

AI, Envision, and You

Some observations from Jim Golembeski

It's 2005. Three retired friends are sitting in a bar watching a baseball game. In the course of their conversation the question comes up, "Who was the AL Batting Champ in 1965?" Delving into their memories, many names come up, along with stories and anecdotes that fill the rest of the afternoon.

It's 2025. Three retired friends are sitting in a bar watching a baseball game. In the course of their conversation the question comes up, "Who was the AL Batting Champ in 1965?" One of the men looks it up on his smart phone, announces "Tony Oliva" and they go back to watching the game in silence.

In 2035, the retired guy lies back in his lounge at home. The smart glasses his family gave him for his birthday are showing him a virtual World Series game featuring the greatest players of the 20th century. The Amazon drone delivers a hotdog and a beer to his door during the 7th inning stretch. He gets Tony Oliva's virtual autograph.

Parmy Olson's recent book, [Supremacy: AI, ChatGPT, and the Race That Will Change the World](#), traces the development of *Generative Artificial Intelligence* (GAI) led by two innovators, Sam Altman (OpenAI) and Demis Hassabis (DeepMind) who began their efforts with the most altruistic of intentions. The book covers the amazing developments in GAI over the last six years and the implications for our world. Most significantly, and beginning with the release of ChatGPT in November 2022, computers no longer just process information, but they generate new information. This has created a whole new reality. But what does it mean for us?

The dreams for GAI were, and remain, life-altering. "Transhumanism" projects that melding human and artificial intelligence will bring about the next step in human evolution. The convergence of human and machines will make us smarter and more creative. We will live longer. The melding of our minds and computers will allow us to extend our reach out into the galaxy. And all of these amazing developments raise significant ethical questions.

Both Altman and Hassabis began their GAI journeys with the most noble intentions—scientific discovery, finding cures for disease, economic abundance shared by all, expanding human lifespan—and they grappled with the ethical implications of their work. But soon the reality of the need for funding and computing power emerged. It was not long before Hassabis allied DeepMind with Google to get access to money, talent, and computing power. But, as Olson observes:

Google's advertising business made up more than 90 percent of its revenue. Despite its reputation as an innovative technology company filled with the brightest engineers, Google's leadership still primarily cared about the age-old business of getting people to buy stuff they didn't necessarily need.

Similarly, Sam Altman, with a close relationship to Elon Musk, soon hitched his wagon to the Microsoft behemoth which gained priority access to OpenAI's technology. The book goes into detail about the economics and intrigues of these mergers, but the implications are straightforward.

The development of GAI and tools such as ChatGPT, aligned with Google and Microsoft, have already had profound effects on our lives. We have learned how much human beings are susceptible to the influence of algorithms. We have seen inherent biases as well depending on what information is used to train AI. The author provides an amusing example of exactly the type of sexism and racial stereotypes any of us can find on the Internet. The companies are more than reluctant to reveal the training sources for their programs.

As algorithms become more sophisticated, we might become more isolated, our faces increasingly buried in our screens, living in echo chambers focused only on our individual needs and wants. This is increasingly true in politics, but it is not unique to that area of social life.

On the other hand, Envision Greater Green Bay members use these new GAI tools in very positive and effective ways. Our Signals Teams use GAI to extend the reach of our knowledge by discovering ideas, pilot projects, and information about underlying signals, however faint they might be. GAI also allows us to sort through a tremendous amount of information and successfully identify commonalities and themes that might require attention in our effort to create a vibrant community of choice.

GAI is accessible and here to stay and it is only in an early stage of development. The big tech companies are already using it to influence us. Plans for new data centers to increase the power of these systems are being debated in Wisconsin and all over the country. Will we use these wonderful new tools to narrow our lives to what we want to hear in our echo chambers, or will we choose to use these tools to broaden our experience, knowledge, and vision to create a truly better future for everyone?