

# AI EMPOWER LAB

by WOMENTOR

## Practice Report: AI Empower Lab

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### From Challenges to Change: The AI Empower Lab

The Search for Practical Solutions to Democratically Organize  
Gender-Inclusive Alternatives in the Work-Age of AI

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### Keywords

*Artificial Intelligence, AI Literacy and Resilience, Diversity and Inclusion, Gender Equality, Inclusive Technology, Creative Industries, Knowledge Workers, Participatory Design, Interdisciplinary Research*

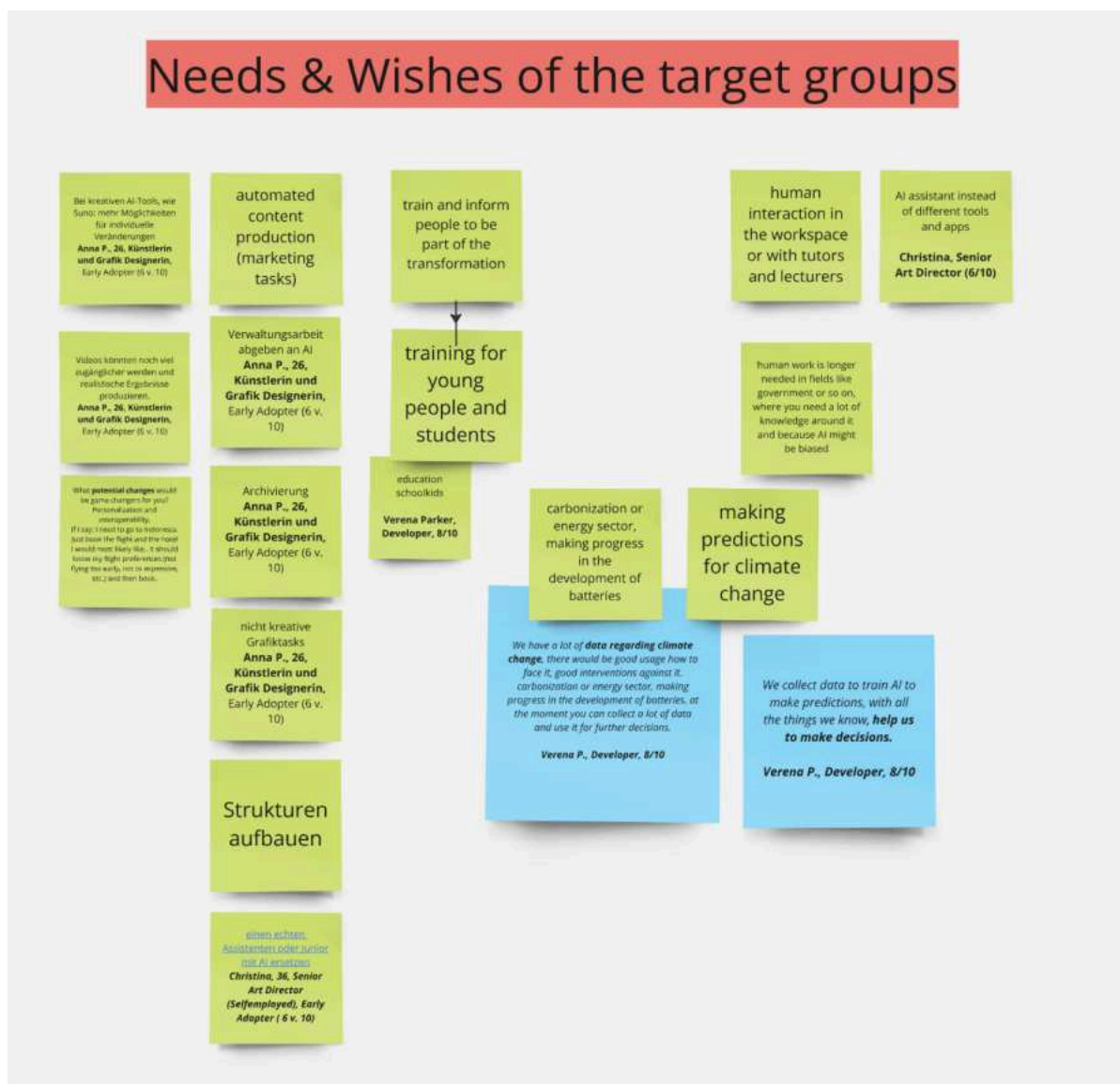
### Project Overview

This abstract presents the ongoing research project, **AI Empower Lab**, dedicated to developing innovative solutions and a prototype aimed at empowering women and minorities in the age of artificial intelligence. Funded by the FFG in the **Impact Innovation** Program and led by [WOMENTOR](#) – a verified social business in Austria. This project utilizes the expertise of a dynamic interdisciplinary and international team and advisory board. The team is united in its mission to tackle the pressing **challenge of gender inequality in AI**, seeking **inclusive** and equitable **solutions** for the sector of **knowledge workers** and the **creative industry**. The project aims to enhance AI literacy and resilience among affected groups, advocate for inclusive technological practices, and promote environments where gender diversity is valued as a crucial asset. By fostering equitable participation in AI-enhanced workplaces and supporting the development of gender-sensitive AI applications, AI Empower Lab aspires to create a model for democratically organizing work in

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technology-driven industries, ensuring that advancements in AI benefit all segments of society, particularly those at risk of being marginalized.



## Introduction

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) since late 2022 has significantly impacted various sectors, including education, creative industries,

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banking, and technology. While AI offers unprecedented opportunities for innovation and efficiency, it also poses challenges related to gender inequality and the marginalization of underrepresented groups. The **AI EMPOWER LAB** project seeks to investigate and address these challenges by focusing on empowering women and minorities in the creative industries and knowledge work in Austria. By exploring user experiences and insights, the project aims to bridge gender gaps in technology, enhance access to AI tools, and develop training programs that promote inclusive participation in the AI-driven economy.

## Problem Statement

The widespread implementation of AI technologies is occurring at a pace that outstrips the ability of governments, businesses, and individuals to fully assess and prepare for their impacts. Key issues arising from this rapid adoption include misinformation, deep fakes, distortions, and significant social risks. One of the most pressing concerns is the potential for job displacement and transformation, particularly affecting marginalized groups such as women, lower-income workers, and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

In Austria, studies have projected that a significant proportion of jobs could be impacted by automation. While earlier estimates, such as the study by Frey and Osborne (2013), suggested that nearly half of all jobs could be at risk ([Frey & Osborne, 2013](#)), more recent research from the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) indicates that about 9% of Austrian jobs are susceptible to automation ([IHS, 2016](#)). The primary challenge lies not in job elimination but in the transformation of tasks due to automation. Without proper interventions, new forms of inequality may arise, further widening the gap between those proficient in AI technologies and those who lack access or skills.



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“First of all, AI doesn't take your job.  
People who use AI will take your job.  
In the next few years, some will develop new skills and  
then do the job of 10 others”

Mo Gawdet, Former Chief Business Officer at Google X

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## Objectives

The AI Empower Lab project has the following primary objectives:

1. **Assess Gender Inequalities in AI:** Examine how AI technologies impact gender dynamics within various sectors and identify areas where inequalities exist.
2. **Develop Inclusive Solutions:** Create tools and resources that promote equitable access to AI technologies, ensuring that marginalized groups are not left behind.
3. **Enhance Capacity Building:** Implement training programs to improve the skills of underrepresented groups in the AI sector, fostering digital literacy and confidence.
4. **Promote Awareness of Biases:** Raise awareness about biases embedded in AI systems and emphasize the importance of diverse perspectives in their development.
5. **Foster Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration:** Build a network of stakeholders, including NGOs, policymakers, industry leaders, and educational institutions, to collectively address the challenges posed by AI regarding gender equality.

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## Literature Review

The intersection of AI, gender equality, and inclusion has been the focus of several significant studies:

1. **AI and Inclusion in the Workplace:** The article "The Evolution of AI in Digital Accessibility" by Wald (2019) discusses how AI can enhance workplace accessibility for marginalized groups. While AI holds promise for increasing participation, the challenge lies in ensuring these systems are designed inclusively (Wald, 2019).
2. **Gender Bias in AI:** A UNESCO study titled "I'd Blush if I Could: Closing Gender Divides in Digital Skills Through Education" reveals alarming evidence of gender biases in AI models, often perpetuating stereotypes. The study emphasizes the need for diverse development teams and inclusive datasets to counteract these biases ([UNESCO, 2019](#)).
3. **Creativity and AI:** The UNCTAD report "Creative Economy Outlook: Trends in International Trade in Creative Industries" warns of the potential replacement of human artists by AI systems. This trend raises concerns about diminishing diverse voices and the homogenization of artistic expression (UNCTAD, 2019).
4. **Impact of AI on Employment:** The World Economic Forum's "The Future of Jobs Report 2020" indicates that AI is increasingly automating roles traditionally requiring human involvement, such as customer service, content creation, and marketing. New inequalities could arise between those adept at using AI and those who are not, especially within marginalized groups (World Economic Forum, 2020).

## Methodology

The project employs the "Double Diamond" design thinking approach, which consists of the following phases:



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1. **Discover & Empathize:** Conduct primary research through interviews and focus groups to understand the challenges faced by the target groups.
2. **Define:** Analyze the collected data to define specific problems and identify key areas for intervention.
3. **Develop & Ideate:** Generate potential solutions through brainstorming sessions and design sprints, involving experts and stakeholders.
4. **Prototype:** Create prototypes of the proposed solutions, incorporating feedback from target users.
5. **Test & Refine:** Engage with target users to test the prototypes, gather feedback, and refine the solutions accordingly.

## Target Groups

The project identifies two primary target groups:

### Target Group 1: Creatives in Marketing

- **Digital Marketing Consultant (Aisha):** Aisha aims to leverage AI tools for targeted marketing but requires training to navigate AI analytics effectively.
- **Freelance Designer (Elena):** Elena seeks access to advanced technology to enhance her design skills but faces budget constraints.

### Target group 1: Creatives (Marketing)

PERSONA 1

#### Digital Marketing Consultant



- **Name:** Aisha
- **Age:** 29
- **Occupation:** Digital Marketing Consultant
- **Background:** Aisha is a Black woman who started her own consultancy focusing on digital marketing for NGOs and social enterprises. She is particularly interested in using AI to analyze data and optimize marketing strategies.
- **Goals:** To leverage AI tools to provide more value to her clients through targeted marketing and analytics.
- **Challenges:** Needs training in AI-powered analytics tools; seeks to expand her network within the tech industry.

PERSONA 2

#### Freelance Designer



- **Name:** Elena
- **Age:** 37
- **Occupation:** Freelance Graphic Designer
- **Background:** Elena is a Ukrainian woman with a passion for digital arts and animation. She freelances for various small businesses but struggles with limited access to advanced design tools and AI-driven software due to financial constraints.
- **Goals:** To gain access to better technology and training to enhance her design skills and compete in a broader market.
- **Challenges:** Limited budget for professional development and advanced tools; increased client expectations.

AI EMPOWER LAB 20

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## Target Group 2: Knowledge Workers

- **Self-employed Consultant (Andrea):** Andrea wants to improve her consulting services but lacks confidence in her technical skills.
- **Employed Project Manager (Olivia):** Olivia focuses on improving project efficiency through AI but struggles with limited training resources.

Target group 2: Knowledge Worker

PERSONA 3

**Self-employed Consultant**



- **Name:** Andrea
- **Age:** 46
- **Occupation:** Independent Business Consultant
- **Background:** Andrea is a consultant with a focus on sustainability and corporate social responsibility. She has over 20 years of experience working with medium-sized enterprises. With the growing influence of AI in business, she feels pressure to integrate AI-driven solutions but lacks confidence in her technical expertise.
- **Goals:** To understand how AI can enhance her consulting services, especially increasing efficiency.
- **Challenges:** Navigating the complexities of AI, pressuring client expectations, time constraint.

PERSONA 4

**Employed Project Manager**



- **Name:** Olivia
- **Age:** 35
- **Occupation:** Project Manager at an International NGO
- **Background:** Olivia, originally from Kenya, manages humanitarian projects focused on education and women's empowerment. With a master's degree in Development Studies, she has 10 years of experience in managing complex projects. As AI tools become more relevant in project management, Aisha feels the need to adapt but struggles with limited access to training.
- **Goals:** To leverage AI tools to improve project efficiency and impact reporting.
- **Challenges:** Limited time for training, constrained budgets, and lack of internal AI expertise.

AI EMPOWER LAB 21

## Needs and Challenges

### Needs

The target groups have expressed the following needs:

- **Access to Training and Skill Development:** They require accessible AI training programs to enhance their competencies.
- **Resources and Support:** There is a need for informative resources that explain AI technologies in an understandable manner.



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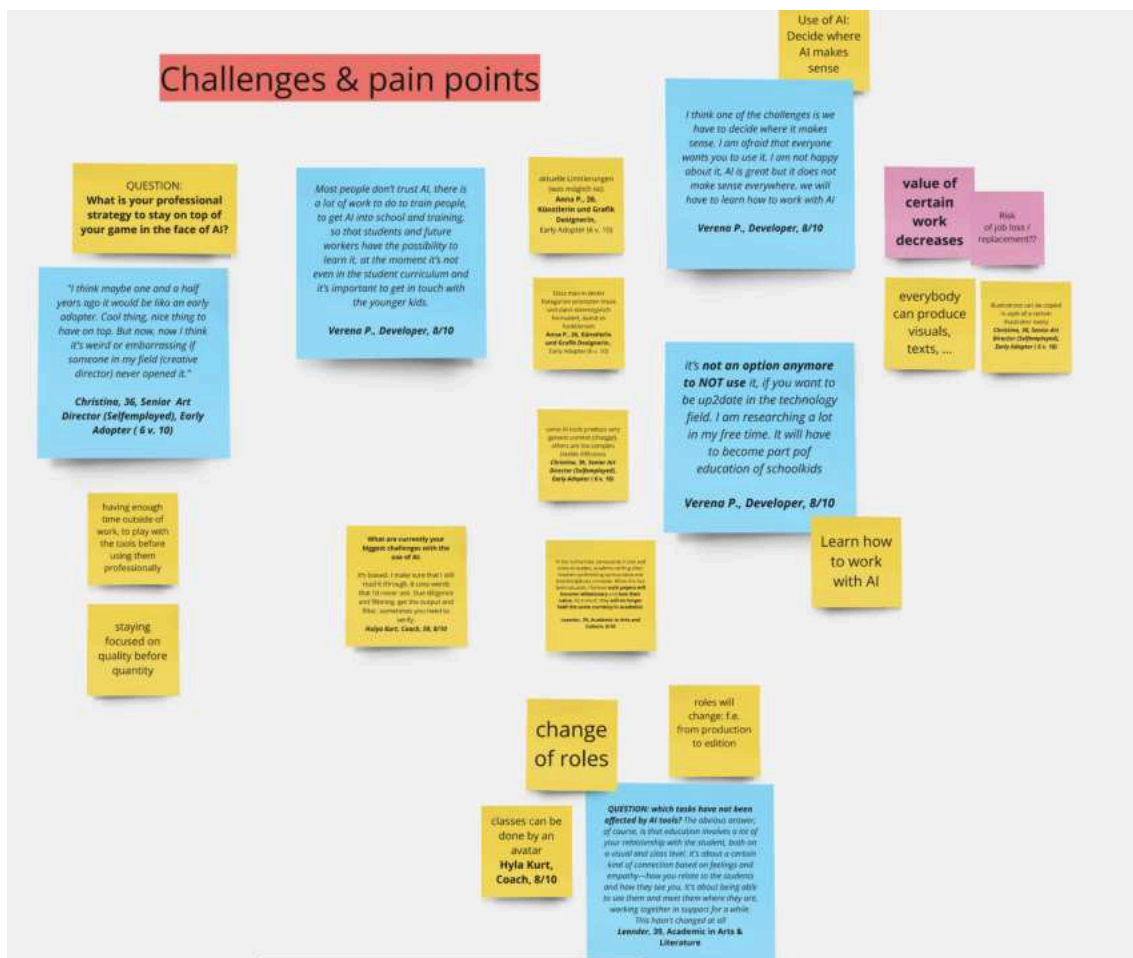
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- **Networking Opportunities:** They seek connections within the industry to share knowledge and experiences.

## Challenges

The challenges faced by the target groups include:

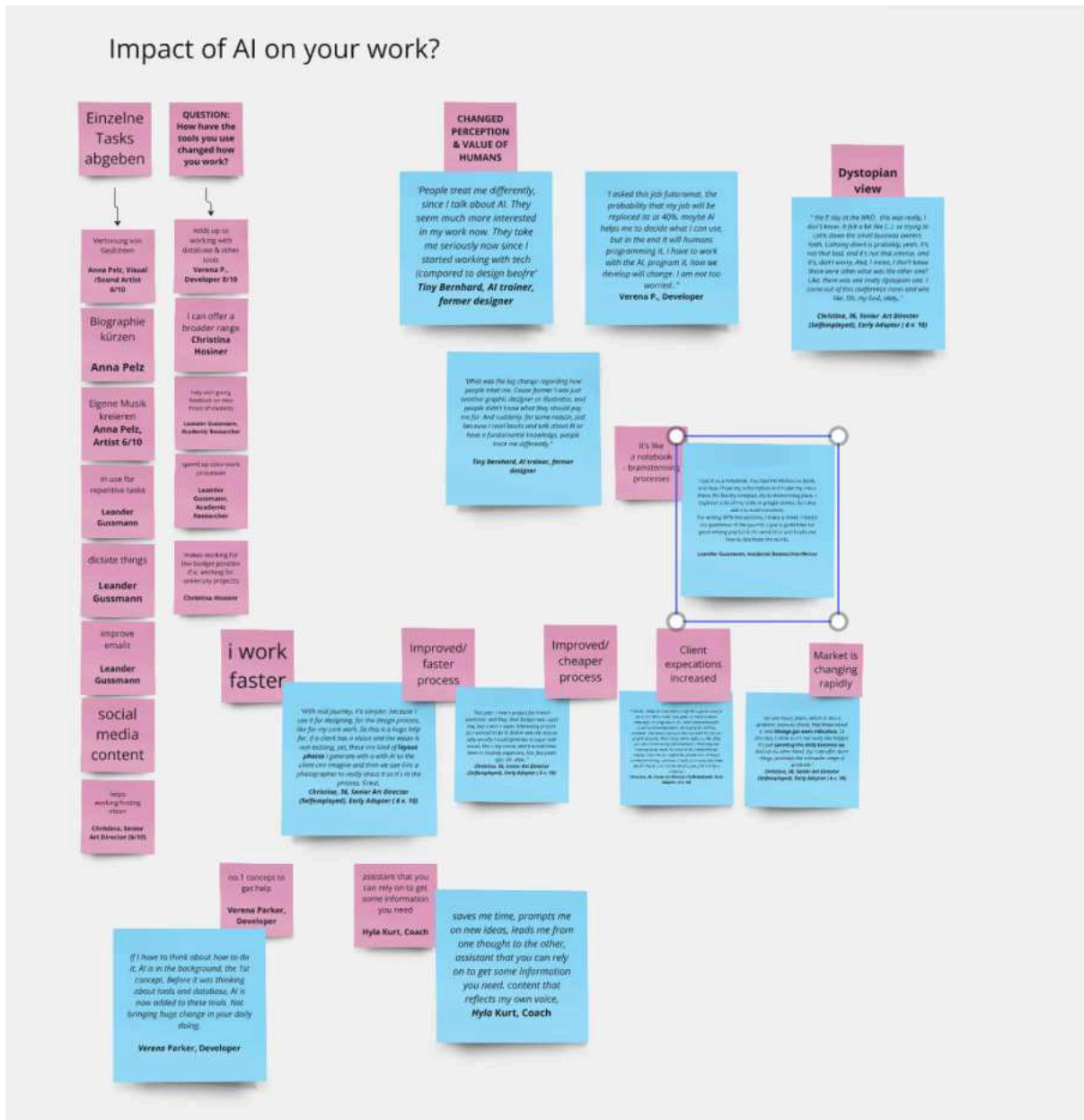
- **Lack of Confidence:** Hesitation to engage with AI technologies due to perceived complexity or fear of inadequacy.
- **Workplace Dynamics:** Variability in employer support for adopting AI skills, leading to unequal opportunities.
- **Access to Tools:** Financial constraints that limit access to necessary technology and software.





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## Insights and Aspirations

Participants have articulated a desire for a more inclusive tech community and emphasized the importance of gender-specific training in technology. They highlight the necessity of practical, user-friendly tools that simplify AI integration into their work processes.

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Additionally, there is a strong wish to see AI technologies developed and implemented in ways that do not perpetuate existing biases or create new forms of inequality.

## Insights from our primary user research



*"What was the big change regarding how people treat me. Cause former, I was just another graphic designer or illustrator, and people didn't know what they should pay me for. And suddenly, for some reason, just because I read books and talk about AI or have a fundamental knowledge, people treat me differently. They seem much more interested in my work now. They take me seriously now since I started working with tech. "*

**Female marketing/ AI trainer, self-employed**  
(Former graphic designer)

*"I think maybe one and a half years ago I would be like an early adopter. Cool thing, nice thing to have on top. But now, now I think it's weird or embarrassing if someone in my field (creative director) never opened it." (Note: it = AI)*

**Senior Art Director, 34 (Self-employed)**

*'... so that we don't achieve great or awesome work, because an okayish output is okay is good enough'*

**Female marketing/ AI trainer, self-employed**  
(Former graphic designer)

*'On one hand, I am now faster, which is also a problem, because clients, they know about it, and timings get more ridiculous. So this also, I think so it's not really like helpful. It's just speeding the daily business up. And on the other hand, my I can offer more things, probably like a broader range of products.'*

**Senior Art Director, 34 (Self-employed)**

AI EMPOWER LAB 22

## State of the Art

Several organizations and initiatives align with the goals of the AI Empower Lab project:

1. **Shades & Contrast:** Focuses on inclusive AI consulting, implementing AI solutions that prioritize fairness ([Shades & Contrast](#)).
2. **Sisterhood: AI Masterclass from Women for Women:** Offers AI masterclasses specifically for women, fostering a supportive learning environment ([Sisterhood](#)).
3. **KI Campus:** Provides free online courses on AI topics, aiming to enhance AI competence across various sectors ([KI Campus](#)).
4. **Future Work Lab:** A lab dedicated to making AI usable in industrial settings, providing a space for industry-specific inquiries ([Future Work Lab](#)).
5. **AI5production:** Offers digitalization services to Austrian manufacturing companies, enhancing access to AI technologies ([AI5production](#)).



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6. **Creative Algorithmic Intelligence:** A research project exploring the capabilities of creative AI and its role in complementing human creativity ([Creative Algorithmic Intelligence](#)).

## Proposed Solutions

Based on the insights gathered, the project proposes the following solutions:

1. **Development of Tailored Training Programs:** Create accessible and practical AI training modules tailored to the needs of women and minorities in the creative and knowledge sectors.
2. **Resource Hub:** Establish an online platform that provides resources, tutorials, and forums for users to learn about AI technologies and share experiences.
3. **Mentorship and Networking Opportunities:** Organize events and programs that connect participants with industry professionals and peers to foster collaboration and support.
4. **Advocacy and Policy Engagement:** Work with policymakers to promote regulations and initiatives that support inclusive AI development and address biases.

## Theory of Change - Expected Outcomes

The AI Empower Lab project aims to achieve the following outcomes:

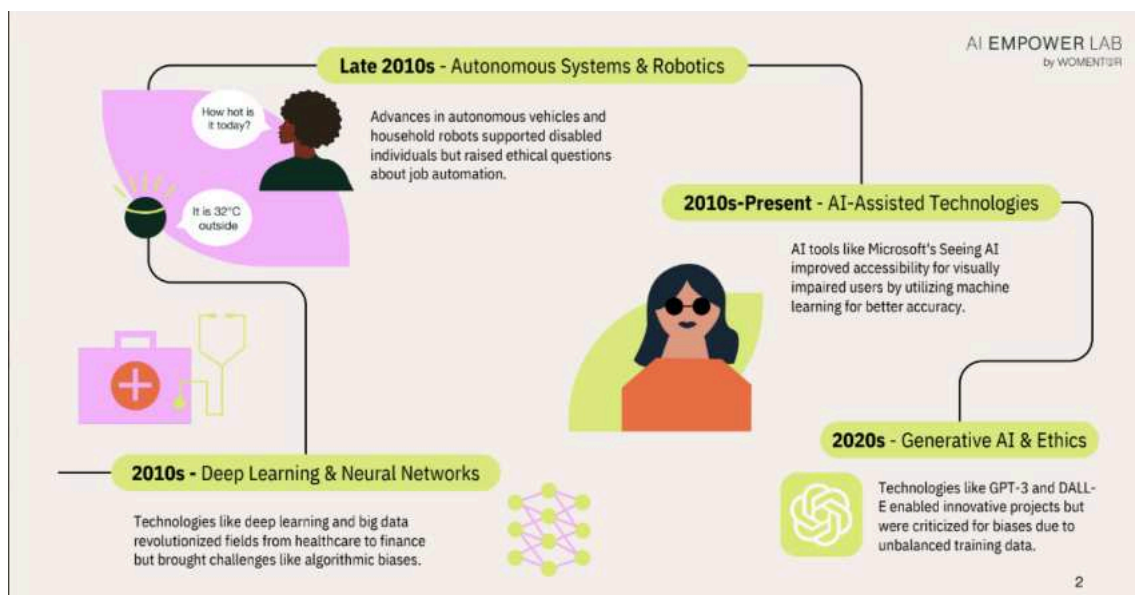
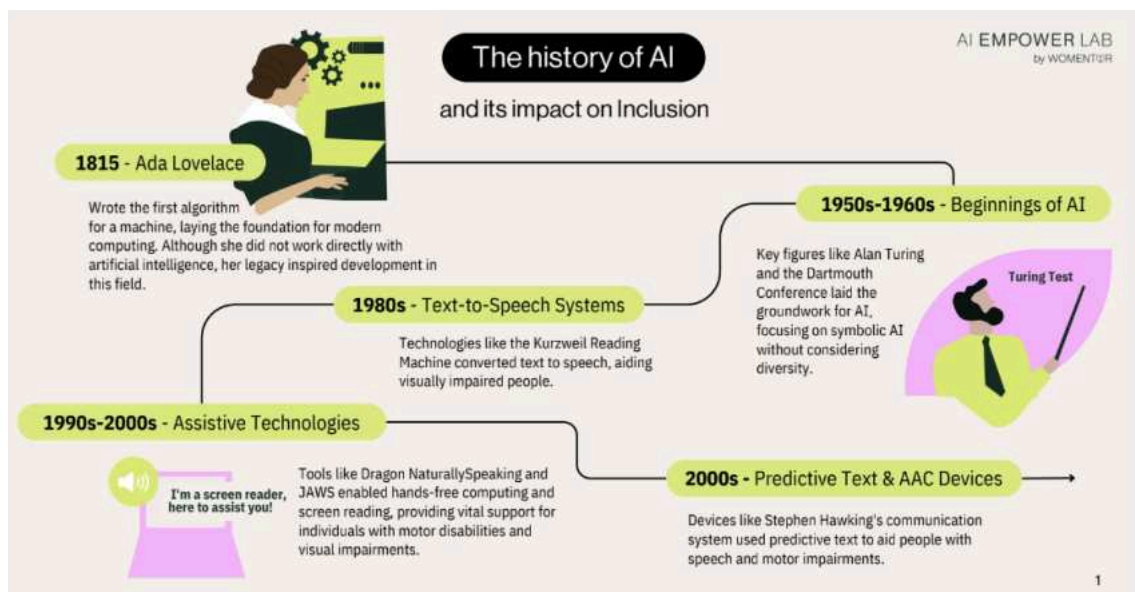
- **Enhanced AI Literacy:** Increase the AI competencies of women and minorities in the target sectors.
- **Reduced Gender Inequalities:** Contribute to closing the gender gap in technology access and employment opportunities.
- **Inclusive AI Ecosystem:** Foster an AI ecosystem that values diversity and actively works to eliminate biases.
- **Strengthened Networks:** Build a strong network of stakeholders committed to promoting gender equality in the AI industry.

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## Output Examples

- **History of AI**



- **Website:** [www.womentor.at/ai-empower-lab](http://www.womentor.at/ai-empower-lab)



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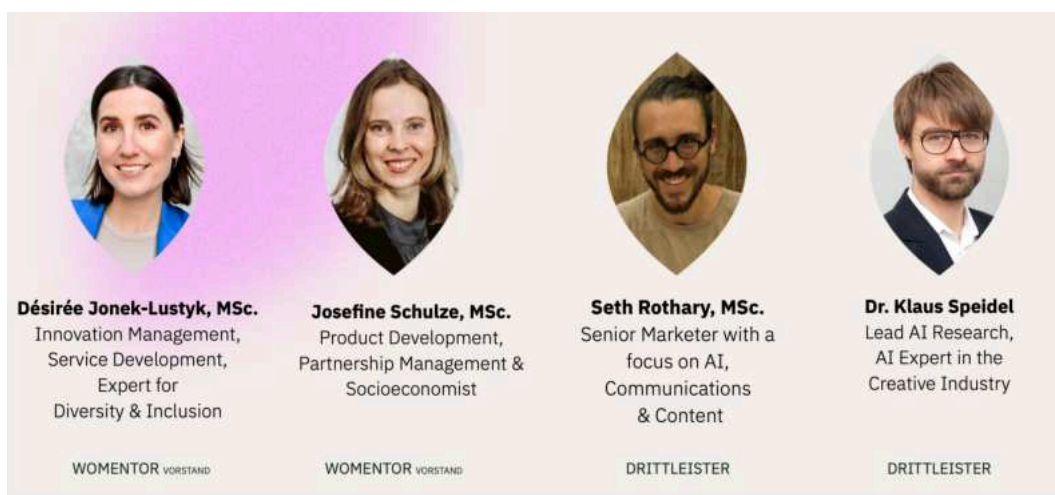
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- [Blog Article: The Impact of AI on Gender Inequality in Austria](#)

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## Core-Team

- **Josefine Schulze, MSc:** Managing Partner at WOMENTOR and a seasoned business consultant for sustainability. With her background as a political scientist and socioeconomist, Josefine excels in impact measurement and risk assessments, deeply committed to advancing social and ecological sustainability.
- **Desiree Jonek-Lustyk, MSc.:** Founder of WOMENTOR, Desiree is a trailblazer in diversity, equity, and inclusion consulting. Her leadership has cultivated a vibrant community of over 1,200 members, driving forward innovative strategies and championing gender equity in social entrepreneurship.
- **Seth Rothery:** Based in Australia & New Zealand, Seth is a seasoned marketing specialist with a focus on AI in marketing. His strategic expertise in digital marketing significantly boosts the project's reach and effectiveness in dynamic markets.



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## Advisory Board Members



A graphic featuring four portraits of advisory board members in teardrop shapes, each with their name and title below. The background is a light beige color. At the bottom right of the graphic is the WOMENTOR logo.

**Ass.-Prof. Dr. Erman Arcar**  
Assistant Prof. for AI  
University of Amsterdam

**Anja & Julie Teßmann**  
Sisterhood Berlin,  
Senior Marketing Manager  
Expert for AI Marketing

**Carina Zehetmaier**  
Präsidentin  
Women in AI Austria

**Stephanie Meisl**  
Co-Founder D#AVANTGARDE  
Let's talk KI  
Expert for technology,  
art & creativity

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## Conclusion

The AI Empower Lab project addresses critical challenges at the intersection of AI, gender equality, and inclusion. By focusing on empowering women and minorities in the creative industries and knowledge work, the project seeks to mitigate the risks of AI-induced inequalities. Through comprehensive training programs, resource development, and stakeholder collaboration, the project aims to equip underrepresented groups with the tools and knowledge necessary to thrive in an AI-driven world. This initiative not only promotes gender equality but also contributes to the development of more inclusive and ethical AI technologies that benefit society as a whole.

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*A Report for the MOMENTUM KONGRESS 2024 "ALTERNATIVES"  
TRACK #2: Organizing more openly, inclusively and democratically*