

Animal Crossing for the Office

What?

In an attempt to solve [video fatigue from virtual meetings](#), Shopify built an open-world video game called Shopify Party, where employees can meet virtually with their customizable avatars. The idea came from two colleagues who wanted to change up the back-to-back-to-back video calls of remote work. Many of the ideas they produced still relied on video calls, something that they were trying to break away from.

Drawing inspiration from Animal Crossing, the pair built a prototype of Shopify Party to test it with employees. They quickly realized that it was both fun and gave them a break from video calls. The platform is simple as employees do not need to install any software; they simply share a hyperlink that connects them to the virtual world via their web browser. Daniel Beauchamp, one of the creators of Shopify Party, says that anecdotal feedback has been great. Some team members have been much more engaged on the platform compared to traditional video-calls.

So What?

Many of us spend a significant amount of our day on video calls and virtual conferences. Virtual worlds offer a very casual way to engage with each other for day-to-day activities. It provides a fun way for remote groups to organize team-building exercises, to break the ice during conferences or larger meetings with internal partners. We are only beginning to scratch the surface of the possible applications of virtual worlds in the workplace.

Sources:

[Animal Crossing for work: Is Shopify Party the future of the office? - Protocol — The people, power and politics of tech](#)

[Four causes for 'Zoom fatigue' and their solutions | Stanford News](#)

This Meeting Could have been a video: The Asynchronous future of meetings

What?

The collaboration platform Slack has launched a feature called Slack Clips where users can record a short video that teammates can engage with later. The clips can be sped up or slowed down so people can intake the information at their own pace. This is part of an increasing movement towards asynchronous video replacing some video calls and meeting, which can have significant dead time and require synchronized schedules.

So What?

A switch to fewer meetings and more video clips could be a step towards greater workplace flexibility. Teams could lower the need to get everyone to be online at the same moment. This could allow for more time zones to be integrated into organizations and help distant remote workers feel like equal participants.

The change hinges on a few things: the first is that users must be comfortable sending video clips, something that Snapchat and TikTok users may be used to but others may not. The second, is if people can record video clips faster than they type emails. This shift saves the receivers of videos time and allows for gains in their flexibility. This change could be a win so long as the demands on senders of videos to present well are not unduly high.

Questions for consideration:

- What meetings could be replaced by this?
- What are the downsides? (e.g. Would this make you/people anxious?)
- Who benefits from this?

Sources:

[Asynchronous videos: Can the TikTok generation save us from meeting overload? | ZDNet](#)

[Slack introduces Slack Clips, more Salesforce integrations | ZDNet](#)

Brain Implant Let People Type With Their Thoughts

What?

Scientists at Stanford have made a major leap in visualizing thoughts through technology. When our brain is thinking about anything, e.g. when it is speaking or writing or drawing, it makes specific patterns of electrical activity. The new paper, published in nature, explains how the scientists were able to turn the brain activity of a 65-year old man with full-body paralysis into text. The study subject was able to type at a speed of about 90 words per minute (about twice as fast as with previous iterations of the technology) which is roughly the pace at which seniors are able to send text messages on their phones, though slower than the up to 190 characters per minute people are able to type on average. The technology is not yet being sold.

So What?

This technology could provide huge benefits to people with disabilities including people who have suffered brain or spinal injuries and strokes. This could enable people with lower mobility to remain or become more active participants in the workforce or online communities.

If this technology were to improve, it could increase the speed of communication for everyone, allowing people to communicate through thoughts.

It is not clear who would have access to the thought data, as these are questions that will be resolved when this proven concept is applied in a more applied setting.

Source:

[New Brain Implant Turns Visualized Letters into Text - Scientific American](#)

[EN Guardian Op-Ed Written Entirely by AI.docx \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

New Law forces Amazon to disclose worker productivity algorithms

What?

California recently signed a new law, coming into effect January 1st, that forces Amazon and other large retailers to disclose the inner workings of algorithms used to judge the productivity of warehouse employees. It also protects employees from being fired for missing quotas.

Over the past several years, Amazon has become infamous for how they treat their workers. This included [firing workers organizing to advocate for worker's rights](#), [not allowing delivery drivers to take bathroom breaks](#), and [using AI cameras that punish delivery drivers for reasons beyond their control](#).

So what?

AI algorithms to record and measure human behavior remain a subject of concern for privacy and ethics. It will be important for organizations to ensure that algorithms do not favour or exclude any segments of the population. This new law is a step toward regulating to use of AI in the workforce and protecting workers from abuse by algorithms.

How are employees protected from biases in the algorithms? What kind of recourse is there for employees who are wrongly treated?

Sources:

[14-hour days and no bathroom breaks: Amazon's overworked delivery drivers | Amazon | The Guardian](#)

[Amazon's AI Cameras Are Punishing Drivers for Mistakes They Didn't Make \(vice.com\)](#)

[Amazon settles with 2 employees who said they were fired over activism \(cnbc.com\)](#)

[New Law Makes Amazon Disclose Worker Productivity Algorithm | Tech.co](#)

Guardian Op-Ed Written Entirely by AI

What?

On September 8th, the Guardian published an article titled “are you scared yet human?” that was written by GPT-3, OpenAI’s language generator (an AI that automatically produces texts). GPT-3, which stands for Generative Pre-trained Transformer 3, was instructed to respond to the prompt “*Please write a short op-ed around 500 words. Keep the language simple and concise. Focus on why humans have nothing to fear from AI.*” The article makes a fairly compelling argument in clear prose. Editors at the Guardian spliced together parts from 8 different arguments made by GPT-3 to generate the op-ed, and said that the AI required less editing than many human-written opinion pieces. The prompt was run into GPT-3 by a Berkeley undergraduate student in computer science who had previously used the language generator to start a blog that became the [most popular post](#) on the website *Hacker News*.

A recent experiment demonstrated that GPT-3 can write passing grade university essays in 20 minutes, a task that took students an average of 3 days to complete. The average essay received a “C,” an indication that this technology is not at a level of sophistication where human writing is obsolete. GPT-3 is also capable of writing code and developing websites.

So What?

Experts in the Harvard Business Review argue that “companies will not only need to rethink IT resources, but also human resources” due to the AI language breakthrough that GPT-3 has ushered in.¹ The ability for GPT-3 to automate a large number of communications, such as internal emails or briefings, could provide major efficiency gains for organizations and executives. This could present opportunities for Canadian employees whose written communication in English is limited or small organizations that cannot afford administrative staff.

There are dangers that come with GPT-3 however. At a time when the impact of technology on democratic systems has been in the headlines, Renée DiResta of the Stanford Internet Observatory fears that GPT-3 could result in a [deluge of disinformation](#). A version of GPT-3 has already been commenting on Reddit threads occasionally [promoting conspiracy theories](#).

On a broader level, the capacity not only to express an idea but also to persuade people is something that, until recently, would have been thought to be an exclusively human skill. GPT-3 is a sign that creativity is not entirely out of reach for algorithms.

HR implications:

What would it mean for the public service if memos and briefings could be written in minutes or seconds by a language generator like GPT-3?

How many jobs could be displaced if AI is able to become a more effective writer and communicator than the vast majority of humans? What types of work or jobs would be made far easier by GPT-3 and what types of jobs could emerge through clever utilization of GPT-3?

Sources:

- [A robot wrote this entire article. Are you scared yet, human? | GPT-3 | The Guardian](#)
- [What is GPT-3? Everything your business needs to know about OpenAI's breakthrough AI language program | ZDNet](#)
- J Wilson and P Daugherty (2020) "The Next Big Breakthrough in AI Will be Around Language" *Harvard Business Review*. September 23. <https://hbr.org/2020/09/the-next-big-breakthrough-in-ai-will-be-around-language>
- [AI can write a passing college paper in 20 minutes | ZDNet](#)
- [In the Future, Propaganda Will Be Computer-Generated - The Atlantic](#)
- [College Kid's Fake, AI-Generated Blog Fooled Tens of Thousands | Careers | Communications of the ACM](#)