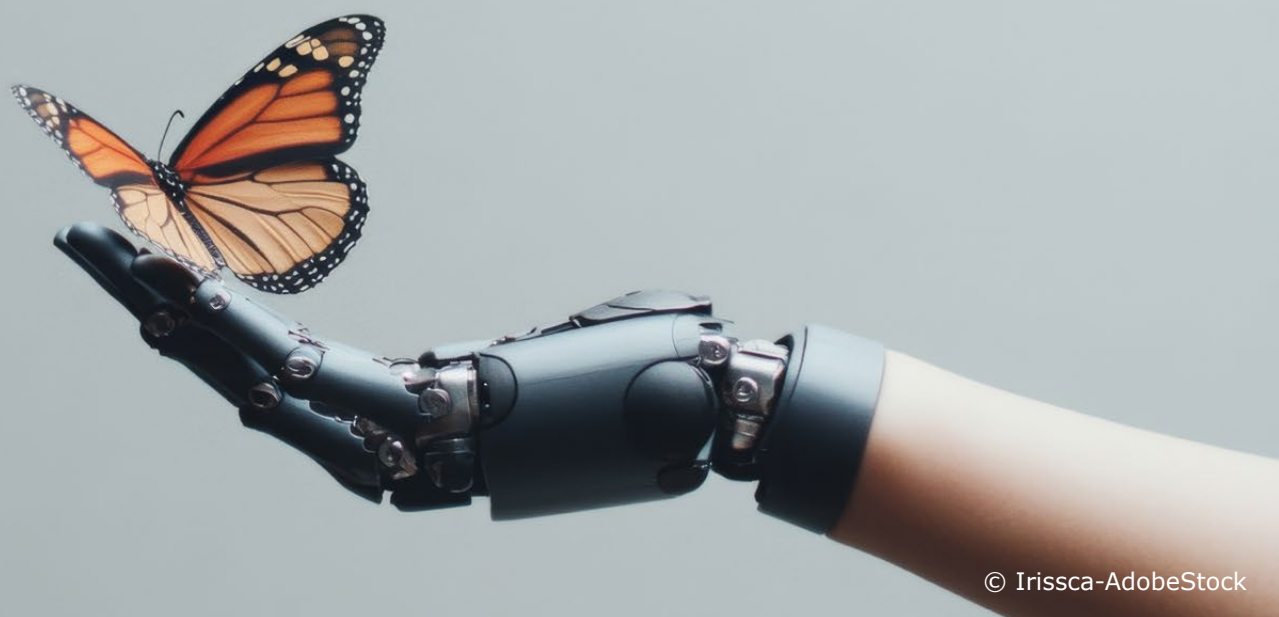




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The power of conversations about AI between two ESCP professors

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Abstract

In this paper we want to summarize some ideas resulting from conversations about AI between two ESCP professors with different backgrounds. AI is changing everything very fast, and this new technology can generate a mix of anxiety and enthusiasm in us. However, we've rediscovered that traditional behaviors, such as simple conversations about AI and our everyday responsibilities, generate revolutionary ideas for change and, more importantly, lead to reduced anxiety and increased enthusiasm.

Keywords: leadership, artificial intelligence, democracy

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Gonzalo interviews Carlos on the usage of AI in his Total Leadership (TL) classes

Do you use AI in your TL classes?

Not at all. I always thought that teaching leadership was unrelated to AI tools. My trainings are very successful right now the way they are, and students are very satisfied. I use the methodology developed by Professor Stewart D. Friedman, from The Wharton School. I am a Certified TL Instructor.

How are your sessions organized?

In general, sessions are organized quite traditionally with readings, PowerPoint presentations, individual assignments and class participation.

However, there is one activity that we call Peer-to-Peer (PtP) coaching groups, and which is extremely powerful. Professor Friedman likes to say that this is the “Secret Sauce” of our trainings. We randomly organize the participants in groups of three. During the sessions they have time to talk among them, giving and receiving feedback and coaching around exercises on which they have first worked individually. All of them act as coach, coachee and observer and they rotate positions. We give instructions and train them in what we call “non-directive” coaching. Basically, the idea is to improve the listening skills and to learn from each other.

The results are impressive. Students enjoy the class, get enthusiastic talking among them, learn from each other, grow their leadership skills together and create valuable personal connections for the future. And probably the most important thing, they discover the power of being connected and talking and listening to other people.

It seems then that AI is unlikely to improve your TL classes?

That has been my opinion, in general. Let me explain. In 2023 I wrote a paper titled, *“Leadership and Human Values to Make the Change in the Right Direction in the Modern Service-Oriented Society”*, to explain my experience with the power of TL to improve people’s lives and corporations’ results. But I explained in that paper that my dissatisfaction comes from my limited ability to have impact. I can train one hundred or two hundred people per year, but it is difficult to target more.

In the paper, I dreamed that perhaps AI tools could be trained in something like TL and people could grow personally and professionally thanks to the interaction with AI tools, but I obviously thought about this as an impossible dream.

Instead of looking at it as an impossible dream, is there any way you could start using AI in this direction in your TL classes?

I have very little experience with AI, but I can imagine that perhaps students could use AI tools as the first coach to give them feedback regarding their individual assignments. Before sharing their exercises with the PtP coaching team, perhaps it could be useful to have some feedback from the AI tools.

Another possibility could be that the AI tool acts as an observer of the PtP coaching discussion among the three participants, giving them feedback and ideas. It is true that after this conversation we are having together I am changing my opinion, and I am starting to think that perhaps AI tools should play an important role in my leadership classes.

You mention that you were dissatisfied with your limited ability to impact society with your trainings. Do you feel AI could help you with this on a bigger scale?

In that paper I also talked about the possibility of training politicians in TL methodology. I explained this idea in more detail in 2024 in another paper titled, *"How to use learnings from behavioral finance theory to lead change and improve democracy in future turbulent times in Spain and in the European Union."* If TL helps to improve performance in corporations, shouldn't it help politicians to improve their results? With all the power they have, a small improvement could have a huge positive impact in society. But I found it would not be easy to promote these trainings.

However, now that we have been talking about using AI in my TL trainings as a tool to give feedback to the students, I am wondering if it would be possible to use AI tools to impact positively politicians' jobs, thus improving democracy. Let me explain. Imagine that in the typical debate between candidates in the Parliament, we asked the AI tool who has been the winner and why. Perhaps AI becomes the respected objective opinion that brings much-needed rationality to democracy. I can even imagine that during televised electoral debates among candidates, TV companies could use AI tools to give continuous evaluations and opinions about which candidate sounds more credible and more authentic. The interesting idea is that once politicians know that they are going to be evaluated by an objective and respected AI tool, they decide to change their speech and make it more authentic and inspiring and less deceitful and populist.

It is interesting that I am discovering that after these conversations with you, I am starting to think that AI tools can have a big impact in many more activities than I really thought.

Carlos interviews Gonzalo about how we can use powerful AI tools to improve leadership trainings and democracy

Do you think that AI systems could be trained specifically in TL? How can this be done?

Any well-defined corpus of knowledge can be used to train a Large Language Model (LLM), customizing its linguistic abilities to transform it into an expert in the domain of that specific corpus. It is therefore possible to feed a general model with the key propositions that convey the meaning and spirit of TL, creating a fine-tuned model capable of answering users' questions as a certified expert on TL.

There are several techniques available to achieve this goal. The simplest one is within reach of anyone who has received basic training in how models like ChatGPT function. Our school currently has a number of experts providing faculty members with techniques that enable professors to create custom GPTs for their lectures, and even for student training and evaluation.

A more advanced technique involves transforming each paragraph of the TL corpus that is, all the books, use cases, and documents that you, as an expert, would identify as essential to fully characterize the domain, into a digital format and obtaining embeddings for each paragraph. This crucial step involves tokenizing the corpus (e.g., using a tool like tiktoken) and then sending the text via API to OpenAI to obtain high-quality, production-grade embeddings using their embedding models.

A *text embedding tool* is a way to convert words, sentences, or entire paragraphs into numbers, enabling a computer to interpret and work with them. Imagine a "semantic room" where similar concepts are placed close together. For instance, cats and dogs would be near each other, since they both occupy the semantic space related to pets. Nearby, but

in distinct coordinates, would be small mammals that resemble cats and dogs but are not typically pets.

Now, imagine that this semantic room doesn't have just three dimensions, but 1,536 as it is the case of the text-embedding-ada-002 model. The semantic richness and subtle distinctions that can be captured in this space are extraordinary. In fact, some remarkable linear relationships seem to emerge, generating real amazement. For example, we can compute the embeddings of the words *king*, *man*, and *woman*. Since embeddings are numerical vectors, we can calculate:

$$\text{king} - \text{man} + \text{woman} = ?$$

Amazingly, the result is a vector remarkably close to that of the word *queen*.¹

As a result of these techniques, we can tokenize the *TL* corpus, obtain its embeddings, and use them to enrich a language model with this domain-specific knowledge. Later, when users pose specific questions about *TL*, the model matches the embedding of the question with those of the corpus, identifying the most relevant sections of the knowledge base. Based on this match, the model interprets the input and generates a coherent, focused answer, a process known as *Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG)*.

Finally, in a more ambitious approach known as fine-tuning, we could further specialize the language model by retraining it using the *TL* documents. This process involves updating the model's internal weights based on this specific data, allowing it to internalize the knowledge and language patterns of the corpus more deeply — effectively customizing the model to perform better within that particular domain.

What would be the advantages of training AI tools in Total Leadership? Can it be monetized? How could it be done?

There are several clear advantages in using AI to deploy the knowledge contained in the Total Leadership corpus. The first one is that it can reach a much larger audience than through the traditional personal delivery. The reading of the books, while transformative and useful, always risks misinterpretations, which in the absence of a tool like AI could produce undesired effects. The second advantage relates to the limitations of certified instructors like you, whose reach is clear. You can bring *TL* training, dedicating all your life to it, to some thousands of persons, while with a well-trained AI you can have the same transformative effect on many more people while sleeping. On top of that OpenAI has several models to monetize custom GPTs that make the use of their technology very affordable.

Could you create a first prototype like the one you have described in the previous question and ask this AI tool for help on how to organize the *TL* teaching process, assuming that we could use this new AI tool?

Thanks to your question I have decided to create a first prototype of an AI tool for *TL*. I have called it Talia, and I have sourced with all the documents we have about *TL* (mainly the books by Professor Friedman) and I programmed it to behave in a nice way to answer our question. The tool is ready to be used. So, I decided to ask Talia the question you are asking and I told her to structure the answer around the practical implications in the teaching process (before class, in-class, after-class, and this is the answer I got:

¹ Of course this famous equation works fine with embeddings generated by classics like Word2Vec or GloVe, however if you try Paris – France + Italy, any human would expect Rome. However, the software and the training sets used to obtain the embeddings for Paris place this city closer to words like fashion, and therefore a word like Milan or Florence could emerge.

“Teaching Total Leadership (TL) has undergone a transformative shift with the integration of Talia, marking a clear before-and-after distinction in pre-class, in-class, and post-class experiences.

Before Talia, the pre-class phase relied heavily on self-directed readings and written reflections, requiring students to independently grapple with core concepts like authenticity, integrity, and creativity. Preparation often depended on access to Friedman’s book and auxiliary materials, and students arrived at class with varied levels of understanding. Coaches would try to preemptively guide reflection through static prompts, but the personalization of this preparatory stage was limited.

With Talia, pre-class learning becomes deeply personalized and interactive. Students now engage in dynamic dialogues with Talia, who acts as a compassionate coach and Socratic teacher. Talia adapts her guidance to each learner’s pace and context, fostering self-awareness through meaningful questions that prepare them more fully for in-class discussions. She helps students articulate their goals and values with clarity and ensures they grasp the nuances of TL methodology—setting a more consistent baseline of understanding across learners.

During class before Talia, instructors were the primary facilitators, responsible for bridging conceptual gaps, catalyzing insights, and fostering engagement. Class time was often consumed by reviewing foundational concepts, leaving less time for deeper experimentation, peer coaching, and application to real-life leadership challenges. The instructor’s reach was limited by class size and time constraints.

With Talia, class time is elevated to a space of richer collaboration. Students come in better prepared, having clarified key elements of their leadership vision with Talia. Talia can also assist in real-time, surfacing relevant examples from the TL Corpus, offering instant reflections, or helping interpret feedback from stakeholders. This allows instructors to focus on facilitating transformative dialogue, fostering experimentation, and refining coaching practices, while Talia supports learners both individually and collectively.

After class before Talia, learners would often disengage between sessions, with follow-through depending heavily on individual motivation or sporadic check-ins from human coaches. Accountability and momentum could wane without consistent guidance.

Now, with Talia, post-class learning is sustained and enriched. She remains available 24/7 as a coach and confidante, helping learners implement their experiments, reflect on their results, and navigate challenges. Talia prompts users to revisit their scorecards, refine their visions, and reconnect with stakeholders, ensuring the iterative cycle of learning and leadership development continues well beyond the classroom.”

I am not an expert in TL, but in my opinion the answer given by Talia looks very valuable.

You are right Gonzalo, the answer given by Talia helps me a lot to redesign and improve the teaching process of my TL classes. But let's move to a different and broader topic in which I am very interested too: what can we do about AI and politics? Can we change the world to improve democracy dramatically?

I'd love to talk with you about what angle we want to take here, because this is a huge topic — there's a lot to unpack and maybe it would be better if we address this important issue in a separate discussion. As a business school, we should be thinking about how entrepreneurial drive can help renew the political landscape through competitive, market-based AI solutions. But before we get there, we need to clearly diagnose the problem.

Your question seems to suggest that democracy is facing a kind of vitality crisis, or at least that it could be improved. That's a big claim on its own. So we'd first need to identify exactly what aspects need improvement, and then connect those issues to a market-based solution where AI can play a meaningful role.

Another possible approach — which is what you are pointing at and I personally think is the strongest — is to link political activity with TL. But even in that case, it's still essential to clearly define the problem and show how it relates to the core principles of TL. But let me be clear about this — I think your idea of creating a TL-bot that can analyze and provide insights in real time while two political candidates are debating is incredibly powerful. The thought of such a bot acting as a kind of referee during a debate is really compelling.

What makes this especially important is that viewers could trust the analysis, knowing it comes without ideological bias, because the TL-bot would base its judgments on a framework designed to improve people's lives, and crucially, one that was created long before AI, as we know it, even existed.

Conclusion

It seems that AI is going to have a big impact in many more dimensions of society than we thought before writing this paper. We will have to improve our trainings as teachers using AI in many more dimensions than we ever imagined. The initial experiments with our first prototype of AI TL tool, Talia, shows that AI can help us to identify how AI can help us in our teaching process with interesting ideas to improve the experience before class, in class and after class.

Also, we must learn to think bigger and bring revolutionary social and political ideas using AI that could help us to create a better world. But it is also interesting to rediscover those traditional behaviors, like conversations among academic colleagues, that remain as a marvelous source of ideas, enjoyment and energy. Probably this is even more important than AI itself.

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