All-Party Parliamentary Group on Artificial Intelligence
Evidence Meeting 4 – Citizen Participation: DIVERSITY
Monday, 3 June 2019 | 5:30-7:00 PM - Committee Room 2, House of Lords

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Biography: Josie Young advocates for designing Artificial Intelligence (AI) products and systems using ethical and feminist principles. In 2017, she developed and tested a design process for building feminist chatbots. In 2018, Josie contributed to a research project with Charisma.AI and King’s College London to identify ways to deal with bias in large word libraries used for Natural Language Processing. Josie works in London at Methods, leading work to understand the most ethical and appropriate ways to deploy AI in the public sector. Josie is also the Co-Chair of YWCA, a charity dedicated to supporting young women’s leadership in Great Britain. Josie’s professional background is in digital transformation and public sector reform. She has also attended and held facilitation roles for a number of international conferences focused on human rights.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

At Methods, our Emerging Technology practice approaches Artificial Intelligence (AI) as an exciting new technology that, if we think creatively enough, can be used to transform government services. It is from the perspective of using AI to prioritise improvements to public services and center on citizens’ needs that this evidence is provided.

The lessons and recommendations provided below are based on what we’ve learned through projects with clients and internal prototyping exercises. I also offer reflections from my research into building ethical and feminist chatbots.

Takeaway 1: The lack of diversity in AI teams blocks innovation

- In the case of AI, where the potential social impact of AI systems is far greater than previous technologies, it’s important to have teams which are equipped to identify the ways in which their product will have positive and negative impacts. This requires a mixture of skills and backgrounds within the team.
- We have found that homogenous teams are prone to participate in ‘group think’, leading to technology solutions that reinforce the dominant views held by that team.
- Homogeneity also blocks innovation - new perspectives and ways of doing things are less likely to be embraced, and so the opportunity for innovation decreases.
• We consider that diversity, in this context, encompasses demographic markers as well as skills and experience. In our work with public sector clients, we strongly advocate for including the policy and customer experts on client-side as well as equipping our own teams with a healthy mix of computer science, user research and social impact skills.

• However, we have also encountered challenges around creating a safe and productive space for all voices to be heard equally, and where the mixture of views were able to improve the project outputs as a result.

Takeaway 2: Practical approaches are still being developed

• We have observed that a new toolkit is required for designing and deploying AI products or systems. The current Agile/Scrum processes or ways of running digital/technology projects don’t explicitly take into account the need for (1) a diverse team, which is (2) able to think critically about ethical and social impact consequences of their products.

• To address issues (1) and (2), we are amending our internal approach to resourcing and running Agile projects. Based on what we’ve learned from projects with clients, we are developing approaches for our day-to-day delivery of AI projects that require a diverse team (skills and demographic profile) and embed the use of existing ethical and social impact-oriented tools and processes.

• To address issue (2), tools like my Feminist Chatbot Design Process have been proven useful in other contexts for facilitating critical thinking throughout the design process. It’s also proven to support more innovation in how AI-powered products can be designed (see Feminist Internet’s ‘Designing a Feminist Alexa’ program).

Resource list

• Summary of Josie Young research and Feminist Chatbot Design Process - bit.ly/designingfeministchatbots

• Feminist Internet ‘Building a Feminist Alexa’ program report - bit.ly/feministalexareport