

Ten Principles for using AI in leadership consulting



About Us

Global Future Foundation is a think tank dedicated to using psychology to provide fearless and original insight into the challenges facing our times. We aim to guide leaders to ask bigger, deeper questions about how we can best serve our communities.

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Introduction

What is AI?

As Artificial Intelligence (AI) becomes an important part of each of our everyday lives – it's important that we take a moment; to think about the ways AI can enhance our work, and to consider the various associated risks and limitations.

To begin, we need to understand what AI is, and what AI is not. While disputes over the exact definition persist – here, we broadly understand AI to be the systems which perform tasks that would otherwise require human intelligence. This includes reasoning, learning, problem solving, decision making and understanding language.

Within this – AI can be divided into two main camps. The first, includes rule-based AI systems which are built on explicit logic, rules and human-encoded knowledge. The second contains machine learning, which refers to systems that infer patterns from data rather than relying on explicitly crafted rules. Here, within the machine learning camp, lie large language models – systems trained on vast amounts of text to generate and understand language.

These categories are important to understand, because they don't simply mark technical distinctions – they shape how AI behaves, what it can and cannot do, what risks it carries and how we should engage with it. Indeed, when we talk about the core principles for using AI, it's important to consider the various types of AI systems we're using.

How is AI changing our work?

'It is difficult to think of a major industry that AI will not transform' – Andrew Ng¹

Computer Scientist and Global leader in AI.

AI is changing everything – and fast. As consultants, our work has centred on helping leaders and organisations navigate change. In that sense, this new era has brought immense opportunity: there's no shortage of clients wanting to become more agile, adaptive, and resilient, and to unlock their competitive edge in uncertain times.

No industry is immune to change – and, as AI has developed, we've also been forced to re-imagine and refine our practices, to meet emerging needs and make the most of new opportunities. After years of guiding others through disruption, AI has challenged us to put our own advice into practice as we navigate the changes brought by new technologies.

Fundamentally, we believe that when the tides are shifting with such force, the task is not to resist or surrender but to move with, in a way that is grounded in your core principles. There is no way to avoid the wave of transformation brought by AI, but if we simply let ourselves be carried along, we risk losing direction altogether. The art therefore lies in steering wisely: harnessing AI to strengthen human judgment and creativity, without being swept away by its speed or seduced by its ease.

What's more, to succeed in times of upheaval, requires not only survival but mindful reinvention. With all this in mind, as we've integrated AI into our practice, we've developed ten key principles to guide how we use it within leadership consulting.

1. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nicolemartin1/2019/06/27/13-greatest-quotes-about-the-future-of-artificial-intelligence/>

Ten Principles:

1. Preserve human connection

In an industry built on relationships and trust there are understandable risks involved with complete automation. This is true, across all stages of the process – including the initial phases of scheduling, where initial connections are formed. Here, a complete zero-touch experience risks losing the required sensitivity. Further, it is sometimes in these early moments that you glean important information about the clients' wants and needs. To protect the foundational exercise of relationship building, we believe it is important to preserve a degree of human connection throughout the process. Ultimately, while AI may be able to complete certain tasks, there's an element of human intuition, presence and connection that (at present) AI cannot replace.

2. Use AI as a 'thinking partner'

Where AI has a super-human capacity for processing information, it can be used to improve consultants' knowledge, providing context and offering challenging probes. Where consultants work across a range of industries, they may lack industry-specific knowledge. Here, AI can provide vital insights – analysing key industry trends, summarising relevant news and reviewing the most recent job descriptions. For coaching, AI can also be a valuable tool, summarising firm-wide insights to detect patterns and highlight priority areas. Further, AI can be effectively leveraged to challenge and enhance consultants' thinking – highlighting blind-spots and questioning assumptions. In this sense, it's important that we use AI not

to outsource our brains – but to enhance our critical thinking and analysis.

3. Approach efficiency-savings with caution

AI can streamline administrative processes and free up consultants' time, but efficiency improvements should never come at the cost of the quality of the service. Cost- or time- saving alone isn't a sufficient measure of success. If integrated uncritically, AI can inadvertently lower the standard of the service – making interactions feel generic or removing the nuance clients value. The guiding rule should be simple: use AI only where it genuinely elevates the work and enhances the client experience, not where it risks hollowing it out.

4. Monitoring and fair play

AI should be used to safeguard the integrity of assessments. In leadership consulting, this is particularly important in psychometric and preliminary testing where candidates might attempt to game the system – using generative AI tools to assist with answers or bypassing identity verification in virtual assessments with visual proctoring. Indeed, where the proliferation of AI and virtual testing has significantly increased this risk, consultants can use AI strategically to detect and deter misuse. This may include monitoring test-takers via webcam or tracking window-switching during assessments. While no system is foolproof, these measures help maintain trust, credibility and fairness throughout the processes.

5. Counter AI's past bias with future-focused fine-tuning

AI is trained on historical data, meaning it tends to reproduce the past rather than anticipate what will be needed next. Without human oversight, it risks defining 'success' through outdated patterns – favouring familiar leadership traits or narrow criteria that may not reflect an organisation's evolving culture or strategic direction. A connected risk is that, rooted in past data, AI can reinforce biases and inequalities, perpetuating exclusionary norms rather than challenging them. To counter this, consultants must integrate a future-focused, bias-aware lens to the way AI is designed and deployed. This may begin with a rigorous job analysis that defines the real skills, behaviours, and outcomes required for success – ensuring AI models focus only on what really matters. This is important because, left unguided, AI can latch onto irrelevant or biased cues – for example, inferring leadership potential from a CV mentioning 'captain of the men's rowing team,' which unconsciously weights gendered experiences. Through careful human oversight – checking what AI measures for – we can reduce contamination and deficiency, aligning the technology with future-oriented, equitable definitions of success.

6. Use AI to inform, not replace, human judgement

AI should act as an assistant, not a final arbiter. It can provide insights, challenge assumptions and improve consistency – but human oversight must remain central, particularly where judgement, context and empathy are needed.

In our work, to maintain quality control, we don't use AI to determine clients' ratings, but to calibrate our independent scoring. Here, AI can be a valuable tool to challenge human biases. Indeed, one of the most prevalent biases, is that assessors tend to prefer candidates who are similar to themselves. In this way, we can use AI to ensure fair judgement and consistent scoring.

7. Safeguard validity and reliability

When using AI, it is essential to ensure both reliability (consistency across repeated assessments or models) and validity (accuracy in predicting real-world performance). This requires continuous monitoring: tracking how AI-generated ratings correlate with human ratings and actual performance outcomes and identifying where discrepancies arise between the AI generated and individually written reports, and between different AI models. By systematically collecting and analysing data, back-testing predictions, and iterating on the systems used to make sure assessment predictions correlate with outcome variables, consultants can ensure AI supports robust, fair and evidence-based decision-making.

8. Maintain transparency and informed consent

In principle, and in particular when using AI in leadership consulting – it is important to practice transparency. Where clients are often seeking the expert insights of our consultants, to maintain trust and protect the quality of our offer, it is important to be explicit about the ways we use AI – to enhance our service rather than simply improve efficiency.

9. Human oversight for hallucinations

As is true in all uses, when we use AI to review notes in leadership consulting, it is important to remain vigilant, and check for hallucinations. Knowing that AI can draw unfounded conclusions from inputted text, it is vital that all outputs are carefully checked to ensure their representations are accurate and that there is always a human layer of security.

10. Democratising access

AI can be used to analyse qualitative data and generate personalised insights at scale, making assessments, development tools and coaching guidance available to more people than ever before. While previously we could only use standardised pre-produced text, with this advancement, access can penetrate to lower levels in organisations. Here, by automating individual feedback and providing tailored development prompts, AI can be used to extend coaching support beyond senior leaders or high-potential employees, delivering meaningful opportunities to support people across the workforce. This is particularly valuable as many organisations are facing a financial squeeze and many people are struggling to navigate the job market – longing for guidance and coaching.

Conclusion

AI offers a huge opportunity for leadership consultancies. We should embrace change and welcome the transformative potential AI holds. However, as we approach these new and ever-evolving technologies, it's important that we enter with our eyes open – aware of the risks, not blinded by the allure of efficiency and ease.

Ultimately, AI should be treated as a living system that evolves with the organisation and its environment. AI systems need to be regularly reviewed, updated and validated to make sure they don't become outdated and incorporate lessons from ongoing outcomes. To ensure AI remains forward looking, fair and accurate – it's important to be continuously refining and retraining models, consistently reviewing the ways they're used to enhance the service and client experience.



