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# The Future of AI in Knowledge Work: Tools for Thought at CHI 2025 Microsoft (2025)

## Context

As generative AI is rapidly embedded into knowledge work, a key question emerges: does it make us think better, or simply faster? Microsoft Research presented four studies and a workshop at CHI 2025 (the ACM Computer Human Interaction (CHI) Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems) examining how AI affects cognitive effort, decision quality, and creative range. Surveying 319 professionals and testing three prototype AI systems, the research reframes AI design as a question of cognitive ownership rather than task automation.

## Key Insights

### Study 1 - Critical Thinking Survey

319 professionals,  
936 use cases

- High AI confidence reduces critical thinking; high self-confidence increases it, at higher perceived cost.
- Effort shifts by stakes: more on high-stakes tasks, less on routine.
- Barriers are structural: low awareness, time pressure, weak prompting skills.

### Study 2 - AI-assisted Decision-making

RecommendAI vs  
ExtendAI (investm. task)

- RecommendAI expands options but feels opaque, which is why users struggle to integrate it into their own reasoning.
- ExtendAI preserves agency by building on users' logic, but risks reinforcing existing biases.

### Study 3 - Meeting Goal Alignment

Passive (ambient chart)  
vs active (nudge)

- Passive cues support individual reflection without disrupting flow.
- Active prompts drive team-level behaviour change but risk interrupting deep focus.
- Effective AI needs dynamic escalation logic, not a fixed intervention level.

### Study 4 - YES AND Brainstorming

Multi-agent persona  
system, turn-taking

- Simulates diverse expertise to counter groupthink and production blocking.
- Agent "Sage" distills without deciding, preserving user agency at the conclusion stage.

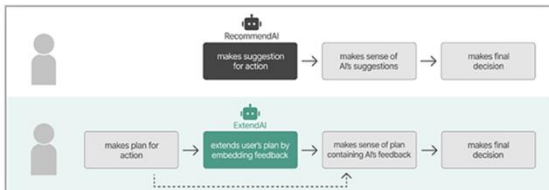


Figure 1. Illustrative comparison of the thought process involved when interacting with two types of AI: RecommendAI and ExtendAI.

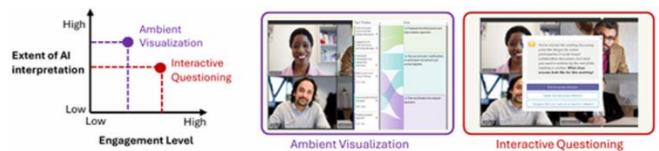


Figure 2. Technology prototypes exploring passive and active ways to keep meetings focused on established objectives.

## Implications

- Where can you try passive AI cues or active prompts to make meetings more fair & goal-oriented?
- How are your customer and employee-facing AI tools designed to activate users' own reasoning?
- What processes exist to detect where your AI tools are reinforcing rather than correcting existing biases in high-stakes decisions?
- How do your firm's policies define who retains the right to draw conclusions when idea generation is delegated to AI agents?