**Transcript**

July 23, 2025, 8:06PM

 **Joie Acosta** 0:03  
FII.

 **Todd Helmus** 0:04  
Does it?  
How do you like for transcription?

 **Joie Acosta** 0:08  
Mm-hmm.

 **Todd Helmus** 0:09  
How do you get that?

 **Joie Acosta** 0:11  
I have to go through like you know the same way you get Adobe Pro, Acrobat or whatever.

 **Todd Helmus** 0:19  
OK.  
See, I'm always learning stuff.  
Do you think it's more accurate?  
All right.  
That's helpful. Thanks.  
So yeah, so we've already started.  
Maybe we can start with doing introductions and I'll. I'll start. I'm.  
Mostly qualitative researcher at Rand.  
And though I've done some quantitative stuff with the help of other Rand researchers, my area focuses mostly on sort of irregular warfare kind of topics.  
Violent extremism, terrorism. Propaganda, disinformation, things like that.  
And also like one other thing, if we could be interesting to get in this and as we do introductions is maybe some of the you know your methodological areas that you're operating at, what methods are you applying at Rand? And for me it's a lot of interviews it.  
Learnt reviews, it's.  
Some survey methods? What else?  
And then social media analytics back in the day when we were doing that.  
I'm not sure we're doing a lot of that now, but doing that as well.  
So that's sort of my background.  
Maybe we can go top to bottom on my screen starting with Ranya.

 **Ramya Chari** 1:39  
Hi everyone.  
I'm. I'm Ramya, I am.  
Kind of a Jack of all trades. I feel like mostly at random done a lot of environmental health work and I do a lot of methodologically like CBPR community based participatory research work and stakeholder engagement.  
I'm have mainly been doing qualitative work at Rand, but involved in studies.  
Kind of like what you said, Todd.  
Doing quantitative work, but mostly like, you know, in teams of other folks who are carrying out the heavy duty quantitative analysis. And so, you know, similarly, it's interviews, it's literature reviews, focus groups. You know, I feel like there's a lot of.  
Kind of crowdsourcing.

 **Todd Helmus** 2:34  
What did you say?

 **Ramya Chari** 2:34  
Studies that crowdsourcing where like basically like gathering data.  
From application like Twitter but also applications that are specifically geared to for a specific topics like environmental, health issues or climate change issues and things like that.  
We like we work.  
I work with a an organization that has developed a platform specifically to gather.  
Crowdsourcing observations on things like flooding and.  
Heat and things like that.  
So we're doing that now and it's a lot of basically qualitative assessment of the content of a lot of different posts.

 **Todd Helmus** 3:17  
Interesting. OK.  
Great. Thank you.  
Sarah.

 **Sara McCleskey** 3:24  
Hi everyone.  
I'm Sarah.  
I work in.  
I'm an associate policy researcher almost exclusively in health.  
I do aging dementia, end of life care.  
I'm also almost exclusively a qualitative researcher, so lots of interviews, focus groups, somewhat reviews.  
Not a ton of quant stuff.

 **Todd Helmus** 3:48  
OK.  
Great, Joey.

 **Joie Acosta** 3:58  
Play like Joy to the world.

 **Todd Helmus** 3:59  
Sorry about that.

 **Joie Acosta** 4:05  
Joy, I am.  
A psychologist by training, but have done a lot of different kinds of projects.  
Including some that have analyzed social media data, some that have.  
Focused on using large language models for other reasons but.  
And I'll look at that.  
Baby where amya?  
And have also been really interested.  
I'm an implementation scientist.  
Have been really interested in thinking about.  
The role that AI plays in implementation science, but also.  
Vice versa, the implementation of AI in science.  
So I'm also like the global scholar in translation and have been focused a lot on how.  
We can translate our research better and more efficiently, and obviously AI has been part of the of what I've been thinking about in terms of that so.

 **Todd Helmus** 5:12  
OK. And it it's it's and just to make it the pronunciate, it's it's a joy. Joy, yeah.

 **Joie Acosta** 5:19  
Yep, just like joy to the world.

 **Todd Helmus** 5:20  
See see how do I pronounce it again?

 **Joie Acosta** 5:23  
Just the same way you say joy to the world.

 **Todd Helmus** 5:25  
Joy to the world. OK, I'm very because I've we've interacted before.  
So anyway, all right, awesome, Luke.

 **Luke Matthews** 5:33  
I think I think really everyone knows me except for Sarah.  
So I'm an anthropologist based in our Boston office.  
I'm a mixed methods researcher.  
For me, that means a lot of my research has involved taking in like data that's originally qualitative and producing some kind of statistical quantified output out of that.  
So I have worked with Sarah, all these illustrious colleagues.  
On this call in in that vein and.  
And my I so I've done social media Data survey interview.  
Basically, oh military records of various kinds.  
Readiness reports intelligence reports.  
So kind of data agnostic when my central interests are about.  
Misinformation, but also more broadly, the scientific process and the generation of knowledge.  
Like reality, I guess.  
I did a bunch of social network analysis for a while, but like Todd was saying, some of that in social media has dried up a bit.  
Right now I'm doing an army interview based project and a health project on how PCPS and psychiatrists perceive and diagnose mental disorders.  
Similarly, or differently so.

 **Todd Helmus** 6:50  
Hmm.

 **Luke Matthews** 6:52  
Gives you a sense of flavor of what, what.

 **Todd Helmus** 6:55  
And her sit in while I got you on here. Luke talking.  
Say a few sentences just to start us off about how you're converting qualitative data into some sort of statistical formulation.

 **Luke Matthews** 7:08  
Sure. So it's in that role that I got into this space, right?  
Because I've been kind of an early adopter of a lot of these tools.  
So like some of my training before and was in doing not just network analysis but like unsupervised machine learning like cluster analysis and different types of lexical analysis around the time I came to Rand, my former employer, I was starting to use supervised machine learning.  
I particularly did a bunch of that around like.  
Like traditional theme coding.  
So like where you're coding themes and documents and then you just make a machine that is like a virtual coder that uses training data from a person to just hit those structured codes the same way.

 **Todd Helmus** 7:44  
Mm.

 **Luke Matthews** 7:53  
And then lately I have been using some of the the LLM side.  
So besides like the auto, I've been doing the kind of machine transcription and stuff, but I've been using some of the LLM's for.  
And kind of more exploring some of their.  
Thematic coding and kind of ability to kind of group documents then generate text for me or you know, I'm kind of old school about that.  
I still want to write my reports. Todd, you know, so they have the Luke flavor to them. They're kind of.

 **Todd Helmus** 8:25  
Sure. Amen.

 **Luke Matthews** 8:29  
It's part of the secret sauce but but.

 **Todd Helmus** 8:31  
Yeah.

 **Luke Matthews** 8:35  
But but yeah, I'm I'm definitely interested.  
I mean, I have a couple papers where one where we're comparing.  
Directly, like the LLM for this kind of theme coding to supervise machine learning to humans.  
So I'm I'm very interested in the tools, yeah.

 **Todd Helmus** 8:50  
Awesome. Thanks man. Doug.

 **Douglas Yeung** 8:57  
What are you doing?

 **Todd Helmus** 8:57  
But.

 **Douglas Yeung** 9:02  
OK.  
Yeah. Yeah. In terms of work compared to focus on building on one hand and then.  
Very security things together. On the other hand.  
Terms of methods.  
I've done mostly like stuff. I've been trained in behavioral sciences, so like a lot of surveys, all interviews focus groups also on social media and data analysis backbone.  
Yeah, I think that that people did.  
That these.  
Yeah, other, like nice naval like prompting techniques.  
Great beyond entertainment, Saber.  
You know what I call used?  
More, but I in terms of how we use it.  
What it means to use it does for us.

 **Todd Helmus** 9:52  
Yeah, you're the the. The sound is coming through.  
I can catch most of your words, but the sounds coming through a little intermittently.

 **Douglas Yeung** 9:58  
OK.

 **Todd Helmus** 10:00  
Just FYI so.

 **Douglas Yeung** 10:02  
OK.  
Gosh, why? Sorry.

 **Todd Helmus** 10:04  
Yeah, I don't know how you fix that, you know.  
All right. OK, awesome. Thanks.  
So this is.  
I'm glad there's a few folks who have experience specifically working AI issues.  
It's good to bring that knowledge into this also.  
Glad that there's sort of a bit of consistent here consistency here on some of the qualitative side of work.  
So I'm curious.  
I want to start by asking.  
So you've identified what what methods that you're using.  
  
So the methods that some of the common methods that I heard are one everyone's doing reviews of some sort or another.  
And then.  
Qualitative interviews, focus groups and things like that seem prominent.  
Maybe that's a good place to start.  
And what I want to do is just take a couple of these methods and walk through them and get your sense of the some of the process that's involved in that and where you see the long pull in the tent and then.  
Any experience you might have using the tools available at rand to do those things or not, which is fine too.  
So just starting out with, you know, interviews and focus groups.  
And maybe to a lesser extent, surveys, but definitely interviews and focus groups.  
Can you walk me through?  
Like what do you see for that particular method as what's the long pull in the tent?  
The most difficult, challenging task related to doing interviews and focus groups.

 **Joie Acosta** 11:45  
Finding the right people and recruiting them.

 **Todd Helmus** 11:58  
OK.  
Yeah, definitely like getting getting the sample, especially if they're not spoon fed to you. Like often times we get on the military side where we get a list of contacts from the sponsor to call.  
Is there a particular like example that you're thinking of, of a challenging population of reach?

 **Joie Acosta** 12:19  
I mean in healthcare, it's hard to get providers.

 **Luke Matthews** 12:23  
Oh yeah, physicians can be a nightmare.

 **Joie Acosta** 12:25  
Yeah. And then second to that would be patients.

 **Luke Matthews** 12:26  
Yeah.

 **Joie Acosta** 12:31  
But I think any almost any group that where you're looking like to recruit somebody that has something special about them, whatever it is can be. It can be a challenge unless you're you got to work through all these intermediaries and then they gotta, like, do these things where.  
You tell people about why you're looking to talk to them and then just a lot of steps involved in in, in that unless you're spoon fed like you do.  
Like you are on the military side.

 **Todd Helmus** 12:58  
  
Are you trying to do like a snowball method like you start with a couple and expand out from there? Or are you trying to like get your full potential recruitment list up from the get go or relying on interlocutors to help identify a list for you?  
Or just wait going into a waiting room and asking random people.

 **Joie Acosta** 13:22  
Not the last, but.  
Probably all the former.  
I mean with focus groups you have to you can't use snowball method  
  
That's not really the best thing to do in a focus group.  
Interviews you can snowball more easily, but focus groups, you kind of gotta have.  
More.  
You know a sample already to pick from.

 **Joie Acosta** 13:48  
But I, you know, recruiting is just one thing like identifying recruiting.  
Others may have other experiences.  
I mean to get us going down one path if it.

 **Todd Helmus** 13:56  
  
What else are sort of long poles of the tent on the quality on the interviews focus group side?

 **Sara McCleskey** 14:12  
Coding large amounts of data.

 **Sara McCleskey** 14:15  
Coding Is very annoying.

 **Luke Matthews** 14:19  
So Sarah, can you specify that what's large and what's coding?

 **Sara McCleskey** 14:24  
For example, I was just on a project.  
We interviewed 30 physicians, which doesn't sound like that much, but the interviews were an hour long and pretty dense.  
And I was tasked with doing them in deduce and it just takes forever.  
And it's not the most like compelling task.  
So I would say that's a point of frustration.  
It's like my least favorite part of the project.

 **Douglas Yeung** 14:53  
Yeah, I was gonna get too, Todd, if you asked what the most difficult one I was thinking about my least favorite one, which I think is what Sarah said (coding).

 **Douglas Yeung** 15:02  
And I mean it takes the longest also. And then I think one thing that you were alluding to, Sarah, but I'm not sure if you what was your experience is that it's a lot harder for me to do the analysis if I wasn't the one if I wasn't the one who was taking notes.  
So if I'm not the one participating in the interviews, then it's like almost impossible to [to code the data].  
  
I gotta do all coding or you know merging or, you know, like analysis. However you you end up your project ended doing it.  
As part of that, you know some of it that also don't enjoy, I guess that that might be helpful to think about is.  
Thinking about the frequency of the post and of the themes (so analyzing statistics around coded content), Like these are the most mentioned themes. Is like this concept mentioned four of the 10 interviews.

 **Todd Helmus** 16:19  
So tabulating, tabulating the frequency of of of comments and topics.

 **Douglas Yeung** 16:25  
Yeah.

 **Luke Matthews** 16:27  
So I'm I just.  
I'll weigh in.  
I'm I'm with joy.  
I find recruitment to be the hardest part and also like this story for another time.  
I mean, I have stories of my own spectacular recruitment failures, right?  
Like one that I remember with physicians or just couldn't get people.  
We didn't set it up the right way, you know, except I find it to be hard and I get.  
I maybe just approach it differently.  
I have a higher pain tolerance for coding, or just perversely enjoy doing that.  
I don't think it takes me longer for like one hour interviews.  
I kind of figure like for an hour interview it's gonna take me at least another hour to like even once I have them on the list, right?  
I'm gonna interview this person, then It's gonna take me another hour to get the person and then save all the notes and everything afterwards, you know, and then to code that maybe it takes me another hour or something.   
[I only use] 30 codes, in my code tree, that's a lot.  
For me, like I'll be very parsimonious about what I want to know, you know.  
So, at least for me, and I know, that was like pratik's muse qda thing, I think was oriented towards speeding up that process.  
But at least for me, I don't.  
I don't find that to be that onerous.

A part of the process like, say, at least for me, unless I'm doing like one of my big scale things right there. I mean, I have one right now in review that has like 20,000 documents. So there's there's no Human [to do that]. I'll inflict a lot of pain on Rand RAs, but they're not gonna get through it, right?  
So that's where I'll turn to like a machine to get it done.

 **Todd Helmus** 18:05  
And Luke, can you talk about that like can it?  
I mean, that's sort of a different side of the same coin, right?  
Is is reviewing documents and parceling out information from documents.  
But like when you're doing that, are you looking for needles in the haystack?  
Are you trying to code all the documents or look for specific information across all of them to see which ones? Which small number might be relevant?

 **Luke Matthews** 18:31  
Yeah, I've done both, but I've done plenty of ones where like the one right now at the 20,000 I'm trying to code like 12 specific themes in all the documents and the themes aren't particularly rare. You know, maybe they occur in each theme, maybe occurs in 20 percent of the documents and I'm looking for like patterns of correlation. You see what I mean between the themes across the documents? So yeah.

 **Todd Helmus** 18:52  
More quantitative focused.

 **Luke Matthews** 18:54  
Yeah, yeah, yeah.  
So like for me, like with the interviews, I guess I I don't.  
It's just my approach, but I'd often if I'm gonna do theme coding, which I don't always, I'd rather like read them all and like feel like it's right.  
Whatever that means.  
Like the way Luke wants it.

 **Todd Helmus** 19:14  
So I mean there's.  
I mean, there's, I I hear you.  
There's definitely something to be said about the intimacy 1 gets with the data.

 **Luke Matthews** 19:21  
Yeah.

 **Todd Helmus** 19:22  
When you go through it like that.  
I know how and I guess that's a that's a question like so. So RAND has a product to help on the coding side. Right muse.  
I'm not sure to what extent folks are familiar with that.

 **Luke Matthews** 19:35  
Yeah.

 **Todd Helmus** 19:39  
But I'm curious like the strengths and weaknesses of using a program like that.  
Had to do the coding versus hand jamming.  
Each individual you know going line by line personally on the document.

 **Ramya Chari** 19:56  
I mean, I just had the this experience on a project.  
Where we were using expert lens and expert lenses, integrating AI now to kind of go through and give a synopsis of what everybody says for the different questions or topics that you're asking about.  
And you know, and and then the synopsis aren't bad.  
But I was finding that it was it was difficult for me to like a just inherently trust what it was spitting out in a way that maybe you want to just like take it and use it to draw further conclusions. And then we found when you know going back and rereading it, that there were definitely, like, nuances that were missed and things that, you know were not picked up that were relevant to our project.  
Especially because this project is like really politically sensitive and there's a lot of this is something that's gonna bring up as as one of the challenges when you're dealing with groups where there's like a lot of like low trust and potential for conflict and you need to be really sensitive about how you go in and sensitive about how you portray your results and what you say and how you frame things that you know, we're finding it difficult to simply just rely on what AI spits out because there's a whole lot of context around it. And what we want to say and how we want to deliver these results that you know that you might lose if you just use AI in that capacity and not, you know, kind of go through and see what people are saying. Like on their own.

 **Todd Helmus** 21:37  
Yeah.  
Yeah. No, I see that.  
Especially if you're not, if you're not going, if you're you're not seeing how everything is coding, or if you're trusting some, the coding of it for parcels of the data, then you really have to trust it or Take your chances with it, I guess.  
Any other observations on the on the coding aspect of this?

 **Sara McCleskey** 22:05  
I used Muse once to sort of check we had already coded all the data and so we use it as kind of an additional check and I think I agree with what Ramya has said, like it missed anything that was nuanced. It sort of wasn't picking up on things. I say this as someone who's sort of AI naive like I I'm sure I could have programmed it better or given it better prompts. Or asked in different ways, but at that point I feel like it's faster to just do it myself, so I just feel like it's not quite doing what I want it to do and I don't know how to get it to do what I want it to.

 **Todd Helmus** 22:56  
Anybody else on that on that topic?  
Have have, have others tried or go ahead.

 **Joie Acosta** 22:59  
  
We've been also using like rapid qualitative analysis method.  
That I think do a kind of what AI does, but better because of the contextual issues.  
And they're quicker. So for me like having AI code, the data opens up a lot of like potential pitfalls. And I would almost could consider that like a step towards rapid qualitative analysis where you know you have to, you could look at the AI synopsis as well as read the transcripts, but there's no replacing in my mind like AI can't replace us in reading transcripts and understanding the context behind the interview in understanding the conversation. So like it might be one tool in the toolbox, but I just don't think it's a replacement for analysis, whereas I think finding people maybe supporting scheduling like that kind of thing feels like like AI could nail that out of the park. But that's just maybe my opinion.

 **Todd Helmus** 24:19  
  
Say more about that particular angle.

 **Joie Acosta** 24:23  
Umm.  
Like Can you imagine? A world where, like AI could feed in information about the kind of participants you're looking for. And AI could crawl the Internet to find them.  
Invite them to participate and then find a time on your calendar for the interview.  
Period.

 **Ramya Chari** 25:02  
I was gonna say even that like, the way that I kind of you know start some projects now or just trying to identify you know who the best partners are (for a grant submission) or the best organizations for inroads into a population that you want to reach. And sometimes that can be really difficult too. And you know, a lot of times I just start with Google. But, you know, having AI, being able to give you this landscape of groups and orgs and. You know, you know at least where to start in the field. It's something I think would be really helpful.

 **Joie Acosta** 25:35  
Even just inputting all of Rand's past projects and who their partners are and like what they did, and having an AI crawl through all of that like, I feel like there's a lot of good leads that like across Rand.

 **Ramya Chari** 25:38  
Yeah.

 **Joie Acosta** 25:50  
You have to send out an e-mail to like some listserv to be like. Does anyone know a partner that blah blah, blah? If you don't like already know somebody who knows somebody and and so there's just a ton of, like, institutional information Rand wide.  
With the partners that, like, I feel like that could be a really helpful tool, especially in given all that's going on.

 **Todd Helmus** 26:15

 **Luke Matthews** 26:38  
Just on the proposals, I mean, there was recently what a NIH release guidance about this because they started receiving like 40 proposals from a single researcher for for this.

 **Todd Helmus** 26:50  
Yeah, that was awesome.  
That guy deserves a medal.

 **Joie Acosta** 26:52  
I know that's.

 **Luke Matthews** 26:53  
Yeah, yeah. So, so but to to Joy's point, joy apparently wants to be inundated with AI spam inviting her to to things, so I think.  
There's a. So NIH put a cap on proposals.

 **Joie Acosta** 27:06  
I I already AM.

 **Luke Matthews** 27:09  
Yeah. So actually Todd I know I floated this on one of our Yammer discussions one time. But I I think somebody actually people aren't anticipating about AI development is some of this technology will be like a red Queen scenario.

 **Joie Acosta** 27:10  
We all are.

 **Luke Matthews** 27:23  
Remember the Red Queen from Alice in Wonderland?  
So you're just running faster and faster. So in the red Queen's running faster and faster to stay in the same place like on a treadmill.  
Right. So because your competitors start doing it.  
I mean, like you're saying, I'm gonna get all these more proposals submitted faster, right? But everyone else is gonna do that. And so then you're just you see what I mean? There's no actual net. Everyone stays where they are.They're just all going faster now, right?It's like one of the analogies I use that is, I think, a perfect example of this kind of technology is like self checkout in grocery stores like at the end of the day, no grocery stores have actually made any more money.  
From this.  
Right. Like they're selling the same amount of groceries, right?  
The the self checkout actually doesn't save money compared to paying somebody because people steal more stuff and every self checkout is more expensive than a cashier staff checkup when you add it all up they say well, if your competitors do it, you kind of have to do it.  
Because if Safeway does it, then customers who like that will go to Safeway.  
So now I'm stop and shop.  
Now I have to do it.  
See what I'm getting at?

 **Todd Helmus** 28:31  
Is that is this an analogy for race to the bottom?

 **Luke Matthews** 28:35  
Well, it's more of a well in and again evolutionary theory, we call it a red queen.  
So it's like predators and prey like over time.  
After evolutionary time, there's like a Co evolution like predators get faster and prey get faster and also brain size and predators get smarter and prey get smarter.  
But the same amount of deer are gonna get eaten at the end of the day.  
You see what I mean by by the wolves? Like everybody's getting better, but nothing's actually changing in terms of what they're getting done.  
It's just wolves eating gear and they just kind of keep going like that.  
You know.

 **Todd Helmus** 29:05  
I that's interesting. Luke, I wanted to ask about take a few minutes to talk about literature reviews as well, because I've had a really good conversation on that particular issue yet. And I just want to get a sense like, I mean, I feel like at rand there's a million different ways to do literature reviews, and I imagine you've all had to do them. And and you know, they vary from sort of shoot from the hip, write a couple pages in your background section to to more rigorous Systematic reviews, and I'm just curious if y'all can talk a little bit about. Just how? Like when you've done literature reviews, how do you do them? Is it more on the like systematic review side where we have to compile like all the data about a particular topic?  
Employing more rigorous sort of data collection procedures and analysis procedures.  
Or is it more of the maybe a less rigorous kind over?

 **Douglas Yeung** 30:08  
I think it's going to be sad.  
One minute. If there's a jump up like analysis, you know, systematic ones. And also like I just say something here, I just need to back.

 **Todd Helmus** 30:24  
Yeah. So so for you.

 **Luke Matthews** 30:24  
I don't.

 **Todd Helmus** 30:25  
It varies.  
Pretty, pretty broadly.

 **Luke Matthews** 30:28  
I think that a this AI stuff and machine learning in general is gonna be like it's gonna become a part of literature views in different ways for like different. Like you say different styles and levels of precision of literature view, you know on the Super like systematic end.  
For like things that impact like patient safety and and use of drugs like Konica Shetty, it's like kinda like the expert on that. You study that a lot.  
But that that's like the most extreme, like end of the systematic review, right?

 **Todd Helmus** 31:05  
Mm.  
Another way of guessing framing the question would be how often do you think?  
How often do you all like rely on spreadsheets to draft your literature reviews, in other words?  
Create a spreadsheet with 10 or 1520 variables and then having Raas or whoever go through reports and then systematically filling in those those data holes on the spreadsheets.

 **Joie Acosta** 31:33  
That's pretty much how I do it.  
Maybe it's old school, but.  
We did try to like use one of those, like elicit. I think it was called to see like whether it was.  
As accurate as our Ra's. But it got like expensive quickly and we when we looked at the side by side comparison between what RA’s extracted and what Elicit did, there were some inconsistencies, I think.  
Like it's pretty high though it was like 90%.  
So I guess it depends on how high your tolerance is. We didn't end up using it because it was a combination of factors.  
That anyway.  
But I can see it being useful for like some broad brushstrokes.  
  
I feel like you'd have to do a sub-study just like you do with any sensitivity analysis, like to look at, you know, whether it was accurate up, you know, like do some inter-rater reliability test.

 **Todd Helmus** 32:44  
Validation exercises.

 **Joie Acosta** 32:45  
Yeah, just like you do with any qualitative data, if you're pulling it from multiple sources.  
But what?  
I don't usually do with like literature review people.

 **Ramya Chari** 32:58  
And we go.

 **Joie Acosta** 32:58  
I mean, if I have two Ra's doing qualitative data analysis, I do iterative reliability.  
But I don't usually do that with literature, but I would think with AI you would have to like do that.  
Something similar in order to use it with confidence.  
But I I think it could be useful. I mean the one thing that I don't know how to still do well myself, but I always have to rely on the librarian for. It's like all of the search strategy stuff like 'cause like they know all of the typologies of how language works in all of the different databases, and so what are the right search terms depending on what you're looking for and when to use the “and” and “or” and like. All of that, the search architecture. Feels like there's, like, you know, probably an AI solution to that, but.

 **Todd Helmus** 33:55  
Right. It feels like there's, I mean, God, I mean, God love them.  
They've helped me out a ton times. It does feel like there's maybe ways to automate for them to be able to automate some of that process.

 **Joie Acosta** 34:07  
I feel like every suggestion I'm making is like putting someone out of a job.

 **Todd Helmus** 34:11  
I know, right?

 **Joie Acosta** 34:12  
All of a sudden, I'm like, let me be careful what I say.

 **Todd Helmus** 34:15  
I know. And we'll talk about, we'll spend a couple minutes near the end of this to talk about the risks of all of this and the challenges inherent in this, which I think is important, alluding to one of which you're talking about here. The any, any other aspects just on the literature side, that's the long pole in the tent.  
I mean, there's the the pulling the data.  
Coding the data.  
Obviously writing it.  
OK.

 **Joie Acosta** 34:50  
Sorry, the only other thing I'll say is.  
Is that I found it harder to look at like so with with a lot of times.  
With literature, it feels like there are cells. I don't know if that's the right word to use, since you study extremism, but there's like cells of authors that publish on different issues. Or little nodes or whatever. Wanna call them networks.  
And. And I feel like there are some relevant pieces of literature that get overlooked when searching for literature because they don't have certain words in the title or the abstract, but they are in fact spot on. And so sometimes like clicks, that's good.  
I like that one, Luke. I feel like sometimes like that's like a very human thing to do is say there's like a parallel study area that is this, that you're not gonna get by searching, like what you would normally put in your search terms.  
But it is very aligned and relevant. But you might be able to see it if you were to look at like the clicks and what they publish and what words that those you know like.  
I don't know. It feels like there's an investigative component to this, especially important as we're trying to study more complex questions like if you were to say like, can you do a literature review on how to deal with the cascading complexities related to global risks? The to do that would be a huge undertaking, right 'cause you to you search in certain areas. Do you search overall? Do you just search global risk and complexities like so? I think with like within the literature review it depends on.  
What?  
Your like to really, I think what AI could do is help us do a better job at the less obvious tasks relating to searching that would allow for more complex like cross disciplinary and like digging into deeper wells and pockets to find insights that are relevant.

 **Todd Helmus** 37:00  
Yeah, 'cause, you're not relying on a word search.  
A term search per SE, which is inherently limiting.

 **Joie Acosta** 37:04  
Mm-hmm.

 **Todd Helmus** 37:06  
You need the right terms.  
You can have only so many terms.  
Some terms are too broad.

 **Joie Acosta** 37:12  
OK.

 **Todd Helmus** 37:12  
Some terms are too narrow.  
But that seems uniquely suited to large language models.

 **Douglas Yeung** 37:20  
Just just.

 **Joie Acosta** 37:21  
Yes, back.

 **Douglas Yeung** 37:23  
I guess like a lot of the way that I end up being or something like 100 or thousand more lists of abstract or papers from keyword search and maybe I don’t need all of it, but it's really clear (why the search results produced so many abstracts) because there's some word in the title that you know matches so. As soon as it could be easy enough to to try to like just remove those (unnecessary or irrelevant abstracts) and then and then you would be a lot more specific, I guess.

 **Todd Helmus** 38:00  
Yeah.

 **Joie Acosta** 38:02  
That's such a great suggestion, and such low hanging fruit like.  
We we tried. I've tried to do that before by saying exclude articles that have this term, but it's like it's to be like an art right? It's like.  
Almost like analyzing qualitative data like you're like, OK, like with some of the word strings like Luke that we used in the trust project where we're like, we want this but not this.

 **Todd Helmus** 38:32  
All right. I gotta ask you, Joey, if if you heard what?  
What Douglas said.  
Can you rephrase it?  
Because I got a garbled on my end, I didn't quite catch it.

 **Joie Acosta** 38:41  
Oh, he was just saying that like, you know, even when you do a search with a librarian. The 80% of what you get back From your title, you know and abstract searches aren't relevant and you start looking at these things and you immediately see why you're like, oh yeah, I can see why it accidentally picked this up, but it's not relevant to me, and it would be really great to be Able to iterate like interactively to strip those out or to like be able to feed some of the those kind of considerations.  
Then, like if you're doing. … Feed those considerations in on the front end or to iterate on the pool of literature that you're trying to like, sharpen focus like you want to whittle down window down or whatever in that way.

 **Todd Helmus** 39:30  
Yeah, something you can interact with like a some sort of database you can interact with. In more facile ways.

 **Luke Matthews** 39:36  
Got it. Yeah. And I think though it it'll depend too on what the review and publishing standards are, right. Like there's certain areas where I've worked like some of the health areas, right where even if it's not like a drug review or something like the expectation is like a very high level of rigor, you know, so it's like you get that list like Doug and Joy are talking about, but then the reviewers or the editors expect that.  
You have a human look at each one of those and exclude them, and it's like when I've tried to come up with an algorithm shortcut They don't like that.

 **Todd Helmus** 40:19  
All right, so I wanted to 50 minutes.  
I wanted to.  
Sort of.  
Open it up a little bit and just ask more broadly.  
Like your thoughts on AI adoption at Rand are there?  
Are there low hanging fruit given the work streams that you do, either from proposals to conducting, executing research to all the administrative stuff that you're doing?  
Do you see any obvious low hanging fruit for?  
Investment in those areas.

 **Ramya Chari** 40:49  
I have something which I is probably definitely not low hanging fruit, but it's an idea where like I'm kind of AI naive also and so I don't know like what is possible and what's not possible. But I kind of like to just brainstorm in this space.  
And something that I've been thinking about that would be super helpful if it was possible for researchers is the idea like we have our ALP panels. You know of people and something I was thinking about would be if we could take those panels and almost for like each person develop an AI agent of that person program it with like personality traits, you know, or maybe even just make it like if we could just basically create virtual populations in essence.

And I thought of ALP because we could actually do that and kind of validate against, you know, like people like a population that we actually have a people if we.

 **Todd Helmus** 41:56  
Like assign an agent an AI agent to each participant in the ALP panel.

 **Ramya Chari** 42:04  
Yeah, exactly.

 **Todd Helmus** 42:05  
Is that?

 **Ramya Chari** 42:06  
And then once you have those agents, if you basically like you know, gave them a survey similar to what we've done in ALP, would they respond in the same way that we might expect given like certain characteristics and backgrounds of, you know, people like each agent would be?  
Programmed with like socio demographic characteristics or personality characteristics, etcetera. And if there was something like something virtual like that, it's feel like as researchers would be like this, you know, kind of like a place like a sandbox to play in before we go out and and maybe test tools in the real world.  
Like instead of doing you know like looking like getting small focus groups do like content validity on our like focus group like interviews and things like that we could you know give it to like a virtual population.

 **Todd Helmus** 42:53  
Mm-hmm.

 **Ramya Chari** 42:56  
See how things work. or we could give a survey population and see, you know. Oh, OK, this worked and This didn't work. Before we like, you know, maybe waste time actually putting it out in the open. Like that, if there were just ways to create things, something like that were, and I, you know, based on what I've been reading, I feel like it's possible. I've seen these sort of like population simulations, right, that that you can make a people, but if we could do that basically for us to be able to, you know I don't like develop our tools for doing research before it hits the real world. Me that would be something that would set Rand apart.



**Todd Helmus** 43:40  
Yeah. And Doug, I said.  
Douglas, I saw you.  
You're thinking about something along those lines.

 **Douglas Yeung** 43:49  
Hopefully you can understand.  
Yeah, I mean it's it we have to do a survey, we close paneled everything.  
And so we use survey to compare. But we don't have time to sit or just talk.  
How to do that? Hopefully be to do in the future.

 **Todd Helmus** 44:23  
Awesome.  
What? What other I? What other thoughts about investments at rain?

 **Joie Acosta** 44:32  
Similar thought to Ramya with a slightly different tweak on it rather than like saying our panels. It's more about like like we do you know, like 50 to 200 reports a year or whatever in the military, for example, and there's a ton of information about what are the barriers and facilitators. To implementing policy recommendations in the military.  
And if there's some way for AI to like, take all of our reports and our recommendations. And Help us to become more situationally aware of things that we've already recommended that might have come out as not being implemented because there's a barrier that prevents that like it would be nice to be able to like reality. Check our recommendations from different reports with like.  
What we know are known implementation issues so that we're not like recommending something that's not feasible Based on somebody else's study at Rand, right. Like I don't want to come out and say, oh, what you should do to fix the prevention problem is hire a bunch of people. When you got a workforce report over here. That said that they have to shrink the force because of XY and Z, so they're definitely Not going to hire anybody for 10 years or whatever, you know, like you don't want to have your your experts coming out with recommendations that aren't feasible or realistic and so. I feel like there's a way, a better way for us to, like create virtual Systems environments. So it's not like ALP ING like a person. It would be like.  
Creating and again this is like where the my experience with like how to set this up is limited like setting up like a a virtual like DoD where you got different you got your different departments and you've got our wealth of knowledge about each of those departments and. You can say, OK, if I said to do this, How likely is that to work? Or if I want to work Air Force and army in this way together, what do we know about what's worked in the past or like I don't know if I'm like, but I think that there is like from an implementation perspective it.  
Feels like we're missing a big boat in terms of making our stuff more relevant.  
By not leveraging what we already know, and even if it's simply like, oh, someone's already recommended this before.  
That would even be useful to know such that you're not.

 **Todd Helmus** 47:15  
You can cite it.

 **Joie Acosta** 47:17  
Yeah, you can cite it.  
You can like think through or talk to that person about how to advance that recommendation, because it sometimes I look back at my own work and I'm like, jeez Louise, I've like not moved the needle an inch on some of this \*\*\*\*.  
I feel like this is another of the same \*\*\*\*\*\*\* recommendations and I just, you know, and even that's my own work.

 **Todd Helmus** 47:35  
Yep.

 **Joie Acosta** 47:38  
So imagine what's happening randwind.

 **Douglas Yeung** 47:42  
Can I?  
Can I bun I?  
Thought I put something in the chat.  
I think boy Joy is saying is useful in other ways too.  
So just an example sometimes, like I'm going to a sponsor meeting or reading or something, and the sponsor will ask what does RAND recommend or what does RAND think about this? And I don't know how to easily find it. And I say, you know, haven't you already know which I usually don't?  
So it would be really beneficial for a lot of in a lot of ways in a lot of different ways across the project life cycle.  
So you know, just for the obvious business development.  
I can we have and also whenever I have these band interactions, I want to know what

 **Todd Helmus** 48:49  
Hmm.

 **Luke Matthews** 48:52  
I just want a second one.

 **Todd Helmus** 48:53  
Yeah, that's really interesting. Go ahead.

 **Luke Matthews** 48:55  
I just want a second what Ramya said.  
I've heard this mention before and I do think like the ALP is something that like outside of Rand, people like buy from us essentially.  
You know what I mean?  
Like they use our AOP in their research as well.  
And so I don't know if they're thinking about this, but I'm, I'm sure various alternative survey panels will be providing this like a virtual version of their panel that you can get at any time.  
You see what I mean?  
Like within two days or something, you send the survey or within a day they give you back the virtual version and we'll give you the real version next month or something. Like just from a business development standpoint, if you would seem like.  
I mean.

 **Todd Helmus** 49:40  
Yep.

 **Luke Matthews** 49:40  
Competitors would be doing it.

 **Todd Helmus** 49:42  
I'll note that I think Adam Grissom has a project where they've been thinking about AI agents and helping U.S. military commands.  
Answer Very particular questions about.  
Audiences in different places.  
So there's some burgeoning work on that, but applying it to ran would be really helpful.  
Well, hey, Annie, it's 456.  
I didn't get a chance to ask the question.  
I normally ask these folks about risks and challenges.  
With AI things we need to watch out for.  
Any any any sort of immediate thoughts on on that item?

 **Douglas Yeung** 50:24  
Reviews. Try it when I'm having Nicholas Sweeten.  
Plantations.  
So I like.  
Trust.  
Tell me.

 **Todd Helmus** 50:43  
All right.  
Well, I'll just, I didn't get any of that.  
So could you just write that in a comment quick?

 **Douglas Yeung** 50:46  
OK.

 **Todd Helmus** 50:47  
I don't know what's going on with the comments, but if you could just write that a snapshot of that down, that'd be helpful.

 **Joie Acosta** 50:55  
I was like thinking about this and it kinda makes my head explode.

 **Todd Helmus** 50:55  
Joy.

 **Joie Acosta** 50:59  
I'm not even sure if it's like a real concern, but I was like, you know, as AI continues to create more content. And it like feeds itself and and it's basing that content on some right stuff and some wrong stuff. So it's perpetuating some wrong stuff and it just keeps getting bigger and bigger like it gets it just. It's like feeding itself.  
So like at some point.  
It's not like it might be having a heyday right now because it's based on real people's real stuff.  
That exist out on the Internet, but eventually AI will be like completely based on AI.  
I don't know.  
I'm like might be like.

 **Todd Helmus** 51:41  
I mean, the internet's already getting populated with with AI material and and you know the model developers need to vacuum all of that up to develop their super duper.  
Large language models, so yeah.  
We may.  
Maybe we're in a very maybe our concerns about losing our jobs are not, so maybe it'll just corrupt itself so quickly that we come back in vogue.

 **Joie Acosta** 52:06  
That that's my like.  
Naive like, you know, 1984.

 **Todd Helmus** 52:14  
Right.

 **Joie Acosta** 52:14  
Concern about AI?  
But like Doug, you know a lot more than I do about AI.  
So you might have other. Besides, it's like accuracy.  
And maybe we're saying the same thing, but in slightly different ways, so.

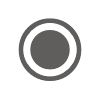
 **Ramya Chari** 52:29  
I think isn't the theory like one theory of consciousness is that consciousness arises from like self referential loops.  
And so I feel like we have a lot more to worry about joy than just losing our jobs.

 **Todd Helmus** 52:44  
Awesome guys.  
Hey, thanks.  
This has been really helpful.  
I put the PTN in the in the chat and enjoyed this conversation, and the insights were pretty helpful. If you have any other thoughts.  
Don't don't hesitate to send me a note if you'd like and or or the Group A note.  
Anything else that we may have missed or not gotten to so?  
Otherwise, thank you for your time.

 **Luke Matthews** 53:13  
Thanks Todd.

 **Joie Acosta** 53:13  
Nice seeing everybody.

 **Todd Helmus** 53:16  
Bye.

 **Todd Helmus** stopped transcription

**Chat from the meeting**

3:59 PM Meeting started

cliques

Ramya Chari FYI we have a small carved out project arguing for exactly that, hopefully publishing as a PE

RCVCI001 AI Research Tool Development and Training - Non-Capital > Phase 01 > 14000 RAND Methods Analysis (05/01/2025 - 09/30/2025)

what Joie Acosta is saying is interestign to me for another reason - people sometimes ask me "What does RAND think about X" and after i explain RAND isn't a monolith and has no actual opinions and doesnt advocate anyway, i still dont know what we may have previously recommended about something

**Douglas Yeung**

what Joie Acosta is saying is interestign to me for another reason - people sometimes ask me "What does RAND think about X" and after i explain RAND isn't a monolith and has no actual opinions and doesnt advocate anyway, i still dont know what we may have previously recommended about something

LOL, "no actual opinion" heavy sigh

lit review - i asked an LLM for something and explicitly asked to NOT make up references, and it still made up a reference. so i need to really see good evidence that i can trust it before using for lit reviews

i just have lots of opinions about its potential negative impacts on humans and society

there are a bunch of intersting articles about AI autophagy Joie

Send me one or two - I love to get lost in a good paradox

4:59 PM Meeting ended: 1h 30s AI and Methods focus groupJuly 23, 2025 4:00 PM - 5:00 PMView recapContentTranscriptAttendance

**Joie Acosta**

Send me one or two - I love to get lost in a good paradox

sure! Here are some links I posted on this over the past 24 months. I sort of stopped tracking this about a year ago. It's related to Doug's point about hallucinations. I suspect the hallucinations and related problem of autophagy/model collapse are more fundamental than the AI makers are admitting. [(20+) Viva Engage - Conversation](https://engage.cloud.microsoft/main/org/rand.org/threads/eyJfdHlwZSI6IlRocmVhZCIsImlkIjoiMjM1MzgzMTc1NzQzMDc4NCJ9)

Viva Engage

[(20+) Viva Engage - Conversation](https://engage.cloud.microsoft/main/org/rand.org/threads/eyJfdHlwZSI6IlRocmVhZCIsImlkIjoiMjk0NzkzMzQ5NjAyNTA4OCJ9?search=autophagy)

Viva Engage