

FSI PRACTICE PAPER

WEITER7

Seven Steps and Eight Examples

Shaping personal development consciously and realistically under uncertainty - with eight practical examples

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Seven steps for effective development over time

Through its extensive work on Future Skills, the Future Skills Institut has created a reference framework: a life-centred overview of the capabilities needed for the future and a detailed consideration of individual skills, their subskills and the ways they typically manifest themselves. The derivation of the Future Skills list is available as a separate download on the Future Skills Institut website. The detailed skill profiles form the core of the app. They help explain what Future Skills mean, how they may show up in everyday life, and which exercises can develop them further from a starting point established through reflection. Which exercises are genuinely helpful depends, among other things, on personality, needs, learning preferences and temperament.

The seven-step method builds on these insights and shifts attention to another level. It no longer asks which capabilities matter or how they can be described. Instead, it addresses a more fundamental question: How can I keep a conscious overview of my own life under complex, uncertain conditions and shape my development realistically?

This explicitly does not mean developing every area of life at the same time. Development is slow, gradual and subject to constraints. Time, energy, attention and the mental space to reflect are limited resources. This limitation is not a weakness; it is a fundamental condition of human development. Trying to change too much at once risks overwhelm, restless activity or resignation.

A central principle of this section is therefore: every life is individual, and all development takes time. Just as every company has its own history, starting point and objectives, this applies even more strongly to human lives. Although similarities may emerge within particular life stages or contexts, the specific way a life unfolds always remains subjective. No model fits everyone, and no life develops all at once.

The seven-step method therefore deliberately follows the idea of gradual development, as also described in the so-called one-per-cent method: change comes not from great leaps, but from small, continuous steps that take effect over time.

The starting question is not “What should I develop?” but “From where I stand today, what would make the greatest difference right now?” This question implies prioritisation. Not everything needs attention now. Not every skill needs to be developed at the same time. Some topics can wait without being lost.

A helpful analogy is the development of professional athletes. Few people reach a high level of performance through short bursts of intensity. Instead, they often invest deliberately in building capabilities over many years: in small steps, with clear priorities, and in ways adapted to their life stage, starting conditions and objectives. As experience grows, the approach also becomes more systematic: which capabilities now contribute most to the overall profile? What is realistic, and what is deliberately being left for later?

Applied to our own lives, this means that readiness for the future emerges through intelligent sequencing rather than the uniform development of every skill.

Shaping development under uncertainty

Scope and limitations

The seven-step method is a practical framework for reflection and development. It supports orientation and small learning experiments, but does not replace psychological assessment, therapy or individual specialist advice.

The approach presented here is neither a manual for controlling life nor a development programme. It offers a pragmatic way of thinking and proceeding that helps people retain their capacity to act under complex conditions, without claiming to have everything under control.

At its heart is the question of how people can maintain an overview of their lives while goals, circumstances and priorities change. In periods of rapid change, there is a particular risk of reacting to isolated issues, prioritising immediate demands or following external expectations while losing sight of one's own guiding vision. Development then becomes fragmented, accidental or exhausting.

This approach deliberately draws on simplified ways of reviewing direction familiar from organisations, projects and personal development processes. The intention is to enable orientation under uncertainty rather than to mechanise life. The aim is not to plan one's life in detail, but to reflect at meaningful intervals:

- Is the direction still right?
- Does what I am currently spending energy on contribute to the life I want to lead?
- Where would a small course correction be more helpful than further effort?

A central element is a long-term, deliberately open guiding vision: a personal “why”. This vision serves as a horizon for orientation rather than a fixed destination. It may change, grow or be readjusted. From it, people can derive specific priorities, choose development opportunities and deliberately limit their focus.

The approach presented below therefore treats development as an iterative process: observe, select, try out, reflect, and decide again. Small steps, manageable periods and deliberate pauses are not signs of slowness; they are conditions for sustainable development. The model invites us to understand development as a learning process: imperfect and non-linear, yet effective over time. It aims to offer good questions more than ready-made answers, and a structure that helps us use limited resources wisely without losing sight of the whole.

Research context

The approach described here was not chosen at random. It reflects central insights from several areas of research and practice that have long addressed sustainable development, motivation and learning processes.

Works such as Atomic Habits show how long-term change arises less from ambitious resolutions than from small, continuous adjustments. Hidden Potential likewise emphasises that development depends less on talent or starting level than on the ability to sustain learning processes over time, often under imperfect conditions.

Approaches such as Start with Why and the WOOP method also underline the importance of inner meaning and realistic connections to action for sustainable motivation, rather than relying on externally imposed goals. The concept of a Serendipity Mindset points out that development in complex environments rarely unfolds according to plan and requires openness, iteration and adaptability. These perspectives share a central principle: development succeeds through orientation, focus and repeated, reflected steps rather than through control. This is precisely where the approach presented here begins.

The method for personal development

The seven-step model rests on an understanding of which capabilities matter under changing conditions and how they can be described. This section shifts the focus to another level: from the content itself to how we work with it.

At its heart is a simple idea: development arises through intelligent focus, small experiments and regular reflection rather than the simultaneous optimisation of many areas. The seven steps describe a cycle that can be repeated, adapted to life stage, context and personal priorities, rather than a linear process.

Step 1: Develop a provisional guiding vision

The starting point is a horizon for orientation rather than a concrete target. The question is not “What do I want to achieve?” but “From today's perspective, how would I like to shape and experience my life?”

This guiding vision may be vague. It describes a direction rather than a final destination. It may change, grow or be corrected. What matters is its inner coherence rather than its precision.

Step 2: Reality check - what is possible now?

Development does not happen in a vacuum. Time, energy, attention and external commitments are limited. A deliberate reality check therefore follows the guiding vision: what circumstances shape my life at present? What is possible, and what is not?

This step grounds ambition rather than restricting it. A guiding vision that does not fit the current life stage creates pressure instead of orientation.

Step 3: Identify orientation anchors

This step uses qualitative signs rather than conventional performance indicators. The question is: how would I notice that I am moving in the right direction?

These orientation anchors are subjective, often not measurable, but readily perceptible: greater inner calm, clearer decisions, less internal friction or a stronger sense of connection. They help make development tangible without narrowing it down.

Step 4: Reflect using the Future Skills Framework

Only now does the competency model introduced in Part II come into play. Consult the overview of Future Skills, with its descriptions of subskills and orientation levels: which capabilities could help me strengthen the orientation anchors from Step 3? How developed are they at present, particularly under pressure?

The focus is on possibilities for meaningful change rather than deficits: which skills would enable me to make the greatest difference right now?

Step 5: Prioritise deliberately

No one can develop everything at once. A clear decision therefore follows: what needs attention now, and what can deliberately wait? Usually this means one skill, or sometimes just one subskill. Everything else remains in view but is not actively worked on. This deliberate limit protects against overload and activity for its own sake.

Step 6: Design development experiments

Development is now tried out rather than simply planned. Choose small, realistic experiments for a manageable period, often four to six weeks. These are concrete prompts for behaviour that can be integrated into daily life, rather than resolutions or programmes. The focus is on opportunities to learn, not on discipline.

Step 7: Reflect on learning rather than judge performance

A cycle ends with reflection on learning rather than a verdict of success or failure: what helped? What was difficult? What does this tell me about my next development decision? On this basis, decide whether to maintain, adjust or change the focus, and whether the guiding vision still feels right.

These seven steps do not form a rigid model. They offer a way of understanding development as a learning process: gradual, dependent on context and effective over time. Not everything needs to succeed at once. But much becomes clearer when development is not left to chance.

Readiness for the future thus emerges through the ability to pause regularly, choose consciously and take the next small step, rather than through perfect planning. The ambition of this model is deliberately modest. It promises no rapid transformation, no control over the future and no guarantee of success. It does, however, offer a structure for retaining the capacity to act under uncertainty, step by step and adapted to one's own circumstances.

Examples of the method in practice

From model to application: seven steps in different life situations

The seven steps describe neither an ideal process nor a sequence that must be followed exactly. They are an orientation framework intended to help people shape development consciously under uncertainty, adapted to life stage, context and individual starting point.

Only concrete lives reveal how differently this method can feel in practice. People begin from very different positions, with different resources, pressures, experiences and questions. Some are under considerable strain; others are in a period of relative stability. Some seek new direction; others want to shape what already works more consciously.

The following examples reflect this diversity. Each uses the same seven-step method, yet the process unfolds differently in every case. Sometimes the guiding vision is central; sometimes the reality check. In some situations, prioritisation makes the decisive difference; in others, reflection on learning does. None of the examples depicts a “solved” life. They are not about perfect outcomes, dramatic breakthroughs or rapid change. Instead, they show how people make small, coherent development decisions under real conditions, and how these can lead over time to greater clarity, self-efficacy and orientation.

The examples are intended as mirrors rather than role models. They should help readers recognise their own situations, draw parallels and mentally apply the method to their lives. Which steps matter most, the order in which they are taken and the duration of a development cycle are deliberately left open. This is precisely the model's strength: it provides structure without standardising lives, and orientation without prescribing a path.

Example 1: Everyday family life

Starting situation

Karen is 42, works in a knowledge-intensive role and is living through a period of heavy demands with her family. Professionally, her expertise is recognised, but she feels increasingly exhausted. At the same time, she feels that her life is strongly driven by external demands: appointments, expectations and obligations. She wonders how she can maintain her capacity to perform over the long term without further neglecting her health, relationships or inner contentment.

Karen has no acute problem that needs to be “solved”. Yet she senses that continuing like this will not feel right in the long run.

Step 1: Develop a provisional guiding vision

Karen formulates a guiding vision, deliberately as a direction rather than a concrete target: “I want to shape my life so that, over the long term, I feel effective, healthy and inwardly calm - professionally engaged, but not permanently exhausted.”

She knows this vision is provisional. It describes a point of orientation rather than a final destination.

Step 2: Reality check - what is possible now?

Before proceeding, Karen considers her circumstances:

- She has little free time.
- Her energy is limited.
- Family commitments cannot simply be reduced.

At the same time, she recognises that small changes would be possible, although major upheavals are not realistic at present. The guiding vision remains, but is adapted to her life stage.

Step 3: Identify orientation anchors

Karen asks: how would I notice that I am moving in this direction? She chooses three qualitative orientation anchors:

- I make decisions with less internal pressure.
- I have more frequent brief moments of calm and clarity in daily life.
- I respond more calmly to the unexpected.

These signs are not measurable in the conventional sense, but they are perceptible.

Step 4: Reflect using the Future Skills overview

Karen now looks at the Future Skills Framework. She asks: which capabilities would help me strengthen these orientation anchors?

She identifies three relevant skills:

- Self-regulation.
- Learning and development competence.
- Dealing with uncertainty.

Looking at her current skill level, she realises:

- Her professional expertise is very strong.
- In stressful situations, however, she quickly loses the ability to step back mentally.
- Reflection tends to happen afterwards rather than during everyday situations.

Step 5: Prioritise deliberately

Karen consciously decides against a comprehensive development programme. Instead, she chooses:

- One skill: self-regulation.
- One subskill: handling internal pressure consciously.

Everything else can wait.

Step 6: Development experiments - six weeks

Karen gathers ideas and chooses two small experiments:

1. Pause briefly once a day and ask: what is driving me right now, and what would be an appropriate response?
2. In tense situations, deliberately introduce a delay before responding, for example by taking three breaths.

She chooses a six-week period as an experiment rather than an obligation.

Step 7: Reflect on learning rather than judge performance

After six weeks, Karen takes time for a brief reflection:

- What helped? The brief pauses helped her avoid reacting immediately.
- What got in the way? Pausing was difficult during especially stressful periods.
- What is the next small step? She wants to continue the exercises and also consider how to recognise peaks in pressure earlier.

She decides:

- The guiding vision still feels right.
- The chosen skill remains relevant.
- Another development cycle makes sense, without adding new skills.

What this example shows

No major goal was achieved, no problem was “solved”, and no life plan was drawn up.

Yet something essential happened: Karen consciously guided her development without overwhelming herself. She gained clarity, recognised room for action and strengthened her self-efficacy.

This is precisely the model's strength: it helps people make development decisions that fit real circumstances rather than control their lives. Not faster or more perfectly, but more consciously.

Example 2: Finding direction between school and work

Starting situation

Martin is 18 and nearing the end of school. In formal terms, many options are open to him: university, vocational training, a degree combined with workplace training, or a year of voluntary service. In practice, however, he feels blocked. The more options he sees, the harder deciding becomes.

People around him frequently ask: “What are you going to do now?” Martin senses pressure more than curiosity. He feels he must choose something “right”, while also fearing that he could set himself on the wrong course.

Step 1: Develop a provisional guiding vision

Instead of immediately searching for a specific occupation or degree course, Martin formulates an initial vision that is deliberately open and limited in time:

“Over the next one to two years, I want to understand better what suits me, what interests me and how I want to learn and work, without committing too soon.”

This vision reduces the pressure. It shifts the focus from a final decision towards orientation and discovering more about himself.

Step 2: Reality check - what is possible now?

Martin considers his circumstances:

- He still lives with his parents.
- His basic financial needs are covered.
- He has little practical work experience, but time and a willingness to learn.

At the same time, he recognises:

- A commitment lasting several years feels too large at present.
- A year to explore his options would be realistic.

The guiding vision remains, but becomes more concrete within a manageable time horizon.

Step 3: Identify orientation anchors

Martin asks: how would I notice that I am moving in the right direction?

He chooses three orientation anchors:

- I understand better what matters to me in learning and work.
- I feel less paralysed by the pressure to decide.
- I gather real experiences rather than only thinking about them.

These signs help him recognise progress beyond a qualification or title.

Step 4: Reflect using the Future Skills Framework

Martin now looks at the framework and asks: which capabilities help me deal with this uncertainty?

He identifies several relevant skills:

- Decision-making under uncertainty.
- Self-reflection.

- Learning and development competence.

Taking an honest look at himself, he recognises:

- He thinks a great deal, but rarely reflects in a structured way.
- Uncertainty quickly leads to procrastination.
- Learning comes easily when he can see a purpose in it.

Step 5: Prioritise deliberately

Martin chooses one focus:

- One skill: decision-making.
- One subskill: making small, reversible decisions.

He realises that he does not need to make the “big” decision straight away; he needs to learn to think of decisions in stages.

Step 6: Development experiments - six weeks

Martin chooses two simple experiments:

1. Arrange one concrete experience each week: a conversation, a taster day or a work placement.
2. After each experience, write down answers to three questions: what interested me? What bothered me? What does that tell me about myself?

The six-week period provides structure without a long-term commitment.

Step 7: Reflect on learning rather than judge performance

After six weeks, Martin reflects:

- What helped? Real experiences significantly reduced the pressure to decide.
- What got in the way? Conversations with other people who seemed very certain sometimes unsettled him.
- What is the next small step? He wants to explore two options in greater depth rather than keep searching.

His guiding vision changes slightly: “I now want to decide on my next learning step, not on the whole of my life.”

What this example shows

No final career decision was made, no “right” answer was found, and no artificial time pressure was added.

Yet Martin gained something central:

- Greater clarity about himself.
- Room for action.
- Confidence in a gradual decision-making process.

The model's strength becomes particularly apparent during transitions. It replaces the illusion of the right decision with the ability to remain capable of action under uncertainty. Not every decision must be right. But it should be made consciously, be open to revision and support learning.

Example 3: Finding direction before retirement

Starting situation

Michael is 61 and a few years away from retirement. He looks back on a fulfilling working life. His role was clear, his expertise sought after and his daily routine structured. Yet for some time he has felt a vague unease.

He asks himself:

- Who am I when I no longer work?
- How will I judge my contribution?
- How do I want to use my time, energy and experience?

Michael is not afraid of retirement, but he takes seriously the emptiness that might emerge when structure, recognition and purpose fall away.

Step 1: Develop a provisional guiding vision

Michael formulates a vision focused less on activity than on quality: "I want to shape my transition into retirement so that I continue to feel needed, remain mentally engaged and experience my time as meaningful, without overburdening myself."

This vision deliberately avoids specifying activities. It describes an attitude.

Step 2: Reality check - what is possible now?

Michael reviews his circumstances:

- He is financially secure.
- His health is generally stable, but his capacity is not unlimited.
- His social network is strongly connected to work.

He recognises:

- A complete break with work would be difficult for him.
- At the same time, he does not want to take on another full-time commitment.

The guiding vision remains, but is directed towards a gradual transition.

Step 3: Identify orientation anchors

Michael asks: how would I notice that this transition is going well?

He chooses three orientation anchors:

- I have regular opportunities for social connection.
- I experience meaning through contribution rather than status.
- My daily life feels structured, but not dictated by others.

These signs are not measurable, but they can be experienced very clearly on a personal level.

Step 4: Reflect using the Future Skills Framework

Michael now considers the framework and identifies several relevant capabilities:

- Flexibility of identity.
- Self-regulation beyond external structures.

- A sense of meaning through relationships and contribution.

Taking an honest look at himself, he notices:

- Until now, structure has largely come from outside.
- Relationships have often been based on roles.
- He has found it difficult to pursue his own projects without external requirements.

Step 5: Prioritise deliberately

Michael deliberately chooses one focus:

- One skill: self-regulation.
- One subskill: developing his own rhythms and structures.

He realises that, before seeking new activities, he needs to learn to give himself a sustainable daily routine.

Step 6: Development experiments - six weeks

Michael chooses two simple experiments:

1. Establish two fixed weekly appointments that provide meaning independently of work, for example volunteering, learning or physical activity.
2. Reflect regularly: do I feel enlivened or exhausted afterwards?

The six-week period allows him to gain experience without making a lasting commitment.

Step 7: Reflect on learning rather than judge performance

After six weeks, Michael reflects:

- What helped? Fixed structures he chose himself provide a sense of security.
- What got in the way? Too many expectations about “making meaningful use” of time.
- What is the next small step? He wants to deepen one commitment and consciously let another go.

His guiding vision changes slightly: “I do not need to replace everything work gave me; I can add something new.”

What this example shows

The focus was not on becoming more active or productive, but on:

- Identity.
- Meaning.
- Self-efficacy during a transition.

Michael has not drawn up a life plan. But he has begun to shape his retirement consciously rather than simply letting it arrive. Transitions later in life make particularly clear that Future Skills are life skills rather than merely career skills. Capabilities such as self-regulation, reflection and relationship-building remain central into old age, perhaps especially then. They help us continue living in a way that feels coherent, rather than requiring us to become something new.

Example 4: Development under financial pressure and job loss

Starting situation

Astrid is 49. For many years, she worked in an administrative, knowledge-based role. In recent months, her department has been extensively automated. AI systems now carry out some of its tasks. Eventually, she loses her job.

Astrid applies for new roles, but mostly receives rejections or no response at all. Many requirements no longer match her profile, or the jobs simply no longer exist. At the same time, her finances are strained. Her savings are limited and the prospect of finding new employment quickly is poor.

Astrid feels not only unemployed, but devalued. She doubts her usefulness and capabilities, and increasingly herself.

Step 1: Develop a provisional guiding vision

In this situation, Astrid finds it difficult to formulate a positive picture of the future. Instead, she deliberately chooses a modest, realistic guiding vision:

“I want to get through this period in a way that preserves my capacity to act and my dignity, and lets me develop new possibilities step by step, even though I cannot currently see a clear solution.”

This vision promises neither advancement nor a quick solution. It focuses on stability and self-efficacy.

Step 2: Reality check - what is possible now?

Astrid considers her circumstances soberly:

- Financial resources are scarce.
- Psychological strain is high.
- Energy and confidence fluctuate considerably.

At the same time, she recognises:

- She has time, even if involuntarily.
- She has life experience and social skills.
- Small steps are possible; major upheavals are not realistic at present.

The guiding vision remains, but is explicitly adapted to getting through the situation and regaining stability.

Step 3: Identify orientation anchors

Astrid asks: how would I notice that I am not slipping further?

She chooses three simple orientation anchors:

- I do not lose my daily rhythm completely.
- I stay in touch with at least one person whose company does me good.
- I feel that I can still make decisions, at least about small things.

These signs are deliberately easy to approach. They indicate stabilisation rather than progress.

Step 4: Reflect using the Future Skills overview

Astrid now looks at the framework, initially sceptical. She thinks: “What use are skills if the market no longer needs them?”

Looking more closely, however, she identifies capabilities that cannot be automated:

- Resilience and dealing with uncertainty.
- Self-regulation in stressful situations.
- Relationship-building and communication.

She also recognises:

- Her technical and professional skills currently have little effect.
- Life skills are now crucial to retaining her capacity to act.

Step 5: Prioritise deliberately

Astrid chooses a clear focus:

- One skill: self-regulation.
- One subskill: structure and self-care under pressure.

Everything else, including further training, a new direction and retraining, is not ruled out but deliberately postponed.

Step 6: Development experiments - six weeks

Astrid chooses three very small experiments:

1. A fixed daily anchor, such as a morning walk.
2. A weekly conversation with someone she trusts.
3. A daily mini-reflection: what did I manage today, however small?

These steps may appear trivial. In her situation, they are fundamental.

Step 7: Reflect on learning rather than judge performance

After six weeks, Astrid reflects:

- What helped? Structure and social contact prevented her from withdrawing completely.
- What got in the way? Comparisons with her former status.
- What is the next small step? She wants to explore where her capabilities might be needed outside conventional job profiles, without immediate pressure to succeed.

Her guiding vision shifts slightly: “I cannot control this period, but I can shape how I respond to it.”

What this example shows

This was not about career, self-fulfilment or growth. It was about:

- Stability.
- Dignity.
- Self-efficacy under difficult conditions.

Astrid has not “solved” her situation. But she has prevented herself from becoming lost within it.

Especially in times of automation, AI and structural change, Future Skills emerge as protective resources for life as well as means of employability. They do not always help people find a new job. But they help people remain capable of action, capable of learning and human when external sources of security disappear. Sometimes this is the most important first step.

Example 5: When everything works, but relationships get too little attention

Starting situation

Laura is 38, professionally successful and heavily committed. Her daily life is full: demanding work, family, organisation and appointments. From the outside, her life looks stable and successful. She experiences herself as capable, reliable and in demand.

At the same time, Laura has felt a quiet dissatisfaction for some time. It is subtle rather than dramatic. She notices that friendships rarely have space. Encounters often remain functional or fleeting. Deep conversations, shared experiences and real closeness are all present, but too infrequently.

Laura does not think, “Something is missing.” Rather, she thinks, “If things carry on as they are, this part of my life will move further and further to the margins.”

Step 1: Develop a provisional guiding vision

Laura formulates a vision that shifts the emphasis without questioning anything fundamental: “I want to shape my life so that relationships and friendships regain depth and commitment, without giving up my professional engagement.”

The vision is a decision about relative importance rather than a break with her existing life.

Step 2: Reality check - what is possible now?

Laura considers her circumstances:

- Time is scarce.
- Energy is limited, but stable.
- Commitments can only be reduced to a limited extent.

At the same time, she recognises:

- Small, regular spaces would be possible.
- What is needed is a different quality of contact rather than more contacts.

The guiding vision remains, but is clearly adapted to everyday reality.

Step 3: Identify orientation anchors

Laura asks: how would I notice that something is changing?

She chooses three orientation anchors:

- I regularly have conversations that go beyond practical arrangements.
- I experience more connection and less merely getting things done.
- I consciously invest time in selected relationships without feeling guilty.

These signs cannot be counted, but they are emotionally very clear.

Step 4: Reflect using the Future Skills Framework

Laura looks at the skills overview and recognises several relevant capabilities:

- Relationship-building and communication competence.
- Prioritisation.

- Self-regulation in handling time and expectations.

Reflecting on herself, she realises:

- She is very good at meeting demands.
- She is less practised at deliberately making room for relationships when there is no external occasion.

Step 5: Prioritise deliberately

Laura chooses one focus:

- One skill: relationship-building.
- One subskill: actively shaping relationships rather than passively maintaining them.

She realises that the issue is not “having more time”, but using time differently.

Step 6: Development experiments - six weeks

Laura chooses two manageable experiments:

1. Arrange to meet one person regularly, with a fixed place in the calendar rather than “when there is time”.
2. In conversations, deliberately ask questions that allow depth rather than remaining at the level of exchanging news.

The experiments are small, but involve a real commitment.

Step 7: Reflect on learning rather than judge performance

After six weeks, Laura reflects:

- What helped? The commitment in the calendar created space without causing stress.
- What got in the way? The feeling that she needed to justify using time “unproductively”.
- What is the next small step? She wants to deepen one more relationship consciously, and no more than that.

Her guiding vision changes slightly: “I do not need many close relationships, but I want to be intentional about the ones I have.”

What this example shows

This was about conscious choices rather than crisis or lack. Laura has not “repaired” anything. She has made a part of her life that matters to her visible again. During performance-oriented stages of life, relationships often recede into the background through constant busyness rather than conflict. The model helps people set priorities before something is missing, instead of only reacting afterwards.

Not everything important is urgent. But some things regain their importance when we make room for them again.

Example 6: Developing a relationship consciously

Starting situation

Claudia and Tobias have been a couple for many years. Their early relationship was characterised by closeness, ease and mutual curiosity. Now everyday life sets the rhythm: work, commitments, organisation and exhaustion. Conversations often revolve around to-do lists, problems or unfinished tasks.

Recently, arguments have become more frequent. Hurtful words are spoken. Afterwards, both recognise that this is not how they want to treat each other. At the same time, there is a clear wish: this relationship should remain fulfilling, rather than merely “function”, and ideally sustain them throughout their lives.

Step 1: Develop a provisional guiding vision

Rather than fundamentally questioning the relationship, Claudia formulates a vision, also speaking for Tobias: “I want to shape our relationship so that we again experience more connection, respect and ease in everyday life, even when not everything goes well.”

This vision idealises nothing. It recognises conflict as part of a relationship without normalising it.

Step 2: Reality check - what is possible now?

Claudia reflects on the circumstances:

- Both are often tired.
- Time for conversation is limited.
- Old patterns quickly take over, especially under stress.

At the same time, she recognises:

- Small changes in how they treat each other would be possible.
- Not everything needs to be resolved immediately.

The guiding vision remains, but is adapted to everyday reality and emotional capacity.

Step 3: Identify orientation anchors

Claudia asks: how would I notice an improvement?

She chooses three orientation anchors:

- Conflicts escalate less often or less intensely.
- We reconnect more quickly after difficult moments.
- I less often regret what I said during an argument.

These signs focus on the quality of handling tension rather than on harmony.

Step 4: Reflect using the Future Skills Framework

Looking at the framework, Claudia identifies several relevant capabilities:

- Emotion regulation.
- Communication and relationship-building competence.
- Self-reflection.

She also recognises:

- Conflicts often arise from overload rather than substantive differences.
- Under stress, her ability to pause in the moment is limited.

Step 5: Prioritise deliberately

Claudia deliberately chooses one focus:

- One skill: emotion regulation.
- One subskill: pausing before speaking.

She recognises that, if this works, much else will change with it.

Step 6: Development experiments - six weeks

Claudia chooses two small experiments:

1. In tense moments, introduce a brief pause before responding, for example by taking a deep breath or leaving the room.
2. After conflict, deliberately seek a moment of reconnection, even if the issue has not yet been resolved.

These steps seem small. Within the relationship, their effect is substantial.

Step 7: Reflect on learning rather than judge performance

After six weeks, Claudia reflects:

- What helped? Pauses significantly reduced escalation.
- What got in the way? The desire to “be right”.
- What is the next small step? Pay more attention to her own emotional state before conversations begin.

Her guiding vision remains, but feels closer and more achievable.

What this example shows

This was not about avoiding conflict or creating harmony. It was about understanding a relationship as a shared space for development.

Claudia has not “repaired” anything. But she has begun to take responsibility for her own part, creating room for change. Long-term relationships rarely fail because of a lack of love. Often, they fail because of a lack of ability to deal constructively with everyday demands, stress and emotions.

Here, Future Skills function as relationship capabilities rather than career factors, and therefore as a foundation for a life of connection. Not every relationship stays easy. But many remain alive when they are shaped consciously.

Example 7: Academic excellence, but blind spots in Future Skills

Starting situation

Lukas is 23 and studying a demanding subject at master's level. He manages the academic content well, has strong analytical abilities and achieves solid to very good results. Seminars, examinations and written assignments primarily demand cognitive and analytical capabilities, subject knowledge and structured thinking.

At the same time, Lukas increasingly notices that many capabilities described as important in placements, part-time jobs or conversations with working professionals hardly feature systematically in his studies. Teamwork does take place, for example in group projects, but it is rarely reflected on. Communication is assumed rather than deliberately practised. Feedback is almost exclusively about academic results, seldom about collaboration or his effect on others. Lukas does not feel poorly prepared. But he senses a gap between academic qualifications and professional reality.

Step 1: Develop a provisional guiding vision

Rather than fundamentally questioning his studies, Lukas formulates a complementary vision: "I want to use my studies to develop not only subject knowledge but also the capabilities that will later make collaboration, communication and self-regulation easier for me."

This vision deliberately complements his studies rather than competing with them.

Step 2: Reality check - what is possible now?

Lukas considers his circumstances:

- The curriculum is demanding.
- Assessment requirements clearly focus on subject knowledge.
- Additional time is limited.

At the same time, he recognises:

- Group assignments provide real opportunities for learning.
- Part-time jobs, university initiatives and tutorials offer additional contexts.
- Small experiments are possible without jeopardising his studies.

The guiding vision remains, but is adapted to the realities of studying and the time available.

Step 3: Identify orientation anchors

Lukas asks: how would I notice that I am developing these capabilities?

He chooses three orientation anchors:

- I state more clearly in groups what I think or need.
- Collaboration feels less exhausting and conflict-ridden.
- I receive informal feedback on my effect on others.

These signs are not graded, but are highly relevant to later professional situations.

Step 4: Reflect using the Future Skills Framework

Looking at the framework, Lukas identifies several relevant capabilities:

- Teamwork and cooperation.

- Communication.
- Self-reflection.

He recognises:

- Subject-specific skills are practised systematically.
- Social and communication skills develop more incidentally, depending on the group, chance and personality.

Step 5: Prioritise deliberately

Lukas chooses a clear focus:

- One skill: teamwork and cooperation.
- One subskill: giving and receiving constructive feedback.

He recognises that improvement here would also benefit presentations, group assignments and his later entry into work.

Step 6: Development experiments - six weeks

Lukas chooses three simple experiments:

1. Regularly ask for feedback in group assignments: "How was my contribution helpful to you, and where was it not?"
2. Reflect briefly after shared tasks: what worked well in our collaboration?
3. More deliberately frame his own contributions as suggestions rather than finished solutions.

These experiments use existing learning opportunities with renewed attention.

Step 7: Reflect on learning rather than judge performance

After six weeks, Lukas reflects:

- What helped? Explicit feedback made blind spots visible.
- What got in the way? His initial uncertainty about asking for feedback at all.
- What is the next small step? He wants to seek targeted feedback on presentations and discussions too.

His guiding vision remains, but becomes more concrete: "I can actively acquire these capabilities even if they are not part of the curriculum."

What this example shows

This was about deliberate supplementation rather than deficits. Lukas recognised that formal education does not systematically cover every relevant capability, and that this is not a personal failure.

He began taking responsibility for his own development without having to change the system. University teaches knowledge. Future Skills often develop between the lines, through collaboration, communication and self-regulation. The model helps people use these learning opportunities consciously rather than leave them to chance.

Not everything important is taught. But much can be learned if we know what to pay attention to.

Example 8: When work becomes uncertain and learning becomes necessary

Starting situation

Thomas is 45 and has worked in a knowledge-intensive occupation for many years. He is experienced, reliable and professionally accomplished. Yet he increasingly notices changes around him: tasks previously performed manually are being automated. Colleagues who make targeted use of AI tools are significantly more productive.

During a conversation, a friend says something that stays with him: “You will not be replaced by AI, but by people who use AI better.”

Until now, Thomas has tended to reject AI. Occasionally, he has tried something and written a few prompts, but without real interest. Now he realises that his job is not immediately at risk, but its security can no longer be taken for granted.

Step 1: Develop a provisional guiding vision

Thomas formulates a vision that is honest and does not sugar-coat anything: “I want to remain able to work over the coming years without having to reinvent myself completely, and understand how I can meaningfully integrate AI into my work.”

This vision is about preserving room for action rather than imagining the future with enthusiasm.

Step 2: Reality check - what is possible now?

Thomas considers his situation:

- Time is limited.
- Motivation is low.
- Resistance to learning is noticeable.

At the same time, he recognises:

- He knows his work processes very well.
- Small learning steps would be feasible.
- In the long run, complete refusal would be riskier than cautious engagement.

The guiding vision remains, but is clearly adapted to his energy and willingness.

Step 3: Identify orientation anchors

Thomas asks: how would I notice that my capacity to act is increasing?

He chooses three orientation anchors:

- I understand where AI can usefully support my work processes.
- I can identify simple automation ideas, even if I do not yet implement them myself.
- I lose less time on repetitive tasks.

These signs concern function rather than identity.

Step 4: Reflect using the Future Skills Framework

Looking at the framework, Thomas identifies relevant capabilities:

- Digital and technological competence.
- Process thinking.
- Learning and development competence.

He also recognises:

- This is less about tools such as ChatGPT or n8n in themselves.
- It is about understanding work as a system and recognising possibilities.

Step 5: Prioritise deliberately

Thomas deliberately chooses a limited focus:

- One skill: digital and technological competence.
- One subskill: analysing processes with a view to automation.

He tells himself: “I do not need to become an AI expert, but I do need to understand where it can take work off my hands.”

Step 6: Development experiments - six weeks

Thomas chooses two manageable experiments:

1. Describe one of his own work processes in detail and mark what is repetitive and what follows rules.
2. Understand what is broadly possible with a simple automation tool, such as n8n, without needing to master it himself.

The experiments are deliberately easy to approach: understanding comes before enthusiasm.

Step 7: Reflect on learning rather than judge performance

After six weeks, Thomas reflects:

- What helped? Looking at processes made his work more transparent to him.
- What got in the way? His internal resistance to “even more technology”.
- What is the next small step? A concrete mini-project: automate one process together with a colleague who is comfortable with technology.

His guiding vision changes slightly: “I do not have to like AI, but I can learn to use it meaningfully.”

What this example shows

This was about pragmatic adaptability rather than curiosity or enthusiasm for innovation. Thomas began learning out of recognition of its necessity rather than excitement. The model helps people acknowledge resistance while remaining capable of action.

In the coming years, many people will face a question less about whether they want to learn new technologies than about how much they need to learn to remain able to work. Here, Future Skills mean freedom of choice rather than passion: a choice between active learning and passively being replaced. Sometimes that provides enough motivation.

What the examples show us

Eight situations, one model

The eight examples differ markedly. Life stage, external circumstances, available resources and inner motivations could hardly be more varied. Some situations are characterised by uncertainty, others by stability; some by scarcity, others by abundance; some by pressure to act, others by quiet dissatisfaction.

Yet they share a common core: in every case, people face the task of making conscious development decisions with incomplete information, not simply because they must, but because standing still is not a viable long-term option.

The model presented here does not claim to solve these situations. Rather, it offers a shared approach for structuring, reflecting on and shaping very different circumstances.

The eight situations at a glance

1. Heavy demands in midlife. A life with many obligations, little breathing space and the sense that health or inner balance is receiving too little attention. The model helps reduce overwhelm, reset priorities and identify small changes with useful effects.
2. The transition from school to work. A lack of direction amid many options and uncertain future prospects. The model replaces the search for the “right decision” with a learning-oriented process involving reversible steps.
3. The transition into retirement. The loss of professional structure and identity calls for new forms of self-regulation and meaning. The model helps people shape this transition consciously without forcing new commitments.
4. Financial pressure and job loss. Limited resources, high uncertainty and little room to plan. Here, it becomes particularly clear that Future Skills are protective resources that help preserve dignity, stability and the capacity to act.

5. Successful and fully occupied, but lacking depth in relationships. No acute lack, but a quiet shift in priorities. The model enables deliberate choices before relationships recede permanently into the background.
6. A long-term relationship under everyday pressure. More conflict and less ease, but a clear wish to keep shaping the relationship. The model helps people understand a relationship as a shared space for development rather than a problem to be solved.
7. Academic excellence, but blind spots in social skills. Formal education provides knowledge, but many capabilities relevant to life develop unsystematically. The model helps students use existing learning opportunities more consciously.
8. Professional uncertainty caused by AI and automation. No immediate job loss, but a growing feeling of being left behind. The model helps people take pragmatic learning steps with clarity, even without enthusiasm.

What these eight examples jointly demonstrate

- The guiding vision is always provisional. It provides direction without fixing an outcome. Development remains adaptable.
- Reality is always the starting point. Resources, motivation, pressures and life stage are part of the process rather than obstacles to it.
- Capabilities are the central means of change. Not every situation can be changed, but many can be handled better when relevant capabilities are strengthened.
- Prioritisation is decisive. In every example, a few deliberately chosen skills or subskills are enough to make a noticeable difference.
- Development is rarely spectacular. It often appears as greater clarity, better decisions or less friction rather than a sudden breakthrough.

Keeping development in view over the years

The long view

The examples in this section have shown how personal development can be shaped under real conditions: step by step, with limited resources and without claiming control. These short- and medium-term development cycles are crucial for remaining capable of action without becoming overwhelmed.

At the same time, there is a second timescale that is easily lost from view in everyday life: the long arc of a life. The work of Bronnie Ware, who spent many years accompanying people in the final stage of life, offers a striking way into this perspective. Recurring patterns emerge from her conversations. At the end of life, people rarely regret isolated decisions or specific mistakes. What they describe instead are long-term shifts in priorities: too much conformity to others' expectations, too much work at the expense of relationships, too little courage to express feelings, and too little lived joy.

These insights point to something fundamental: things rarely go off course because of individual wrong decisions alone. Rather, they do so through long-term imbalances that gradually emerge while we are busy trying to do things “right” in daily life.

This is precisely why it helps to complement the short-term development approach with a broader perspective. Not frequently, ritualistically or as a form of self-assessment, but deliberately and occasionally.

Such a long-term review might take place once a year, or even less often. It follows no method and no fixed format. At its heart is a simple shift in thinking: looking back from the future.

Questions such as these can offer orientation:

- When I look back on this phase of life in ten or twenty years, what would I like to be able to say about myself?
- Which aspects of my life should carry weight in retrospect?
- Where am I currently investing a great deal of energy, and does that contribute to the life I want to lead?
- Are there areas I have neglected for a long time without clearly noticing it in daily life?

Such questions do not require immediate answers. Often, simply allowing them into awareness is enough. Their effect arises through returning to them rather than through unwavering follow-through.

Connecting this perspective with the Future Skills Framework reveals a further relationship. Some capabilities contribute to short-term performance but become less important over the long term. Others work more slowly and less visibly, yet shape the quality of a life over many years. These include relationship-building, self-regulation, the ability to learn, dealing with uncertainty, and the ability to keep realigning meaning and values.

The invitation in this section is therefore not to replan one's life. It is to pause occasionally before misplaced priorities become entrenched. Corrections are possible through small shifts over time rather than radical breaks.

The long-term perspective thus complements the development cycles described earlier. The seven-step method helps people act consciously in everyday life. The long view helps them retain sight of the whole.

Ultimately, readiness for the future does not mean doing as many things right as possible. It means repeatedly checking over the years whether one's life is still moving in a direction that feels coherent, and having the courage to readjust while that is possible. The model does not answer the question: what is the right life?

It supports another, often more important question: under my own circumstances, how can I make development decisions that are conscious, open to learning and coherent? This brings Part III full circle: through orientation, the ability to learn and conscious choices over time, rather than control or optimisation.