

# Promise and Peril: Ethical Considerations for Integrating AI in Social Work with Groups

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# Objectives

## Identify

ethically responsible uses of AI in social work with groups.

## Assess

ethical issues related to the principles of fidelity, human relationships, self-determination, privacy, social justice, competence, respect, and integrity in relation to the use of AI in social work practice with groups.

## Develop options

to mitigate ethical risks related to the use of AI in social work with groups.



# Agenda

- Introduction: AI & Uses in Group Work
- Ethical Principles & Tensions
- Small Group Case Discussions
- Conclusions



What is AI?

Digital systems, programs, or machines

that can perform tasks previously achievable only through

human reasoning, perception or reasoning

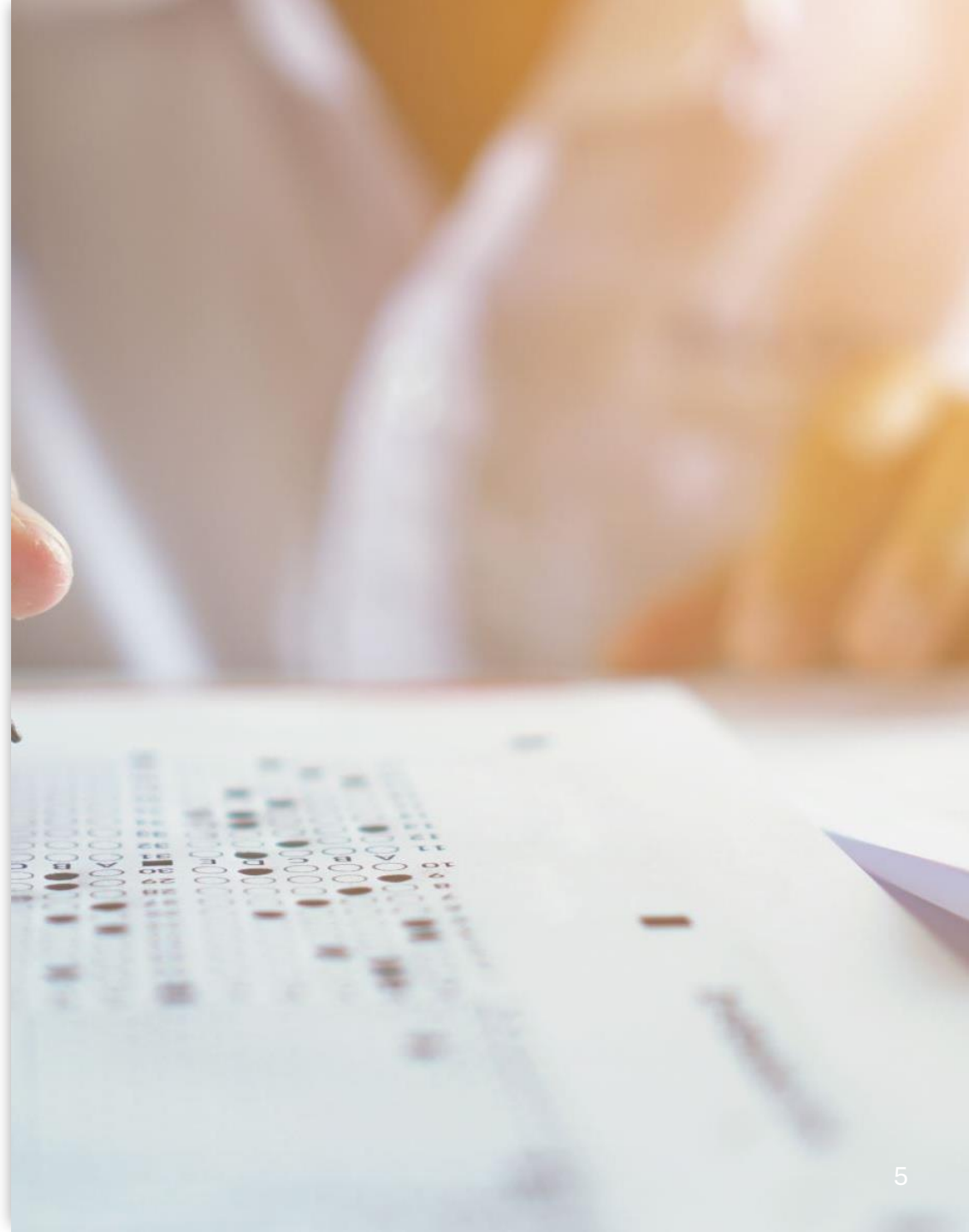
(IT Chronicles, 2023)

Mimics human intelligence



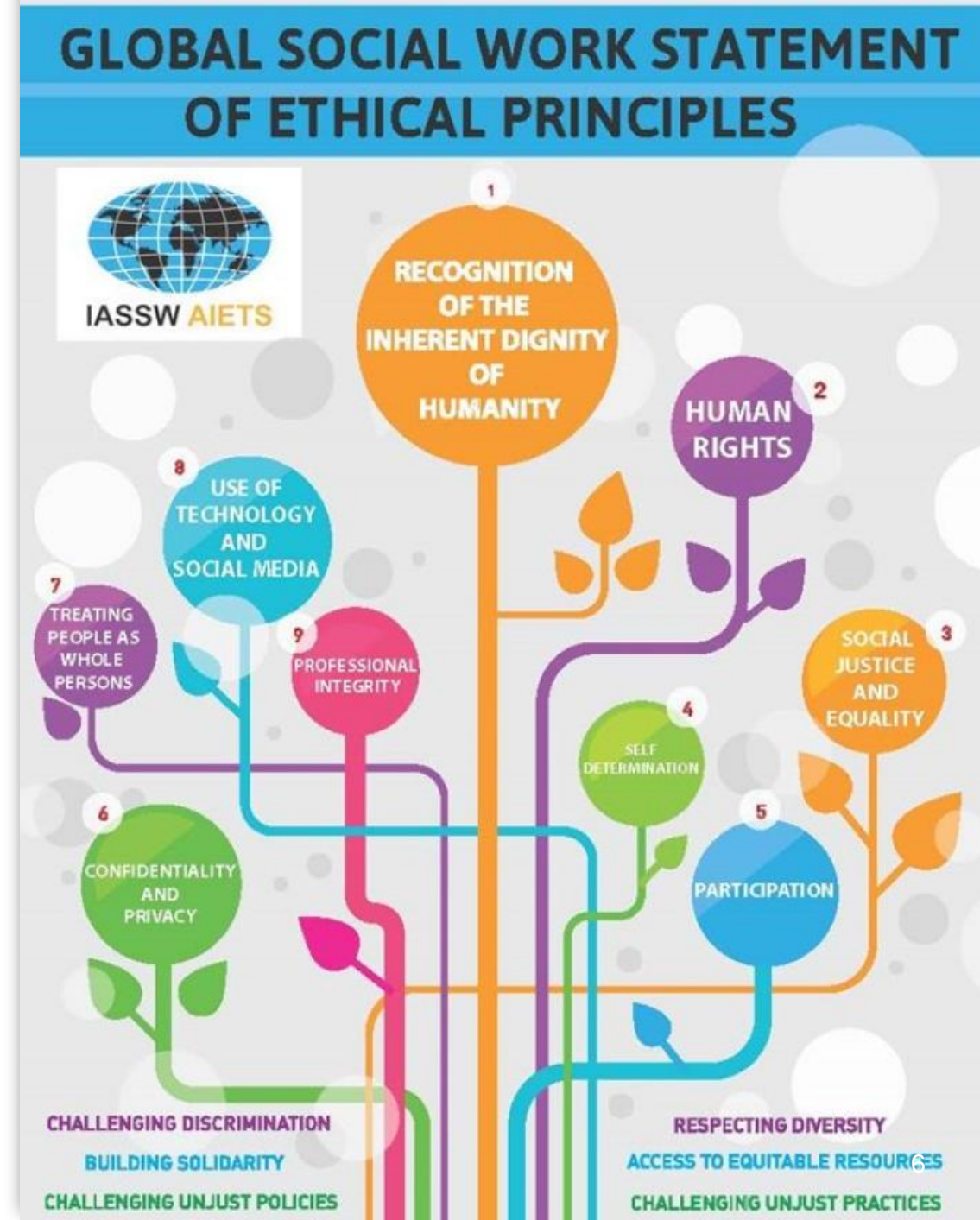
# Uses of AI in Group Work

1. Automated documentation
2. Pre-group screening, matching, and preparation
3. Session planning and facilitation support
4. Education assistant
5. Screening – Predictive analysis
6. Real-Time Co-Facilitation (carefully bounded: simultaneous translation, captioning, onscreen prompts, monitoring...)
7. AI as facilitator

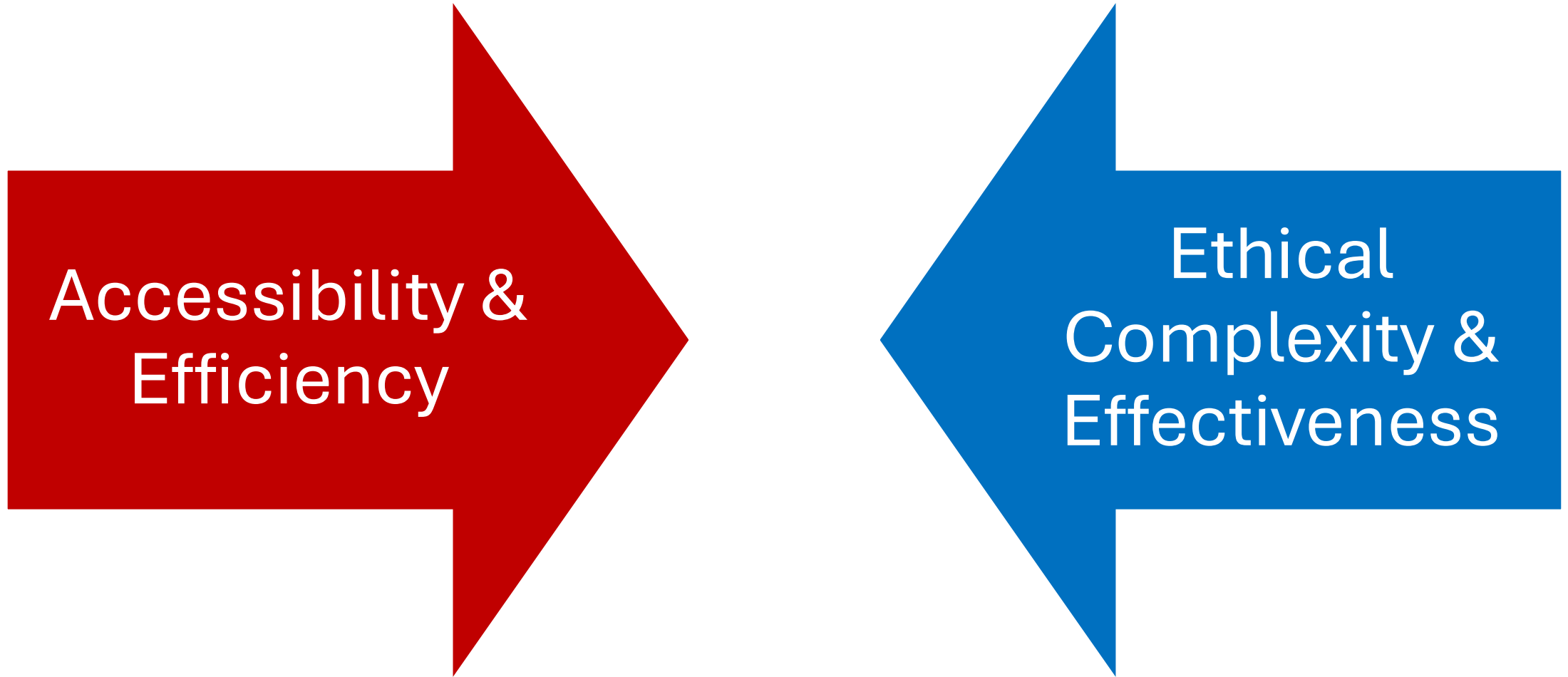


# Relevant Ethical Principles

- Autonomy – self-determination, informed choice, participation
- Integrity – transparency about benefits and risks of AI, ensuring AI outputs are accurate
- Competence – knowledge and skills required to use AI – including how to recognize and correct for errors
- Beneficence – using AI for good
- Nonmaleficence – do no harm with AI
- Respect for dignity and worth of all
- Social justice – fairness, correcting for discrimination and oppression



# Tension: AI-Assisted Group Work



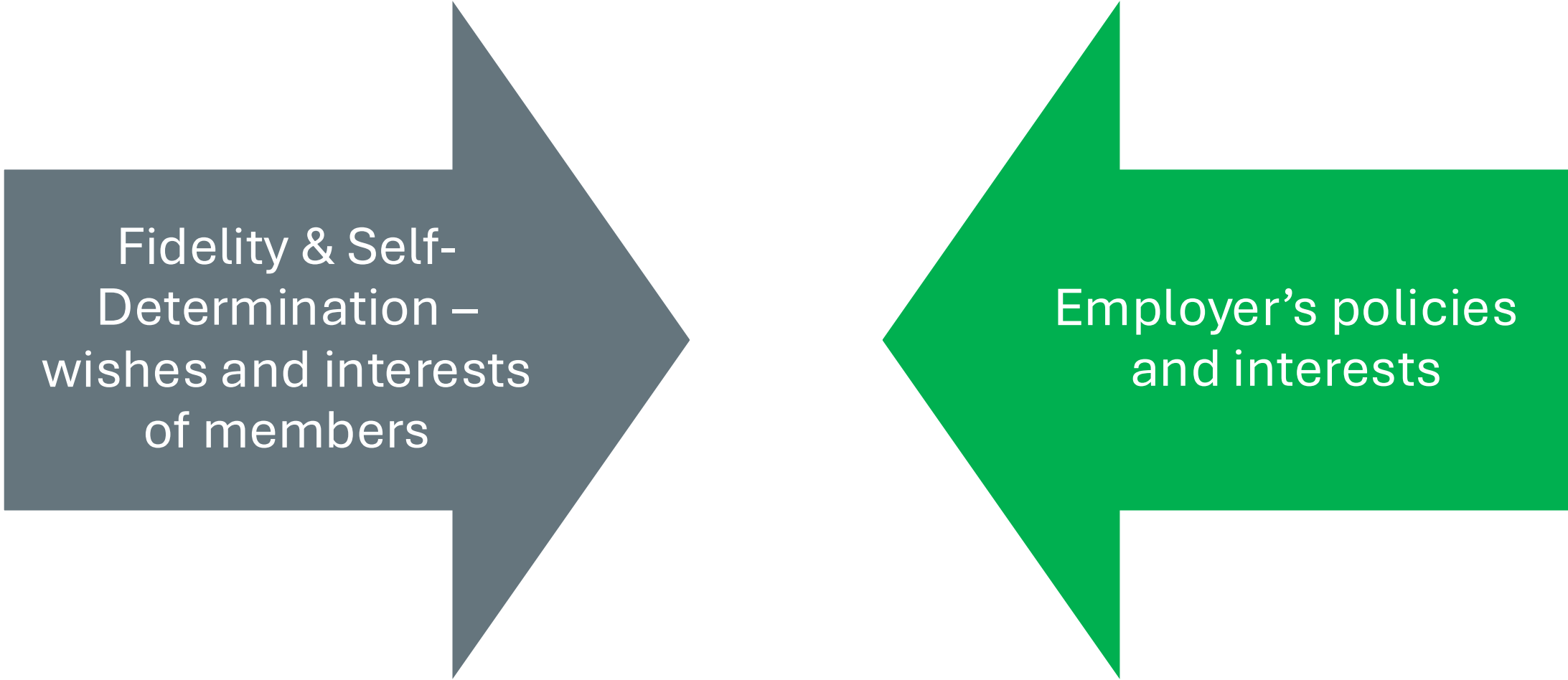


# Effectiveness of AI in Teamwork

- Depends on member's attitudes toward AI
- Trust may depend on what AI is being used for (e.g., information gathering vs. moral decisions)

Bezrukova et al., 2023

# Tension: Conflicting Interests



Fidelity & Self-  
Determination –  
wishes and interests  
of members

Employer's policies  
and interests

# Tension: AI-Assisted Group Work



AI's 24/7 real-time response

AI does not experience burnout, vicarious trauma, or countertransference



Keeping a human in the process

Need for “human empathy” and responsiveness?

# Tension: Neutrality vs. Individualized Responses



Justice,  
Fairness,  
Respect

AI may be trained to be responsive to cultural diversity among members

AI may be trained on imperfect data



Algorithmic bias;  
disrespectful  
responses

Need to monitor and correct for such risks

# Small Group Discussions (3-4 people)

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1. Introduce selves
2. Appoint facilitator and reporter
3. Review situation
4. Identify 1 to 3 Ethical Issues – choose one to analyze
5. Identify relevant ethical principles
6. Identify potential conflicts in ethical duties and interests of key stakeholders (group members, group facilitator, others)
7. Discuss options
8. Work toward consensus and prepare to report back



# Situation 1: AI Cofacilitator

CBT group for people with anxiety

Facilitator uses AI chatbot during sessions for prompts & reframing AI suggests interventions in real time

Some members feel supported; others feel “monitored”

AI occasionally produces inaccurate or overly generic responses

Members were informed and agreed, but consent discussion was brief

1. What ethical principles and issues should facilitator consider?
2. What practice guidance would you offer the facilitator? Why

# Situation 2: Automated Clinical Notes

- Addiction recovery group with court-mandated participants
- Facilitator uses AI-generated progress notes from recordings of sessions
- Notes include summaries of individual disclosures
- One member discovers sensitive information recorded inaccurately
- Clients were told sessions are “documented,” not specifically AI-recorded
- Data stored on third-party cloud platform



1. What ethical principles and issues should facilitator consider?
2. What practice guidance would you offer the facilitator? Why



## Situation 3: AI for Documentation

- Community mental health agency uses AI to assign clients into different treatment groups
  - Algorithm considers diagnosis, risk level, demographics
  - Results: LGBTQ+ clients disproportionately assigned to “high-risk” groups
  - Staff trust AI due to efficiency gains
  - No transparency about how decisions are made
  - Clients not aware AI influenced placement
1. What are the ethical issues?
  2. How should the facilitator address these issues?



## Situation 4: AI in Peer-Led Mutual Aid Group (text-based)

- Online peer-led grief support group
- Members begin using AI tools to generate responses to others
- Some posts feel polished but emotionally “flat”
- One member discloses using AI to respond to multiple people
- Others feel authenticity and mutual aid are compromised
- No formal facilitator; group norms unclear

Group Chat  
Gratitude & Support  
Be kind

21-Apr-26



# Questions

# Conclusions

- Many possible uses of AI to assist with group work
- Possible benefits – efficiency, effectiveness, accessibility...
- Pilot test apps before using
- Need for *ongoing* informed consent
- AI should augment, not replace, human relationships, professional oversight, and accountability
- Attend to risks of bias, inaccuracy, confidentiality breaches, overreliance...
- Importance of transparency and shared decision making in groups





Use the power, wisdom, and energy of the group to maintain ethical principles such as respect for persons and their autonomy, creation of a socially just society, access to services, cohesion, and respect for privacy (IASWG, 2022)

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