


TLIC PAPER

# Cultivating Corporate Serendipity through GenAI Dialogic Training

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## ABSTRACT

Serendipity is at the heart of innovative ideas and strategic opportunities and is crucial for business success. Cultivating serendipity has become a growing priority for many organizations, typically by redesigning work environments and introducing aligned incentive schemes. These strategies, however, often fail to deliver the expected results. Given this, we propose leveraging GenAI-enabled dialogic training as an alternative. In this new paradigm, GenAI supports individuals in engaging in dialogue that creates psychologically safe space for them to co-evolve with diverse and unknown ideas. By engaging in the dialogic space, individuals develop the skillsets to question assumptions, challenge preconceptions, and critically assess new ideas, all of these are also core for developing a serendipitous mindset that enables individuals and corporates be ready to recognize, embrace, and harness serendipity effectively and sustainably.

## KEYWORDS

serendipity, dialogue, dialogic intelligence, dialogic thinking, AI in corporate education

## 1 INTRODUCTION

For corporate managers, locating innovative ideas and strategic opportunities are enduring strategic priorities [1]. Serendipity, the art of making accidental but valuable discoveries [1], [2], has been recognized as essential in achieving these strategic goals [3]. Many renowned business successes, such as the invention of 3M's Post-it notes and Honda's entry into the U.S. market, have been driven by the power of serendipity [4].

The strategic role of serendipity in business has led many corporations to actively seek ways to foster it. Companies like Pixar and Google have intentionally designed their workspaces to encourage cross-departmental interactions, creating opportunities for unexpected connections [5]. The demand for serendipity has grown even stronger following the COVID-19 pandemic and the rapid rise of

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artificial intelligence (AI), both of which have made the business landscape more dynamic and unpredictable [5]. To stay competitive in this ever-changing landscape, entrepreneurs and organizations need to actively utilize serendipity to adapt to change and seize emerging opportunities [3].

Harnessing serendipity requires both organizational and individual levels of learning and adaptation [6]. Serendipity does not originate from the systematic application of what is already known; instead, it emerges from unexpected contingencies or chance events that occur without a clear cause [7], [8]. Thus, for entrepreneurs and organizations, serendipity is not an automatic or guaranteed benefit. Rather, it is a potential that needs to be unlocked through the ability to recognize, embrace, and act upon unknown unknowns [9].

However, to date, little has been done to equip entrepreneurs and corporate managers with a mindset for serendipity. In this context, this study explores GenAI-enabled dialogic training as a potential alternative and reports on a design based research project undertaken to evaluate its feasibility and pedagogical value.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 defines serendipity and outlines the conditions for cultivating a serendipity-prone corporate environment. Section 3 explains how dialogue can act as an incubator for readiness. Section 4 introduces a GenAI-based programme to foster dialogic space, illustrated with evidence from a design science project. Section 5 concludes with directions for future research.

## 2 SERENDIPITY AND WAYS TO CULTIVATE IT

Serendipity was coined by Horace Walpole in 1754, signifying a valuable discovery triggered by surprise and sagacity [1], [4]. Many industry giants, such as Apple, Tesla, and Honda, owe their business success in part to serendipity [10]. For corporations, serendipity can serve as a valuable source of strategic advantage [11].

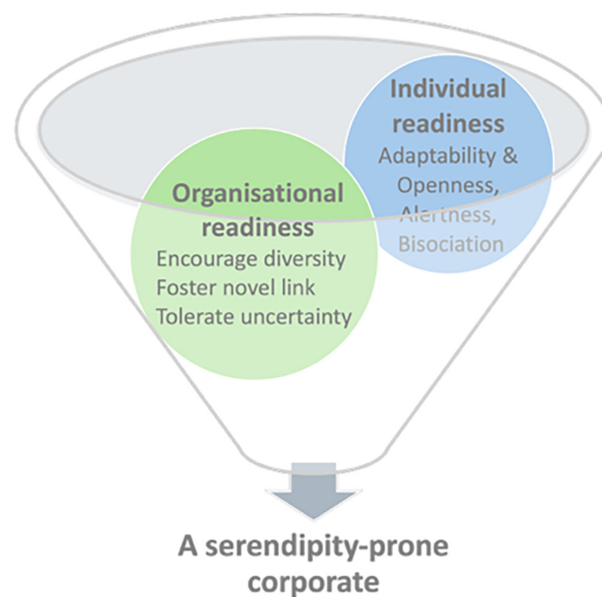
The strategic value of serendipity lies in its power to spark innovation. Rather than following a predefined course, serendipity often appears as a surprising anomaly, challenging established thinking and revealing new possibilities [11]. By embracing serendipity, corporations are prompted to move beyond the boundaries created by knowns, being opening to exploring unknown unknowns to uncover novel and transformative insights [9]. However, as Louis Pasteur famously stated, “chance favors the prepared mind,” and not all corporations are sagacious enough to capitalize on the innovative potential and strategic value of serendipity [12], [13]. As not all corporates are ready to adapt, redirect their efforts, and take proactive steps when faced with anomalies that may initially seem disruptive [14]. Without adaptability, valuable opportunities can be lost, especially in the context of today’s fast-evolving social and organizational contexts [15].

Seizing an accidental opportunity does not necessarily mean that a corporation has bumped into serendipity. To harness serendipity, corporations need to be alert in recognizing accidental happenings within their business environments [6]. Without this alertness, they risk missing critical shifts and remain constrained by routine thinking. In practice, alertness is closely tied to corporations’ familiarity with the business environment [15]. The better they understand and engage with their surroundings, the more effectively they can identify anomalies that signal new opportunities and respond proactively to unexpected developments [16].

Skills in bisociation are also essential to corporate sagacity in harnessing serendipity. Bisociation, the ability to link seemingly unrelated ideas, concepts,

or experiences [4], plays a key role in connecting the unknown with the known, allowing corporations to unlock the value of anomalies [17]. However, due to cognitive limitations, a single corporation's bisociation efforts may not capture all the potentials. This is where network-based bisociation becomes vital. Strong professional networks help broaden access to diverse expertise and perspectives [11], enabling corporations to uncover hidden connections in transforming anomalies into innovative ideas [3].

Given the above, serendipity in business is not merely a fortunate coincidence but a capability that needs to be intentionally prepared for and cultivated at both organizational and individual levels (see Figure 1).



**Fig. 1.** Condition for a serendipity-prone corporate

Among the two groups of conditions for corporate-level serendipity, individual readiness constitutes the central foundation. Erdelez's research demonstrates that super-encounterers, i.e. those most prone to serendipity, are distinguished chiefly by their mindset rather than by external circumstances [18]. Yet strategies for cultivating individual readiness remain underdeveloped. Most corporate-level initiatives focus primarily on preparing the organizational readiness, often through measures such as open workspaces [19] or the incentivization of side projects [20]. Because of this misplaced focus, corporate initiatives to foster serendipity have largely failed. The paradox of Google's 20% Time initiative exemplifies the limitations of these organization-focused strategies [21]. Initially, this strategy was designed to encourage serendipitous innovation by allowing employees to dedicate part of their work hours to independent projects. However, in practice, they found the opposite. Instead of fostering creativity, because managers now expected the full work to be done in 80% of time, this initiative reinforced managerial control and added to workload pressures. Employees' creative freedom was restricted, ultimately stifling serendipity.

In response, new strategies are needed to foreground individual readiness. We propose dialogue as the central paradigm to achieve so and examine in more detail the role of dialogue in cultivating serendipity in the next section.

### 3 DIALOGUE: AN INCUBATOR FOR INDIVIDUAL READINESS FOR SERENDIPITY

Dialogue can be a powerful method for cultivating the individual readiness for serendipity, yet it is often overlooked. Through dialogue, individuals can enter spaces where diverse perspectives interact without premature judgement, gradually cultivating the sagacity needed to recognize and act on unexpected opportunities [22].

Dialogue is a discursive relationship that engages both the heart and the mind [23]. It is forward looking, aiming to uncover more possibilities and potential problems rather than close them down [24]. In dialogue, differences are acknowledged and explored rather than resolved for the sake of consistency [24], allowing participants to rethink their perspectives and expand their understandings [23]. By fostering this dynamic exchange, dialogue dissolves rigid boundaries that confine identities and ways of thinking [25], opening a shared space for the free flow of heterogeneous ideas [26].

In the dialogic space, a conceptual and social space where multiple voices interact creatively [22], [27], surprising moments that trigger serendipity can emerge freely [3]. Compared with other contexts, the surprises afforded in dialogic space are often richer and more transformative. As a driver of human thinking and development [23], dialogue connects across time and space, from ancient Greek philosophers to contemporary thinkers [22], enabling the discovery of unknown unknowns beyond immediate experience. Its forward-looking nature also allows for a continuous widening and deepening of novel ideas, thereby nurturing the potential for ongoing innovation and resilience [23], [28].

By engaging with and exploring the dialogic space, individuals are supported in undergoing a process that gradually equips them with a mindset ready for serendipity. More specifically, entering the dialogic space opens opportunities for individuals to engage in mutual resonance with difference and uncertainty [29]. Without mutual resonance, dialogue risks becoming either monologic, i.e. dominated by a single viewpoint, or superficial, wherein ideas fail to connect meaningfully [26]. Thus, to engage in dialogue and sustain the dialogic space, individuals must be willing to question their existing understandings and actively examine new ideas [23]. This continuous process of moving beyond and augmenting cognitive boundaries is precisely what fosters **open-mindedness**: the willingness to set aside preconceived notions and embrace new and even opposing beliefs [30].

As ideas resonate, individuals widen the scope of engagement in the dialogic space, encountering a greater range of intellectual voices, perspectives, and experiences, which increases the likelihood of bumping into unforeseen perspectives and uncertainty [23], [31]. To continue participating in this widened space, individuals need and will be supported to cultivate **adaptability**, namely, the ability to remain resilient and flexible in response to uncertainty and change [32], [33]. Dialogue does not seek to reach a predetermined destination but rather to uncover new possibilities [24], even if that means encountering uncertainty dilemmas along the way [23]. By directly engaging with uncertainty, individuals can develop a deeper appreciation of the value of risk-taking [23]. This, in turn, helps to strengthen their resilience in unpredictable situations. In addition to sustaining meaningful dialogic relationships in uncertain contexts, individuals are required to move beyond rigid thinking, embrace evolving perspectives, and seek support from the context in the moment [22]. This ongoing practice of thinking, learning, and responding in

the moment fosters and strengthens individuals' flexibility and ability to switch cognitive strategies to face new and unexpected conditions [34].

As individuals adapt and approach the perspectives of others, they are gradually guided to think more critically and reflectively about the reasoning underlying their own viewpoints as well as those of others [23], [27], namely, becoming more **alert** to anomalies [6], [14]. This reflective process not only deepens individuals' understanding of context but also strengthens their joint contributions to dialogue. In doing so, it lays the foundation for **bisociation**, i.e. the ability to connect previously unrelated information, ideas, and events [3].

Building on the above discussion, we argue that dialogue is a powerful incubator for serendipity, as it provides a psychologically safe space in which individuals can gradually practice engaging with diverse perspectives and uncertainty, thereby cultivating the readiness required to embrace serendipity (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Dialogue as a method for training individual readiness for serendipity

Stages for Engaging in Dialogic Space	Serendipity Readiness Cultivated
<i>Opening</i> Mutual resonance with difference and uncertainty	<i>Openness</i> Readiness to embracing new and opposing beliefs
<i>Widening</i> Remaining resilient and flexible in responding to diverse voices	<i>Adaptability</i> Readiness to be flexibly in uncertainty
<i>Deepening</i> Critically reflecting to anomalies to build shared understanding	<i>Alertness</i> Readiness to locate opportunities from the unknown
<i>Expanding</i> Collective reasoning to create infinite possibilities	<i>Bisociation</i> Readiness to connecting disparate for unforeseen values

#### 4 CULTIVATING DIALOGIC SPACES AT CORPORATES: INSIGHTS FROM A DESIGN BASED RESEARCH PROJECT

To afford a corporate-level dialogic space that prepares individual readiness for serendipity, the potential of GenAI should be harnessed for two main reasons: (1) First, GenAI can provide the demanding conditions required for dialogue at scale, which human beings alone can hardly achieve. Built on foundational models, GenAI demonstrates a high degree of autonomy, with the capacity to interpret meaning in parallel, manage complexity, and adapt to real-world scenarios [35]. These capacities, in turn, enable GenAI sustain fluid, evolving exchanges and help restore the diverse, dynamic flow characteristic of dialogue. (2) Second, GenAI can afford a psychologically safe communicative context that is difficult for human facilitators within corporations to achieve. Dialogic space is grounded in a mutually resonant setting. Yet most corporations are hierarchical, with vertical information flows and power asymmetries that inhibit the formation of such conditions [36]. GenAI, often perceived as more neutral and less judgmental than human [37], can mitigate these barriers, enabling freer discussion to flourish and the dialogic space to expand.

Yet, cultivating GenAI-enabled dialogic space in corporates is not straightforward; two critical challenges need to be addressed: (1) First, the social

sycophancy of GenAI, that is, GenAI can often accommodate users' preferences rather than constructively challenging them [38]. If social sycophancy continues, GenAI risks reinforcing echo chambers and directing individuals into monologism rather than into dialogue. (2) Second, the difficulty of restoring complex corporate realities within AI simulations. Both dialogue and serendipity are inherently contextual and situational phenomena. Without realistic and contextually grounded simulations, training risks becoming overly abstract, ineffective, and of limited practical value. To address these two challenges, a design based research project was jointly undertaken by [University Anonymized] and [Company Anonymized].

#### 4.1 Design concept and process

As the first attempt to explore GenAI-enabled corporate-level dialogic training for serendipity, the project initially focused on a specific corporate reality, namely the difficult conversations that occur during performance reviews. This contextual choice was guided by three reasons: (1) first, attempting to cover all corporate routines at once would risk excessive abstraction, especially given the lack of precedents; (2) second, enabling GenAI to act as a partner in difficult conversations required the design of challenging personas, which in turn compelled the project team to develop strategies to mitigate the social sycophancy of GenAI (i.e. challenge one); and (3) third, performance review conversations are widely recognized as common whirlwind moments in corporate life [39], focusing on them ensured that the designed scenarios were highly relevant to organizational realities (i.e. challenge two).

Prompt engineering was adopted as the central design method, given its benefits of enabling quick iteration, supporting flexible adaptation to context, and fostering continuous improvement through natural-language feedback [40]. Three groups of datasets were employed to inform the design of the prompts:

1. Dialogic principles [22], [23], [24] and heuristics for dealing with workplace conversations [39], [41]. These informed the development of prompts that enabled the AI to recognize dialogic principles and workplace culture, allowing it to act as a dialogic partner that is attuned to workplace contexts.
2. Datasets about challenging workplace conversations, systematically collected from open-source community platforms such as GitHub and Hugging Face. These datasets informed the design of realistic scenarios for workplace conversations and the creation of authentic personas for the AI partner.
3. Insights from academic literature and professional training manuals, which ensured that the prompts structure were pedagogically sound and theoretically grounded.

Also, to make interaction with the AI dialogic partner more engaging, several human-likeness features were incorporated into the UI/UX design (see Figure 2), including: (1) an avatar and personalized name to strengthen the AI partner's social presence; (2) behavioral indicators (e.g., "...") to signal that the AI partner is 'thinking' during the interaction; and (3) an interface modelled on common messaging applications to recreate conversational scenarios similar to workplace interactions.

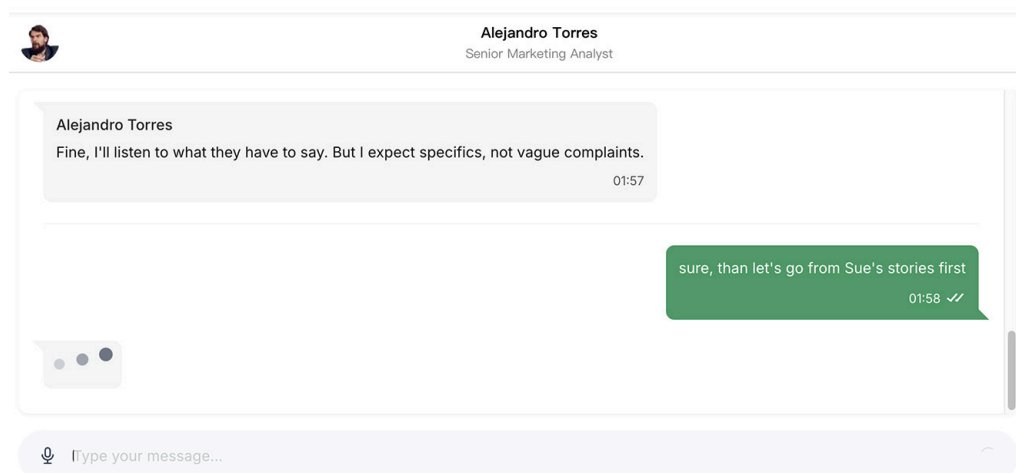


Fig. 2. Overview design of the UI/UX for the first prototype

## 4.2 User testing and findings

Based on the design ideas outlined in Section 4.1, an initial prototype was developed and tested with 20 participants. The participants comprised 13 professionals and 7 students, with a gender distribution of 12 females and 7 males, providing a balanced representation that strengthens the validity of the findings.

The test was conducted from late June to mid-July 2025. Each participant engaged freely in an average 20-minute interaction with the AI partner, with interaction histories recorded in the system backend. Following the interaction, participants took part in a 30-minute debriefing session consisting of a semi-structured interview and a predefined survey with four aims: (1) to assess whether the AI partner had overcome social sycophancy in acting as a dialogue partner; (2) to evaluate the realism and persuasiveness of the designed corporate scenarios; (3) to reflect on what they had learned from the role-play, thereby examining whether the design enabled dialogue and the potential for serendipitous mindset; and (4) to collect suggestions in refining the design.

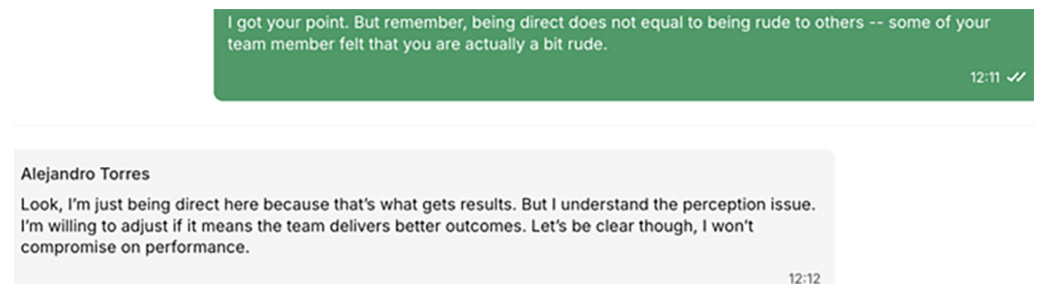
The resulting data, consisting of interaction records and participant feedback, were analyzed using thematic analysis supported by descriptive statistics. The analysis was guided by three questions: (1) Was the AI partner effectively designed to function as a dialogic partner (i.e. first design challenge)? (2) Did the scenarios capture the complexity and realism of real-life interactions (i.e. second design challenge)? and (3) Did the insights participants derived from the interaction contribute to enhance individual readiness for serendipity? The findings in response to these questions are presented below:

To address the first challenge regarding the risk of social sycophancy in the AI partner, participants reported that although the system was built on a GPT model typically configured to be friendly and helpful, it had been prompt-engineered to emulate difficult personalities commonly encountered in high-pressure and uncertain workplace contexts. As one experienced participant noted:

*“This person is awful.”* (P9).

To further substantiate that the AI partner did not exhibit social sycophancy, screenshots of interaction histories are presented in Figure 3. These illustrate

how the AI partner, named Alejandro, was able to challenge rather than simply accommodate participants during the interaction process.



**Fig. 3.** Participants-AI interaction history

To address the second challenge about providing a realistic dialogic space that reflects workplace dynamics, the large majority of the participants gave feedback indicating that the design was successful in this regard, as evident in P14 and P20's comment:

*"I can say that this situation definitely happened in my work" (P14).*  
*"It's a realistic situation; every new manager definitely sees and experiences it in their work" (P20).*

The realism of the scenarios led several participants to confirm that interacting with the AI partner could generate insightful reflections on workplace practice, as shown in the following excerpts:

*"... as effective as a stress simulation with a human coach on soft skills in an MBA class" (P17).*  
*"This would have excellent training application for new HR professionals and new or existing line managers" (P19).*

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that, with the applied design strategies, GenAI moved beyond social sycophancy and was able to act as a challenging partner familiar with workplace culture. Equipped with these capabilities, the AI partner afforded role-play scenarios that recreated the conditions of dialogic space in organizational contexts. Building on this foundation, we then examined whether interactions within such space could foster dialogic thinking and prepare individuals for serendipity.

Feedback from participants showed that the dialogic space, although constrained by the goal of delivering a pre-defined evaluation to the AI partner, still generated sudden and surprising moments that created opportunities for serendipity to emerge, as illustrated by the remarks of P1 and P8:

*"This AI bot really never followed the usual pattern; sometimes it suddenly shifted direction" (P1).*  
*"I think Alejandro can sometimes go off track" (P8).*

Table 2 provides examples of such moments and demonstrates that, by engaging with these unexpected encounters, participants were able to progressively cultivate their readiness for serendipity.

**Table 2.** Example of unexpected interaction that fosters serendipitous readiness

<b>Interaction History</b>	<p><i>AI partner:</i> I understand the need for this conversation, though I hope we keep it practical. What exactly do you want me to change about how I interact in meetings? Tell me, I'll follow you.</p> <p><i>Participants:</i> I've noticed that a few people in team are taking part less and sounding more hesitant than they used to do and I'm worried we are losing their skills and knowledge in the meetings. In the next meetings, perhaps you can let the team have more voices.</p> <p><i>AI partner:</i> I get the point you're making. But frankly, if people are hesitant, maybe it's because they aren't prepared or don't have the data to back their points. Still, I will follow my style but to be more mindful of how I push the team.</p> <p><i>Participants:</i> I appreciate that – and you may be right – it would be good to think about how to draw people out so they feel motivated to do the detailed and thoughtful prep. Do you have any thoughts on that as a strategy or an alternative perhaps?</p> <p><i>AI partner:</i> Look, I'm not against pushing the team, but I'm not about to lower the bar. If drawing people out means spending more time on fluff instead of facts, that's a waste. Maybe we can set clearer expectations upfront and hold everyone accountable. That way, they know they have to come prepared or face the consequences.</p> <p><i>Participants:</i> Totally agree with you – I'm hoping that by perhaps allocating responsibility for different aspects of for example data or comms coverage, we actually have more succinct meetings where everyone is contributing and feeling as if they are making a difference and are respected for that.</p> <p><i>AI partner:</i> Assigning clear responsibilities could help cut down on the noise and keep meetings efficient. As long as everyone knows their role and delivers, I'm on board with that.</p>
<b>Unexpected moment (s)</b>	<p>At the beginning of this round of conversation, the AI partner agreed to follow the participants' suggestions and adjust its behavior. However, when participants subsequently offered their suggestions, the AI partner reversed its stance, began to question the participants, and refused to follow their input.</p>
<b>Serendipitous readiness prepared</b>	<p>Two forms of individual readiness for serendipity were exercised in dealing with this unexpected moment: (1) Adaptability and Openness. When the AI partner suddenly changed its stance, the participants did not resist; instead, they followed its line of reasoning, which kept the exchange productive and ensured that the AI partner remained engaged in the dialogue. (2) Bisociation. When the AI partner raised the issue of accountability, the participants immediately connected it to their earlier point about ensuring that everyone had an opportunity to speak during meetings, and in doing so persuaded the AI partner to further consider and support their proposal.</p>

Participants' responses to the question "What have you learned from the role-play?" further demonstrated that interacting with the designed AI partner fostered readiness for serendipity. For instance, P1 highlighted the importance of "appreciating difference" and P4 emphasized "patience and openness", both pointing to the development of openness and adaptability. While P19 reported the practice of "linking different ideas to a coherent logic", pointing to the development of bisociation.

## 5 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PLAN

In today's rapidly evolving corporate landscape, serendipity is increasingly vital for innovation and success. To harness its value, corporations must prepare employees and managers to recognize and act on unexpected opportunities. GenAI-enabled dialogic training can foster such individual readiness for serendipity, as evident by findings from an ongoing design science project. Through prompt engineering informed by dialogic theories, conversational heuristics, and real-life datasets, GenAI can afford a dialogic space where individuals can learn to co-evolve with diverse ideas in a psychologically safe way, in turn, gradually cultivating openness, adaptability, alertness, and bisociation, i.e. qualities essential for recognizing and harnessing serendipity in practice.

To further strengthen the design and impact of GenAI-enabled dialogic training on corporate-level serendipity, the following steps will be taken in the future.

First, a new AI mentor will be introduced to provide systematic guidance and support structured reflection on participants' exchanges with the AI partner to better prepare them for serendipitous readiness. Second, scenario coverage will be expanded to include a broader range of corporate routines, enhancing the training's relevance and applicability across diverse organizational contexts. Finally, longitudinal studies will be undertaken with larger and more heterogeneous user groups to evaluate the long-term impact of the training, in turn, informing further refinements to the training programme.

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