Stefanie Keto: Welcome to SRAI's Shop Talk, a monthly podcast spotlighting the people, practices and evolving landscape of research administration and the community that works collectively to support it. Whether you are new to the field or a seasoned pro, each episode features insights from experts across institutions, big and small, working in pre-award and post-award compliance, communication, and everything in between. I'm Stefanie Keto, based at the Office of Post-award Financial Services at North Carolina State University. This season, we're exploring the theme, Bridge Builders, creating unity across roles, generations, and technologies.

Welcome to today's episode of Shop Talk. Joining me today is a diverse group of individuals who have a broad range of experience with developing AI tools that assist with the day-to-day aspects of our jobs and research administration. In this episode, we'll talk about the challenges from development to implementation and the impacts of their use across higher ed institutions.

We go beyond the surface-level discussion on covering the deeper potential that artificial intelligence can provide for us. Meanwhile, preserving that vital human element that is core to our daily work. Come with me as we explore all the hard work our guests have contributed to our field.

Hello everybody. Welcome to today's episode of Shop Talk. We have a very full house today with everybody joining us for this AI's emerging roles in research administration conversation. So first off, to kick everything off, can each one of you introduce yourselves and provide brief background of what you're doing and where you work?

Tomer du Sautoy: Pleasure to be here as well. My name is Tomer du Sautoy. I'm one of the co-founders and the CEO of Atom Grants. My personal background is in research. I studied physics in the UK, transitioned out of academia after I got my masters and went into the tech world. I spent a couple years as a founding engineer for a startup and then kind of came full circle back to building research tools, sorry, AI tools to support the research ecosystem, and have been working on Atom grants for the last couple of years. We're based out of New York. We're supporting around 40 to 50 universities across the US including NYU, Langone, Auburn, DHHA, Memphis to name a few. And yeah, happy to be here.

Stefanie Keto: Thank you.

Lisa Wilson: Hey, I'll jump in next. Lisa Wilson. First, thanks for having me. I am genuinely excited to be a part of this conversation, and to join my colleagues who are doing what I think is very important work in advancing AI and research administration. As far as my background, I have a BS in physics and a master's from Kellogg Northwestern University. And I have been in research administration for longer than I care to admit. I have the pleasure of serving as

the assistant vice president for strategic optimization and training within Emory's Office of Research Administration.

Our team works at the intersection of operational improvement of workforce development. We're responsible for business continuity across our distributed or decentralized research enterprise. And most recently, and since OpenAI launched Chat GPT in 2022, we've been working on applying AI across research administration operations. We basically have five AI projects going on right now. One Gen AI, one Agentic AI. We're working on Copilot adoption across our 600 research administrators. We provide customized prompt literacy training. So we're trying to create sort of an ecosystem or what I call an AI system of intelligence within the Office of Research Administration. And we do that, yeah, we just do that to translate organizational strategy and institutional priorities into some type of sustainable operational solutions.

Stefanie Keto: I like the way that you have it all categorized there.

Lisa Wilson: Yeah, I've been working on that.

Stefanie Keto: All right.

Sarah Martonick: I'm Sarah Martonick, I'm the director of sponsored programs at the University of Idaho, Go Vandals. I'm also the principal investigator for a National Science Foundation granted project. The formal title is Crossing the Innovation Valley of Death, Democratizing Data and Artificial Intelligence for Research Administration. Very long title, we call it AI4RA. My role on the project is to help reduce burden for research administrators and faculty, while helping innovative research reach our national community. And we are working on integrating artificial intelligence and a unified data model into our enterprise processes. And our goal is to make that open source so that other entities and schools can also benefit from that, which we understand will translate to improving our national research enterprise. And I do that with a large team of people. My expertise is most certainly not artificial intelligence or data management, and Dr. Barrie Robinson is one of those very important people.

Barrie Robinson: Hey, that's me. Hey everyone, my name is Barrie Robinson. I'm the director of our Institute for Interdisciplinary Data Sciences here at University of Idaho, and we collaborate very closely with Sarah and her team. So in my institute, I have a whole bunch of AI and computer science nerds that do a lot of the development and data science work for our project. And myself, I'm actually a biology professor as well, and I'm the outlier here in that I'm actually on the PI side of things in terms of being a researcher. And so I'm reasonably new to the amazing and horrifying world of research administration.

Stefanie Keto: It's not horrifying.

Barrie Robinson: It's horrifying in terms of its complexity and the stakes and all of those kinds of things. It was real eye-opener for me to learn all of the things that all of you have to do on a daily basis.

Stefanie Keto: Yeah.

Lisa Wilson: Thank you. Appreciate that.

Stefanie Keto: Well, thank you all for coming and joining us today for this conversation. I'm really looking forward to hearing everything that you'll have to say, all the projects you're working on and everything like that. I am a big supporter of AI. I use it quite frequently, so I'm very curious to hear what is on the forefront for all of y'all. So Barrie and Sarah, you are working on this AI4RA project. What was the main contributing factor that prompted the idea for this project?

Sarah Martonick: In one word, frustration. This started with me going to a committee meeting. Barrie and I were appointed to a committee at the university. I walked into this in-person meeting after just an awful day of trying to support my team, more regulations, more burden, researchers not being able to keep up, trying to figure out how we balance that administrative burden while also getting things done within deadlines in a timely manner. And most importantly compliantly, I walked into this room, plopped down next to Barrie, and he looked over and said, "Why so grumpy today?" And I said, "I just am super frustrated because my team works so very hard, and we just cannot get our heads above water. And I've tried everything that I know how to do. We've integrated APIs and efficiencies, we've got great data programs, and I just don't know what else to do."

And he very kindly said, "How about we set aside some time and you show me where these frustrations are coming from, and let's see if my institute can help you?" And that's where we started. And from there, Barrie cried during our meetings where I showed him our processes, and he began to help us. And during that time, a colleague in our research faculty development office walked over to my office and plopped the granted proposal opportunity on my desk and said, "Hey, I heard about what you're trying to do. You should go for this."

And I brought it to Barrie and Dr. Luke Sheneman, and they said, "Yeah, as long as you agree to be PI."

Stefanie Keto: Sucker.

Sarah Martonick: So I said, "Buckle up," and off we went.

Stefanie Keto: Oh, they didn't want to take the responsibility of being PI?

Sarah Martonick: Well, they are already PI on so many projects. And honestly, that perspective of being a PI for an administrator, that's huge. I thought I knew I did not know, hadn't even scratched the surface. So that is a huge benefit for me in my role is just that perspective and that journey as well.

Stefanie Keto: It's kind of interesting that both of y'all have basically flipped roles for this project.

Sarah Martonick: Yeah.

Stefanie Keto: Yeah.

Barrie Robinson: That's very true.

Stefanie Keto: Yeah, very interesting.

Barrie Robinson: As Sarah said, I don't have much to add to what she said, but I will say that that perspective for her and for me has been incredibly important.

Stefanie Keto: It could maybe snowball into another proposal.

Barrie Robinson: No, calm down.

Stefanie Keto: You never know.

Barrie Robinson: Let's transition over to Lisa and ask her about ...

Stefanie Keto: Well one more question for y'all before we step away, but what would you say would be one of the constraints that you've had in your project or so far?

Sarah Martonick: Just one, huh?

Barrie Robinson: Yeah. Wow.

Sarah Martonick: Yeah. Barrie, what do you think?

Barrie Robinson: A constraint that we're experiencing or that we're trying to address?

Stefanie Keto: You choose.

Barrie Robinson: I mean, I'm going to go, I'll just jump in and say what we're experiencing is, remember she titled the project title was Crossing the Innovation Valley of Death. That transition from the first 80% of, "Whoa, look what AI can do," to the final 20% of, "Hey, here's a hardened secure ..." And Tomer and Lisa, I'm sure will be able to comment on this if they wanted to as well, "Here's a secure,

reliable, measurably accurate thing that users want to use." That's hard work. That's a constraint. And all of us have to slug through it.

Stefanie Keto: Mm-hmm. So Lisa, Tomer, do you have anything to add on that?

Lisa Wilson: Oh, yeah!

So, two come immediately to mind, and one of them is institutional readiness, or even just for our department. So ours is not at the institutional level. It is within the Office of Research Administration. Even the readiness, are we ready to do, this was one of major constraints. And I spent a lot of time having conversations with lots of people, trying to get them to understand the benefits and the value that this could bring to the organization. And then there's the adoption thing, right? Getting everybody on board to use it.

The other one is institutional investment. So positioning your projects in such a way that after you share how valuable this can be, how it might reduce costs, how it might increase productivity, you have lots of these conversations, the constraint is what is it going to cost? And so for us trying to support 600 research administrators, give them access to a knowledge bot, which is our first solution, the cost of tokens, the price of scaling. There's a phrase out there that we joke about saying POCs are in POC purgatory, right? You just can't get out of it. So those two things, institutional readiness and institutional investment, those have been my hills to climb.

Tomer du Sautoy: I think there's also an interesting side of this, which is, you two spoke about adoption amongst research administrators, but there also needs to be adoption acceptance amongst faculty as well, right? Because for this to be a useful tool for research administrators, faculty also have to be engaging with it. And often I think we've ran a couple of design partnerships now with various universities across the US and research administrators are, they know the challenges and they want the AI to help them, but sometimes faculty, they have their own workflows. They don't want to engage with any new process that a research administrator throws at them. So for us, it's really about how do we build stuff to actually engage faculty such that it helps research administration, right? So yeah, just an interesting point.

Barrie Robinson: Are you saying faculty can be difficult sometimes?

Tomer du Sautoy: Not at all. Not at all.

Barrie Robinson: I feel personally attacked. No, I totally agree Tomer and Lisa, absolutely. That is a real thing.

Stefanie Keto: Well, it goes back to that bell curve of acceptance of change. So you're going to have the people that are the early adapters to those that are the never want to do it. Well, Lisa, you're working on a pretty interesting project with award closeout and AI as well, right?

Lisa Wilson: Mm-hmm.

Stefanie Keto: So what made that project the number one for you? Why did you decide to go with that?

Lisa Wilson: So let me first share that that's our second-

Stefanie Keto: Oh, okay.

Lisa Wilson: ... AI project. It's a multi-agent solution. We had scaling a single agent solution, our knowledge bot. So the knowledge bot is very simple. It is designed just for research administrators, not faculty. It allows our research to just ask the bot questions, how-to questions, how do I do this, how do I adapt, what is this policy, et cetera? And that's scaling and that's working great. But then Agentic AI came out, and as we all know, Gen AI is different from Agentic AI. And we got really curious about bots performing tasks for research administrators. And so when we decided to do this or to try this and see and build a proof of concept. Award closeout was a very deliberate choice. It was also a very top down choice. Primarily because award closeout was one of our highest priority pain points. You always want to start with your pain points.

You want to solve a problem, not just create a tool for the benefit of creating a tool, an AI tool. So a work closeout is bounded, it's complex. It's at the crossroads of institutional risk. It requires a lot of regulatory compliance. Everybody's hands are in it, right? It's very cross-functional, uses lots of our internal systems and applications. So very complex projects. So it was a perfect fit for multi-agent solution. And we were hoping that we could do this in a very controlled way. So originally the idea was to do a proof of concept, because people didn't really understand the difference between Gen AI and Agentic AI, right? No one had a lot of time to understand that there are software bots that can run around and perform tasks for you without being prompted. They're autonomous, they can make decisions. So we had to spend a lot of time doing that.

We decided to create a proof of concept, and then we said, "Well, no, let's not do another PFC. Let's do something that's production ready." So that's why we chose award closeout because we didn't want to do just anything exploratory. We wanted something that could be sustainable and significant. And at the same time, we were also continuing our other use case development workshops, which is a part of our workflow. What other use cases can we come

up with? So we continued that. We also looked back on our RPA, our robotic process automation use cases to surface other use cases. But again, this one rose to the top primarily because it has such an impact on the university if you don't close awards out on time and impact offices. So that's why we chose award closeout.

And we're still in the design phase. We're still teaching people what these software robots do. We're still having conversations about, we're keeping humans in the loop. It's not going to decisions without you. We are identifying the different bots, the different agents that can run around and deciding what tasks they can perform all in an effort to shorten the time it takes to close out awards, and to reduce the burden on research administrators in gathering that information and reconciling invoices and expenses, and just helping them get their job done more efficiently, more effectively.

Stefanie Keto: I'll be curious to see how those chatbots do 'cause I work in audits, so I'll be curious to see how they handle when audits come around. Follow up podcast for that.

So Tomer, you're now working on the other side for the systems for everybody. So when you're looking at that and how it impacts the institutions, what can AI realistically do for research administration today, and what can it not do? What are our realities?

Tomer du Sautoy: No, it's a great question and something that we're also, at Atom always trying to answer ourselves 'cause frankly, AI is changing every two weeks. If you stop paying attention, you're suddenly out of the loop. I think it's interesting, Lisa started kind of from the closeout because we approached it from, let's start at the beginning of the grant life cycle. So we started building tools for research and proposal development, and our plan is to expand from there. So Atom, what we've built is essentially a grant search engine, but we're helping automate a lot of that work, that manual painstaking work that research development teams do in building out research directories. We automatically kind of generate those profiles and then we match make. So AI is really good at extracting information from stuff, pulling internet information, scraping, building those profiles. And then actually it's really good at understanding the intent and meaning behind language. That's what LLMs are, right? It's basically we've developed a computing system that can understand meaning behind language now, and some people call it a stochastic parrot, but I think actually there is an element to it that is ...

Obviously we're still a little far away from AGI, but when you're speaking to it really feels like it understands you. And so that combination of understanding the intent behind what you're looking to do, the ability to extract information from RFPs, it's really good at connecting the dots. That's where we started. We started in research development grant search, pushing funding opportunities

out to faculty, and then we're slowly expanding from there. So connecting faculty with other faculty members. So we've got these rich profiles, we can help you find collaborators. I think the AI4RA team worked on something similar as well, right? You had a-

Sarah Martonick: We did.

Barrie Robinson: But it's only internal to us, whereas you guys are cultivating a really rich portfolio, national, international portfolio of collaborators.

Tomer du Sautoy: Exactly. That's the goal really, is to help you find international collaborators that you can co-apply to grants with and connecting the dots between where are you lacking in your portfolios, and where can you fill the gaps with the collaborator.

And then the next stage really is looking more at proposal development. And this is the interesting place because I think this is where AI can fall down quite a lot at the moment. And also there are agency requirements to not or disclose when you use AI and proposal development or to not use it at all. I think that NIH have a very strict rule now in place, but you can only submit up to three or so. I can't remember the exact number. Because of a case of where a researcher submitted, I think it was over 30 different applications in the same cycle, and it was clear they were using AI.

So, from our perspective, we don't think AI is quite there yet in terms of: it's going to write proposals for you. And I don't think we ever want it to really get to that place. Faculty still need to develop their own narrative, their own ideas. But the things that it can do quite well at the moment, it's the data extraction. So what we're developing is cheat sheets for putting proposals together. So instead of having to read through 20 page PDFs or the PAP-G for the NSF and understand the requirements, we can condense that into easy to use kind of web page. Actually, I mentioned getting faculty to use new stuff. We've made it printable because they don't want to log into a new system so they can print it off and they can stick it up on their wall.

Barrie Robinson: That's so true. It's so true.

Stefanie Keto: They know where every single piece of paper is when they need it.

Tomer du Sautoy: Exactly.

Sarah Martonick: …Do they?

Tomer du Sautoy: Exactly. So I think AI, it is really good at information synthesis, but for generating new ideas, I think that's the important human aspect. I'm hopeful that it will

take out all of the boring painstaking work and let us just do the creative stuff. That's I think really the power of AI.

Stefanie Keto: Until it catches up with us on that. No, I'm just kidding.

Tomer du Sautoy: Yeah. Well, when we get to AGI, who knows? We'll be in another ...

Stefanie Keto: Yeah, it'll be over.

Tomer du Sautoy: Let's not think about that.

Stefanie Keto: So you bring up the human element of it. Would each of y'all be able to walk through, I know we briefly touched on all your projects, but if I was a single user coming into whatever it is that you're creating, right?

Tomer du Sautoy: Yep.

Stefanie Keto: What am I doing? Where am I going? What information is kind of being done by the AI? What am I doing and are there approvals? Who's doing what and where throughout this?

Tomer du Sautoy: So for us, the journey actually starts with the research development team. I was talking about the challenges with faculty adoption. What we realized is that faculty don't want to come in and set up their own profiles or interface with a new platform. So we want to make it as easy as possible for them to start getting value out of our platform. I.E. finding more funding opportunities, applying to more proposals. And so what we do is we empower the research development teams to basically push funding opportunities out. So we work closely with the director of research development and whatever it is, we have an onboarding process. They upload a CSV of all of their faculty. All we need is a name, an email address, and their position and title. And with that, our AI basically goes off and it will pull in information from things like publications previously awarded grants directories, and it will generate this directory of all of your researchers and their interests.

And then off the back of that, we basically plug this into our search engine, which is a kind of hybrid model of keywords and semantic search, which basically just lets you kind of put any piece of natural language in. So it's like you can put an abstract from a paper or whatever it is. And what we'll do is, we'll, on a weekly basis, we'll match make those funding opportunities that we found with the researchers, and then we'll help the research development team proactively push funding opportunities out to faculty. The idea being is that faculty members don't even have to lift a single finger really to begin getting value out of the platform. And because of that, we see quite high rates of engagement with our platform. We did a case study with the HHA recently. They

saw in the first three months, three times more engagement than they had with their previous system. And I think the whole idea here is that make it as easy for the faculty to see the value as possible and they will engage.

So yeah, it's all done through the research development and then it's automated from there. So once you've turned it on, faculty start interacting, their profiles get more fleshed out with the interactions, the data we collect, and then we can make more and more accurate predictions to the things that they're going to be interested in.

Stefanie Keto: Snowballing metrics. I love it.

Barrie Robinson: I just want to jump in and say that Sarah and I actually met with Tomer and one of his colleagues quite a while ago, and he, in real time, used my PI information and generated a summary of who I was and what I was up to. And it was very cool. And that was quite a while ago. I'm sure it's even more amazing now.

Tomer du Sautoy: Yeah, it's always a fun use case to do a PI live right in Senna. Get that feedback from it.

Barrie Robinson: It was a moment. Yeah, so that—

Tomer du Sautoy: “They know who I am!”

Barrie Robinson: Yeah.

Stefanie Keto: Were there things you forgot?

Tomer du Sautoy: What was that for Barrie?

Stefanie Keto: Yeah, for Barrie yeah.

Barrie Robinson: Oh, were there things I ... So…

Stefanie Keto: Were there things that you forgot?

Barrie Robinson: Not that I recall.

Stefanie Keto: Okay.

Barrie Robinson: I think, yeah. But I—

Tomer du Sautoy: We try and weight it such that it's more of your recent research, because we don't want to be sending you outdated stuff. So we have a kind of, yeah. What about you, Sarah? What's ...

Lisa Wilson: So I have one to share about the day in the life of a research administrator and then reengaging with our Gen AI bot or our [inaudible 00:27:38] one. So the way I envision it, the way it's happening with the Gen AI bot, the knowledge bot when it's scaling is that a user research administrator might, for example, ask the bot, within Teams, Right? So they can access it within teams. And they might say something like "What are steps and the approvals for a no cost extension at Emory?" Any complex tasks like that. And the virtual assistant doesn't just pull from general knowledge. It does not go outside of Emory. It is grounded on the documents, the job aids, the SOPs, the policies that we've curated the corpus with. And so it will pull from its own knowledge base, the answer to that question, and it'll provide comprehensive answers.

Actually, the response is too long right now, right? It is, it's very verbose. But see, that becomes a cost issue, right along the responses. So we started looking at that yesterday, how many tokens are coming back and what it's costing us because the bot is so verbose. But basically they ask their question, the bot looks across its corpus of data. We have an ORA knowledge repository, we point to different sites. There are a couple of external sites that we point to CFR 200, NSF, NIH, things like that. So it can pull from all of that to generate its response, and it will give it a comprehensive response, but it'll also cite its sources. Where did I pull my answer from? And so they can click on those citations and it might take them to an SOP or it might take them to a job aid, but in most cases, it's dynamic.

It pulls from all of the information to create this dynamic response. And so yesterday, I think it was our AVP for regulatory compliance research and regulatory compliance said to me that she asked the bot a security question, a compliance question, and she was quite pleased. And when anybody says that to me, I'm thinking, oh God, I hope the asks right? I hope it responds well, right? But she was satisfied with this response. So that makes me feel good.

And in terms of engaging with the Agentic AI bot, here's what we're hoping, especially for award closeout. The bot is designed to have all of these different agents to run errands. But for example, if there is an expense on a grant, and we're not sure it should be on that grant, we have designed a bot that will go check for compliance for allocability and things like that.

So it might look at this expense and go check the terms and conditions of the grant. It might go to two CFR 200, it will probably go to Emory's own policies and procedures, and it'll come back with an answer. I have found this expense to be allowable or unallowable. Now, it could trigger a collaborative grant to go fix that, but we're not ready for that yet. Instead, we're going to let the research administrator make the next decision and say, "Okay, here's what I need you to do next." And so those are the types of interactions we're looking for with the Agentic AI solution. To go run these errands, bring back the answer. Errands that

could take two to three days or weeks, especially if you might be waiting for a PI to answer. Now, if it's very-

Stefanie Keto: Yeah. Yeah.

Lisa Wilson: Yeah. That's what it's designed to do, and it can look across emails as well. So if there's a conversation between the research administrator and the PI, it can check that as well to come back with, "Well, here's what I found and here's what I think you need to-"

Stefanie Keto: Well, that might be a solution to everybody's problem with reconciliation.

Lisa Wilson: That's the idea.

Stefanie Keto: So many people say that they don't have time to reconcile, but that right there is basically reconciliation in nutshell. So Sarah, Barrie, anything that you want to add?

Barrie Robinson: I just want to ask Lisa a bunch of questions about how she's solved the data integration problems of providing access to prior expenses, emails, and all of those kinds of things. So if we could just take that offline, because I have detailed notes.

Lisa Wilson: I'm a good negotiator.

Barrie Robinson: I mean, she's, I think, underselling how difficult a challenge that is.

Lisa Wilson: How much work.

Barrie Robinson: And how impressive it is to get something like that working.

Stefanie Keto: I can only imagine. Yeah.

Barrie Robinson: Yeah.

Lisa Wilson: It's a part of the strategy, right, to pull all those people into your cross-functional team, and it takes a long time to demonstrate what's in it for them.

Stefanie Keto: Well, that would be a huge benefit though. I mean, when you're talking about closeout and compliance.

Lisa Wilson: It's been a slow process. Trust me, Barrie.

Barrie Robinson: I want to say I'll defer to you, Sarah, in terms of a user journey or something like that if you want to.

Sarah Martonick: Sure. Yeah. I mean, we are really working on three things with AI4RA. One is the Vandalizer tool, which is our artificial intelligence solution. It's the one that gets talked about the most. The other is a unified data model, which speaks to what Lisa was talking about, integrating all of our disparate data and adding adapters so that any of our data can be pulled into one comprehensive report.

Right now, I have to smash together seven, eight spreadsheets, PDFs, CSV files from different sources that might have different labels, different categories, different numbers might be called something different. We have our systems do not use the same labels, and I have to figure out how to do V-code lookups, and I have to use chat to figure out what formula I need to add so that my data is clean. This unified data model idea is that we could have a data lake, a data lake house, all of that data together, and be able to seamlessly pull information across all of our sources, inputs and outputs, which speaks to Lisa's challenge of really getting everyone to allow you access to that data from wherever it lives.

Because we all know sponsored funding, research administration data, it is data from all systems across the university. We have to use all of the data to perform all of our functions. There are so many systems that we utilize the ability to have all of that in one place. That would be a game changer. It would allow better decision-making, better timeliness. We could serve our faculty better by having projections and better reports across our systems. So that is a piece that I'm really excited about. But as Lisa said, that's slow-going. So we're pushing hard there, but working on it. The third piece is a community of practice. So we realize nationally and internationally, so many people, this podcast is a great example, are working on integrating AI solutions at an enterprise scale.

Those people have brilliant ideas, and Lisa have already solved some of the barriers that we've seen. We've seen the great products that Atom Grants has put out. What if all of those people contributed together in an atmosphere, shared their ideas, helped one another, right? That's our idea for community of practice is a platform for everyone to discuss, share challenges, barriers, ideas, come up with solutions so that we can all be better and do better, be more efficient, effective, and compliant. Within Vandalizer the idea of a user journey, it's a multifaceted tool. It's actually a suite of applications. So the user journey is going to vary depending on what the person wants to do. I'm very much a type A personality, and I need to know all of the things and how all of the things work. So I'm a user who would want to log in and build my own workflows and build my own tasks and vet my own data and vet my own answers.

But not everyone is that personality, and not everyone has the time to do that. So the Vandalizer tool allows the user to pick their own journey, their own level of AI literacy. They don't have to write their own prompts, but they can if they want to, they can choose from pre-vetted workflows that Barrie's team has already evaluated for security and accuracy, completeness, and consistency. Or they can build their own and submit it to Barrie's team so they can do that

analysis, and then it will be shared with all of the Vandalizer community as a published workflow. So really, it's kind of a choose your own journey type tool. It allows you to experience AI literacy at the level that you come in, and also allows you to learn as you use the tool. Barrie, what did I miss in that?

Barrie Robinson: That was great. No notes.

Stefanie Keto: Choose your own adventure. I like it.

Tomer du Sautoy: Yeah, I mean, it's an interesting question. How much of these workflows are consistent across universities within universities? You think everyone is going to be building their own solutions, or there's a solution that might apply to everybody?

Sarah Martonick: I think both in some cases. Like Lisa's example of closeout, we all have to do it. It is not a painless process, but if you miss a deadline, it is extremely painful. There might be different steps that Emory takes versus University of Idaho versus someone else. But in the end, we are required to reconcile check for allowable, allocable, consistent use of costs, make sure it's within our policy agency policy, federal policy, and submit that FFR. The Vandalizer allows you to use that workflow, but adapt it to your own steps if you need to. So you can remove tasks or steps in a workflow, and you can add your own, you can modify prompts or you can create your own totally. You can copy an existing workflow and then just modify it, or you can use whatever is pre-built. We really have tried to invent a, it will be useful for anyone at any level.

Tomer du Sautoy: Awesome.

Lisa Wilson: So I have to say that I like the idea of Vandalizer. I've read about it. You got to demote it to me. I understand how it works. I like the idea of end users being able to build their own agents to help them get their job done. Copilot 365 does that, and what we've discovered is that there are handful of people within ORA who are curious enough about AI, who have learned how to build their own agents, and I fear them running away with their own agents. What else are they going to build? So that for us is a challenge. Getting our arms around who's building their own agents and for what, and whether or not they're considering the governance framework that is out there, making sure that it's biased.

It's very hard to be unbiased in a model that's already created and grounded, but we are starting to monitor who is building their own agents, and people are really starting to teach themselves how to use Copilot Agent Building to help them complete some of their tasks and to gather information for them and things like that. I think we're going to get to a point where it's just going to be the wild wild west, and everybody's going to be building their own agents, and we need to figure out how to manage.

Tomer du Sautoy: I mean, there are so many tools out there already to help you build your own apps and code your own projects. Frankly, our dev team, I think right now are probably writing 1% of their own code. The AI is writing most of the code for us at this point. So when our AI is getting good enough to help us build these micro-apps, I guess that was my question is are universities just going to build their own thing or is it going ... Yeah, because the tools are getting there that an individual research administrator can have their own closeout app that they built themselves in less than a day.

Barrie Robinson: Until our Office of Information Technology… yeah. That tension that you're both describing. It is very real. You want to empower people to innovate and be creative and get the stuff done. And at the same time, there are very real risks with that going too far. Because what Tomer's is saying is totally possible, and yet that's a major security concern. There's PII, there's intellectual property, there's all sorts of stuff related to this world that you all have to manage that ... Yeah, I don't know that anyone has the crystal clear answers on that topic, but it's a polarity that we're navigating too. Within Vandalizer, we have admin tools to monitor what workflows are being run and by whom, which ones are ... and we can see the prompts and we can see the responses. We run it all on our own local infrastructure, but that doesn't completely make the security concerns and wild west, as Lisa said, go away. It's a real thing.

Stefanie Keto: Yeah, I know we ... SRAI's actually hosted a couple folks that have done the legal side of AI. We won't get into that right now. So I just have one last kind of fun question for you. So myth or fact, right? So two statements here, myth or fact, is AI going to replace analysts? What are your thoughts?

Tomer du Sautoy: Yeah, I'm happy.

Lisa Wilson: So by when?

Stefanie Keto: Is it a myth or a fact, right? What do we think?

Tomer du Sautoy: I personally think, no, I think—

Lisa Wilson: Can I have the time to answer?

Tomer du Sautoy: I think no. I think in the short term, I think a lot of people are fearmongering about AI replacing jobs and roles. And frankly, it's in the interest of all of the big AI corporations to promote that story because that boosts their share prices. But I think AI, as I kind of said before, I think AI is going to replace the boring manual tasks rather than replacing entire roles. It's going to help us think more strategically, do the creative work. And yeah, I am generally an AI and tech optimist, so maybe I'm biased there, but the boring stuff, it will replace the tasks, but it's not going to replace the person I don't think.

Sarah Martonick: Agree, myth.

Stefanie Keto: Myth.

Lisa Wilson: I'm inclined to agree with some reservation, so not anytime soon is my answer. And if you look across the industry and the research that's been done about these companies that have laid off massive amounts of people saying that they have AI solutions that are replacing their staff. If you go back and look at the research, they're hiring those people back.

Tomer du Sautoy: Yeah, they're all hiring them back.

Lisa Wilson: We're not there yet, but I'm not going to say that we are not going to get there, because I think that when AGI comes out, or maybe not in my lifetime, yeah.

Tomer du Sautoy: But I think by the time—

Lisa Wilson: If we allow it—

Tomer du Sautoy: ... by the time we get there, I think research administration being replaced is going to be the least of our worries, I think.

Lisa Wilson: Right?

Tomer du Sautoy: I think that's—

Lisa Wilson: Human existence, right?

Stefanie Keto: Okay. So then, last thing before we call it quits: Myth or fact, you need a perfect data set to start.

Tomer du Sautoy: Definitely not from my perspective. I think you just need to act. You just do stuff and you'll learn, and then that will also improve your data. So definitely a myth from my perspective.

Lisa Wilson: I agree. It's a myth and you should not let it constrain you if you're developing your solution. We did not start with a perfect data set when we started this time to, well, I don't know if I mentioned this earlier, but we had SOPs that had not been updated since 2014 and 2016, and part of our solution was to have a generative AI solution that could help us update our SOPs, but we needed to build a proof of concept first. If we had waited, we wouldn't be where we are today. So I don't think you need perfect data to initiate your project and start it, because once you have your corpus up and running and your bot up and running, it's so easy to replace the incorrect data or the dated data in your corpus, and then that's all we do.

Barrie Robinson: As a data scientist, I lead a data sci- an experienced data scientist in this space will tell you that the notion of a perfect data set or data ecosystem is the myth.

Stefanie Keto: Yeah.

Tomer du Sautoy: Mm-mm.

Barrie Robinson: It's never a thing. And if you find a university that has that, please let me know because I might consider applying. It's just not a thing. Right? I agree with what Tomer and Lisa both said.

Stefanie Keto: Yeah. Yeah. Oh, well, I know we could talk probably at length about this for all the different things that are going on. I know this is just kind of scraping the surface with everything that y'all are doing, but I do want to say thank you for coming and sharing your wealth of knowledge with me and our listeners. So thank you again, Tomer, Lisa, Sarah, Barrie. This has been very fun. Maybe we need to revisit after a while, I'm curious about the audits, curious about what Tomer's going to do. So I feel like his brain was kind of going with some ideas while we were talking, and of course with Barrie and Sarah, with your success of your proposal and award.

Barrie Robinson: Yeah, thanks so much. This was a lot of fun. I really enjoyed it.

Lisa Wilson: Thanks. This was fun.

Sarah Martonick: Yeah, it was.

Tomer du Sautoy: It was Great. And hopefully you see you at some conferences, maybe. SRAI in Hawaii, right?

Stefanie Keto: Yeah. Yeah. All right. Well, thank you again.

Tomer du Sautoy: Cool.

Barrie Robinson: Bye.

Sarah Martonick: Thank you.

Tomer du Sautoy: Thanks everybody. Bye.

Lisa Wilson: Bye everybody.

Stefanie Keto: I would like to thank everyone for tuning in today, and for our guests who shared such brilliant ways to recruit AI's assistance into the mundane aspects of our jobs, while navigating that gray area of cost compliance and AI regulation in

a rapidly evolving space. I know I certainly look forward to hearing how all of their projects continue to grow and develop over the next few weeks, or even years. Solutions around efficiency and productivity are key to research administration, especially today.

A huge thank you as always to our wonderful podcast team, and everyone who continually contributes to enhancing this podcast. We are proud that this platform brings together people, ideas and new opportunities in research administration. The conversation doesn't stop here. We would love to hear from you. Please submit your suggestions for future episodes of SRAI's Shop Talk to shoptalk@srai.org. Thank you again for listening to this episode. Don't forget to subscribe and help grow our community by sharing. I'm Stephanie Keto, and I'll catch you on the next episode!