AI tools in your daily life and work

Now that we understand how AI learns, let's explore the AI tools many of us are now likely to encounter every day - both at home and at work.

From the moment you check your phone in the morning, to using digital systems in your work day, AI is everywhere. There is plenty out there that you might be using without even realising it.

Voice Assistants like Siri, Alexa, or Google Assistant use Natural Language Processing to understand your questions and respond appropriately. When you ask, 'What's the weather today?' - that's an AI system at work.

And our smartphones are packed with AI - from the camera that automatically focuses on faces and suggests people to tag in photos, to predictive text that finishes our sentences, to the navigation apps that find the best route to avoid traffic.

And don't forget streaming platforms like Netflix, Spotify, YouTube, and your social media feeds, all use AI to recommend what to watch, listen to, or read next based on your previous behaviour. Those 'algorithms' we hear so much about, they're mostly AI.

When we shop online, those sites use AI to suggest products too, and to detect fraudulent transactions, and even optimise delivery routes.

And AI is behind the spam filters in email software that remove rogue messages. So, AI is an everyday tool that in many ways can help us to get more done. It can analyse patterns in data to make predictions or suggestions. And the same principles apply to the more specialised tools we use at work.

In many workplaces, you're likely encountering more sophisticated uses for AI applications. For example, AI analyses patterns in data to make forecasts about future scenarios or events. In organisational settings this can include identifying people, customers or clients, who may need additional support. Tools such as Microsoft Dynamics 365 Customer Insights, which predicts customer needs or potential risks make these recommendations by drawing on similar past examples stored on the system. These tools are designed to complement rather than replace professional judgment.

Natural Language Processing - or NLP - helps computers understand and work with human language. In organisational settings, this can include analysing information in meeting notes, emails, or referrals to extract key details or automatically flag urgent concerns.

Tools such as Microsoft Copilot use NLP to help draft documents or summarise lengthy reports. While others, like Otter.ai, apply the same technology to transcribe meetings in real time. These tools are designed to support, rather than replace the work of professionals.

Chatbots, such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Microsoft Copilot, provide initial support for people seeking advice information or services. They can answer common questions or collect basic details, before directing the person to a human colleague for more specific or complex needs. By handling routine queries, these tools help to manage demand, signpost people quickly, and ensure that urgent questions get an immediate response.

Case Management Systems increasingly use AI to help prioritise cases, suggest relevant resources, or flag potential safeguarding concerns based on patterns in the data entered.

And Automated Decision-Making systems can process applications, assess eligibility, or allocate resources without direct human involvement.

AI tools might also include:

- Smart scheduling apps that optimise your routes between the places you need to be for work
- Voice-to-text apps that help you quickly record observations or notes
- Or safety apps that can detect if you're in danger or distress and may need to alert colleagues

In all these systems, human oversight is really important - not just to safeguard the quality and suitability of the outcomes, but to understand how the system used reached that outcome. There will be several considerations here. For example, in publicly funded services, there will be a wish to ensure that the system is able to operate in line with the values, principles and service standards the service or organisation has.

Whether it's a simple recommendation algorithm suggesting what to watch on Netflix, or a complex system highlighting that a family many need additional support, the same principles apply. These tools should enhance human decision-making, not replace human judgment.

This is especially crucial in social work and healthcare, where the stakes are high and the people needing support can be vulnerable. An AI system might something as high-risk based on historical patterns, but only a trained worker can understand the full context of the situation concerned, including, for example any recent developments, individual needs, and/or cultural or intersectional factors.

This all leaves us with some fundamental questions. Now that we know about how and where AI might be working in our personal and professional lives, how comfortable are we with the idea of AI tools and systems being used to make decisions about services and support for people?

For example, if use voice assistants are used by public services supporting people needing help with health or social care, might this affect the relationships and trust between workers and them? Should people always know when AI tools are being used in their interactions, even for seemingly simple tasks like translation or note-taking? Could or should people needing support be using AI tools themselves to help them or their interactions with services? What legal and/or data protection issues should be considered?

These questions don't have simple answers but noticing the AI tools we use every day, from our smartphones to case management systems, helps us to think more critically about how technology shapes our work and the people public services exist to support.