

ROLE-PLAY: LATERAL LEADERSHIP IN AN RSE CONTEXT

A role-play for students – the »LernSpur« scenario

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A role-play in which students practise lateral leadership: leading a research-software initiative *without* any authority to give orders – relying only on mutual understanding, expert power, and trust. The scenario is set in empirical education research, a deliberately accessible domain, so that attention stays on the leadership rather than on technical jargon.

WHY A ROLE-PLAY AT ALL?

You don't learn lateral leadership from a slide – you learn it by *experiencing* it. The role-play creates a safe space to try things out:

- You get to feel it first-hand: what it's like to lead a team without any authority to give orders – with real pressure, conflicting goals, and vague requests, but no real risk.
- You can test behaviours that take some courage in real life (asking follow-up questions, saying no, setting priorities) – and see straight away how the others react.
- The project isn't the point; the dynamic between you is. There's no "winning" and no perfect solution – the learning lies in *how* you deal with one another. That's exactly what we draw out afterwards in the debrief.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS

BUILDING BLOCK	FOR WHOM	CONTENT
<u>Scenario</u>	everyone	shared briefing: the »LernSpur« platform & the kickoff meeting
<u>The roles (handout)</u>	everyone	one shared overview of all roles – <i>public</i> knowledge only, one PDF for all
<u>Distribution & cards</u>	facilitator	distribution notes + links to the confidential individual cards (1 per person)
<u>Events & timeline</u>	facilitator	7 triggerable events with a recommended timeline
<u>Facilitator's guide</u>	instructors	secrets overview & conflict matrix, competency goals, observation, debrief

IN ONE SENTENCE

Robin, freshly hired as an RSE, is tasked with turning the scattered data of an education-research study into a sustainable, FAIR-compliant platform – and, in the kickoff meeting, must lead without being anyone's boss: an enthusiastic professor, a deadline-driven postdoc, an overwhelmed student assistant, and a sceptical partner-school teacher.

LEARNING GOAL IN BRIEF

Lateral leadership means *leading as equals, without relying on hierarchy – relying instead on the power of your own effectiveness*. Students experience how conflicts of goals – between sustainability and speed, between individual interest and the common good – can be worked through not by giving orders, but through understanding, argument, and trust. The full competency mapping is in the facilitator's guide.

QUICK START FOR INSTRUCTORS

Beforehand (strongly recommended): Hand out the scenario and the shared role overview already a few days before the session – and let the students choose their role by preference. That way they arrive prepared and have already engaged with “their” character. For the session, bring name tags and printed role and event cards.

1. Hand out the scenario + the shared role overview to everyone (read together, ~5 min) – both free of secrets.
2. Assign roles by preference; give each person exactly one confidential role card (their own PDF/printout) – the others’ hidden goals stay secret (negotiation practice).
3. Creative preparation phase: everyone fleshes out their own persona (the small task is at the bottom of every card) and sharpens their secret goals.
4. Start the meeting; sprinkle in the events along the timeline (how many is up to the facilitator).
5. Watch with the observation sheet, then reflect using the debrief guide.

Time needed: about 100–110 minutes (10 explanation · 25 preparation incl. persona · 2 × 30 play · 15–20 debrief), easy to scale and to split across two sessions. Details under schedule & timing.