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Hum-Dev AI Lab Session Recap

This is a recap of a Humanitarian-Development “AI Lab” session hosted by DevLearn and Sonata Learning, with a summary of the ideas, use cases, and “wish list” items participants brainstormed during the session, plus notes and additional readings / resources.

Organizations Represented

- International Labor Organization (ILO)
- Mercy Corps
- Gatsby Africa
- Norwegian Refugee Council
- FCDO
- Habitat for Humanity
- International Trade Centre
- SIPPO
- SDC
- Palladium

Key Takeaways

Participants suggested multiple use cases for AI language models, from **analyzing qualitative data** to **writing proposals** to **conducting literature reviews**.

- A few of these use cases could be fulfilled on a basic level by staff simply using the regular “chatbot” interface of popular AI platforms [like ChatGPT](#) and Gemini.
- Other use cases would require some work integrating AI tools like ChatGPT with an organization’s data sources and document repositories (e.g. SharePoint or a data analytics platform)
- Several use cases are (e.g. proposal writing) are likely best suited to off-the-shelf commercial solutions built on top of the major AI platforms (see links below).

That said, the most exciting proposed use case was to **create virtual coaches/ consultants for MSD and MEL**. These could build on [existing AI tools](#) developed by Sonata, draw upon commonly used [MSD frameworks](#), and integrate clients’ own materials and case studies. **These “virtual coaches” could support project teams to design and implement the MSD approach**, enhancing the impact of the existing MSD Advisors, and improving the quality of MSD implementation.

If any workshop participants are interested in taking this forward, please contact Sonata Learning and DevLearn for a more in-depth conversation.

Use Cases

Scenario 1: AI as Assistant

These use cases are where humans are still doing the actual “work”, but the AI assistant might act as a resource.



- **Onboarding tool for new staff / partners** - Provide a quick guided overview of the organization, sector(s), projects, countries, etc. More convenient, interactive than a manual or presentation.
- **“Summative” Search Engine** - An AI-enhanced search engine that doesn’t just locate keywords, but is capable of pulling together and summarizing what’s been done before (in a country, in a sector, in a thematic area) vs. having to hire a consultant or technical advisor to do that work. Platforms like Google are heading in this direction already, meanwhile [Microsoft](#) and [third-party software vendors](#) offer solutions organizations can use with their file repositories.

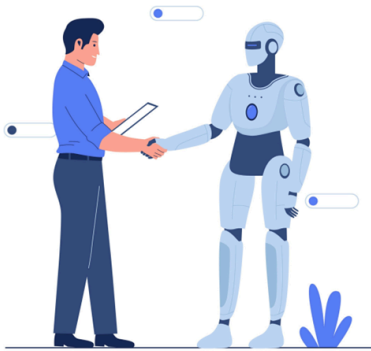
Concerns for Summative Search:

Hallucinations - How can we ensure it is pulling from accurate sources? We could provide it with specific high-quality data sources for “[Retrieval Augmented Generation](#)” but who will populate and maintain those data sources? Does a repository exist? Could it be created as a global good?

Algorithmic Paternalism - How can we ensure people won’t get lazy and just defer to the AI / fail to dig deeper or double-check / find alternate perspectives? Can we engineer the AI’s prompt in such a way that it provides its own disclaimers and alternative viewpoints? Can it flag when it’s going outside “reliable” data sources or conjecturing with lower certainty?

Scenario 2: AI as Collaborator

These are use cases where humans and AI are handling different parts of the workload / process or working collaboratively.



- **Brainstorming how to solve complex problems** beyond the usual high-level bullet points Ai chatbots produce by default.
- **Proposal-writing** (this could potentially be done using [various off-the-shelf, purpose-built AI proposal writing tools](#) or else building a [ChatGPT 'assistant'](#) or a ['corpus' of past proposals in a platform like Vectara](#)).

Can also do the same for contract / RFP writing.

- **Augment the expertise of people with sectoral knowledge / country knowledge but not the approach** by offering copilots for the application of different methodological frameworks [[click to view example](#)]
- **"Always on" virtual coach** for follow up after a training workshop or technical consultation. Potentially better than a coach saying "refer to this document." More convenient and accessible than having to reach out to human coaches / technical experts. But can it also provide the same level of motivation / challenge / inspiration for behavior change? *This blog addresses the topic of using AI as pre-work / post-work in training, though the same principle could apply to technical assistance:* [Link](#)
- **Summarizing, synthesizing data from reports / conducting literature reviews.** This can be done, though it might involve having a [different type of AI \(Predictive Analytics\)](#) do the summarizing and synthesizing of quantitative data then Chat GPT uses its outputs as a data source for conversation. There are also [existing apps](#) that are specifically set up to use AI to summarize results from various peer-reviewed research repositories.
- **Answer questions based on internal filing systems such as SharePoint** ([Microsoft is already claiming to do this with their Copilot app](#) though - like most Microsoft solutions - not sure how well it will work in practice across a large Microsoft 365 tenant.)
- **Analysis of transcripts** - For instance, asking "Did they answer question X in all 15 interviews?" or [sentiment tagging](#). The key question is whether it could understand subtleties, and whether someone is addressing a point even if they don't use certain keywords, directly.

Scenario 3: AI as Automaton

These are use cases where AI handles entire processes independently, with minimal human supervision..



- **AI transcription during surveys**
- **Monitoring use of IT tools / platforms** (patterns in usage)
- **Data collation** (challenging given the org's data itself is not well-organized / consistent)

Action Items / Takeaways

Some actions humanitarian-development organizations can take include:

- **Developing clear AI policies** to make sure staff are using the technology responsibly, in a way that won't compromise the organizations' sensitive data (see [this article](#) with basic guidance for IT departments seeking to manage AI usage.)
- **Training staff on basic "prompt engineering"** to get better results from popular AI chatbots like ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini. [OpenAI's online guide](#) is a good place to start learning the basics.
- **Investing in purpose-built "off the shelf" AI tools** for critical tasks like proposal writing, where there is a clear ROI on the cost of subscriptions.
- **Identify cases where hiring professional prompt engineers / AI application developers to create custom tools might be warranted**, if the opportunity is great enough.
- **Advocate for donors to fund development of universally useful AI solutions as a "global good"** the same way donors have funded tech projects like [DHIS2](#) in public health. This could include incentivizing experts to capture their approaches in AI form or curation of reliable data sources that could be leveraged by custom AI solutions to make AI copilots / virtual coaches more useful for hum-dev organizations.

Contacts

If you would like to brainstorm more specific use cases for AI within your organization or just discuss how AI can be leveraged in the hum-dev sector, generally, feel free to reach out to DevLearn and/or Sonata Learning to review your specific goals, or set up a general co-creation / brainstorming session with your team to identify and scope potential use cases.

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