
Navigating Changes Successfully at Work

The Development of a Course
about Unlearning and Good Work
for Adult Learners

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A Collaboration between
Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education, and
Singapore Institute of Management

Danny Mucinkas, Marga Biller, Helen Wajda,
Howard Gardner, and Desmond Yuen

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INTRODUCTION

On a global scale, we are facing an increased rate of change, including in the workplace. The future of work is likely to be shaped by several trends and factors, including automation, artificial intelligence, remote work, and a focus on upskilling and reskilling. These drivers of change have prompted us to rethink the very nature of work, the types of jobs that will be available, and the types of skills and capabilities that will be required from workers. According to the 2023 World Economic Forum's *Future of Jobs Report*,ⁱ 23% of jobs are expected to change by 2027, with 69 million new jobs created and 83 million eliminated. Technology-related jobs will continue to be one of the fastest growing roles, while administrative and factory roles replaced by automation will decrease. Correspondingly, companies expect that 44% of workers' skills will be disrupted in the next five years with 6 in 10 workers requiring reskilling before 2027. This means that employees may have to transition to new industries and actively reskill their capabilities if they are to participate in the sectors with the greatest opportunities for growth.

Similarly, a report by the McKinsey Global Institute estimated that up to 375 million workers worldwide (or roughly 14% of the global workforce) may need to switch occupations or acquire new skills by 2030 due to automation and other technological changes.ⁱⁱ If we are to meet the many changes to the nature of work, we must focus on human adaptability. As Thomas Friedman suggested in his book *Thanks for Being Late*, technological growth has increased over the last 5-10 years so quickly that an argument could be made that it has now outpaced human adaptability.ⁱⁱⁱ

Navigating the future of work demands that we continuously develop new skills and approaches to doing our work. Furthermore, for many people, the work of the future will include interacting with artificial intelligence systems (such as ChatGPT, which has recently been credited with revolutionizing AI writing capabilities). While some aspects of work may become more automated via AI and therefore remote from human engagement, there will also be a growing need for uniquely human capabilities such as creativity, critical thinking, and empathy. We must nurture these capabilities, as they will provide a competitive advantage to both individuals and companies when compared to technologies.

Given the pace of change, it is imperative that we revisit the assumptions that have driven how we have organized work, conducted work, and acquired knowledge and capabilities in the past. Over 90% of leaders estimate that employees will learn the new skills required for future success while on the job.^{iv} This means that, across many environments, we will have to continuously both learn new skills and unlearn the skills, ways of thinking, and habits that we currently rely upon but that no longer serve us.

We must also consider why and how we do our work, what our standards are, and how the decisions we make impact ourselves and others, especially important in an age of globalization and rapid communication. Yet most people do not have designated or structured opportunities to consider how they have negotiated change in their careers, what the overarching themes are in change management, and what lessons they can distill from their experiences that might be helpful for the future as they seek to do their best work.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Against this landscape of rapid change, we recognized a need within the education sector for more programs that deal explicitly with the obstacles people face while experiencing multifaceted career transitions. Accordingly, these concerns brought together two institutions: 1) the Singapore Institute of Management, and 2) Project Zero of the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

The Singapore Institute of Management (SIM) is a private Singaporean university founded in 1964 that provides undergraduate and professional education and is one of the region's leading educational institutions. SIM provides skills-based learning experiences that enable students, professionals, and enterprises to learn and thrive. SIM Global Education offers higher education pathways across more than 120 academic programs for 16,000 students with universities across the world, while SIM Academy provides professional development and enterprise solutions for over 11,000 career professionals across over 400 programs centered on skill development and lifelong learning.

Project Zero (PZ) is an academic research center at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States. Founded in 1967, PZ staff have investigated topics including the nature of thinking and understanding, arts education, and ethical conceptions, across the lifespan. PZ often collaborates with individual educators, schools, museums, and other entities to conduct research that is grounded in practice. PZ's work has taken place across the non-profit, governmental, and for-profit sectors.

In early 2020, SIM and PZ began their collaboration. At that time, Dr. Kevyn Yong, Chief Learning Officer at SIM and a graduate of HGSE, approached Dr. Howard Gardner, Hobbs Research Professor of Cognition and Education at HGSE. SIM's proposal was that PZ should develop a program or course suitable for working adults. Such a course would meet a demonstrated need for more learning experiences for workers, with

tools that promote reflective capacities in times of fast change. Together, the SIM and PZ teams explored ideas that could be harnessed to help mid-career learners.

After several months of discussions, the collaborators agreed to create a learning experience targeted to workers within Singapore identified as PMETs (Professional, Managerial, Executive & Technical employees). Most often, PMETs are individuals who have been working for at least several years and who have held multiple middle-management roles but who may therefore be vulnerable to structural or economic changes. Given the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the worldwide economy, the target learner profile focused on the many PMETs who were experiencing career change caused by a role transition, corporate retrenchment, or unemployment. With this intended audience in mind, PZ's involvement focused on two long-standing initiatives: the Learning Innovations Laboratory and The Good Project.

First, the Learning Innovations Laboratory (LILA) is a consortium with over two decades of experience bringing together the latest in organizational and educational research with the expertise of field practitioners from the public, private, and non-profit sectors. LILA functions as a membership group that hosts regular gatherings among enrollees to exchange ideas, insights, and applications across various settings. In the past, the initiative has studied how individuals and systems respond to dynamic changes. The contributions from LILA to the course development at SIM were led by Project Director Marga Biller, who has worked with the group for over a decade.

Second, The Good Project is a research group that has, since 1998, studied the meaning and nature of "Good Work" for young people and for professionals at various career stages. The project's goal is to help people do work that is meaningful and socially responsible. To that end, the researchers have developed a set of materials and activities for educators and learners, including a discussion-based approach to situational dilemmas that are intended to spark debate and reflection. The contributions from The Good Project to the SIM course were led by Project Manager Danny Mucinskas, who has been a member of the core team for several years.

Thus, SIM and two independent strands of PZ ultimately came together and created a course offered to Singaporean learners facing workplace changes, spearheaded by Gardner and Yong throughout the process. The course represents the first time that SIM and PZ have collaborated on the creation of a learning product. By working with SIM, the PZ projects were able to test and adapt concepts to a Singaporean context, where the ideas had not been previously tested. In addition, while much of PZ's work happens within separate project teams, the course development afforded PZ researchers from The Good Project and LILA an occasion to combine formerly separate insights into a coherent learning experience.

Course development efforts officially began in November 2020. The ultimate product developed by the end of the collaboration is a four-session workshop course entitled “Navigating Changes Successfully at Work,” focused on the development of skills that are intended to promote learner sensitivity to specific aspects of employment transition.

CORE CONCEPTS

The course is structured around two core frameworks: 1) Unlearning, and 2) Good Work. Below, we describe these frameworks in further detail.

Unlearning

Drawing on research by the Learning Innovations Laboratory, we define Unlearning as “learning to think and behave differently when existing assumptions and behaviors get in the way.”^v Unlearning is not simply forgetting prior knowledge or behaviors. Rather, this framework positions unlearning as a process in which prior knowledge is moved to the side (or sidelined) in contexts where it is no longer helpful, instead of completely erased. While unlearning can be deeply personal, it is not limited to the individual—it can happen at the group or organizational levels as well. Throughout the course, we focused on three dimensions of unlearning to help participants specifically target challenges that they may have struggled with during moments of career change. These dimensions are Mindsets, Habits, and Systems.



Figure 1. The Unlearning framework includes Mindsets, Habits, and Systems.

First, Mindsets are mental attitudes or stances that shape beliefs and interpretations of events, including values, identities, and assumptions. Mindsets may pose obstacles to our ability to unlearn when beliefs and attitudes prevent us from developing new ways of thinking about our work. Second, Habits are routine behaviors that are largely unconscious and shaped by cues, routines, and rewards. While habits can be powerful

tools for achieving goals, when goals change, unhelpful habits must be unlearned. Conversely, intentionally implementing new habits can help you effectively navigate changes. Third, Systems are the structures we are embedded within, including organizations, teams, and personal networks. Within systems, we can develop ecologies to aid in learning and development. Unlearning across these three dimensions is particularly relevant during career transitions because individuals may need to adapt to new job roles, industries, or work cultures, which require different skill sets, attitudes, and approaches.

As an example of the role that Unlearning can play during career transitions, consider a person moving from a technical role to a managerial position. The person may need to unlearn. Specifically, the individual should probably sideline their formerly helpful focus on complex technical skills, which was essential in the analytic requirements of their previous role. Instead, the person needs to develop new skills such as communication, leadership, and delegation, which are necessary to managing others. Similarly, someone transitioning from a corporate job to entrepreneurship may need to unlearn the mentality of relying on a steady paycheck and benefits and instead develop a risk-taking mindset (which is easier said than done!).

By paying attention to the three dimensions across which Unlearning can occur, individuals may more easily become aware of and let go of familiar beliefs and practices that they no longer need or are no longer serving them. In this way, they can interpret new information that may challenge their assumptions. By intentionally unlearning and being open to new ideas and perspectives, individuals can practice what we call smart learning, which enables them to adapt to new roles, industries, and work cultures. By letting go of outdated beliefs and behaviors, individuals can develop new skills, mindsets, and practices that are essential for success in their new career paths.

One way to nurture smart learning is to integrate Unlearning into the career development programs offered to individuals as they develop their skills portfolios for future jobs. If we fail to do so, we will continue to be faced with a shortage of skilled individuals who have the capabilities to do the necessary work. We will also intensify the inequalities that exist between lower and higher paying jobs. The changing nature of work requires smart learners who can update their skills portfolios with agility throughout their lifetime. Companies and Individuals who intentionally focus on Unlearning on their way to becoming smarter learners will likely be more skilled at identifying, navigating and adapting to the ongoing changes in their environments.

Good Work

Being aware of the dimensions of Unlearning during periods of acute change can help people adapt to new circumstances. However, it cannot necessarily help people

answer deep questions about their relationship to their work. Such questions might include, “What are my standards for my work? What connects me to the work I do? And how does my work impact others?” We accordingly used the course as a venue for learners to explore their standards, purposes, and responsibilities at work, including their views of what it means to do “good work.” For The Good Project, a three-part framework of “Good Work” refers to work that is Excellent (high-quality), Ethical (socially responsible), and Engaging (meaningful).

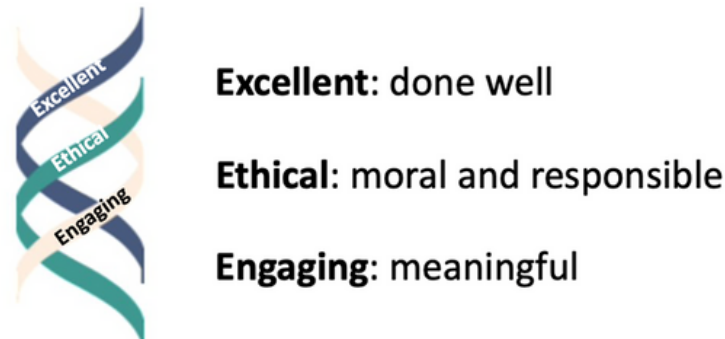


Figure 2. The three intertwined elements of good work are Excellence, Ethics, and Engagement.

In this framework, Excellent work aligns with personal or professional standards (e.g., a commitment by an accountant to triple-check their audits; an oath sworn by doctors as part of their practice to “do no harm”). Ethical work is achieved when workers consider how their responsibilities to themselves, their immediate others (e.g., their teams or families), their organizations and communities, and their society or world should influence their decision-making. Engaging work connects to the emotions of care, commitment, and motivation that can sustain workers during challenging times.

All three of these elements are intertwined with one another, visualized as a “triple helix” that is difficult to disentangle. People with a strong sense of how they define and navigate tensions related to good work in practice may experience a stronger understanding of their principles and an awareness of a higher purpose beyond day-to-day tasks. In organizations, discussions of how people view the three strands of good work may result in greater alignment around a shared vision of work. The benefits of being intentional about doing “Good Work” thus cross the individual and systemic levels. Often, when dilemmas and difficult situations arise, it is due to tensions between excellence, ethics, and engagement at work.

For instance, imagine a doctor working at a busy hospital emergency room. She may find engagement in her work by focusing on the assistance she provides to her patients in need and the way her job improves her community, and she may feel a responsibility to be ethical by communicating timely information to families. However,

her sense of engagement might come at a cost: she could become so deeply invested with her work that she forgets to rest and recharge, therefore making mistakes that prevent her from doing excellent work and compromise her commitment to patient well-being.

Additionally, imagine a Vice President at a company selling construction materials. He may find engagement in the way his work supports the housing for citizens of his city, and he may have standards in place to do his work well. But he may struggle with ethical decisions if his colleagues want to take shortcuts from what is required in the building code in order to save costs. Such a situation could demonstrate a lack of alignment between stakeholders about the priorities of the company, pitting financial profit against safety.

We all face difficult situations like the two examples in our working lives when we aren't sure what to do and when our visions of excellence, ethics, and engagement are in conflict. An awareness of how the three elements intersect and interact can help workers better understand their career needs and tensions, especially when circumstances are changing quickly.

Furthermore, the two frameworks of Good Work and Unlearning are deeply connected (see Figure 3). Mindsets may enhance meaning and engagement in the workplace, while developing helpful habits and deconstructing disruptive ones can support high-quality work. In addition, because working within systems involves interacting with others, a systemic lens of analysis on work encourages us to reflect on the effects of our work on others and the ethical implications of our decisions. Good work does not happen in isolation. Realizing excellence, ethics, and engagement at work requires individual, team, and organizational commitment and might even involve altering systems.

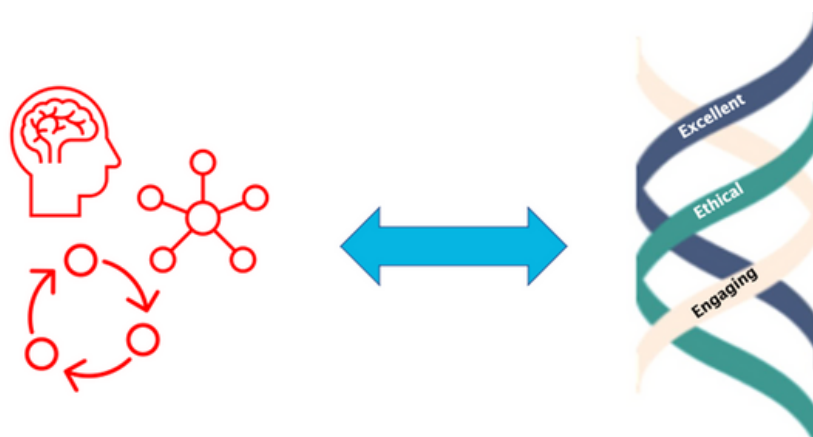


Figure 3. The dimensions of Good Work and Unlearning can enhance and support one another.

COURSE DESIGN

A key learning outcome of the course was for participants to move beyond an understanding of Unlearning and Good Work through an application of these concepts to their personal circumstances. To this end, we intentionally developed and iterated the program to include activities and pedagogies that would maximally engage the core audience of mid-career adult learners and encourage transfer to their own experiences. We were inspired to create a learning environment that was collaborative, learner-centric, relevant and reflective.

Collaborative

Drawing on research that associates collaborative learning with increased motivation and concept engagement, we integrated group work into each session.^{vi} Group activities included full class discussions, as well as in-depth explorations of prompts and real-world dilemma scenarios in small groups. Discussion-based activities sought to provide learners with opportunities to share their viewpoints and learn from diverse perspectives. For example, when discussing concepts in a smaller group, participants might enhance each other's understandings of the frameworks by hearing a range of interpretations and personal anecdotes. This practice can also help learners build a supportive learning community, as participants were not always previously familiar with one another. Accordingly, we allotted team-building time at the outset for students to forge interpersonal connections, with the hope that a strong sense of connection to the group would increase learners' engagement with the course.

Learner-Centric

The classroom climate positioned students and their personal contributions and experiences as principal sources of knowledge. Facilitation that emphasizes students' lived experiences has been linked to increased motivation to learn.^{vii} We used techniques in class discussions to establish psychological safety, or the ability "to take risks, to express their ideas and concerns, to speak up with questions, and to admit mistakes," so that learners would feel comfortable contributing.^{viii} The class could then essentially function as a "community of practice," a group of people who have come together to share and generate specific knowledge (in this case, about how to best handle similar changes at work).^{ix}

Throughout the sessions, we encouraged participants to use their personal experiences and prior knowledge to understand concepts. We included prompts that asked participants to bring in their own experiences and involved learners in the co-creation of course norms. Even when the facilitator was speaking, participants were regularly invited to situate the frameworks within their own life experiences. In doing

so, participants' diverse perspectives were integrated into the fabric of the course. Further, each module began with holding space for questions and insights. Rather than simply recapping learning, this format was intentionally designed to allow for discussion and questions so participants' individual learning processes could actively shape the course.

Relevant

We emphasized the utility of the concepts in the course to real-life situations for learners. Many of our activities showed how concepts could “come alive” in relatable workplace scenarios. Participants were asked to contribute stories from their own lives during class discussions and in at-home activities that encouraged them to make connections between the abstract and the concrete. Our aim was for learners to transfer what was discussed in class to their own challenges, especially for this particular target audience. Many enrollees were struggling with job searches and involuntary career change. The course was built to increase learners' awareness of decision-making, to empower them to develop solutions, and to do so together by listening and responding to others. These elements may increase participants' feelings of self-determination.^x

Reflective

The course intentionally incorporated metacognition, simply defined as “thinking about thinking.”^{xi} The practice of metacognition requires conscious effort rather than passive receptivity, and students had opportunities in the course meetings and intervening periods to plan, to monitor, and to evaluate their thoughts and their learning over time.

Individual reflection took place several times throughout each course session, with specific reflection prompts to help learners see how unlearning and good work applied in their own lives. For example, every session ended by engaging in the “I used to think...Now I think” thinking routine activity. Facilitators led participants in completing each statement to reflect on how their thinking and mental models related to their work might have changed during the session. Participants then conveyed their statements to the whole group, allowing them to share insights and deepen each other's learning. Students were further encouraged to be metacognitive in their at-home activities, which asked them to record ideas and insights in journaling and worksheet formats. Reflective exercises were sometimes assigned before, during, or after sessions as individual work that was then discussed as a whole group as well. The explicit reflection activities aimed to provide participants with tools they could seamlessly integrate into their routines after the course and would aid in deep, substantive understanding.

In general, the elements of this course described above may promote “deeper learning” experiences that exist at the nexus of mastery, identity, and creativity.^{xii} We created this course not only to encourage students to master several different frames that they can use to respond to difficulties in their working lives. We furthermore believe that the activities and discussions encourage the learners to develop their identities related to their work and to creatively problem-solve in collaboration with peers and colleagues in ways that can be directly and creatively applied to their lives.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Below, we sequentially summarize the major project activities and milestones that occurred over the span of the collaboration.

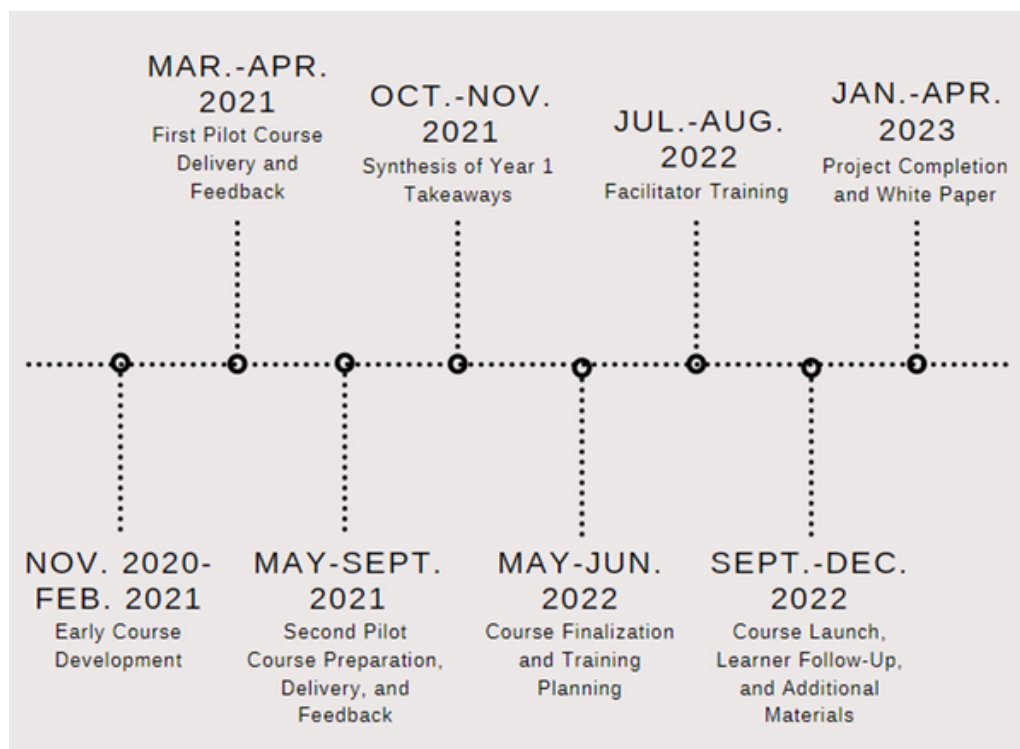


Figure 4. Project Timeline.

Early Course Development (November 2020-February 2021). We constructed a pilot version of the course, structured as a mini-workshop with two sessions, for PMET learners in the midst of workplace change. The experience was designed with the two core anchor concepts in mind as described above: 1) “Unlearning,” a way of approaching change with attention to the personal mindsets, repeated habits, and embedded systems that may constitute obstacles to change, distilled from synthesis undertaken by LILA; and 2) “Good Work,” which involves three dimensions that are

crucial in performing thoughtful daily work (excellence, ethics, and engagement), a framework developed from The Good Project's qualitative research with professionals. Notably, the design process happened during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic caused global economic change and turmoil, at the macro scale due to economic restructuring but also at the individual scale in events like layoffs. Global events therefore shaped the learners we would encounter and the delivery method and effectiveness of our course, which was completed entirely remotely (via Zoom).

First Pilot Course Delivery and Feedback (March-April 2021). We initially deployed the pilot course with a group of ten SIM employees who had recently experienced a role change. Prior to the start of the course, we conducted one 45-minute focus group with three of the learners to discover more about their backgrounds, hopes, and expectations. We then completed the two course sessions of two hours each with the SIM employees. In Session 1 of the course, we introduced the "Unlearning" and "Good Work" concepts, followed by an analysis of particular components of personal mindset. In Session 2, we covered the cycles of habit formation and a systemic lens of change management. Feedback from the first pilot participants was collected via a post-survey and five short interviews. Reviews by participants were generally positive, and the concepts and structure of the course were highly rated. Recommended areas of improvement included more class time, both to explore ideas and to allow learners to develop comfort with the dynamics of interacting with their peers.

Second Pilot Course Preparation, Delivery, and Feedback (May-September 2021). We added further content and activities to our course plan based on the first pilot experience. In July 2021, we conducted a full-length pilot version course with a group of 12 unemployed PMETs. All learners were enrolled in an advanced manufacturing training program at SIM and were actively looking for work in that sector. This second pilot iteration of the course was more than double the length of the first pilot, with five two-hour meetings interspersed with several days between each meeting to allow for individual processing and application time.

The sequence of the course meetings was as follows: 1) Team-building (in order to create a sense of a learning community) and framing activities about change at work; 2) Unlearning and Good Work, covering the two foundational concepts from PZ's research; 3) Mindsets, including personal examination of values, identities, and expertise; 4) Habits Cycles, including how to make habitual reflection a part of normal practice; and 5) Systems, including how to create a learning ecosystem and reach alignment with stakeholders.

Participant feedback to the second pilot run continued to be generally positive, with multiple learners believing that the content would be helpful to their job searches and

unemployment needs. Breakout group discussions were particularly valued for collective processing of the content and sharing personal stories, which promoted a sense of agency and belonging. We also recognized the necessity for further long-term follow-up with participants to determine the impact of the course on learners' lives.

Synthesis of Year 1 Takeaways (October-November 2021). At the conclusion of the first year of work, we had created expanded versions of the course materials and learned about two different audience experiences. Learners universally rated the sequence as helpful to teaching them about managing workplace transitions. A limited number of post-course interviews and surveys indicated that participants had developed a familiarity with the core concepts of the module, which were overwhelmingly described as useful. However, learners often described wanting more time to explore concepts to develop a more nuanced and complete understanding of how to apply the content to their lives. We also recognized that remote delivery limited our ability to interact with enrolled students and may have reduced attention spans and collaboration capabilities, at least in comparison to what would have been possible in a traditional in-person classroom setting (where non-verbal cues like eye contact, body language, and classroom climate are easier to monitor and judge).

Course Finalization and Training Planning (May-June 2022). Following a break in the project, we began Year 2 of the collaboration by finalizing the course materials. The materials included a set of session PowerPoints with full facilitator notes for course leaders; a Learner Guide with session overviews and concept notes; a Facilitator Guide with lesson plan instructions and timing information; and an Assessment Plan regarding how to monitor learner progress towards desired outcomes. We adjusted the embedded activities in the course in response to the pilot feedback (such as changing the wording of reflection questions and the focus of situational dilemmas) and allotted additional time for engagement by lengthening the course. The finalized course sequence is a 12-hour learning experience of 4 sessions of 3 hours each. Finally, we compiled a list of further readings and created a core concepts handout for learners.

Facilitator Training (July-August 2022). We provided an in-depth training experience to a group of eight experienced Singaporean facilitators. These individuals were selected by the SIM team for their capability in teaching a course on the topic of workplace change. Facilitators first took part in the entire course as learners, engaging fully with the content and activities as though they were participants. Facilitators then each presented a segment of the course content and were coached regarding their performance. At the conclusion, facilitators were presented with a certification allowing them to independently teach the course. The e2i agency in Singapore was identified as a partner that would offer multiple rounds of the course to learners. e2i is a strategic partner of Workforce Singapore (WSG) and provides employment

facilitation assistance to jobseekers, as well as manpower development programs. The collaboration with e2i served the purpose of training unemployed job seekers in the course and sought to help learners find job placement within 4 months of course completion.

Course Launch, Learner Follow-Up, and Additional Materials (September-December 2022). Two facilitators in the trained group launched the e2i course with three cohorts of enrollees totaling 40 participants. All students were Singapore citizens or permanent residents with a minimum of 10 years of working experience and an average of 32 years of working experience across a wide spectrum of roles in the public and private sectors. The highest educational qualifications of learners ranged from the diploma level to PhD level. Many were attracted to enroll by the course title and sought to understand new ways of handling change in their careers or other pursuits. A large portion of participants were also in a period of unemployment but actively looking for new work. Recordings of the first run of the course were provided for feedback, resulting in minimal recommendations for improvement.

To learn about the impact of the course on learners' perceptions of how to navigate change, all participants in the e2i groups and in the first-year pilots were contacted and invited to be interviewed about their experiences. 15 interviews were completed to gather data regarding the most resonant concepts and applications. Furthermore, we created a survey tool for learners to complete at the start and end of the course to diagnose and monitor their personal development and growth. Participants' overall satisfaction with the course was rated 4.35 out of 5.0 in course evaluations, with 30 of 31 respondents saying that they would recommend the course to colleagues or friends. Many participants indicated that they benefited from peer sharing/learning about real experiences relating to the concepts during the sessions.

Project Completion and White Paper (January-April 2023). We co-designed a set of online learning experiences for students enrolled in SIM programs, which connect to SkillsFuture's "Critical Core Skills." The modules are hosted on Canvas and provide learners with asynchronous exposure to the core course concepts of Unlearning and Good Work. We also developed a course overview video as a reminder for participants. Finally, we wrote the present paper, which explains our process and key insights.

LEARNER IMPACT INTERVIEWS

We intentionally built the collection of feedback from learnings into our pilot and full course launches, including a series of interview conversations. All participants from two pilot sessions of the course were invited to participate in a brief conversation and

voluntarily signed up to contribute. During interviews, participants were asked a set of questions about course concepts and their course experience. These included discussing which course concepts stood out the most, how participants applied the concepts to their daily lives, and how participants felt their ability to navigate change was impacted by the course. We also asked all learners what they recalled about each dimension of the Unlearning and Good Work frameworks. Interviews ranged in length from 15-90 minutes, and we transcribed and took notes on each conversation. From the transcriptions, interview responses were analyzed to identify common themes. Overall, 15 learners participated in the interview process, and of these, 11 noted that they felt better off at handling transitions after having completed the course.

Through these interviews, we identified changes that learners implemented after course completion, including: 1) Applying unlearning to navigate transitions; 2) Developing awareness of habits; 3) Practicing reflection and perspective-taking; and 4) Increasing understanding of ethics, excellence, and engagement at work. While we are not able to draw broad conclusions about the impact of the course, we present these findings to note the changes described by some course participants as a result of their enrollment. These categories do not represent the experiences of all participants, and within the themes, participants differed in their personal application and understanding of each concept.

Applying Unlearning

Several participants described using the Unlearning framework to adapt to changes. For example, one learner noted that reflecting on their identity helped them realize that “things are changing, but that doesn’t mean I cannot adapt to it. I should also think of ways I can start changing.” Another participant described that unlearning while switching workplaces is a method of “prepar[ing] to face change.” A third learner spoke about changing their mindset after the course, noting, “You can’t say [to yourself], ‘[my experience] needs to apply to one job.’ You need to have a growth mindset and unlearn.”

Increased Habit Awareness

The development of more nuanced insight into habit cycles and habit formation came up frequently in our discussions with learners. A few people noted that, after the course, they became more aware of the routines they performed subconsciously. Of the 9 participants who discussed habits, most mentioned specifically working on changing habits and identifying which habits were no longer useful, both in their personal lives and in the workplace. One participant described realizing that “things I used to do on a frequent basis were not useful, and I should change that.” Another participant noted examining workplace habits to “change the rewards and make a better routine.”

In one interview, a participant talked about improving their health and wellness by applying their understanding of the habit loop to establish a routine of exercising. A second learner discussed forming a habit of making their bed after the course. While it was not our primary intention to influence participants' hygiene and health habits, this demonstrates how some participants did not confine their application of course concepts to the workplace.

Reflection and Perspective Changes

Relatedly, some learners noted becoming more reflective or aware of other viewpoints after the course. One learner talked about implementing reflection exercises to form new habits after taking the course, saying, "When we transition to new roles, or something that's new, we also have to think what are the hindrances that don't allow us to transition properly, and then we have to reorient ourselves." In other interviews, participants forged connections between course concepts and their personal lives to "think about what I could have done better" and look at things from "a different perspective." In describing their biggest takeaway from the course, one learner stated that the course "expanded [their] thinking" and ability to "look at things from different angles."

Even when participants did not recall all the components of the frameworks, many still described becoming more aware of different viewpoints and intentionally thinking through processes such as habits and how they might change their mindsets after the course. This suggests that for some participants, the reflective practice provided in the course stuck with them, even when particular course concepts did not.

Deepened Understanding of Good Work

Although not every participant interviewed recalled the definition of Good Work used in the course, many mentioned an increased awareness of the components of the Good Work framework, including ethics, excellence, and engagement. One interviewee noted that these components became a "guiding principle" in their life after the course. Another described how the good work framework changed how they thought about work, stating that they now understood that "when we are engaged...then [work] will be meaningful."

Of the three components of Good Work, ethics seemed to be most resonant. 9 learners mentioned the concept when discussing how they thought about Good Work following the course. Of these, some explicitly stated that they had begun to pay more attention to ethics in the workplace: one learner described developing a distinction between "doing a good job" and carrying out ethical work. Another stated that they had considered the importance of high-quality work before but felt that "less is emphasized on the rightness of things," and that the course "explicitly incorporated [ethics] into the definition of work."

CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

While the experiences of the facilitators and the feedback received from learners was generally positive, the project team encountered several challenges during the implementation of this course. These challenges require further exploration, which may lead to the refinement of the course design and the ways in which it is currently offered.

First, while the second pilot group of learners took part in this course as a component of a re-skilling program for the advanced manufacturing sector, other groups took part in the course as a stand-alone or “one-off” experience. Therefore, there were few connections that could be explicitly drawn to other classes that learners may have been enrolled in concurrently. We continue to wonder about the relationship between this course—which emphasizes the development of “soft skills,” such as awareness of personal values and how to visualize a learning ecosystem—to courses or programs that teach “hard skills,” such as a particular coding language or technical expertise in a specific domain. This course does not teach skills that can be easily quantified and placed on a resume, nor does it focus on practical tips (such as interviewing advice) regarding how to secure a next job. Additionally, we did not consider whether institutional supports at SIM or otherwise (e.g., career office services) could potentially intersect with and help to reinforce the course. Therefore, more time should be invested in considering the placement of the course within SIM or other organizations in order to maximize usefulness for enrollees and ensure that the course complements experiences that participants may be having simultaneously.

Second, and relatedly, learners did not have sustained engagement with this course, which is relatively short-term (occurring over the course of two weeks to a month in duration, over four session meetings) in comparison to the duration of both the job transition period itself and to the time that will be spent in a new role or workplace. In fact, many participants expressed in follow-up interviews and in course evaluations that they wanted more time to explore the ideas from this course and more time to talk together as a group. For example, several learners recommended having some type of post-course discussion group in which learners could continue to exchange stories and discuss their work transitions with one another. The desire for further investigation of the themes we introduced demonstrates that topics such as mindset exploration and personal encounters with ethical dilemmas are ripe for deep consideration and for revisitation from multiple angles. The limited timeframe of the course also meant that we had a short window during which to influence learners’ development and their reactions to the changes that they were experiencing outside of the class meetings.

Finally, evidence of the long-term impact of the course remains limited. Although we were able to conduct interviews with some learners many months after they took part in the pilot versions of the course, we do not currently have access to learners who completed the finalized version of the course more than several months ago. Additionally, interviewees provided mixed information about the staying power of concepts that they had learned in the course: while some people remembered ideas that made an impression, they had also often forgotten some of the concepts or were no longer applying the frameworks in their own settings. We do not currently have sufficient ways to explain why certain concepts were more impactful for certain people or vice versa. More research is required to determine how to make the course's concepts both memorable and easier to apply beyond the end of the course.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Any developmental program that is provided as a “stand alone” course will inherently create challenges for participants who try to transfer their newly acquired skills and knowledge to their work environment. This is why we propose the following recommendations to improve and extend the current learning experience.

- **Provide opportunities for practice:** SIM and/or companies can provide opportunities for participants to practice the skills they have learned in the course. This could involve assigning new projects or tasks that require the use of the newly acquired skills, applying the skills to other courses, and working on action learning projects where the demand for Unlearning and a perspective on “Good Work” is key and encouraged.
- **Create and support cohort groups:** As part of the course, set the expectation that participants will meet as a cohort regularly to share what they have learned from the course. Chat groups and virtual meetings that are moderated by a facilitator could fulfill this purpose. For example, participants could bring an actual challenge they are facing to the cohort group and ask for advice from their peers. The moderators could introduce reflection exercises to further the application of the ideas from the course. These groups could continue to meet beyond the duration of the course itself to provide learners with a stable community.
- **Provide resources for continued learning:** SIM can provide resources such as books, articles, and online courses that participants can access to continue learning and applying their newly acquired skills.
- **Link with career services:** Given that participants may be students who are taking part in degree or certification programs at educational institutions, coaching from career services could function as a connection or as a reward for participating in the course. Coaches should be trained in the course so that they can bring ideas and reflection prompts into career conversations with participants.

- **Offer an expanded version of the course:** The initial course was designed to be delivered in a four session, three-hour format. Feedback from participants showed that extending the time for each of the modules would provide a deeper understanding of the concepts as well as application to specific situations. We would recommend considering a half-day course for each of the modules to increase learning and application. It is also possible to create a new version of the course that brings in additional ideas and practice opportunities to those that have been through the first course.
- **Send weekly email and content reminders:** Facilitators may wish to generate a list of questions that can be sent each week to learners for the first 2 or 3 months after participation in the course, to prompt reflection on learners' current work and how to apply ideas from the course.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As noted, navigating the opportunities brought on by the advent of new technologies, including artificial intelligence, globalization, and the pandemic, requires a more holistic approach to workplace development and worker understanding. In an interconnected world, a change in one area of business or the economy can have unintended consequences that ripple throughout the whole system, down to individual workers.

We propose that future development opportunities related to this course should address not just the acquisition of skills but also the need to unlearn as a sensemaking and reflection routine that prompts a deeper understanding of how one's own mindset, habits, and practices might need to be adapted to meet new challenges. Learning skills alone is no longer enough; we must also update the underlying and often unconscious premises that drive the way we see and operate in the world.

Changing minds and supporting continuous application of the ideas from the course cannot happen overnight. To support Unlearning and Good Work throughout a person's life, one of the most important recommended changes to the current approach would be to introduce the frameworks and the ways of thinking that they represent across all of SIM's offerings—as was done about 'systemic thinking' in recent decades. In this way, navigating change in one's career becomes something that is a regular part of the institutional culture and is reinforced from all corners.

Additionally, while the PMET audience certainly benefited from the course, it is possible that other target groups would also be enriched by exploring ways to navigate change on the job. Future audiences for this specific course could include:

- Entire organizations in the midst of transitions. The ideas could be applied at the organizational, leadership, team, and individual levels.
- Organizations which may wish to implement this course within their employee, student, or client development programs.
- Enrollees within degree programs offered by SIM and other institutions, where the course could be integrated with other offerings.
- Secondary schools, which could offer the program to advanced students in order to prepare them for their first job.
- Other educational institutions or universities, who would partner with SIM to deliver the course to their students.

With any intervention such as this course, it is important to know the impact that the ideas, skills, and tools offered had on the participants. The initial interviews suggest that participants found the course useful. However, since many of the interviewees were still unemployed at the time of the interviews, we don't have extensive information regarding how they are applying the ideas from the course to their career transitions. Once there are a larger number of participants who are actively searching for work and/or have been placed in new jobs, it would be important to gather information on the impact of the course.

Questions related to future data collection from learners might include:

- Does the course change how individuals navigate the career changes they are faced with in ways that are significantly different from those who have not taken the course?
- How do individuals who are facing career transitions apply the concepts to their lives after the course (and for how long)?
- What is the course's impact on how individuals approach work, including unlearning on the job and perspectives of the meaning of good work in new situations?
- What would be the next set of interventions that could be provided to individuals going through transitions to enable them to be successful?

At PZ and SIM, we will continue to consider these and other questions as we work with new cohorts of learners and potentially new audiences during the rollout of this course.

We encourage others who are similarly interested in the management of workplace change to apply what we learned through this collaboration, as described in this paper, to their own efforts and initiatives.

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CONTACT

The Project Zero team can be reached at:

Danny Mucinkas | daniel_mucinkas@harvard.edu
Marga Biller | marga_biller@harvard.edu

Project Zero
Harvard Graduate School of Education
13 Appian Way
Longfellow Hall
Cambridge, MA USA 02138
pz.harvard.edu



+1 617 496 4652

The Singapore Institute of Management team can be reached at:

simacademy@sim.edu.sg

Singapore Institute of Management
461 Clementi Road
Singapore 599491



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