helmet.

AI Is Bigger Than the Chatbot

An online session for WOOW members

Presented by Vjera Orbanic, Founder of helmet.

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Why AI literacy matters

AI literacy is fluency: the ability to reason about any AI tool, including the ones that don't exist yet. A fluent person understands how AI works, where it helps, where it falls short and what to ask of it. Knowing which buttons to press in one tool is a useful skill with a short shelf life; fluency carries across all of them. It shows up in sharper briefs, better questions to vendors and decisions that hold up as the technology moves.

You don't need to code, build models or follow every new deployment in the news. What you need is the key terminology, the fundamental building blocks of AI and an honest view of its limitations. That is enough to lead a conversation, make informed decisions and understand AI in your work and life.

Know your need

Start by asking why you are using AI, what do you need from it. Purpose is the filter for every decision: which tool, which data, which risks are worth taking and what success looks like. Without a clear need, there is no way to tell whether AI is working for you.

We don't live in a **vacuum**. The world is dynamic, ever evolving and ever changing, and the context AI works in shifts with it: customers, markets, regulation, language. AI has to move with that change. A system that stops following the world slowly stops working, so the need you define today deserves a regular revisit.

How AI works: input, processing, output

Every AI follows the same flow:

1. **Input: data.** AI runs on data. Digitising turns a complex, nuanced experience of life into numbers and categories, and some of it is lost on the way. A conversation becomes text, a customer becomes a row, a mood becomes a rating. Whatever the data leaves out, the AI never sees, so the quality of the input sets the ceiling for everything after it.
2. **Processing:** Once AI has the information, it makes sense of it in three ways. It brings order by sorting and structuring, detects the patterns that repeat, and predicts what those patterns will do next.
3. **Output:** What AI can produce is finite: insights, predictions, generated content and actions. Every AI product you meet delivers one or a combination of these four.

AI is already running in the background

AI sits inside the tools and services we use every day, well beyond the chatbots. Most of it works quietly, which makes it easy to use and easy to overlook. Look for it in:

- Autocorrect and predictive text, guessing the word you meant
- GPS and route suggestions, forecasting traffic before you meet it
- Smart home appliances, learning your routines
- Recommendation algorithms on streaming, shopping and social platforms, shaping what you see next
- Spam filters, bank fraud alerts and voice assistants

Each one runs the same flow: data in, processing, output.

AI complements human ability

AI complements human ability and extends it in three directions. Each answers a limit that every person shares:

- **Scalability.** A person is one person, with limited hours in a day. AI automates repetitive tasks and scales beyond that natural limit, so an owner, a team or a one-person business can accomplish more than individual capacity allows.

- **Observability.** The human mind can’t hold or reach endless information. AI processes and surfaces information at a scale the brain can’t manage alone, giving visibility into patterns, trends and detail that no one could digest in a day or a lifetime.

- **Comparability.** A person builds deep expertise in one or two fields in a lifetime. AI compares across fields we haven’t mastered and brings in research from outside our own specialism, so ideas travel between disciplines that rarely meet.

In each case the human sets the direction and AI extends the reach.

Limits and risks

AI is no magic wand. It works from the data it was given, it can be confidently wrong, and it knows nothing of your context unless you supply it. The risks that follow are **human** ones. They come from misuse, and from what misuse sets in motion across people and society:

- Power dynamics: who controls the tools and the data
- Political, social and human consequences
- Sustainability: the energy and resources AI consumes
- Human wellbeing
- Inequality
- Misinformation: content that looks credible and is not

Opportunities

Opportunity starts with a question: **what do we want AI to do?** Name the outcome you want, then work back to the data, the process and the output that deliver it. Used with intention, AI elevates humanity. It frees people from the repetitive, widens what they can see and leaves more of their time for the work only people can do.

Get AI fluent

Ready for more? Ethical Intelligence's **AI Literacy for Non-tech Professionals** takes the ideas in this session further. It is an online course in 6 modules, designed for people without a technical background, in plain English (no jargon). Take it at your own pace to build the confidence and informed decision-making to thrive with AI.

Course info: https://ailiteracy.yourhelmet.io/

Contact:

Vjera Orbanic: vjera@yourhelmet.io yourhelmet.io +44 7547897791

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