REIMAGINE ADM

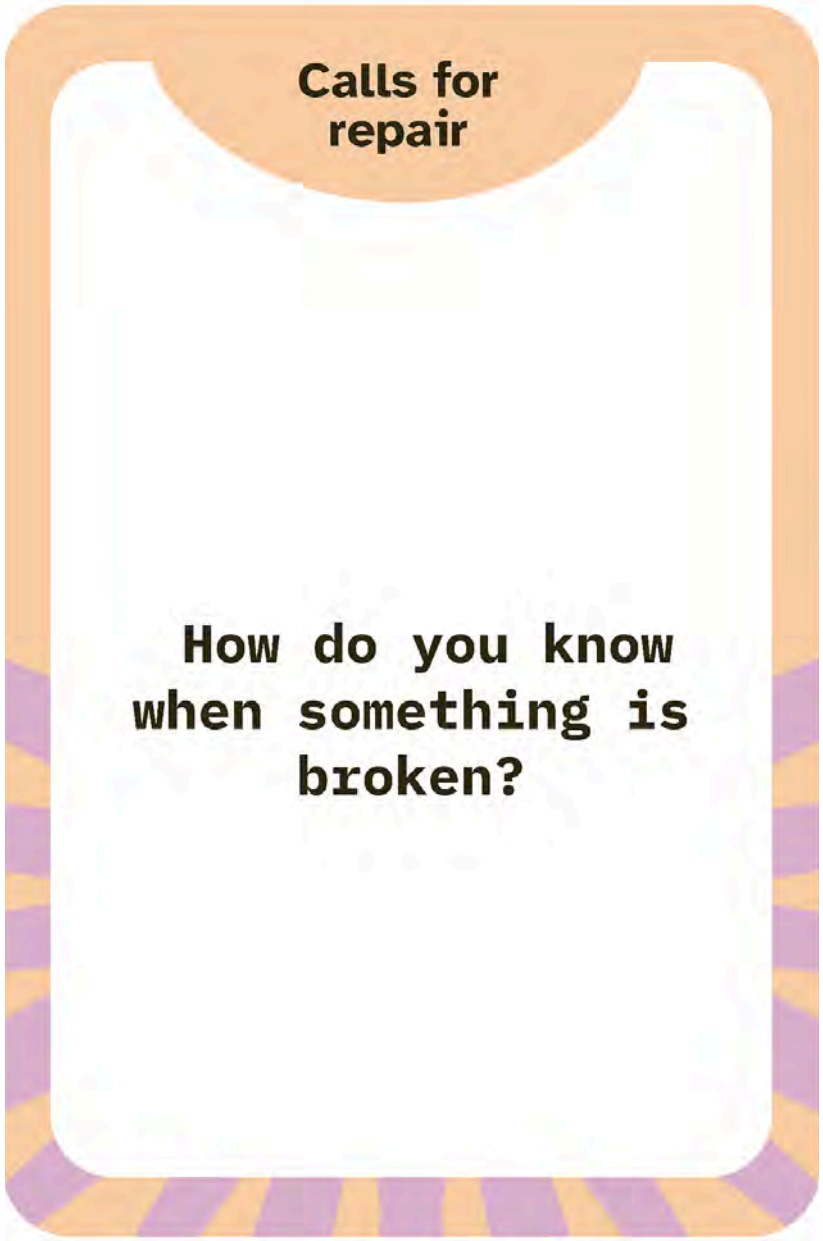
Keywords for the algorithmic age

Our story of change began when the Reimagine ADM project was still in its planning phase. The project leader invited a group of scholars who had successfully explored questions of automated decision-making and algorithmic systems in fields ranging from insurance and health to energy and media to be part of a venture that aimed to develop novel conceptual vocabulary and frameworks to assess algorithmic systems and envision future developments. The aim was to go beyond a conventional project format that starts with data gathering, proceeds to analysis, and concludes with presenting research findings as deliverables. This project would begin from the middle, so to speak, and build on research that we had already conducted.

The first major milestone was the enthusiastic reception of the project proposal by the reviewers. To our great delight, they valued the attempt to challenge and perhaps even change how scholars think and work within research projects. We would build on one another's work rather than starting from scratch. The goal was to create "a metaproject" that aimed to detect shared patterns and logics in order to go beyond individual case studies.

Once we began our collaborative work, we needed to find fruitful ways to think together. While we presented our work to each other, we sought concepts that resonated with our collective efforts. We also employed digital and analogue mapping techniques to discover what they might reveal about the broader logic of automation. In our biweekly meetings, we went back and forth, at times questioning whether the project would generate shared findings. The temptation to revert to individual case studies and new data collection was always present, as this was something that we already knew how to do.

Gradually, after countless hours of meetings, our efforts began to pay off. The project settled onto its track, developing vocabularies for the algorithmic age. We began to see that certain keywords, including repair, friction, threshold, and steering, can unlock the logics of algorithmic systems. These keywords appeared to open up the values embedded in algorithmic systems while also assisting in the examination of human interaction with these systems within the broader societal context.



A preliminary illustration for a REAL card that focuses on repair and brokenness.

A series of trials conducted with students and stakeholders confirmed that combined with the right questions the keywords could promote critical thinking and collaborative knowledge-making. We learned that shared patterns in algorithmic systems, embedded values and their possible future trajectories were much easier to uncover using the keywords we had defined. To make our work accessible to others, we decided to develop a set of cards to facilitate further discussions.

The final product, REAL cards, will be presented at the Chanse conference in Krakow, and the cards will then be available online with instructions via below QR code.

https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.29222054

We hope that the REimage ALgorithmic systems cards will serve as a tangible tool for having meaningful conversations about the complexities of algorithmic systems and their implications for society.