

EES Professional Development Workshops proposal

Basic information

Title	Hacking Artificial Intelligence: unleashing and understanding its potential for evaluation
Level	Designed for individuals at all career stages, this workshop welcomes anyone from AI novices to those more familiar with its applications.
Prerequisites	No prior experience or knowledge of AI applications is necessary – and experts are welcome. This workshop is crafted to be accessible and enriching for all participants, regardless of their background in AI.
Target number	To ensure a highly interactive and engaging experience, we aim for a group of 15-25 participants. This size allows for optimal interaction, personalized guidance, and dynamic group activities. We are flexible and can adjust to meet the needs of the European Evaluation Society (EES) and the constraints of the chosen venue.

Purpose, content and anticipated learning outcomes

Training often presents Artificial Intelligence (AI) essentially as a sophisticated piece of software, and boxes its use into predefined prompts and procedures. This barely scratches the nature of AI and its offerings. Another misconception is that harnessing AI power requires deep technical expertise. Yet simple “hacks” can go a long way – if we make use of our key evaluator’s skill: capacity to ask questions and see through the answers. “Hacking” is understood here in a benign way: creatively using prompts and engaging in “conversations” with AI to explore its potential. AI did not come with an instruction manual and we are still in early stages of understanding its capabilities; an open-minded, inquisitive approach is not a frivolous exercise but imagines possibilities – and highlights challenges.

By seeing AI practically in action, we will confront ethical issues and existential questions, such as: *will AI become a gigantic echo chamber for mainstream thinking? or will AI support or substitute evaluators?* Answering them requires reimagining our interaction with technology, reflecting on how we approach evaluation and reclaiming the humanity lost in standardized, bureaucratic processes.

Participants will:

- Gain an overview of AI and examples of its use in evaluation;
- Learn how to better “hack” AI (mostly conversational AIs, but also for image generation and speech recognition) to support and innovate on evaluation processes;
- Discuss how AI can support rather than hinder diversity in evaluation, and be used in collaborative and participatory ways;
- Ponder the ethical and existential links to the setup, governance and use of AI for evaluation – as well as its potential sensitivities.

Delivery Methods.

As an experienced evaluator with a strong background in facilitation and adult experiential learning, I effectively blend various learning styles. Topics will be explored through a combination of concise presentations and interactive activities. We will not just frame AI as “yet another analysis software” but reimagine its role in evaluation. Thought-provoking examples will push us to grapple with ethical considerations and AI's transformative potential for our work. We set “hacking labs” spaces for participants to experiment hands-on with AI - individually or in small groups. Participants might likely have different levels of knowledge and exposure to AI, and in the spirit of collective discovery, we will ensure that experiences are shared, making the workshop an opportunity for harvesting practices.

History of versions of the proposed workshop

I have been working on the idea of “hacking by the prompt” since Dec 2022 and conveyed it in several workshops and presentations (besides the publication of articles and blogs on the topic). No workshop

has been the same: they evolved by incorporating new ideas and dilemmas – and, of course, new experiments and practices – as is to be expected in a rapidly evolving field. Some workshops took place remotely (e.g., Vienna Evaluation Workshop and EES Autumn Event in Nov 2023, Indiana Evaluation Association Quarterly event series in April 2023, a Symposium at the University of Mississippi & University of Connecticut in March 2023). The content was also presented in person at a workshop for the MSF Stockholm evaluation unit (Sep 2023), at the Cariplo Innovation Day in June 2023. I run postgraduate workshops for students at ISPI Milan, Social Change School, and Malmo University. This version of the workshop will, of course, be specifically tailored for the EES conference – and will be crosscutting through the strands of action, thinking, and practice – with an emphasis on participatory and collaborative engagements, and on the needed innovation for evaluative thinking in addressing the polycrisis.

Handout materials

All presentations will be shared in electronic formats.