



NEXTGEN NETWORK

KEY TAKEAWAYS: LONDON, UK | SEPTEMBER 2-3, 2019

BUILDING THE FUTURE: ADDRESSING THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF AN AI-ENABLED WORLD

The Aspen Institute's International Partners launched a global effort, with support from Microsoft, to build a network of NextGen leaders from the public, civic, academic and social sectors to engage in open discussion about one of the most pressing concerns for the present and future: artificial intelligence (AI).

The NextGen Network aims to provide a new outlook from the NextGen perspective on how AI and technology affect our society today, the opportunities it creates, as well as the challenges humanity might face in the near future. Furthermore, it brings the topic closer to the local context. The first workshop was held in October 2018 in Mexico City, Mexico, followed by Berlin, Germany, Prague, Czech Republic, New Delhi, India, and Paris, France. The sixth workshop was held in London, UK in September 2019.



Tyson Barker, Program Director for Transatlantic and Digital at Aspen Germany.

VALUES AND POLICYMAKING

The Aspen Initiative for the UK, in collaboration with the Aspen Institute's International Partners and Microsoft, hosted the sixth workshop with the NextGen Network in September 2019, bringing together thirty young leaders from 30 startup founders, academic researchers, civil servants, political advisors and charity sector workers to develop new ways to address the inevitable policy issues created by the introduction of artificial intelligence technology. The workshop was moderated by Tyson Barker, Program Director for Transatlantic and Digital at Aspen Germany.

Before diving into a discussion on technology, participants began the workshop by discussing what experiences shaped their core values and how that informs their current work. The group was then split into small breakout groups tasked with identifying the values they believe should be at the core of decision-making and regulation on technology in the UK and world, specifically artificial intelligence (AI).

Two of the core values many of the groups focused on were **redistribution** and **transparency**. The groups recognized that technological innovation has always caused significant disruption to society and that, while progress is a necessity, there will always be those who lose out, whether from the loss of their livelihoods or from the social dislocation which comes from new forms of working and interaction. The groups came up with ways to ensure the dividends from new technology could be felt throughout society, as well as making sure companies used AI technology responsibly.

Participants also recognized the harm technology can cause when developers are not sufficiently transparent. One of the examples cited was the recent popularity of the face modification app FaceApp, which raised concerns about the security of the data its Russian developer, Wireless Lab, has collected.

Building on the discussion of values, participants split into groups to devise and agree on two policy proposals based on two principles they would want to see incorporated into regulation of AI in the future.

PRINCIPALS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO REGULATE AI IN THE UK

An “authorship” scheme to identify and hold people responsible for tech to account.

Make available an “authorship” scheme with a public database of the people behind any technology or app available in the UK. The developer, the owner and any other relevant people to the production of the technology would be listed and therefore be more accountable for any harm caused.

A national, voluntary research database.

There is a problem of diversity in tech, and one way to increase the participation of people from ethnic minorities or diverse socio-economic backgrounds would be to create a nationwide database of people willing to act as beta testers or research subjects. This would make it easier for developers to diversify their data sets when designing their tech and algorithms.

The employment of an “AI ethics officer” within tech companies.

More than one group suggested introducing an AI officer within companies, a role which would be similar to a GDPR officer, responsible with ensuring that the company considers the implications of any new product or service and takes appropriate steps to mitigate them. An accreditation process would ensure the company has met these requirements before the technology could be deployed.

Test of competency/ability to explain it to the general public.

Tech education should be extended further to the general public. There must be a standardization of tech terms and the public must be able to make an informed decision whether to use it and to be aware of how their data is being employed. There must also be an effort to educate people about the risks of using technology - particularly for generations who are growing up with it.

Clear identification of who is responsible for the technology.

Much like the earlier proposed ‘AI Officer’, a mechanism would be devised to make sure that people who are responsible for developing technology are identified clearly, to encourage ethical use. Individuals at each stage of development would be identified, and be shown to take responsibility. There would also be accountability for the person at the top of each organization, who would ultimately take responsibility for its operation and ethics.

Economic redistribution programs.

Recognizing the tendency of technology to concentrate power and wealth in the hands of a small elite, this proposal suggested the nationalization of percentages of large tech firms, giving citizens a share of or stake in their success. The group stressed this project should be carried out over several decades, and was intended to be illustrative of tech’s asymmetrical effects on society.

Tech “labelling” and standardization to explain technology to the general public.

New technologies should be subject to an illustrative labelling system, similar to how food manufacturers label their products. This system would include information about how data is taken, stored and what is used for and what rights the user has to it.

Creation of an independent advisory body.

Create an independent body comprised of government, tech firms and charities who would make consensus-based decisions on best practices and the systems which should be in place to regulate new technologies. The association would be voluntary, with mechanisms to ensure stakeholders wanted to join. For example, such as a company had to be a member of the group in order to win government contracts.

POSITIVE APPLICATIONS OF AI IN THE YEAR 2029

When tasked to write a fictional news article about the positive application of AI in the year 2029, the groups focused on a variety of different issues such as food waste, climate change, and inequality. Each group presented an article which detailed the positive impact resulting from AI and tech policy changes that were implemented. (Find the 2029 scenarios [here](#)).



A 3% tax on AI technology which goes directly to retraining people who lose their jobs.

A small tax would go to helping people start a new career after they have seen their previous disappear due to new technology. The tax creates positive cycle where a dinner lady is able to retrain and start a business using AI to create healthy food options for young children which in turn creates more jobs.

A fully automated transport network.

Driverless, electric vehicles would be installed in every town and city in the UK, which operated on an AI-enabled carpool system. Private transport would not be abolished but would be so heavily taxed it would become unattractive to most people. Although there would be widespread protest in the beginning, the idea would eventually become accepted and carbon emissions would fall dramatically enabling the UK to meet its commitment to be carbon neutral by 2050.

An algorithm based on data shared between supermarkets.

A specialized design would be created to help supermarkets reduce waste in their supply chains when ordering the food stock. All major supermarkets would share their anonymized data from their customers with each other so they would be able to see wider trends in what people want to buy and when.

Creation of a National Data Trust.

A national trust would be established where people would donate their own data about their spending habits, their lifestyles etc. on a voluntary basis which could be used by any company or institution who signs up to the scheme. This would, in theory, led to an economic boom because companies have more access to diverse data sets to build their products and services. In turn, this money could be reinvested into economic and social inclusion projects to help people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

The discussion centered around values that participants identified as being critical for informing and developing policy around AI in the UK. The group emphasized the possibility of redistribution mechanisms to reduce inequality, the importance of ensuring that individuals have ownership over their data and that companies are held accountable for their actions. Special attention was paid to sustainability, in particular food waste and transportation, with community planning at the center of the approach. Possible governmental policies in the UK would be to provide opportunities for reskilling and to establish a government-adjacent data trust to steward and maintain how individuals' data is used and shared. Ultimately, the disruption caused by AI in society will create losers and winners, making a human-centered approach to regulation necessary.

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