

Living and Learning with AI Inquiry — April Meeting 2 Summary

16 April 2026 · Based on WhisperAI transcript of meeting

Present: Melissa Shaw (chair), Norman Jackson, Jenny Willis, Jose Ramirez, Alireza and Pip

1. Trust in AI — nuanced, selective, and evolving

Trust emerged as the meeting's dominant thread. Participants converged on the view that trust in AI cannot be blanket or uniform — it must be carefully calibrated to context. Norman articulated this most directly: living well with AI means developing a nuanced, sophisticated, and selective trust, knowing which areas to rely on it and where to remain sceptical. Several distinct dimensions of trust were explored:

- Trust in outputs versus trust in process: Norman distinguished between areas where he trusts AI's generative quality (writing, structuring ideas, narrative construction) and areas where he would not — particularly complex human judgement requiring sensory or relational understanding.
- Trust eroded by emotional state: Alireza described sharing his mother's medical results with ChatGPT over several days, not pausing to evaluate the AI's reliability because the conversational interface felt indistinguishable from messaging a person. The emotional intensity bypassed critical evaluation entirely.
- Trust and data privacy: Jenny raised the concern that data shared with AI systems may be used in unforeseen ways — analogising to familial DNA being harvested from genealogy platforms to assist criminal investigations. This points to a latent trust question: not just 'is the answer reliable?' but 'what is happening to what I share?'
- Trust and source quality: Josie described actively prompting AI to draw on named, reputable sources (Mayo Clinic, Oxford, Stanford), as a strategy for improving reliability. This suggests that users can partially shape trustworthiness through prompt design.

2. AI and social isolation — a quiet risk

Alireza offered the meeting's most striking personal reflection: that using AI to answer questions he would previously have put to friends or family — even simple ones about gardening — is gradually eroding the social contact those interactions sustained. The catch-up, the collateral conversation, the possibility of a meeting: all of this disappears when AI provides a faster, more efficient answer. This concern extended to the broader cultural pattern of his generation preferring messaging to phone calls — AI-mediated interaction fits seamlessly into habits already moving away from voice and presence. The risk is not dramatic; it is incremental and almost invisible.

3. The medical information problem

Two participants raised concerns about using AI for medical information, from different angles:

- Alireza (as both patient-relative and medical professional) found AI-generated prognoses for his mother's cancer distressing and clinically shallow — producing worst-case-scenario answers that failed to account for the complexity of the individual patient. His consultant's response was entirely different in character. AI, he noted, cannot know a patient's physical reserve, their context, their humanity.
- Josie uses AI as a substitute for GP visits for minor queries, deliberately framing prompts around trusted clinical sources. She is aware this involves giving personal information to systems with unknown data practices, and has developed strategies to limit disclosure.

The discussion surfaced a structural tension: AI is blunt where doctors are cautious (often for liability reasons), which makes it superficially attractive for obtaining direct answers — but that bluntness can be harmful, particularly where the answer concerns prognosis or personal risk.

4. The quality of AI as a thinking and creative partner

Several participants described experiences of AI exceeding their expectations — not merely completing tasks but doing so in ways that opened up new directions. Norman described the conversational process as what surprises him most: the way exchanges take off, the quality of analytical feedback, and the fact that challenge produces genuine regeneration of ideas rather than defensiveness. He noted that AI always offers more — suggesting further steps without being asked — and that this 'egoless' quality is unlike most human collaboration.

Norman also described a practical creative workflow: using Claude to shape a spoken narrative (structured for voice rather than reading), feeding that into ElevenLabs for audio generation, and combining the result with filmed footage to produce a documentary-style nature trail film. His judgement at every stage — selecting from AI-generated options, evaluating tone, iterating — remained central. The product, he felt, was better than anything he could have produced alone.

5. The importance of prompt quality and critical engagement

A clear consensus emerged: the quality of what AI returns depends substantially on the quality of what you put in. Participants described learning to frame prompts more carefully over time — becoming more specific, more structured, more directional. Josie noted that this discipline in prompting had begun to improve her general communication, including written messages to parents at school. Norman offered a particularly useful technique: asking AI 'What questions would you ask of me?' as a way of generating productive self-interrogation rather than simply seeking answers. The group also noted the risk of uncritical acceptance — of taking AI outputs as authoritative without evaluating them. Melissa observed that AI is often indulgent (affirming, validating, rarely confrontational), and that prompting it to take a critical or professional role (psychologist, adversarial reviewer, sceptic) is necessary to obtain genuinely challenging feedback.

6. The invisibility of AI and the erosion of agency

Alireza's observation that AI embedded in WhatsApp is indistinguishable — in interface and feel — from messaging a friend resonated with the group. This invisibility is not accidental; it is a design choice. When the same screen, the same gestures, and the same conversational register mediate both human and AI interaction, critical distance collapses. The question 'should I trust this?' stops being asked, because nothing signals that it needs to be asked.

This connects to Josie's concern about echo chambers: AI fed with one person's questions and inclinations tends to confirm and amplify rather than challenge. She described actively seeking out opposite perspectives as a countermeasure.

7. Ethical and privacy dimensions

Pip's account of exploring grief-support AI (Hereafter) raised the question of ethical consent: can an avatar or memory archive be created for a person who has lost capacity, or who is deceased? The paywall she encountered also echoed the broader equity concern raised by others — that the most capable AI is accessible only to paying users, introducing a new dimension of digital inequality. She also described the GlucoAI diabetes app as invasive in its data requests and push notifications — raising questions about whether the trade-off between functionality and surveillance is always worth making.

8. AI as tireless, non-judgemental companion

Multiple participants noted that AI's availability, patience, and non-judgemental quality made it attractive for tasks where human listeners might disengage or become fatigued. Melissa described a family member able to process a difficult day at work with AI in ways they could not easily do with people close to them — because the concern about burdening someone else was absent. Norman observed that late-night reflection, prompts before sleep, the ability to return to an idea at any hour — all of this changes the texture of thinking and creative work. The group did not dismiss this as trivially positive; the same quality that makes AI a patient collaborator makes it an indulgent one.

Suggested further lines of inquiry

A. Mapping thresholds and variations of trust

Each participant is developing an implicit, personal map of where they trust AI and where they do not. Making this map explicit — and comparing it across the group — would generate rich insight. What are the domains where trust is established? What triggers withdrawal of trust? Is the line stable, or does it shift with experience and emotional state? This could be structured as a simple personal audit: for each regular AI use, rate confidence in the output and reflect on whether that confidence is earned or assumed.

B. The social cost of efficiency

Alireza's insight about AI replacing the social interactions that used to surround information-seeking deserves its own focused exploration. What social contacts, spontaneous conversations, or relationships are quietly being displaced by AI efficiency? Could participants keep a brief diary over one month of moments where they used AI instead of calling or messaging a person — and reflect on what was gained and what was lost?

C. AI in emotionally charged situations

Alireza's account of seeking medical prognosis for his mother in a state of fear illustrates a specific vulnerability: that emotional urgency suppresses critical evaluation, and AI's conversational interface exploits (unintentionally) the same social trust cues as human dialogue. How do participants experience the relationship between emotional state and critical AI use? Are there situations where they now consciously delay AI use until they are in a more reflective frame — and if so, what prompted that practice?

D. Prompt design as a learnable skill

The group touched on prompt design as something participants are developing organically, through trial and error. A more structured experiment might be valuable: take the same task and generate responses using a vague prompt, a structured prompt, and a prompt that explicitly assigns a role and asks for critical output. Compare the results. What does this reveal about the difference between AI as a passive tool and AI as an active intellectual partner?

E. Equity and access

Several participants noted the difference in quality between free and paid AI services, and the implications of that difference. This is worth examining more systematically. What does the paid/free divide mean for equitable access to AI's benefits? Are there contexts — medical advice, legal information, educational support — where the stakes of this divide are particularly high? And what does it mean that the most powerful thinking tools are subscription-gated?

F. The ethics of AI-mediated memory and identity

Pip's exploration of grief AI opens questions that extend beyond the immediate application. What does it mean to curate another person's memory, or to create a conversational avatar of someone who has lost capacity? How is consent meaningful in these contexts? And more broadly: as AI becomes a medium through which we represent ourselves and others, what new ethical frameworks are needed? This could be a productive thread for a dedicated session.

G. Talking about AI with people outside the inquiry

Several participants — Melissa, Josie — described prompting conversations about AI with family members and within their professional contexts (parents at school). This informal outreach is itself part of the inquiry's value. Participants might reflect on: What did people outside the group reveal about their AI use that was surprising? What questions or concerns arose? How does the framework developed here translate when introduced to people with no prior exposure to this kind of reflection?