

# Critical AI Literacy

A Framework for Widener University

The Widener University logo, which consists of the words 'Widener University' in a dark blue, serif font. The text is centered over a background of a complex, wireframe-like geometric pattern that resembles a mountain range or a network of interconnected nodes and lines.

A STRATEGIC GUIDE TO PURPOSEFUL, ETHICAL, AND EFFECTIVE AI INTEGRATION.

# Before We Begin.

On your card, write:

What is the one thing about AI  
and your work at Widener  
that you think about most?

*It can be a worry, a question, an opportunity, a frustration.*

*Just one thing.*

**2 MINUTES**



# Two buckets.

## PROTECTING

*What AI threatens*

(academic integrity, skills,  
original thought, jobs...)



## PREPARING

*What students need*

(competencies, judgment,  
adaptability, literacy...)

If we solved every concern  
in the Protecting column,  
would our graduates be ready?

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# Core Values.

Technology changes, but our core values remain the constant.

We view AI literacy through the lens of Widener's identity.  
It is not just about tools; it is about character.

## RESPECT



Centers human dignity  
and inclusion in all  
AI-mediated work.

## INTEGRITY



Insists on transparency,  
accountability, and  
ethical judgment.

## EXCELLENCE



Elevates the rigor and  
quality of learning and  
professional practice.

# Defining *Critical AI Literacy*

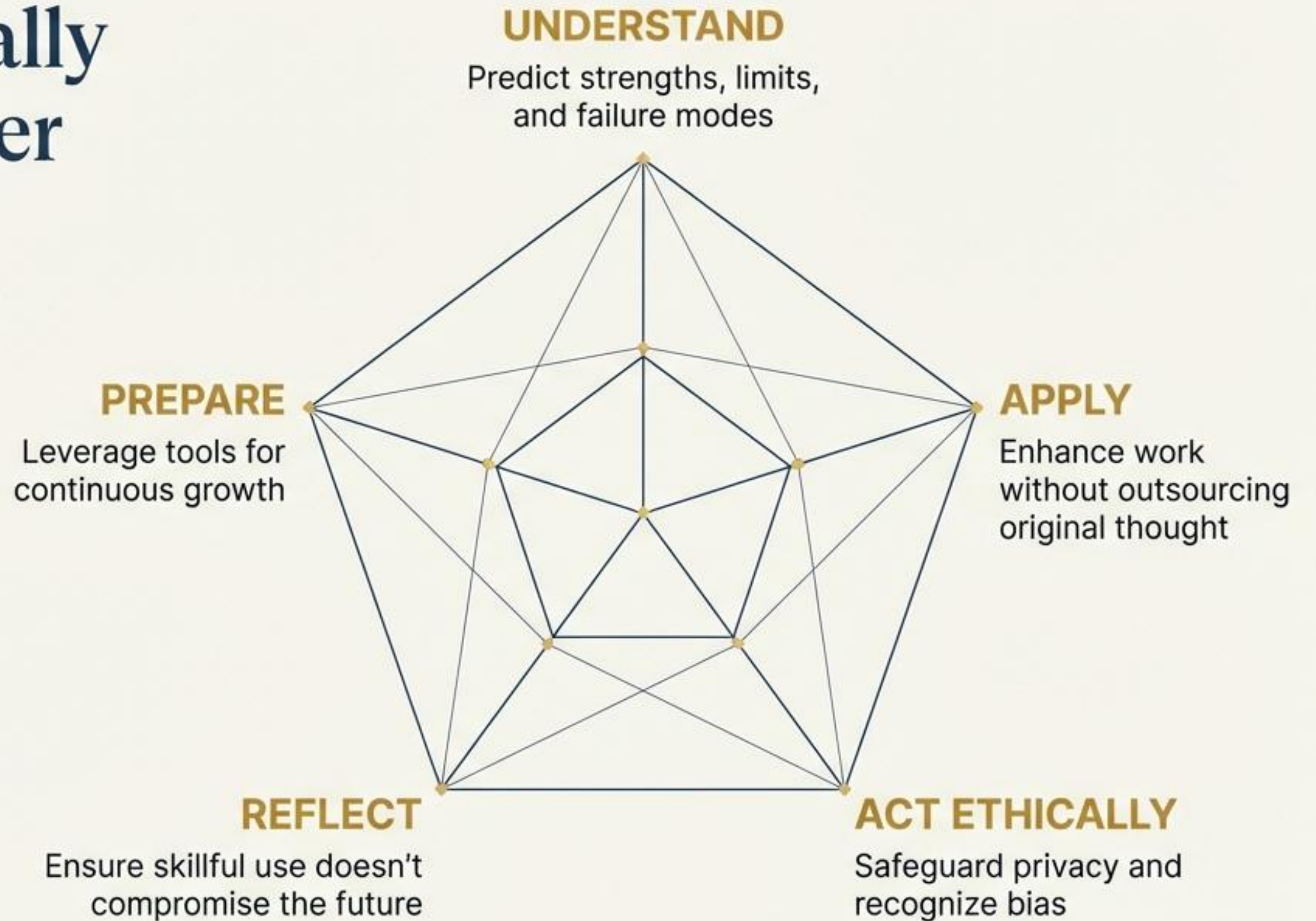
Critical AI literacy is the ability to use contemporary AI tools **purposefully**, **ethically**, and **effectively** in academic and professional settings while maintaining a **human-centered perspective** with a **critical awareness** of AI's **limits**, **costs**, and **societal and environmental impacts**.

Used intentionally to add value

Decision whether and how to use is informed by the potential negative impacts



# Profile of a Critically AI-Literate Learner

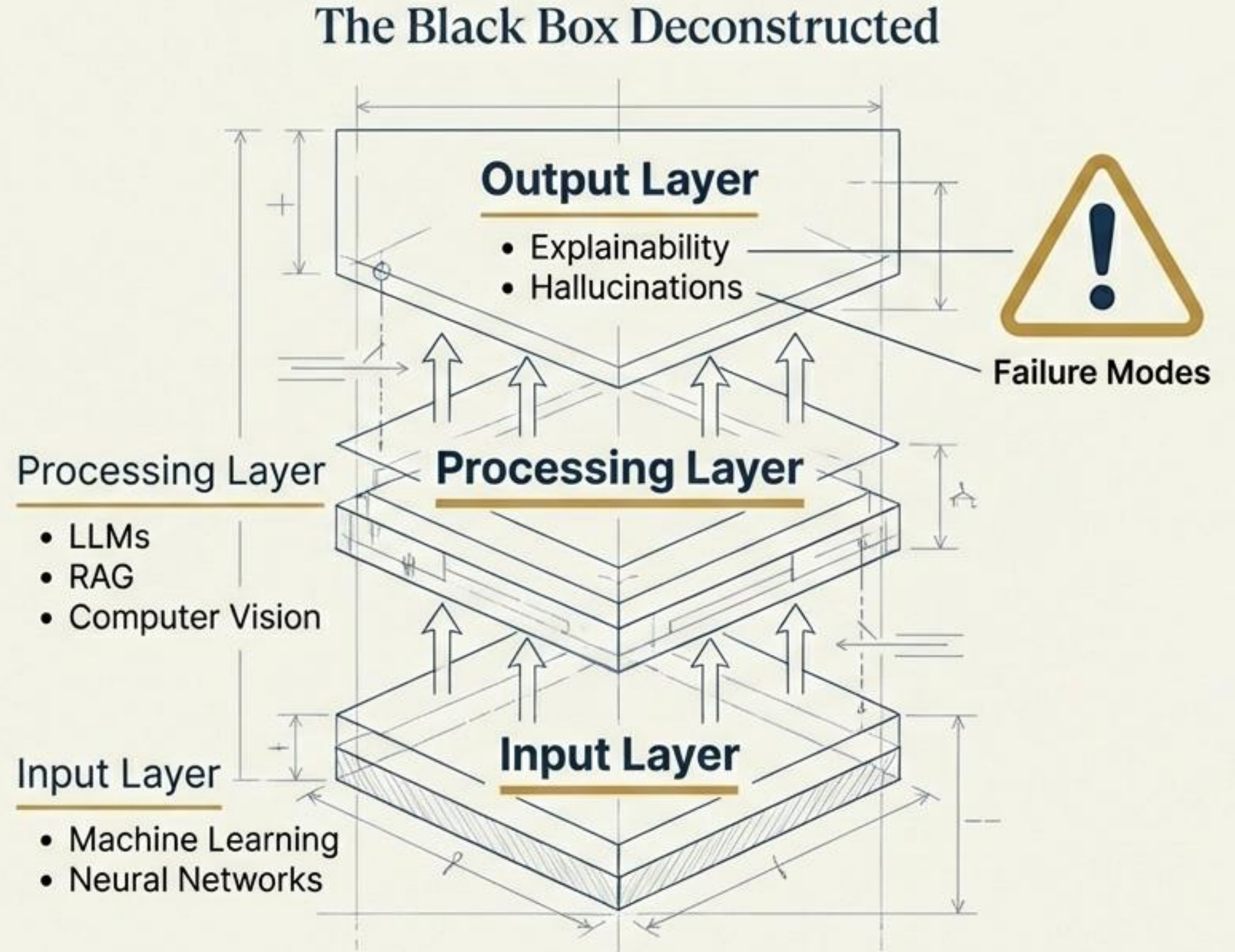


# 01. Understand

## Technical & Conceptual Foundations

Learners must understand and explain how outputs are generated.

To use a tool well, you need to know how it works. To predict when it will fail, you need to know its limits.



# 02. Apply

## Academic & Professional Practice

Learners must make the move from theory to practice, identifying where AI enhances value versus where it undermines it.

The goal is sophisticated use without sacrifice of the human component.

### Effective Practice



- Prompt engineering
- Iterative prompting
- Human-in-the-loop workflows

### Risks to Mitigate



- Skill atrophy
- AI Slop (low-quality flood)
- Outsourcing critical thought

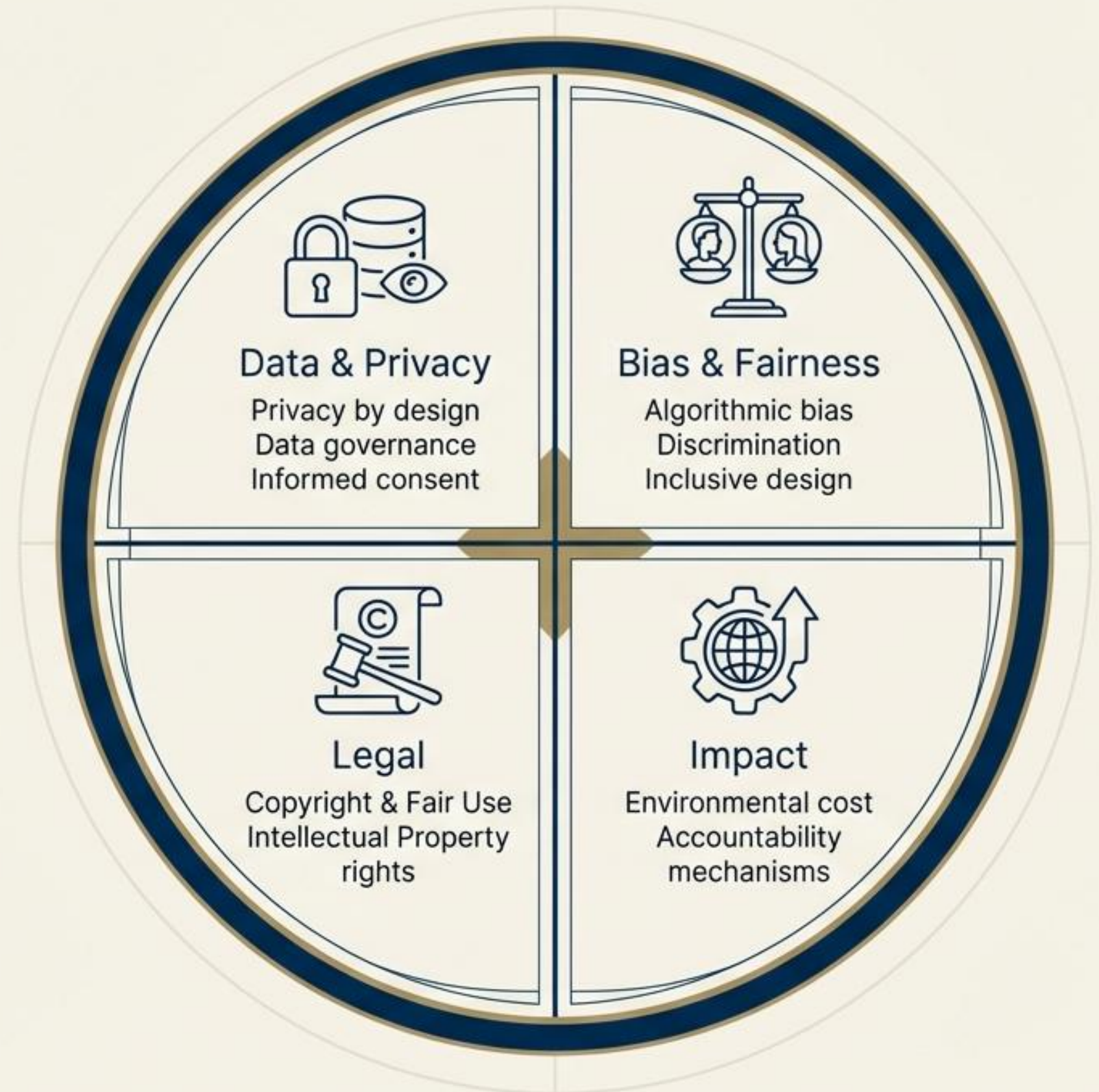
"Produce outputs that are more sophisticated than they might otherwise have been."

# 03. Act Ethically

## Ethical & Legal Use

Students should be able to navigate the grey areas.

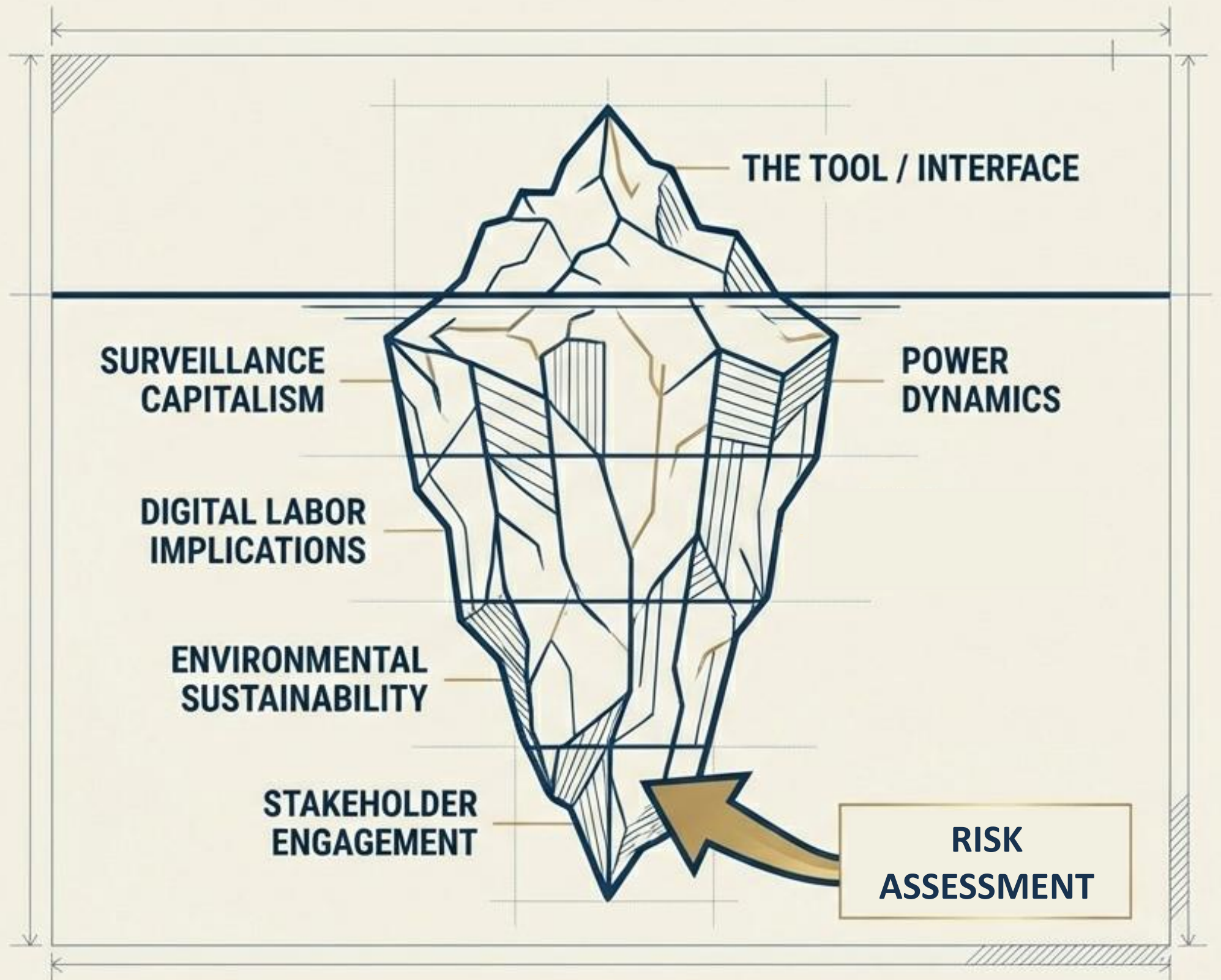
Beyond plagiarism, learners must navigate institutional regulations (FERPA, HIPAA), intellectual property, digital rights, data privacy, bias, and environmental impacts.



# 04. Reflect

## Societal Awareness

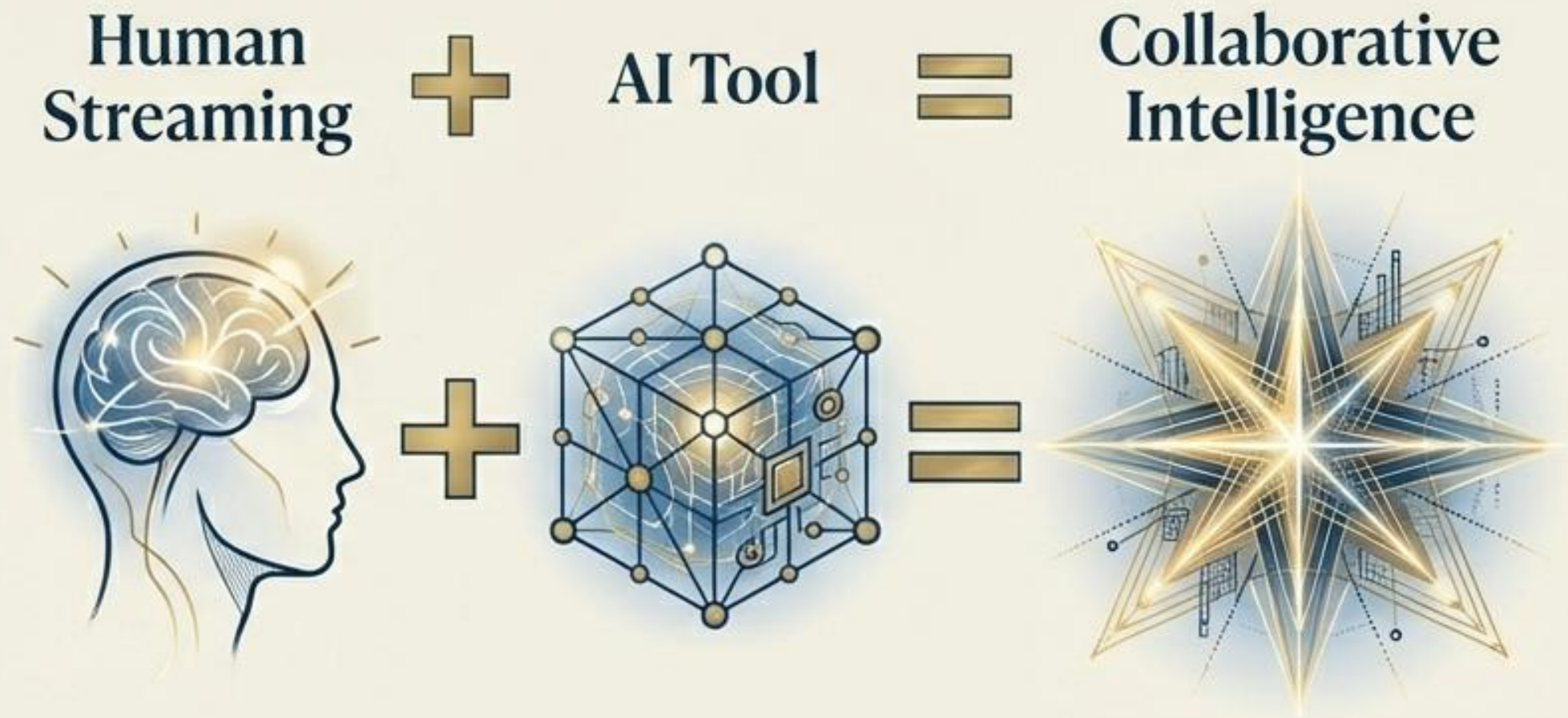
Learners must situate AI within broader cultural, economic, political, and environmental contexts. They should use (or not use) AI with an awareness of its impact on labor, equity, and democracy, including its use in the creation of mis- and disinformation.



# 05. Prepare

## Human-Centered Creativity

Students should prepare to use AI to extend human creativity while preserving authorship, voice, ownership, and accountability. Augmenting human capability, not replacing it.

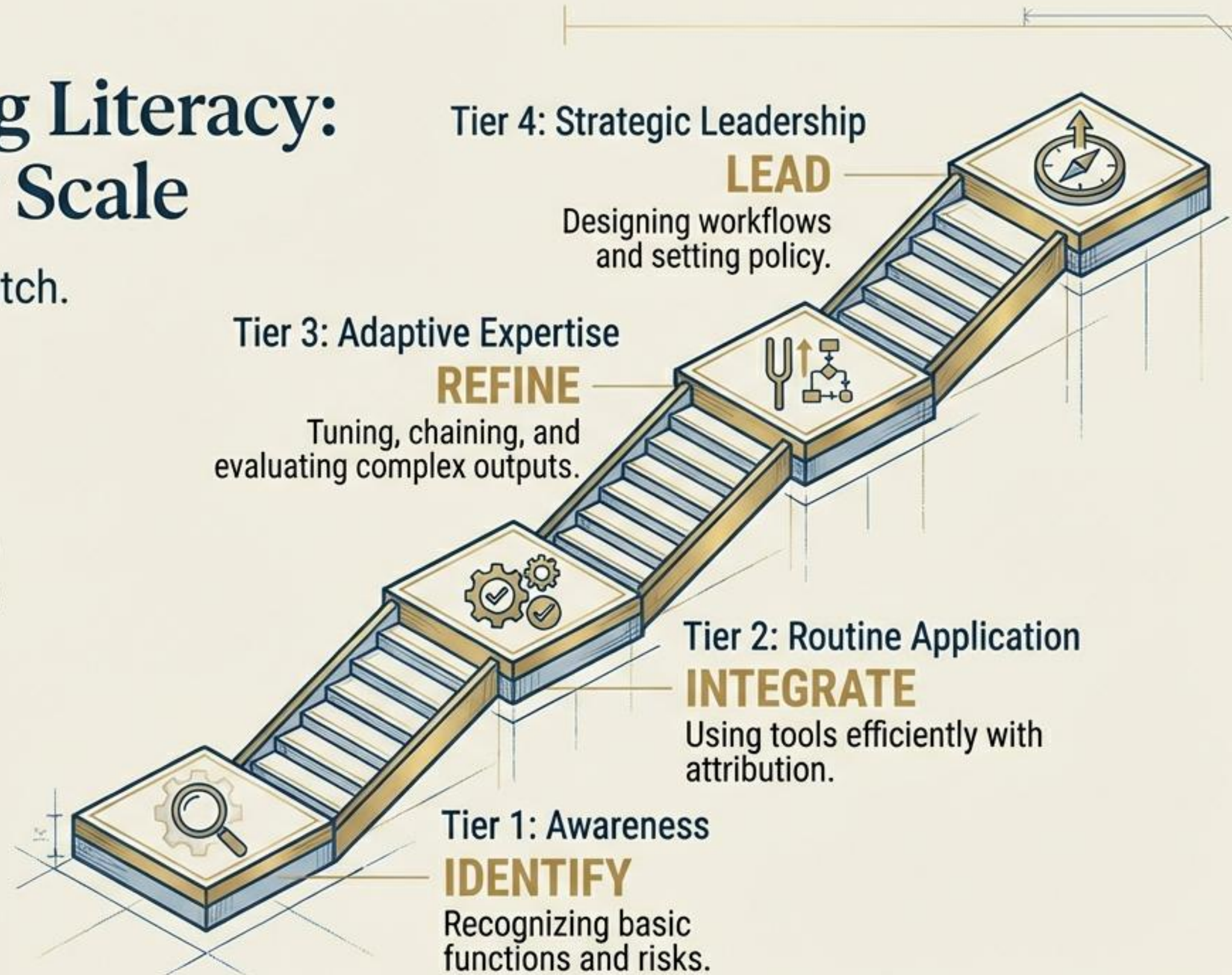


-  Co-creativity
-  Augmented co-authoring
-  Rapid prototyping
-  Multi-modal generation

# Operationalizing Literacy: The Proficiency Scale

Literacy is a ladder, not a switch.  
Skills develop over time.

A structured approach to understanding and building proficiency, progressing from basic recognition to strategic leadership.



# Build forward.

Where does critical AI literacy fit?

**Move to the scenario closest to your world.**

Two questions to discuss:

1. Where in their four years at Widener could this readiness develop?
2. What would faculty, staff, and students need to make it happen?

## FOUR WIDENER GRADUATES. FOUR “REAL” SITUATIONS.

### **SCENARIO A** Nursing

Maya works in an ER that adopted an AI triage system. It assigns acuity scores before she sees patients. Last week it scored a woman as low-acuity. Maya’s gut said otherwise. She was right; the patient was having an atypical cardiac event that the algorithm wasn’t trained to flag. She had to make her case to her colleagues against the certainty of the AI system.

### **SCENARIO B** Social Work

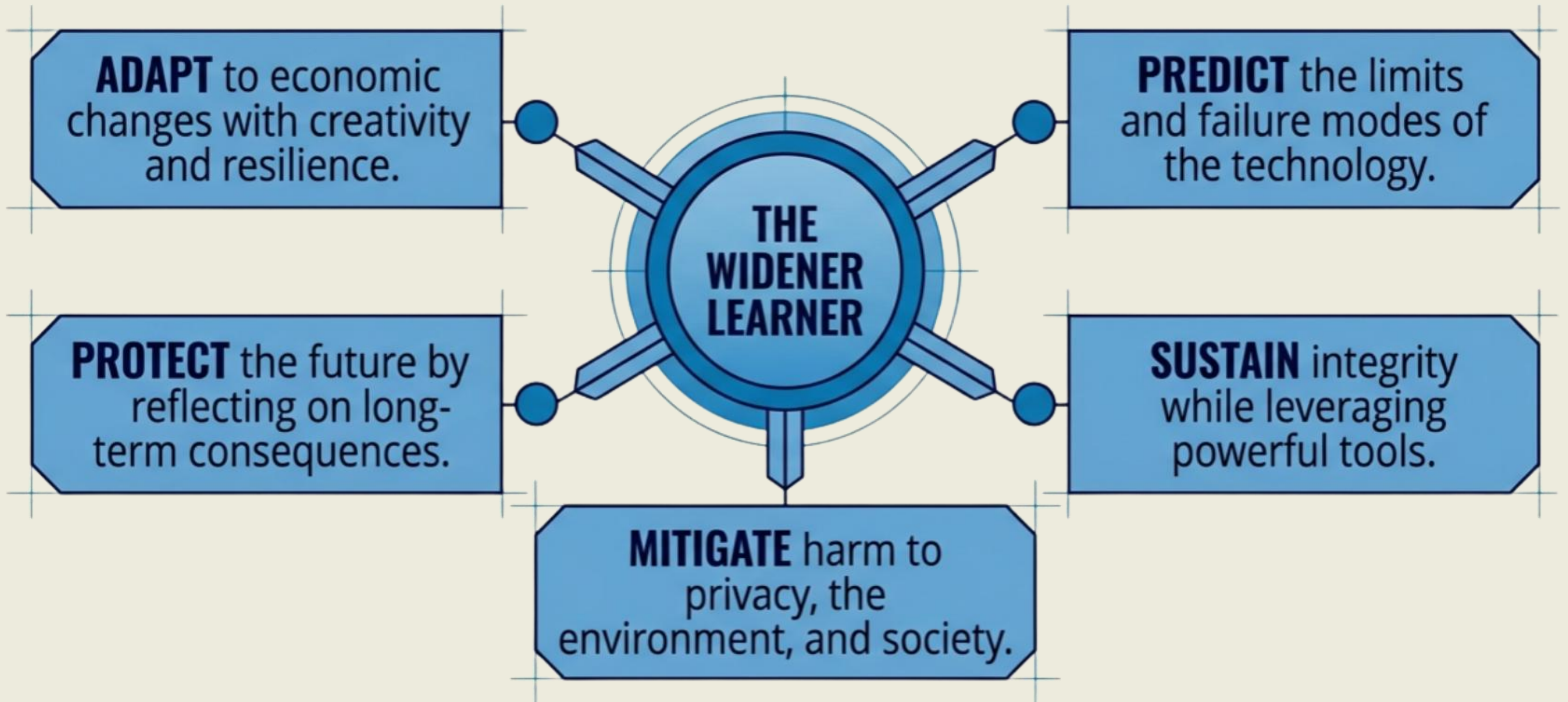
Darius works for a county child welfare agency that uses a predictive analytics tool to flag high-risk families. He’s noticed it disproportionately flags low-income zip codes. His supervisor says it’s one data point among many, but in practice, flagged families get investigated and unflagged ones don’t. He’s been asked to write a memo on whether the tool should continue.

### **SCENARIO C** Engineering

Priya’s team uses an AI design tool that generates structural components from performance constraints. The geometries pass simulation testing but don’t match anything in standard handbooks. Her project lead wants to move forward. Priya has to decide whether to sign off on a design she can verify computationally but can’t fully explain. She has to decide whether to trust the AI tool.

### **SCENARIO D** Business

Amara used AI tools to synthesize financial filings, competitor data, and industry reports for an acquisition analysis, building a model in a fraction of the usual time. She caught that the AI overstated revenue growth from a retracted projection, pressure-tested the model against data the tool missed, and flagged a hidden liability. Her report shaped the final decision.



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