recurring processes

The ability to identify routines, repetitions and typical sequences in everyday life or work.

LEVEL 1	Routines remain unconscious.
LEVEL 2	Repetitions are noticed but not analysed.
LEVEL 3	Recurring patterns are identified.
LEVEL 4	Processes are analysed systematically.
LEVEL 5	Processes are observed proactively.

2. Structuring processes

The ability to organise processes mentally: What happens when, why and towards what goal?

LEVEL 1	Processes are disorganised.
LEVEL 2	There is some structure.
LEVEL 3	Simple process models are possible.
LEVEL 4	Complex processes are clearly structured.
LEVEL 5	Process architecture is systematic.

3. Assessing automation potential

The ability to judge which steps can usefully be supported or simplified and which cannot.

LEVEL 1	Automation is not considered.
LEVEL 2	There are isolated ideas.
LEVEL 3	Recurring tasks are reviewed.
LEVEL 4	Efficiency potential is analysed consciously.
LEVEL 5	Automation decisions are strategic.

4. Interaction between people and technology

The ability to decide clearly what should be automated and where human judgement remains essential.

LEVEL 1	Technology replaces or dominates.
LEVEL 2	People and technology are viewed as competitors.
LEVEL 3	Use is complementary.
LEVEL 4	Roles are deliberately allocated between people and technology.
LEVEL 5	Collaboration is optimised.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Understanding automation & processes” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

24 DIGITAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL SKILLS

Digital ethics & responsibility

Four subskills | Five descriptive orientation levels each

1. Awareness of the effects of digital technologies

The ability to recognise the social, psychological and societal consequences of digital systems.

LEVEL 1	There is little reflection on societal consequences.
LEVEL 2	There are isolated concerns.
LEVEL 3	Social effects are understood at a basic level.
LEVEL 4	Engagement is nuanced.
LEVEL 5	An ethical position is actively taken.

2. Reflecting on power, dependence and inequality

The ability to understand how technology can concentrate power, create dependencies or reinforce inequalities.

LEVEL 1	There is no sensitivity to power asymmetries.
LEVEL 2	Individual criticisms are noticed.
LEVEL 3	Structural effects are understood.
LEVEL 4	Digital power structures are critically analysed.
LEVEL 5	There is an active commitment to fair technology development.

3. Responsible decision-making

The ability to weigh up personal decisions about technology consciously, beyond efficiency or convenience.

LEVEL 1	Short-term efficiency dominates.
LEVEL 2	Ethical aspects are secondary.
LEVEL 3	Consequences are weighed up.
LEVEL 4	Responsibility is consciously incorporated.
LEVEL 5	Ethical orientation is long term.

4. Setting boundaries and taking a stand

The ability to define personal boundaries and consciously take a position in digital environments.

LEVEL 1	There are no clear digital boundaries.
LEVEL 2	Boundaries are applied inconsistently.
LEVEL 3	There is some clarity of position.
LEVEL 4	Personal standards are consistent.
LEVEL 5	Digital integrity is exemplary.

REFLECTION QUESTION Which of the four subskills within “Digital ethics & responsibility” would make the greatest positive difference in your current life situation?

From understanding to development

The atlas explains what a Future Skill means in concrete terms and how different levels can be described. Development does not begin, however, with an ambition to score as highly as possible everywhere. It begins with a conscious choice.

A practical sequence

1. Consider your life situation.
2. Choose a relevant Future Skill.
3. Prioritise one subskill.
4. Reflect on your current level using concrete situations.
5. Try a small development step.
6. Observe its effects.
7. Adjust your approach.

For practical implementation, the atlas can be combined with the Future Skills Institut's seven-step method and the My Future Skills App.

Go to the My Future Skills App: <https://my-future-skills.lovable.app>

Go to the Future Skills Institut: <https://future-skills-institut.de/en/>

A note on developing the framework further

Competency models are never final. Terms, distinctions and descriptions should be reviewed regularly in light of new research, experience of application and social change. This is why this document carries a version date. Suggestions and professional feedback are expressly welcome.