Practical lessons in workforce development:
leadership, management, training

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Abstract: In this article, we argue that sharing and transmitting professional knowledge can produce the structure for skills training and development, economic mobility and self-efficacy, and social networking capabilities for the next generation of workers. In the results, we shared practical lessons backed by empirical evidence to support students and graduates in the context of workforce development.

Keywords: Skills. Training. Development. Management. Workforce. Practical Lessons.

Resumo: Neste artigo, argumentamos que o compartilhamento e a transmissão de conhecimento profissional podem criar a estrutura necessária para o treinamento e desenvolvimento de habilidades, mobilidade econômica e autoeficácia, além de capacidades de networking para a próxima geração de trabalhadores. Nos resultados, compartilhamos lições práticas, respaldadas por evidências empíricas, para apoiar estudantes e graduados no contexto do desenvolvimento da força de trabalho.

Palavras-chave: Habilidades. Treinamento. Desenvolvimento. Gestão. Força de Trabalho. Lições Práticas.

Resumem: En este artículo, argumentamos que compartir y transmitir conocimiento profesional puede generar la estructura necesaria para la capacitación y el desarrollo de habilidades, la movilidad económica, la autoeficacia y las capacidades de creación de redes sociales de la próxima generación de trabajadores. En los resultados, compartimos lecciones prácticas respaldadas por evidencia empírica para apoyar a estudiantes y graduados en el contexto del desarrollo de la fuerza laboral.

Palabras clave: Habilidades. Formación. Desarrollo. Gestión. Personal. Lecciones Prácticas.

Introduction

A recent report on May 6, 2025, from Resume.org surveyed 1,000 hiring managers to understand how they felt about hiring recent college graduates and the challenges they encountered with this population (Resume.org, 2025). It was reported that 1 in 6 hiring managers were unwilling to hire recent college graduates because the hiring managers felt unconvinced about the skills, qualifications, capacities, and professionalism of young workers entering the workforce (Crist, 2025; Resume.org, 2025). Likewise, a career coach at Resume.org, Irina Pichura, asserted that "colleges don't teach students how to behave in the workplace, and there is a lack of transitional support from both universities and employers" (Crist, 2025). Additionally, Crist (2025) noted that hiring managers often communicated that recent college graduates' challenges are due to the lack of professionalism (39%), excessive phone use (39%), poor time management (38%) and an attitude of indifference (37%). Meanwhile, other hiring managers pointed to poor communication skills, difficulty handling feedback and an inability to adapt to company culture (Crist, 2025). With all these challenges that recent college graduates are facing in the workforce, we believe that college students and graduates can learn these skills training from their professors with industry experience, while developing and identifying their emerging career readiness skills. We call this process the sharing and transmitting of professional knowledge, which can produce the structure for skills training and development, economic mobility and self-efficacy, and social networking capabilities for college students and graduates in the context of workforce development.

Lemick (2025) reported Fortune's data that 58 percent of recent college graduates, which is more than half of new college graduates are still looking for a job. This data far exceeds the number of new graduates looking for work right after college by more than 25 percent of three generations: Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials (Lemick, 2025). This shows that there is a skills training and career readiness disconnect on our college campuses and in the classroom. Could this be a result of colleges and universities hiring professors with little to no industry experience who can share and transmit their industrial knowledge to help students create a structure for their skills training and development, economic mobility and self-efficacy, and social networking capabilities? Another concern we have debated is, should the focus of workforce development become the priority in academic programs? These

concerns and questions are debatable among the public and the scholarly community. Whichever school of thought we subscribed to, the fact of the matter is that we are in a skills development crisis and today's skills hiring culture highlights the gaps and challenges that recent college graduates face in their search for employment.

Recent college graduates are entering labor markets characterized by heightened uncertainty, rapid technological change, and intensifying employer expectations. Although higher education continues to yield positive average employment and earnings premiums, a growing body of evidence indicates that many graduates struggle to secure career-relevant roles and to demonstrate the "employable skills" employers demand. This has provoked critiques that colleges and universities are not adequately preparing students for the workplace, particularly in relation to transferable skills, work experience, and career development support.

Literature review

Evidence of employment challenges for recent graduates and students

Recent survey data suggest that the transition from college to work has become more precarious. The *2025 Graduate Employability Report* (Cengage Group) survey was based on 2,500 hiring managers, educators, and recent graduates, and as summarized by Marrin (2025) at *Poets & Quants*, finds that only about 30 percent of U.S. 2025 graduates had secured full-time jobs in their field at the time of the survey, which is down from 41 percent for the 2024 graduating cohort. Nearly half of graduates reported feeling unprepared even to apply for jobs, despite rising credential requirements for entry-level roles (Marrin, 2025). Internationally, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shows that while tertiary graduates generally have higher employment rates than those with only upper-secondary education, the transition from education to work is increasingly protracted, with sizeable shares of youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET) in many countries and persistent skills mismatches among graduates (OECD, 2025). These patterns suggest that higher education is not consistently translating into smooth entry stable, career-relevant employment for students and recent graduates.

Parallel research by Workplace Intelligence (Schawbel, 2025), based on a survey of 800 HR leaders and 800 recent graduates in business roles including finance/accounting, marketing, sales, management, operations/logistics, or business analytics/intelligence, indicated that "85% of graduates wish their college had better prepared them for the workplace, and only 24% believe they possess all the skills needed for their current roles." More than half, "55% say their college education did not prepare them for their job at all" (Schawbel, 2025). These findings underscore that underemployment and perceived unpreparedness are not marginal phenomena but are widely experienced among recent graduates. From the employer side, the same Workplace Intelligence study by Schawbel (2025) reported that "98% of HR leaders say their organizations struggle to find talent, yet 89% avoid hiring recent graduates." Their reasons include a lack of "real-world experience (60%), lack of a global mindset (57%), insufficient teamwork skills (55%), it cost too much to train them (53%), inadequate job-specific skills (51%) and having poor business etiquette (50%)." These concerns highlighted a perceived career readiness gap for students and college graduates despite employers' talent shortages. In the same report by Schawbel (2025), hiring managers and employers suggested that "they would rather hire a freelancer (45%), recruit a retired former employee (45%), have a robot/AI do their job (37%), or leave the position unfilled (30%) than hiring a recent college graduate."

Skills gaps and misalignment of expectations

Across multiple large-scale surveys, employers repeatedly signal that newly minted graduates lack key competencies. The American Association of Colleges and Universities' employer survey by Finley (2021), *How College Contributes to Workforce Success*, found that although employers strongly value the broad outcomes of a liberal education, only about six in ten believe recent graduates possess the knowledge and skills needed for success in entry-level roles at their organizations. The report concluded that there is "room for improvement" in how effectively colleges prepare students for work, particularly in applied learning and communication of skills to employers (Finley, 2021). The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) report codified eight core "career readiness" competencies, such as communication, critical thinking, teamwork, professionalism,

technology, leadership, equity and inclusion, and career self-development, which are intended to represent baseline employability expectations (NACE, 2024). Yet NACE's analyses show a persistent gap between student and employer perceptions of how well graduates have developed these competencies. Using data from the 2024 Student Survey and *Job Outlook 2025*, Gray (2025) reported that students and employers broadly agree on the *importance* of competencies like communication and critical thinking but diverge sharply on *proficiency*. For example, 78 percent of students rate themselves as proficient in communication compared with only about 54 percent of employers, and similar 20 to 30 percentage-point gaps appear in critical thinking, professionalism, and leadership. This misalignment suggests both genuine skill gaps and a failure to help students accurately understand and articulate their competencies.

Could college students and graduates' benefit from Artificial Intelligence skills training? We would say affirmatively that AI and humans are becoming more of co-workers in the workplace. Schawbel (2025) highlighted that "94% of graduates who received AI training in college say this has helped their career, by giving them more job stability (47%), more respect at work (42%), faster promotions (34%), and a higher starting salary (34%)." This evidence is one of the many facts that colleges and universities must embrace to give students credentials, qualifications, and skills for the future of work. The College Graduate Skills Study by Schawbel (2025) further highlighted that employers now place particular emphasis on "human skills." Among HR leaders surveyed, 98% rate communication, 93% a willingness to learn, 92% collaboration, 90% creativity, and 87% critical thinking as skills that new hires should bring to their roles. Despite this, many graduates reported that their programs did not adequately emphasize these abilities or provide structured opportunities, such as challenge-based projects, team-based work, or mentorship to develop them (Schawbel, 2025). Macro-level trends reinforce the urgency of the issue. The World Economic Forum's recent analysis of global labor markets by Whiting and Chhabria (2025) estimated that 44% of workers' skills will be disrupted within the next five years due to technological and structural changes, and that analytical and creative thinking, alongside AI and data skills, are among the highest-priority areas for upskilling. In this context, graduates who lack adaptable, future-oriented skills are at heightened risk of both unemployment and rapid obsolescence.

Students' own perceptions of guidance and preparedness

We, the authors, assert affirmatively that the skills gap is intertwined with a guidance gap. According to the College Graduate Skills Study by Schawbel (2025), 94% of graduates reported some regret about their degree, and roughly two-thirds wish they had majored in another field. Half say they did not receive enough guidance when selecting their major, and many attribute their perceived misalignment between degree and job to shortcomings in both college and high-school counselling. OECD's *State of Global Teenage Career Preparation* and related analysis show similar patterns earlier in the pipeline. Drawing on data from around 700,000 15-year-olds, Schleicher (2025) reported that 39% of students across the OECD now fall into the "don't know" category when asked what job they expect to hold at age 30, up sharply from about one in four at the turn of the century. Many young people aspire to highly competitive professional careers without clear plans to acquire the necessary qualifications or skills, and misalignment between aspirations and realistic labor-market demand is common. These findings indicate that students often proceed through secondary and postsecondary education without robust, labor-market-informed career development. When they reach graduation, the result is not only employment difficulty but also a subjective sense of having been under-prepared and poorly advised.

How colleges fall short in preparing students for the workplace

The evidence shown throughout this article points to several structural and pedagogical shortcomings in higher education's approach to employability:

1. *Limited integration of career readiness into the curriculum*.
   NACE's 2025 quick poll on career readiness integration by Gatta (2025) found that while 83.3% of responding colleges report implementing career readiness competencies, more than half have not aligned these competencies with formal learning outcomes, and fewer than one-quarter have developed systematic assessment plans. This suggests that, on many campuses, employability is being added onto existing curricula as a set of loosely connected initiatives rather than embedded as a core design principle.

2. *Insufficient applied and experiential learning*.
   The AAC&U employer survey by Finely (2021) found that nine in ten employers would be more likely to hire graduates who have engaged in "high-impact practices" such as internships, undergraduate research, community-based projects, or capstones. Yet significantly fewer employers believe that most graduates have had such experiences (Finley, 2021). Cengage's Graduate Employability Report by Marrin (2025) similarly noted that many students felt their programs did not help them secure

internships or build employer networks, despite viewing these as more important to their job search than the degree itself.

3. *Slow curricular responsiveness to technological change*.
Employers interviewed about skills gaps emphasized that the labor market is evolving more quickly than many academic programs. As one industry leader quoted in the Cengage-based reporting observes, students may enroll in a coding program only to find that, by the time they graduate four years later, the tools and frameworks they studied are already outdated (Marrin, 2025). When curricular revision cycles lag technological and industry shifts, graduates emerge with knowledge that is partly obsolete and skills that lack currency.

4. *Over-emphasis on disciplinary content, under-emphasis on transferable skills*.
Many programs remain organized around coverage of disciplinary knowledge rather than deliberate cultivation and assessment of cross-cutting competencies such as communication, teamwork, problem solving, and career self-management. NACE's data by Gray (2025) showed that employers see sizeable gaps in precisely these areas, and the Workplace Intelligence study by Schawbel (2025) revealed that HR leaders overwhelmingly expect colleges to train students in these "human" skills, yet graduates perceive that their programs fell short.

5. *Fragmented or reactive career services*.
Although career and student success centers increasingly collaborate with faculty and integrate career content into courses, career development is still frequently treated as extracurricular or optional. The OECD's work on career preparation highlighted that high-performing systems weaved sustained employer-connected guidance throughout schooling rather than confining it to the final years (Schleicher, 2025). Many graduates' complaints about poor guidance and inadequate preparation suggest that such comprehensive models remain the exception rather than the norm.

Emerging institutional responses and their limitations

There are important signs that higher education is attempting to respond. NACE's quick poll data show that career readiness competencies are being scaled across the curriculum: 31% of institutions report institution-wide implementation and many more at the departmental or divisional level (Gatta, 2025). Colleges are increasingly embedding career competencies into first-year experiences, internships, and on-campus employment, and developing workshops to help students articulate their skills to employers (Gatta, 2025). Similarly, AAC&U has championed high-impact practices and liberal education outcomes explicitly linked to long-term career success, and employer surveys indicate considerable support for these outcomes when they are clearly communicated (Finley, 2021). Some institutions are experimenting with micro-credentials, industry-aligned certificates, and deeper employer partnerships to make the curriculum more responsive to labor-market needs.

Nevertheless, the persistence of skills gaps and underemployment among graduates indicates that these reforms remain uneven and incomplete. The Workplace Intelligence studies finds that 96% of HR leaders believe colleges should take more responsibility for

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workplace preparation and 75% believe that most college education are not preparing people for their jobs, points to a large trust deficit between employers and higher education (Schawbel, 2025). Unless efforts to integrate career, readiness are accompanied by systematic assessment, rigorous partnerships with employers, and structural support for scaling effective practices, they may not be sufficient to shift outcomes at the level of whole graduating cohorts.

Methodology

Research design

The analyses presented in this study are based on a qualitative, interpretive narrative review of secondary data, which were also quantitative by reporting. Rather than collecting primary data from students, graduates, or employers, the study synthesizes existing empirical surveys, policy reports, and research briefs produced by organizations such as AAC&U, NACE, OECD, the World Economic Forum, and industry partners. The overarching aim is conceptual and analytic: to integrate disparate sources of evidence to characterize (a) the employment challenges faced by recent college graduates and students and (b) the extent to which higher education institutions are perceived to be preparing learners with employable skills. Accordingly, this work aligns most closely with an integrative literature review and document analysis methodology. It seeks to connect findings across practitioner-oriented reports, international policy analyses, and employer/graduate surveys rather than to test a specific hypothesis using primary quantitative or qualitative data.

Data sources and selection

The "data" for this study consisted of publicly available reports and articles that present quantitative and qualitative evidence on graduate employability, skills gaps, and employer–higher education alignment. These include:

- Employer and graduate surveys conducted by professional associations (e.g., AAC&U, NACE).
- Industry and HR-focused studies (e.g., Workplace Intelligence & Hult International Business School, Cengage Group–reported findings).

- International comparative analyses and policy briefs (e.g., OECD, World Economic Forum).

Inclusion was guided by the following criteria:

1. **Topical relevance**: Sources needed to address at least one of the following:
    - Employment and underemployment outcomes of recent college graduates.
    - Employer perceptions of graduate skills and career readiness.
    - Student/graduate perceptions of preparedness, skills, and guidance.
    - Institutional or policy responses related to skills gaps and employability.
2. **Recency**: Priority was given to sources from approximately *2021 onward,* with a focus on the most recent available reports to reflect current labor-market conditions and expectations.
3. **Authority and scope**: Preference was given to:
    - National or international organizations (e.g., OECD, WEF).
    - Large-scale representative or near-representative surveys (e.g., NACE, AAC&U employer surveys).
    - Widely cited industry or HR research with transparent methodology.
4. **Accessibility**: Only sources available in English and accessible online (e.g., via PDF reports, organizational webpages, or news outlets summarizing primary reports) were considered, to allow readers to consult original documents directly.

No attempt was made to exhaustively identify every study on graduate employability; rather, *purposeful sampling* was used to select a set of influential and recent reports that illuminate the central research questions.

Data collection procedures

Data collection proceeded as follows:

1. *Initial scoping*: Key terms such as *graduate employability*, *skills gap*, *career readiness*, *recent college graduates*, *employer survey*, and *transition from education to work* were used to identify major organizations and recurring reports in this domain (e.g., AAC&U workforce reports, NACE Job Outlook and competencies documents, OECD *Education at a Glance* chapters, skills-gap analyses by WEF and industry).
2. *Targeted retrieval*: Once core organizations and report series were identified, their most recent publications on relevant topics were retrieved (e.g., the latest AAC&U employer survey, recent NACE quick polls and competency reports, the newest OECD and WEF analyses on skills and youth transitions).
3. *Supplementary sourcing*: News and commentary pieces (e.g., *Poets & Quants* coverage of Cengage's Graduate Employability Report) were used selectively where they synthesized or contextualized primary survey data. When such secondary summaries were used, the reliance on an underlying primary study was noted.

The final corpus thus comprised a *small but diverse set of high-visibility, contemporary documents* providing converging evidence on skills gaps and graduate outcomes.

Data analysis

The analysis followed a *thematic, qualitative content analysis* approach:

1. *Close reading and coding*: Each report was read to identify key findings related to:

- Employment rates, underemployment, and job search outcomes of recent graduates.
- Employer assessments of graduate skills and "career readiness competencies."
- Student/graduate self-assessments of preparedness and perceptions of guidance.
- Institutional practices and reforms (e.g., integration of career competencies, experiential learning).

Informal, *open coding* was used to highlight recurring phrases, statistics, and claims (e.g., "skills gap," "lack of work experience," "human skills," "career readiness," "guidance," "misalignment of expectations").

2. *Thematic grouping*: Codes were then aggregated into broader *analytic themes,* such as:
   - Evidence of employment challenges and underemployment among graduates.
   - Skills gaps and misalignment between graduate self-perceptions and employer expectations.
   - Deficits in career guidance and labor-market–informed decision-making.
   - Structural and pedagogical shortcomings within higher education.
   - Emerging institutional responses and their limitations.
3. *Cross-source comparison*: The analysis compared and contrasted findings across sources to identify *convergences and divergences.* For example, employer surveys and graduate surveys were read together to illuminate perception gaps in competency proficiency; international data (OECD, WEF) were used to situate national-level findings within broader labor-market trends.
4. *Interpretive synthesis*: Finally, the themes were integrated into a *coherent narrative argument* about nature and causes of employment struggles among recent graduates and the role of higher education institutions. This synthesis preserved key quantitative indicators (e.g., proportions of employers or graduates endorsing views) while emphasizing explanatory, conceptual connections among them.

Trustworthiness and limitations

As a qualitative narrative review based on *secondary, heterogeneous sources,* this methodology has several important limitations:

- *Non-systematic sampling*: The selection of documents was purposeful rather than systematic. Consequently, the analysis may underrepresent studies that present more positive or more negative assessments of graduate preparedness, and it does not claim statistical generalizability.
- *Reliance on organizational surveys*: Many of the underlying data are drawn from employer and graduate surveys conducted by professional or industry organizations, which can be subject to *sampling biases, self-selection, and response biases.* The methodology here treats their reported findings as informative but does not independently verify their sampling frames or measurement instruments.
- *Contextual and temporal variability*: Labor-market conditions and institutional practices vary across countries, sectors, and time. By emphasizing relatively recent reports, the analysis foregrounds contemporary dynamics but may not capture longer-term trends or historical baselines.
- **Interpretive orientation**: The analytic approach is interpretive and thematic. Different researchers might emphasize alternative themes or reach slightly different conclusions about the relative weight of factors (e.g., institutional vs. structural labor-market causes).

Despite these limitations, the methodology offers *analytic depth and conceptual integration* across multiple reputable sources. It is well suited to answering broad, policy-relevant questions about how recent graduates are faring in the labor market and how higher education is perceived to be performing in relation to employable skills.

Type of research methodology

In summary, this study can be classified as grounded in thematic content analysis of organizational and policy reports:

- *Research strategy*: Qualitative, interpretive.
- *Primary method*: Narrative / integrative literature review combined with document analysis.
- *Data type*: Secondary data (existing quantitative survey results and policy/analytic reports).
- *Purpose*: Exploratory and explanatory seeking to understand patterns, gaps, and relationships rather than to test specific hypotheses or estimate precise causal effects.

Results and discussion

The purpose of this study is to convey to college students and recent graduates across our nation's colleges and universities that they can learn from professors with strong industry experience and that they can develop, identify, and *see* their own career readiness skills take shape in their studies and majors.

Here is some practical advice from Prof. Felix Quayson to college students, recent college graduates, faculty members, staff, and colleges and universities.

1. Learning from professors with extensive industry experience

Big idea: Don't treat an industry-experienced professor only as "the person who grades me." Treat them as a combination of *instructor*, *mentor*, and *inside source* on how the field really works.

A. In class: Turn every concept into a workplace question

Encourage students to ask questions that connect theory to real work:

- "When you worked in industry, where did you see this concept show up?"
- "Can you give an example of a project where this skill made a difference?"
- "What mistakes do early-career hires usually make with this tool or topic?"
- "If I were a new hire on your old team, what would you expect me to know about this by day 30?"

Advice to students: Write down one "workplace question" per class and ask it during Q&A, office hours, or on the LMS discussion board.

B. Outside class: Use office hours as mini career mentoring sessions

Students often use office hours only when they're "lost" in the course. Instead, they can:

1. *Schedule themed visits*
    - "I'd like to talk about how to break into [subfield/role]."
    - "Can you review my resume/portfolio from an employer's perspective?"
    - "What entry-level roles should I be looking at if I enjoy [specific class topics]?"
2. *Bring evidence, not just questions*

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- A draft resume or LinkedIn profile
- A project or paper they're proud of
- Job postings they're interested in

Then ask: *"From your industry experience, what would make this more compelling to a hiring manager?"*

3. *Ask for "insider translations"*
    - "This posting says, 'strong communication skills.' In your experience, what does that actually look like on the job?"
    - "When employers say, 'must be a self-starter,' what behaviors do they expect in the first few months?"

C. Projects: Treat assignments as prototype portfolio pieces

Students should assume *every major assignment* could become a sample of their skills.

Encourage them to ask the professor:

- "How could I tweak this assignment, so it looks more like something I'd do in an entry-level job?"
- "Can we choose a real company/client or real dataset for this project?"
- "If you were my manager, how would you evaluate this deliverable?"

Then:

- *Polish the final version* (clean formatting, clear visuals, error-free).
- *Ask permission* to show anonymized work in a portfolio or on LinkedIn.
- *Add a short reflection*: 3–5 bullet points on what skills this project demonstrates (e.g., data analysis, teamwork, written communication).

D. Networking: Use professors as bridges to industry

Many industry-experienced professors still have contacts.

Students can:

- Ask: "Are there alumni or former colleagues you think I should talk to about this field?"
- Request ***a very specific introduction***:

"Could you introduce me to 1 person who works in [role/company/sector] so I can ask about early-career steps?"

- When they meet that contact, they should:
    - Prepare 5–7 questions.
    - Ask what skills *matter* in the first year.
    - Take notes and send a thank-you email.

This builds *informational interviews*, which often lead to internships, referrals, and clearer direction. Avoid trying to take selfies or photos with them first before speaking to them. Be prepared to be a professional because social and professional etiquette would distinguish you from the rest.

E. Behaviour and professionalism: Practice "being a colleague"

Students can treat the classroom as low-risk practice for professional norms:

- Show up on time and prepare (like a meeting).
- Contribute to group work as if they're on a team project at work.
- Follow through on commitments and deadlines.
- Write emails professionally (subject lines, greeting, clear ask, closing).

You can explicitly tell them:

"The habits you practice with me are the same habits employers will evaluate you on reliability, communication, and how you handle feedback."

2. Developing and identifying emergent career readiness skills

Big idea: Students already practice many "career readiness" skills; they just don't recognize or name them. The goal is to *develop, track, and translate* those skills into language employers understand.

For reference, typical career readiness competencies include communication, teamwork, critical thinking, professionalism, technology use, leadership, inclusion, and career self-development.

A. Use a simple "skills log" each semester

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Have students keep a one-page table they update every 1–2 weeks:

Course / Activity	*Task or situation*	*What I actually did*	*Skills I used*	*Evidence I can show*
Marketing 302 group project	Client presentation	Designed slides, presented findings	Communication, data visualization	Slide deck, presentation recording
Part-time job at café	Handling rush hour	Prioritized tasks, coordinated with coworkers	Teamwork, time management, stress management	Supervisor reference

This helps them:

1. *See* that everyday work = real skills.
2. Collect concrete *evidence* they can bring into resumes, interviews, and grad-school applications.

You can build short reflection assignments around this log.

B. Map class activities to career readiness competencies

At the start or end of a major assignment, ask students:

1. "Which 2–3 career readiness skills are most central to this assignment?"
2. "How will you know you've improved in them?"

For example:

- Research paper → Critical thinking, written communication, technology.
- Team project → Teamwork, leadership, professionalism.
- Class presentation → Oral communication, use of technology, confidence.

Then, after they submit:

- Have them write a short reflection:
  - *What did I get better at?*
  - *What feedback did I receive that I can quote later?*
  - *How would I describe this skill on a resume?*

C. Use feedback as data about skills

Students often see feedback as "good grade/bad grade." Instead, teach them to mine it for *skill signals*:

- Comments like "strong argument," "clear structure," or "insightful analysis" → evidence of *critical thinking and written communication*.
- Comments like "good contributions in discussion," "helped keep team on track" → evidence of *leadership and teamwork*.
- Comments like "met all deadlines," "reliable," "prepared for class" → evidence of *professionalism and reliability*.

Encourage them to:

- Save written feedback in a folder (or screenshots).
- Pull exact phrases into a private document titled "What my professors say about me."
- Later, translate this into bullet points:

"Recognized by faculty for clear, well-structured analysis in research projects."

This builds confidence and specific language for interviews.

D. Take on roles that stretch "human skills"

Students don't develop career readiness only in class. They learn it through *roles that force them to interact, lead, and deliver*:

- Serving as a group leader or coordinator on projects.
- Leading a student organization committee.
- Tutoring peers or serving as a teaching assistant.
- Coordinating events, workshops, or campaigns.

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- Doing customer-facing part-time jobs.

Advice you can give:

"Every semester, choose one role that stretches you in communication or leadership. Don't wait for a job title—practice now, while the stakes are low."

After each role, they should ask themselves:

- What did I do?
- What was hard at first, that is now easier?
- What did others rely on me for?

Those answers define their *emergent strengths*.

E. Translate skills into employer language

Students often say: "I have good communication skills," but employers want specific, behavioral examples.

Teach them to use a structure like "Skill + Context + Action + Result":

- Instead of: "I'm good at teamwork."
- Use:

"On a 4-person capstone team, I coordinated weekly check-ins, delegated tasks, and helped resolve conflicts, which allowed us to deliver our final prototype two weeks early."

Encourage them to practice this translation:

1. Pick a project or experience.
2. Identify 1–2 key skills.
3. Write a 2–3 sentence story showing those skills in action.

This makes their "career readiness" visible and believable to employers.

F. Seek structured feedback on skills, not just grades

Advise students to occasionally ask professors or supervisors:

- "From your perspective, what are my top 2 strengths in a workplace context?"
- "What's one skill you think I should prioritize developing before graduation?"
- "If you were writing a reference letter for me, what examples would you use?"

They should:

- Write down the answers.
- Look for patterns across different people (e.g., everyone says "reliable," "good communicator," or "analytical").
- Use those themes to build their personal skills narrative.

G. Build a living skills portfolio

Finally, students can create a simple digital portfolio (Google Drive, OneDrive, Notion, or a website) that holds:

- 3–6 best projects (papers, presentations, code, designs, reports).
- A running list of competencies each project demonstrates.
- Short reflections linking each item to workplace-relevant skills.
- Any letters, emails, or evaluations that highlight their strengths (used privately).

This portfolio becomes:

- A confidence builder ("I actually have done real work").
- A prep tool for interviews ("Tell me about a time you showed leadership…").
- A bridge between what they did in college and what employers need.

Here are some practical advice and lessons from Dr. Diana Garza to college faculty members and adults during a crisis.

Practical knowledge

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Our current work environment is rapidly evolving due to technological and AI adoption, as well as social, cultural, economic, environmental, and political factors. Such rapid change necessitates effective leadership to drive organizational success. Organizations that can adapt quickly are more likely to thrive in a rapidly changing business landscape. There are many reasons why organizations should become nimbler, among them, talent attraction and retention, innovation and creativity, agility and responsiveness, and gaining a competitive advantage. As an educator and HR expert, I have firsthand experience with the importance of developing leaders who can navigate complex organizational challenges while keeping employees engaged. This paper includes practical lessons and experiences in leadership and HR in education, highlighting key takeaways for leaders navigating complex, fast-paced business environments.

The impact of external factors on professional development

External forces, such as environmental, political, and economic, social, and technological factors, were impacted by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Such an event forced organizations to make critical decisions regarding business continuity. This event also led to shifts in remote work and education. The shift to remote work and education forced many businesses and academic institutions to adopt new technologies and quickly shift to emergency remote teaching. The rapid and forced adoption of new technologies also created an urgent need for immediate internal organizational training. In academic settings, there was an urgent need for faculty to adopt and use learning management systems (LMSs) such as Canvas, often with little to no prior experience or preparation. This unprecedented shift exposed significant gaps in faculty preparedness for online pedagogy.

Personal Experience – Canvas training during the pandemic

As the liaison between my former school and the Office of Teaching, Learning, and Technology, which supports faculty in developing effective learning, I took a leadership role in the planning of professional development for full-time and adjunct instructors on the

Canvas LMS. Before the pandemic, the school had been using Blackboard for several years but had recently signed a contract to implement Canvas. The onset of the pandemic forced the school to transition to "emergency remote instruction," and the full training plan we had in mind shifted to faculty training focused more on the immediate technical skills needed to use the new platform than on sound pedagogical methods. We quickly formed a Professional Development team of 2 full-time faculty members, one adjunct, and 2 Instructional designers. Within a matter of days, we had to gather data on our adjunct pool and their proficiency with Canvas or other technologies. We learned that we had "technology-resistant" faculty to technologically savvy faculty.

Faculty were separated by their technology proficiency, enabling a more personalized, scaffolded learning path tailored to learners' specific needs. The benefits of this plan included reduced anxiety and intimidation, creating a more supportive environment in which tech-averse faculty felt more comfortable asking basic questions. The training focused on building essential skills from the ground up, including setting up modules, creating assignments, and managing the gradebook. This training was mandatory and held on Saturdays for at least 3 months. It was noted that trainers working with technology-averse faculty must possess a blend of technical expertise, excellent interpersonal skills, and a grasp of adult learning principles and pedagogy. Core personal characteristics include patience and empathy, recognizing that aversion often stems from fear of the unknown; adaptability and flexibility to adjust teaching styles to meet individual learning needs; and strong communication skills to explain complex concepts in simple terms. It was also essential to create a respectful, supportive environment and to gain learners' trust.

For the intermediate group of learners or the faculty already possessing intermediate, technological knowledge, we focused on the "why" versus "how to", prioritizing more hands-on activities and real-world scenarios. For the advanced group of learners or faculty with advanced technological knowledge, we focused on practical applications relevant to their teaching goals. This type of scenario or case necessitated different skills from trainers. Transformational leadership enabled us to create a clear vision for the training, motivate participants, foster intellectual stimulation, and offer individualized consideration and feedback. Knowledge of andragogy and understanding that adults are self-directed, bring life experiences, and are motivated by the need for knowledge.

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Conceptual Framework for our study

Here is a conceptual framework of our study to help college students, graduates, faculty members, staff, and colleges and universities understand career readiness skills and employability skills. Based on our argument that the sharing and transmitting of professional knowledge can produce the structure for skills training and development, economic mobility and self-efficacy, and social networking capabilities for the next generation of workers, our proposed questions are answered with the conceptual framework, what are the best ways for students and graduates to learn from their professors with extensive industry experience in their skills training? and how can students develop and identify their emergent career readiness skills?

Conceptual Framework for Developing Career Readiness Through Industry-Experienced Professors

[1] CONTEXTUAL INPUTS
- Institutional & program context
  – Curriculum design, experiential learning opportunities, career services
- Instructor industry capital
  – Depth/recency of industry practice, professional networks, insider knowledge
- Student characteristics
  – Motivation, prior experience, baseline academic and social skills

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[2] INSTRUCTIONAL & RELATIONAL MECHANISMS
- Workplace-oriented instruction
  – Real-world cases, practice-based examples, authentic assessments
- Office hours as career mentoring
  – Career conversations, resume/portfolio review, job-market translation
- Project and portfolio orientation
  – Assignments framed as portfolio artefacts meeting workplace standards
- Network brokerage
  – Alumni and employer introductions, support for informational interviews

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[3] STUDENT ENGAGEMENT & SKILL DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES
- Active, workplace-focused engagement in class
  – Professional behavior, group work as team practice, workplace-type questions
- Feedback utilization and reflection
  – Extracting “skill signals” from feedback, writing brief reflective notes
- Skills logging and competency mapping

– Linking tasks and roles to specific career readiness competencies and evidence
• Stretch roles and deliberate practice
– Leadership positions, customer-facing work, challenging tasks and projects

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[4] MEDIATING PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTS
• Career self-efficacy
– Confidence in performing job tasks and navigating the job search
• Emerging professional identity
– Seeing oneself as a member of a profession or field
• Skills articulation and translation ability
– Naming skills and telling concrete, workplace-relevant skill stories

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[5] CAREER READINESS & EMPLOYABILITY OUTCOMES
• Emergent career readiness competencies
– Communication, teamwork, critical thinking, professionalism, technology use, leadership, inclusion, career self-development
• Tangible career artefacts
– Curated portfolio, targeted resume and LinkedIn, documented references/feedback
• Early career outcomes
– Quality internships, relevant job offers, stronger person–job and person–field fit

Feedback loops:
• From [5] back to [3]:
– Early career successes/failures reshape students' engagement strategies, reflections, and skill-development efforts.
• From employers / labor market back to [2]:
– Employer feedback and changing skill demands inform how industry-experienced professors design instruction, projects, and mentoring.

Conclusion

The struggles of recent graduates and current students to secure appropriate employment are not simply the result of individual shortcomings; they are symptomatic of systemic misalignment between higher education and the evolving demands of labor markets. Evidence from employer surveys, graduate self-reports, and international analyses converges on several key points: many graduates lack opportunities to develop and demonstrate employable skills; career readiness is still not fully embedded in most curricula; guidance systems often fail to help students make informed, labor-market-aware choices; and institutional responses, while growing, have yet to close the gap between academic preparation and workplace expectations.

Addressing these challenges requires reframing employability as a shared responsibility among institutions, employers, policymakers, and students. For colleges and universities, this implies designing programs around clearly articulated, assessed competencies; integrating sustained, experiential learning; collaborating closely with employers; and treating career development as a core educational function rather than a peripheral service. For employers, it means engaging more deeply with educational partners, investing in early-career training, and recognizing the developmental nature of graduate talent. Without such coordinated efforts, the promise of higher education as a pathway to meaningful, sustainable work will remain only partially fulfilled for many of today's graduates.

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