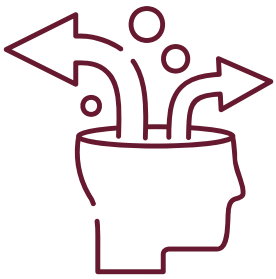


Embracing Uncertainty

Learn how to embrace uncertainty in complex challenges

ACTING | Perseverance and Resilience

What you will need:

- 10-60
- Groups of 4-6
- 30 mins preparation
- 1.5 hrs execution
- Sticky notes, pens, paper, imaginative cards

Related Tools:

- Navigating Uncertainty
- Fostering Resilience
- Creating New Metaphors

Menu:

"Sometimes the bigger problem is not that society's future is uncertain, but that we feel uncertain. When we can tap into the courage that it takes to overcome the uncertainty paralysis, change will become possible."

—Nina Bohm

I. Overview

Uncertainty is more than not knowing. In navigating complex societal transitions, it's just as important to understand *what* we don't know as it is to grasp what we do. This tool invites students to explore the different dimensions of uncertainty — from the incomplete and ambiguous to the utterly unpredictable

Through mapping, discussion and metaphor drawing, students engage both cognitively and emotionally with uncertainty. The activity sharpens their conceptual understanding, reveals their personal responses to the unknown and encourages reflection on how uncertainty *feels*.

By designing a small experiment, students uncover tailored strategies that empower them to become more resilient in the face of uncertainty.

Learning outcome

- The student is able to identify different types of uncertainty, express what triggers their sense of uncertainty and propose a concrete action to address it

II. Learning Activity

Students map the uncertainties within the challenge — individually, as a team or within a community — and reflect on how to deal with those uncertainties.

1. Tune into Uncertainty

10 mins

Invite the students to check in with their current sense of uncertainty:

- Is it a feeling?
- A situation?
- A shape, a weight, a fog?
- What does uncertainty feel like or look like to you?

Invite creativity—let them choose to express it through words, drawings or both.

Tip: use visual cards to invite open associations around the theme of uncertainty. They're great for surfacing different perspectives in a group. You can use Dixit or Tarot cards or download and print the Metaphor image cards.

2. Map the Uncertainties

10 mins

Now that there is space for uncertainty, let students dig a little bit deeper and analyse what uncertainties are related to the challenge that they are working on. Place the blank Uncertainty Map on the table as students work on identifying different types of uncertainty.

Ask students to write down all the uncertainties they can identify in the challenge by responding to these three prompts:

- What don't I know?

- What is unpredictable about the future?
- What conflicting things have I seen or heard?

First, ask: What kind of uncertainty do you recognise? Then: How big is that uncertainty?

Tip: use sticky notes so uncertainties can be moved around during the discussion. If students are working in teams, make sure they do this in silence to ensure individual reflection. Use a different colour sticky note for each team member.

3. Tell Me Something I Don't Know

30 mins

Begin by introducing the Uncertainty Map. Explain that not all uncertainties are complex — some might be complicated or even clear. Optionally, show the section from 1:12 to 2:03 in the knowledge clip where the model is explained.

As students work with the map, they'll begin to distinguish between these types and recognise which uncertainties require deeper navigation and which can be addressed more directly.

Give each student or team a copy of the Uncertainty Map. Ask them to share the uncertainties they noted earlier. Every time a sticky note is introduced, it should be placed directly on the map. In teams, similar uncertainties can be grouped together on the map.

Tip: hold off on discussing solutions at this stage, as this is about surfacing and mapping the unknowns, not fixing them.

4. Increase Complexity & Reflect on How it Feels

30 mins

Now that uncertainties have been uncovered, it's time to explore how to deal with them. Instruct the students to move from left to right on their map and discuss what strategies fit each type of uncertainty — clear, complicated or complex.

Some uncertainties may call for outside expertise, more research or data analysis. Others might remain unresolved and require something different, such as adaptability, empathy or simply learning to sit with the unknown.

After the discussion, shift to reflection. Invite students to pause and consider: How does working with uncertainty feel?

Using the worksheet, let students draw a metaphor or any visual expression, that reflects their relationship with uncertainty. Optionally, use these prompts to guide the students:

- How do you feel about big uncertainty?
- What is your attitude towards uncertainty?

5. Design a Small Experiment

10 mins

Explain that uncertainty is part of working on transitions — and some of it remains. Even after uncovering uncertainty and sharing and reflecting on your feelings, uncertainty doesn't disappear. Maybe the best thing to do is to "embrace uncertainty and hangout with it on your couch" (Senova, 2017).

Introduce the students to the idea of a small experiment, a concept by Le Cunff (2025). It's a simple yet powerful way to build resilience in the face of uncertainty. Walk them through the four steps of Designing a Small Experiment they can try this week to support themselves in dealing with uncertainty.

Let students know they can build a reflective practice by repeating this process regularly, one small experiment at a time.

III. Assessment

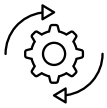
Students submit three products that capture their engagement with uncertainty, along with a 500-word written reflection, describing their insights and experiences related to each uncertainty. They are invited to use a set of guiding questions to reflect on how they recognised and made sense of uncertainty, how they related emotionally and cognitively to uncertainty and how they might act in future situations of uncertainty.

Purpose

Assessment *for* learning (formative assessment) aims to gather evidence and provide feedback on students' learning during the learning process.
Assessment *as* learning aims to strengthen the learning process and the development.

Roles

Self-assessment and teacher-led assessment



Characteristics

Self-regulated learning

Materials

Reflective assignment

Assessment

As part of this activity, you developed three products that capture your engagement with uncertainty in a complex project or challenge:

- An Uncertainty Map
- A Metaphor representing your relationship with uncertainty
- A Small Experiment that helps you navigate uncertainty

Please submit all three together, along with a 500-word written reflection.

How to reflect
Use the guiding questions below to support your thinking and reflect in a meaningful way. They are not a checklist — you are not expected to answer each one. Focus on clarity and honesty, rather than completeness.

1. Reflection on your Uncertainty Map

- What types of uncertainty did you identify?
- What helped you become aware of them?
- What did the map reveal about the challenge you're facing?
- How did it feel to visualise and share these uncertainties?

2. Reflection on your Metaphor

- What metaphor did you choose to express your relationship with uncertainty?
- Why does this metaphor reflect your experience?
- How did your metaphor compare to those of your peers?
- What did you learn from these differences or similarities?

3. Reflection on your Small Experiment

- What experiment did you design, and why?
- What happened when you tried it?
- What did it teach you about how you deal with uncertainty?
- Would you repeat or change the experiment? Why?

Closing reflection

- What personal insights did this process give you?
- How would you describe your current attitude towards uncertainty?
- When facing uncertainty in the future, how would you like to respond? What might help you do so?

IV. Key Advice

This tool works best in project-based learning settings, where students collaborate in teams and encounter moments of uncertainty.

Using the Metaphor cards or Tarot, Dixit or other visual cards (Step 1) invites open associations around the theme of uncertainty. They're great for surfacing different perspectives in a group.

If you would like to learn more about the kinds of uncertainty — knowledge incompleteness, unpredictability and multiplicity — (Step 2), we recommend this article by Brugnach et al. (2008) and this article by Bohm et al. (2024).

The Uncertainty Map (Steps 2-4) can be downloaded below.

Print the **worksheet for Designing a Small Experiment** (Step 5) double-sided and cut to A5. On one side, students draw a metaphor that captures how they experience uncertainty. On the other side, they describe their small experiment.

Anne-Laure Le Cunff explains the concept of a tiny experiment on her blog and in this podcast episode, where she talks about common uncertainty responses and how you can train an attitude of embracing uncertainty. **Instructions for Designing a Small Experiment** can be downloaded below.

what kind of uncertainty?

knowledge incompleteness

What knowledge is lacking? Do you know how to gain the knowledge (or skills) you need in this project?

unpredictability

What is difficult to predict about the problem, situation or environment you are working on in this project?

knowledge frame multiplicity

Who needs to be involved in the project? Do you see (constructive) conflicts arise?

how big is this uncertainty?

what kind of uncertainty?

knowledge incompleteness

What knowledge is lacking? Do you know how to gain the knowledge (or skills) you need in this project?

unpredictability

What is difficult to predict about the problem, situation or environment you are working on in this project?

knowledge frame multiplicity

Who needs to be involved in the project? Do you see (constructive) conflicts arise?

how big is this uncertainty?

known knowns

known unknowns

Even if knowledge, information or data is not present now, it is clear how it can be gathered.

unknown unknowns

There is a lack of information or (reliable) data, theoretical understanding or ignorance. Doing more research might uncover more uncertainties.

predictable

The problem is understandable as a sum or parts.

consistent

Clear cause and effect ties can be recognised.

By careful examination of the system, it can be understood, and plausible scenarios can be developed.

dynamic

Due to the randomness of nature, human behaviour, societal processes or technologcial suprises, the project could change drastically.

coordination

Decisions can be made based on agreed upon facts and procedures.

cooperation

Conflicting advice and interests are at play. A panel of experts could be used to come to a solution.

collaboration

The network of involved public or private actors have different norms, values and interests.

uncertainty

Think about what uncertainty feels like to you. Can you draw that feeling? Is there a metaphor that comes to mind? Use all the tools available to you.

Transition Makers Toolbox

uncertainty

Think about what uncertainty feels like to you. Can you draw that feeling? Is there a metaphor that comes to mind? Use all the tools available to you.

small experiment

Think of a small experiment that you can do to deal with, embrace or overcome your uncertainty. Make it small and meaningful. Write it down below. And then do it.

Transition Makers Toolbox

small experiment

Think of a small experiment that you can do to deal with, embrace or overcome your uncertainty. Make it small and meaningful. Write it down below. And then do it.

Key Advice

Designing a Small Experiment

A small experiment, a concept by Le Cunff (2025), is a simple yet powerful way to build resilience in the face of uncertainty.

Follow these steps to write down one small experiment you can try this week to support yourself — or your team — in dealing with uncertainty:

1. **Choose a topic**
   Pick one of the topics from the Uncertainty Map or choose something more personal that you have been hesitant to act on.

2. **Design a small experiment**
   Come up with a small, concrete action to explore or shift that uncertainty. It should be low-stakes and doable within a few days.

   If needed, look back at the strategies you and your team have already come up with to deal with uncertainty.

   Use the following template: *I will [action] for [duration]* or *I will [action] [time(s)]*. For example: '*I will go on a long walk when I feel overwhelmed for 30 minutes'* or '*I will call the municipality to gather more information about their plans this Wednesday*'.

3. **Take action**
   Experiment this week, preferably in the next few days.

4. **Reflect**
   Reflect on the experience, either individually or with your team, the next time you meet.

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