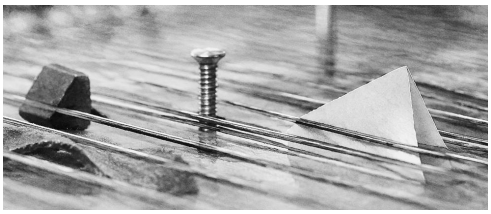
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Many ways of knowing in work with language models

A transdisciplinary practice of priming language models to support people working together on the problems of our time



Groups that work across fields are bringing language models into how they analyze, plan and decide, often faster than they can agree on what should be handed over. Most meet a model as one agreeable voice, shaped in advance by the company that provides it and leaning toward the dominant ways of writing and knowing. A *polyphonic priming ecology* places other texts in the model's context, the text it has before it as it writes: texts written in dialogue with several ways of knowing and kept in tension. The model is not retrained; what changes is what it reads, and the practice of the people around it.

By *ways of knowing* I mean the ways in which something becomes known or possible to respond to. In my work, four have mattered most, all of them ways the default voice tends to pass over: artistic practice, neurodivergent ways of perceiving, process-oriented approaches, and thought that asks whose knowledge and whose lives have been allowed to count.

Three parts, built for each situation

1 of 3

Maintained texts that someone answers for

Given to the model each time it answers, or found in a knowledge base when the work calls for them. A named person or group revises them and takes responsibility for what is carried forward.

2 of 3

Several ways of knowing acting on one another

Each keeps its own questions and puts them to the others. None is written as the authority over the rest.

3 of 3

Tension written into what the model reads

Drafts can point to a difference instead of settling it. Someone chooses which tensions are brought forward; keeping them open is the work of people.

What it can make possible

Some of this I have seen in my own work; some is what the practice is designed to do.

Questions reframed before answers

People see their question beside others they had not considered.

Disagreement kept open

Drafts can point to a difference instead of smoothing it over.

Seeing where the model pulls

A group notices when training and settings draw its work toward the generic.

A new look at shared practice

The mapping is yours to keep, even if no model is ever used.

Where it can matter

In organizational change, where interests conflict, power is unevenly shared, and a question has to be reframed before people can act together.

In companies, where shifting demands on sustainability, faster change and answering for more than profit call for people with different backgrounds, artistic experience among them.

In research across disciplines, where each field's frames are opened to the questions of the others.

In public and civic work, where those affected are many, and some of them are never in the room.

In artistic and collective practice, where a model can be one more voice in the room, and can be set aside.

Where models are already in use, and the risk lies in what is handed over, and in who takes responsibility for it.

What it does not do

It does not replace people's judgment, experience or presence, and it cannot make sure that many ways of knowing are taken into account. It is not a product, and whether it helps can only be tried in the work, over time.

What it costs

Energy and water each time the texts are sent, the labor the model rests on, and dependence on the company behind a commercial model. Knowing when not to use a model belongs to the practice.

Building a priming ecology together

A priming ecology cannot be bought finished or set up from a description. It is built collectively, for each organization, company, project or collective, from its own ways of knowing and with the people who will carry it, and it is theirs from the start.

How a collaboration runs

It begins with a conversation about the work, and about where a model does not belong in it. Some tasks do not need one, and some are better done by a smaller one. Three phases follow. They overlap and return, and a fourth runs through all three.

Mapping

With the people concerned, and mostly without a model: which knowledge practices bear on the work, whose questions are being asked, which tensions should stay open, who is missing, and what the model should never be asked to do, with someone named for each limit. You can stop here and keep what you made.

Building

The first texts are written with you, in your own language, and tried in work you actually do. We start from what your place already has, such as a meeting format or a way of keeping notes. Every change I propose is visible, and the people whose texts these are can refuse it.

Maintaining

This phase does not end. Someone reads what comes back, revises the texts and their terms when they stop doing what they were written for, and retires what no longer earns its place. I propose to step back when your own people have changed or struck something without me, can say why, and can turn down a proposal from me.

Who bears it runs through all three: who maintains the texts, with how much time set aside and with what recognition of the skill involved, who reads what comes back, and who takes responsibility for what is carried forward.

What stays with you

What is built is yours from the start. After the mapping, that is a short written account of your positions, practices, tensions and limits, with a named owner for each limit. If you go on, it is also texts in your own language that your people can read, argue about and change.

Conditions and limits

Anyone concerned can keep the model out of their own part of the work, and you can end the collaboration at any time, without giving reasons. Someone takes responsibility, by name or role, for every output carried forward. What goes to the company that runs the model is decided before anything is sent. Where people cannot decline the model's part, what is built is not called a priming ecology.

What I bring

Two things are needed that organizations tend to underrate. One is a processual orientation: a trained habit of seeing situations as still forming. The other is experience across fields that has been lived and not only read. Mine comes from growing up between cultures and from work across the history of religions, philosophy, music, improvisation and artistic research, inside the arts and outside them, and from building and maintaining a priming ecology of my own.

You can also do it without me

None of this means that only a few people can do the work. Much of it needs no model at all: positions said aloud, the practices of a place mapped, work read by someone who takes responsibility for it. You can build a priming ecology yourselves, with people who bring such an orientation and experience, starting from what your place already has.

Get in touch

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Working together

nevrin.se/many-ways/working-together/

This overview at more length, with examples from different contexts.

The short version

nevrin.se/many-ways/

What a priming ecology is, with four short scenes, and the way on to the essay.