INTENTION
2 IMPACT

Getting *REAL* about responsible use of *ARTIFICIAL* intelligence in research & evaluation

Starter Guide in Centering Humanity in AI for
Evaluation & Research Practice
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Artificial Intelligence (AI) is here to stay – whether you are ready or not.

As with any new technology, the widespread uncertainty is palpable (and reasonable). Especially in evaluation & research, the capabilities of AI sparks concern about data privacy, bias embedded in tools, and whether this technology will render our humanity obsolete.

At Intention 2 Impact (I2I), when we feel unsettled, we start asking questions.

As a next-generation social impact consultancy that centers equity whilst pushing boundaries, we set out to explore this brave new world and build our own case for embracing (or rejecting) AI as one of the many tools in our wheelhouse.

This practice guide:

- Makes the case for why we use AI in our evaluation practice

- Offers criteria and questions that we consider when using an AI tool

- Applies criteria to some AI tools we have tested for qualitative analysis

THE 5-POINT CASE FOR EMBRACING AI

The human case. Despite fears that AI makes us "less human," technological evolution is a defining characteristic of humanity. Just as technologies like cell phones, the Internet, and social media have helped people navigate life with more ease and connection, **AI has the potential to make everyday experiences even more efficient — allowing humans to focus on more meaningful and creative endeavors.**

The business case. In addition to AI being advantageous for humans, there is a compelling business case across industries. Companies that leverage AI technologies can better capture and use data to make more informed decisions. **AI can boost efficiency through automation, reducing human errors, and increasing efficiency.**

The evaluator case. Evaluators have demonstrated the need to evolve based on trends and technology over time. Consider movements towards mixed-methodologies, data visualization, complexity-aware approaches, systems change, equitable and culturally-responsive evaluation, and causal pathways, **AI will likely be the next disruptive change in how evaluation processes are designed, conducted, and delivered; ultimately, requiring a new kind of evaluation education and capacity building.**

The time case. One of the most obvious reasons to leverage AI in evaluation consulting is to increase efficiency and save time by automating processes that would otherwise be conducted manually. This allows us to save time and energy to focus on higher-level thinking that cannot be outsourced. **In our experience, evaluators' added value lies in the relational, strategic, and values-based aspects of the work, such as centering equity in terms of both process and outcomes; building capacity; fostering trust and more.**

The value case. Time savings can also translate into increased profitability of projects. We firmly believe that evaluation budgets should be based on *value* rather than *time* spent. Saving time through the use of AI tools does not mean decreasing hours and reducing the budget. Rather, we are maximizing the budget by enabling our teams to provide more value. **An abundance-mindset in organizations leads to better decision-making and happier teams, ultimately producing higher quality work and contributing to more meaningful impact.**

Here are the criteria & questions we ask ourselves to ensure we keep *ARTIFICIAL* intelligence as *REAL* as we can.

UTILITY | **First, get clear on the use case of AI technology in your work.**

- What added value do I hope this tool brings to me/my team/my work? Will this tool enable me/my team to save time in a way that frees us up to strengthen relationships, grapple with complexity, or engage in more equitable and inclusive practices (e.g., amplify *more* voices during data collection)?

- How does the usage of these tools align with my values or the guiding principles of respected professional associates (such as the [American Evaluation Association](#)'s commitments to common good & equity, respect for people)

- How have you communicated the use of these tools to your team? What efforts have you taken to address concerns and receive consent about whether these tools are "safe to try"?

- To what extent do you need to communicate the use of these tools to your client or the folks you are collecting data from?

PRIVACY | **Next, read the fine print. Before using any tool, don't be afraid to reach out to the AI developers to ask the following questions.**

- Does the tool use a training or inference based model/algorithm? Note: any tool that uses data for "training", retains that data, while "interference" does not.

- How are data stored in the tool and why? If data are passively retained, who has access to the data?

- What are the measures used to strengthen data security and privacy (e.g. 2-factor authentication, SSL integration)?

- Is the tool certified for data privacy and protection through one or more external third parties?

- Is the tool: compliant with federal and state privacy laws (GDPR, CCPA, CPRA, LGPD, etc)?

FUNCTIONALITY | **Once you are feeling confident about the principles and privacy undergirding the tool, cross-check the functionality of the tool.**

- Are the outputs useful? Are they clear and organized? Are they ready to use/ in a format that is easy to use/apply to your work?

- Does the tool allow us to set the context and provide useful background for the work?

- Does the tool offer collaboration capabilities?

- Does the tool integrate multiple modes/forms of data (specific for data analysis tools)?

QUALITY AND ACCURACY | **Lastly, experiment with the tool and review the AI output to validate the quality and accuracy.**

- Is the output clearly linked/ easily traced back to the data

- Is the output customizable and modifiable?

- How valid and reliable is the output (subjectively at least)

- How comparable is the output to those generated manually?

- Does the tool offer customer service or technical assistance supports?

Overview of AI tools for Qualitative Research & Evaluation that I2I has tested

Tools were reviewed in January 2024; tools may be rapidly changing.		**TOOLS** (hyperlinked below)			
	CRITERIA	**CoLoop**	**AILYZE**	**Avalanche Insights**	**FathomAI**
Data Analysis Type	Open-ended items	x	x	x	x
	Focus group / Interview transcripts	x	x		
Pricing	Offers different pricing tiers		x	x	
	Offers free / demo version		x		
	Relative expense level	$250/mo	$50/mo	need to request quote	need to request quote
Output	Output is comparable to themes developed by our team when we compared with manual processes	x	x	x	x
	Output themes linked to data sources	x	x	x	x
Privacy / Security	Security standards comply with GDPR & CCPA regulations	x	x	x	x
	Data security and privacy policies are easy to access	x	x	x	x
	Utilizes two-factor identification when signing in	x	unknown	unknown	x
	Utilizes SSL encryption	x	x	unknown	x
	No passive retention or training of data	x	x	unknown	unknown
	Platform engages Open AI API	x	unknown	unknown	x
	Platform makes data available to Open AI API			unknown	
Additional Features	Contains data visualization tools			x	x
	Easy download of output data	x		x	x
	Allows team collaboration	x			x
	User able to edit / reorganize AI generated themes				x
	Provides rapid analyses	x	x		
	Accommodates multiple file types during upload	x	x		
	Provides transcription services	x			
	Relies on human-in-the-loop to complete analyses		x	x	
	Provides additional analyses (i.e., outcome harvesting; qualitative comparative analysis)		x		

Ready for more REALness about AI in practice?

Below are some resources for further reading and forums for engaging in the conversation.

- **LinkedIn Live AI & Privacy Convo:** I2I's Founder & CEO, Nina Sabarre, interviewed the Co-Founder of CoLoop (our favorite AI tool), Jack Bowen about AI & Privacy.

- **New Directions for Evaluation Special Issue on AI**

- **MERL-Tech Initiative**

- **Natural Language Processing (NLP) Community of Practice**

- **UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence**

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