

Breakout Session 2

The Hard Questions: Ethics and Monetising

Breakout Session Format

We will separate into four small groups of 4 - 5 people

We're going to get Claude to pick the groups!

Arrange your chairs into little circles towards the corners of the room

~30 minutes of discussion, around 10 minutes on each talking point

~15 minutes to summarise all the groups' thoughts

We're going to ask an LLM for their thoughts on the topics too!

Topic: The Hard Questions

Topic 1 (all groups): What is the single biggest risk of AI?

(starter ideas: rogue AIs/bad actors, environmental impact, fatal mistakes)

Topic 2 (all groups): How is AI monetised?

(starter ideas: is it financially sustainable, should AI companies get your data for free?)

Topic 3 (one scenario per group): See handouts

Scenario 1: The Carbon Cost

Scenario:

A University department enthusiastically adopts AI across its operations — generating reports, summarising emails, creating marketing content, and running an AI chatbot for student enquiries. A staff member raises concerns about the energy consumption.

Discuss:

How does the environmental footprint of AI compare to other digital activities like social media scrolling, video streaming, or cloud storage?

Is AI meaningfully different in its energy demands, or is it just the latest in a long line of energy-hungry technologies?

Scenario 2: Are You the Product?

Scenario:

A popular AI assistant is completely free to use, but its privacy policy reveals that conversations may be used to train future models and that anonymised interaction data is shared with advertising partners. A competing service charges £15/month but guarantees no data is used beyond the conversation.

Discuss:

What is the real transaction when you use a free AI tool?

How should people weigh privacy against cost, and is meaningful informed consent even possible with these systems?

Scenario 3: Bias in the Machine

Scenario:

A local council uses an AI system to help allocate social housing. After six months, a pattern emerges — applicants from certain postcodes are consistently ranked lower. The AI was trained on historical data that reflected decades of systemic inequality.

Discuss:

Who is responsible when AI reproduces or amplifies existing biases?

Is the risk of AI-driven decision-making greater than human decision-making?

Scenario 4: The Deepfake Dilemma

Scenario:

During a local election campaign, a convincing AI-generated audio clip circulates on social media appearing to show a candidate making offensive remarks. By the time it's debunked, it has been shared thousands of times and the candidate loses. Meanwhile, a national charity uses the same AI technology to generate a powerful fundraising video featuring a synthetic narrator, saving thousands in production costs.

Discuss:

When the same technology enables both manipulation and genuine good, how do we regulate it?

Who should bear the cost of verification and trust — the platforms, the creators, or the public?

All Groups Summary

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