

Work on Being and Acquiring Knowledge

In 1900, New York's Fifth Avenue was a sea of horse-drawn carriages, with just a single motorcar sputtering down the street. Barely a decade later, the horses were gone, replaced entirely by cars. In a few years, the hard-won expertise of thousands of skilled carriage drivers became obsolete—not because they stopped working hard, but because the technology beneath them changed completely.

If you're currently sitting in a university lecture hall or a college library, that history lesson is for you. For generations, a higher education qualification was, for many, a golden ticket. Students spent years—and small fortunes—mastering specialised domains of knowledge or developing complex skills like financial modelling, coding, or legal research. Today, AI and smart algorithms are automating such tasks.

In *Surviving and Thriving in the AI Era*, authors Dr David L. Francis and Dr Mike Woodcock deliver a blunt reality check. Traditional education is still focused on mastering bodies of knowledge. This remains valuable but is incomplete. When an AI can analyse knowledge faster than a human, relying solely on your major leaves you vulnerable to the cliff edge of career obsolescence. The fix isn't to work harder at tasks a machine can do. It's to shift your focus from *what* you know to *who* you are.

Francis and Woodcock help us to understand this with their **Three-Layer Cake Model**. While your degree sits in the middle, the foundational bottom layer matters most: **Core Personal Dynamic Capabilities (PDCs)**.

The truth is that when computing power becomes a commodity, technical skills alone won't protect you. Your ultimate differentiator is the **Human Premium**—your character, judgment, and empathy. An AI can generate ten thousand options in seconds, but it takes human wisdom to answer the one question that matters: *What should we do?*

Rather than treating AI as a threat, Francis and Woodcock's book provides a practical **AI-era career workout**. It gives you real tools—like Appreciative Inquiry and Blockage Mapping—to treat your personal growth as an active, lifelong project.

Read it before you graduate. Stop acting like a passive process manager and start building the human capabilities you need to direct the technology, rather than getting replaced by it.

Here are some ways that students can actively strengthen their PDCs outside the traditional lecture hall:

- **Practice Impactful Agency:** Stop waiting for permission to lead. Take ownership of independent projects, organise student society events, or pitch a new initiative to a campus club. Acting with integrity and initiative without a supervisor watching builds the muscle of self-starting trust.
- **Cultivate Requisite Agility:** Step outside your academic comfort zone. Take an elective in an entirely different discipline or join a hackathon where you must pivot strategies under tight deadlines. Learning to discard dead ends quickly and adapt to new information is a superpower in a fast-moving world.
- **Embrace Adhocracy Leadership:** Instead of defaulting to rigid group project hierarchies, experiment with fluid, collaborative teamwork. Try different organisational models. Learn

how to listen actively, leverage different peers' strengths, and guide a team toward a common goal. Learn when to lead and when to facilitate.

- **Spark Innovation Competence:** Don't just consume course material—apply it. Take a theoretical concept and turn it into something tangible, whether that is a portfolio piece, a prototype, or a community solution. The key is bridging the gap between a creative idea and real-world value.
- **Nurture Entrepreneurial Zeal:** Hunt down and dismantle unnecessary friction in your daily environments. If a campus process is broken, research a solution and propose it to faculty. A proactive mindset helps you spot roadblocks and clear them away.

Treat your personal growth as an ongoing project. By intentionally stepping into messy, real-world scenarios during your studies, you begin to develop the personal qualities needed to transition into an adaptable leader ready for anything.

Perhaps the most important tool is receiving feedback. Getting useful feedback is a crucial step in developing the personal dynamic capabilities needed for today's changing job market. Students may make the mistake of asking vague questions like "How did I do?" which usually invites polite, unhelpful praise. Instead, treat feedback as an active tool for growth.

First, **be specific about what you want to improve.** Rather than asking for a general critique, ask precise questions like, "Was my explanation of the data clear?" or "Did I interrupt people too much during the meeting?" This gives mentors, peers, or professors a clear target and helps them give actionable advice.

Second, **seek feedback from diverse perspectives.** Don't just rely on friends who will tell you what you want to hear. Ask classmates who approach problems differently, professors who challenge your assumptions, or internship supervisors who see your professional habits in action.

Finally, **listen without defending.** When receiving constructive criticism, resist the urge to explain away your mistakes or make excuses. Acknowledge the feedback, ask clarifying questions, and treat it as valuable data to refine your approach. By actively hunting down honest insights, you turn every project into a stepping stone.