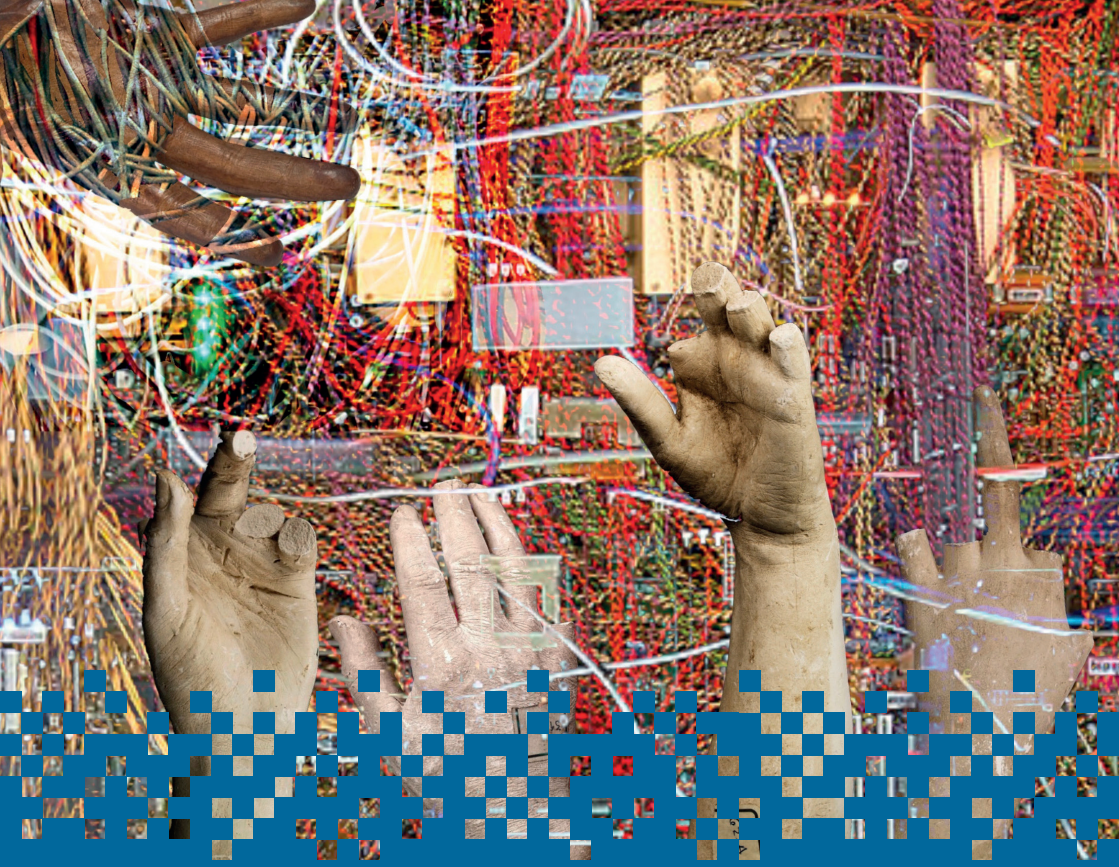

Bridging the Gap: Human Connectors in AI-Powered Peacebuilding

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I. Introduction

The success and failure of Artificial Intelligence (AI) projects hinge not just on the technology itself, but on an often-overlooked factor: the presence and effectiveness of what this report calls the 'bridge role'. This type of role is not new. In fact, different versions of this role have existed in different disciplines at different times, and have always been necessary for any type of digital transformation (Henriette et al., 2016, pp. 4–6). What makes these roles important now is that we are at an inflection point in the adoption of AI, and this shift is being acutely felt in the world of peacebuilding. As AI applications proliferate, from conflict prediction systems to automated translation tools, to data analysis platforms, peacebuilding organisations face a critical challenge: how to responsibly implement these powerful but often opaque technologies in contexts defined by sensitivity, stakes, and complexity.

The challenge is fundamentally one of bridging worlds. The AI and technology sector operates with its own methodologies, terminologies and culture that can seem foreign to people working in peacebuilding, peace research or diplomatic circles. Likewise, peacebuilding domains have developed their own ways of working, grounded in relationship-building, context sensitivity, and ethical considerations that can seem frustratingly slow or imprecise to software developers and data engineers. When these worlds must collaborate, miscommunication and misalignment are almost inevitable. AI systems deployed in peacebuilding contexts require not just technical excellence but also deep understanding of conflict dynamics, power relations, and local legitimacy. Without effective bridges between these domains, even the most technically sophisticated projects risk failure.

So what is a bridge worker, and what makes them essential for AI in peacebuilding? Bridge workers, operating under many different names and roles, are individuals or teams who possess dual literacy in domain expertise and digital skills. They translate between disciplines, mediate between stakeholders, and ensure technical capacity aligns with the ethical responsibilities and needs of users. While similar roles have existed in previous waves of digital transformation, AI presents distinct challenges that heighten their importance. Unlike earlier digital tools that primarily automated existing processes, AI systems make predictions, classifications, and decisions that can directly affect people's lives and safety. In peacebuilding contexts, the stakes are particularly high: a chatbot can miss crucial linguistic nuance that changes meaning in conflict-sensitive communication (Transitions, 2025). Early warning systems can lack the local knowledge and legitimacy needed for communities to trust and act on their outputs (Muggah & Whitlock, 2022). Data scientists and conflict mediators can struggle to understand each other's ways of working and communicating concerns.

Funding institutions and AI developers can fail to identify and match priorities and goals. How are these problems identified, communicated, and addressed? In each case, it falls to someone performing a bridge role. This report looks at bridge roles as a distinct professional function in a team implementing an AI powered project in peace work. The roles are more than just a 'nice to have' function; they are structural necessities of any project and as crucial to their success as the technical and domain expertise themselves.

The PeaceTech literature has begun to understand the need for this role. Christine Bell identifies "creative translators" as crucial to any PeaceTech team (Bell, 2024, p. 170). Wahlisch and Kufus (2025) call for "specialized digital peacebuilding teams, which combine a deep understanding of conflict resolution methodologies with knowledge of technological possibilities." Yet even with this increased focus in the literature, there is still little detail on what these roles actually entail, what skills they require, and how organisations can cultivate them.

This report first looks at the interdisciplinary literature on this unique professional function, drawing insights from fields including technology design, business management, digital humanities, peace and conflict studies, and feminist design principles. From these diverse sources, the report develops a comprehensive framework that defines what bridge roles are, clarifies the specific functions they perform, and explains why they are essential to project success. The report then presents findings from interviews with nine experts working at the intersection of AI and peacebuilding. These interviews illuminate the concrete challenges that arise when technical and domain expertise must work together, and they demonstrate how bridge roles address these challenges in practice. Finally, the report examines the competencies required for effective bridge work. It identifies the key skills that enable individuals to successfully navigate between technical and domain worlds, and concludes with a series of practical recommendations for organisations looking to establish and support bridge roles within their teams.

II. Literature Context

AI Bridge Roles Across Domains

The concept of bridging roles in projects that leverage new digital tools is not entirely new, but rather partially builds on well-established work in management scholarship. For decades, researchers have examined how knowledge brokerage functions across organisational boundaries, particularly in contexts where different forms of expertise must collaborate to achieve shared goals. This existing literature provides a valuable foundation for understanding the bridge roles that emerge in AI and peacebuilding contexts.

Traditional Knowledge Brokerage Roles/Framework

Carlile's foundational work (2002) establishes a framework for understanding the types of boundaries that require bridging in organisational settings:

1. Syntactic boundaries – difference in terminology and information that requires bridging through transfer of knowledge using common lexicons.
2. Semantic boundaries – difference in meaning and interpretation that requires translation to have shared understanding.
3. Pragmatic boundaries – differing power relationships and interests that require the transformation of practices.

Each type of boundary presents distinct challenges for knowledge sharing and collaboration. Furthermore, knowledge is embedded within specific practices, which makes work across these boundaries challenging. In the past, these roles were often distributed amongst IT professionals who served as intermediaries between technical and business domains (Pawlowski & Robey, 2004). However, as this report demonstrates, the unique challenges of AI in peacebuilding require a more deliberate and distinct approach to bridge roles.

To understand these bridge roles, it is useful to consider how they relate to similar positions in adjacent fields. While they share some characteristics with adjacent fields, they serve a distinct function. Digital humanities (DH), for example, represents one model of bridging technical and humanities expertise. DH scholars embody both domains, such as historians who code or literary scholars who build databases (Busa, 1980; Kirschenbaum, 2010). This is related to what bridge workers do, as often people who work in this role, like those in DH, have multiple domain expertise. But while this expertise is useful to have, this is not necessarily a requirement nor everything a bridge worker might do.

There are lessons to be drawn from what is called the social aspect of DH, as pointed out by Kirschenbaum: "…digital humanities is also a social undertaking. It harbours networks of people who have been working together, sharing research, arguing, competing, and collaborating for many years." (p. 56). Digital humanities' experience with collaborative authorship across designers, coders and scholars reveals the profound challenges of integrating different epistemologies and ways of working. Moreover, the DH community recognise that technical platforms "set the terms of cultural production" and embody specific world views (Burdick et al., 2012, p. 97). This highlights one of the reasons a bridge worker would be needed. Just as DH platforms embody specific worldviews, AI systems in peacebuilding contexts can encode technical assumptions about how conflict should be understood and addressed, potentially marginalising local expertise and culturally-grounded peacebuilding practices.

AI Era Challenges

The emergence of AI technologies has built upon these existing bridging functions while expanding their scope and complexity. Existing knowledge boundaries remain present, but AI systems introduce additional complexities around who interprets algorithmic outputs, how brokerage roles emerge informally, and whose interests these intermediaries ultimately serve. This transforms traditional bridging functions into politically charged sites of organisational knowledge production.

Talk of interdisciplinary expertise in this field has had different iterations. While not quite the bridge worker, the early emphasis on having skills that could work across different domains was there. David Guest is often credited with coining the phrase "T-Shaped" worker in the article entitled "The hunt is on for the Renaissance Man of computing" (1991). This is someone who has deep knowledge in one core expertise, in this context – computing expertise – but the ability to work cross different domains in a management capacity. While showing the beginnings of the boundary work to come, this concept still privileged technical depth as the primary expertise, with cross-domain breadth as secondary.

While early formulations such as the T-shaped worker emphasized individual skill sets that combined technical depth with contextual breadth, later work has shifted attention from capabilities to roles. As AI systems increasingly produce outputs that must be made meaningful outside technical domains, this cross-domain expertise becomes institutionalised in the figure of the broker, whose work is no longer merely connective but interpretive. Such knowledge boundaries between AI systems and decision makers necessitate brokers who can translate algorithmic outputs for policy makers. They move from simply relaying AI outputs to interpreting and contextualising them, potentially becoming curators who control what information reaches users (Waardenburg et al., 2022). This brokerage role can become a site of contestation, as brokers may reinforce managerial control by "selling workers on accepting algorithmic outputs that are often putting workers under more comprehensive control" (Kellogg et al., 2020, p. 389), while simultaneously exercising discretion in how they interpret and present algorithmic results to different stakeholders.

The dynamics of such brokerage are illustrated in Pachidi et al.'s (2021) study of a telecommunications company's sales department, where data scientists introduced an algorithmic customer lifecycle management model that challenged account managers' established practices of "knowing customers via personal contacts and strong relationships" (p. 24). When account managers resisted this shift toward "identifying customer needs based on data-analytic predictions, derived from the processing of large, historical data sets" (p. 19), they resorted to symbolic conformity, pretending to use the model while maintaining their traditional approaches. Meanwhile, data scientists engaged in symbolic advocacy, presenting the model's apparent success while obscuring its limited actual use. Together, these reinforcing cycles of symbolic actions accelerated radical change. The regime of knowing transformed from valuing personal relationships to prioritising algorithmic efficiency, ultimately rendering the account managers redundant (pp. 32–35).

This case reveals how brokers can wield significant influence over technological change and organisational knowledge, yet such influential roles often emerge informally rather than by design. Organisations do not often have the time, resources or foresight to formally designate these roles. When implementing different IT systems, key competencies come to light: recognizing when translation is needed, managing competing priorities, brokering between stakeholder interests, and tolerating ambiguity (Levina & Vaast, 2005). As AI systems become more pervasive, the informal emergence of such boundary-spanning roles raises important questions about who gains interpretive authority over algorithmic outputs and with what consequences.

Knowledge Engineering

Literature on knowledge engineering provides more insights into the bridging role. Bridging technical and domain knowledge is not just about getting the two sides to speak the same language, but also a professional practice that involves developing ontologies, making implicit knowledge explicit, and handling the interdependent relationship between the definition of the problem and the type of solution. Studer (1998) points out that building AI systems was not simply a matter of transferring knowledge into a computer. This is because it is difficult for someone to fully articulate their knowledge, as much of it remains embodied in practice and intuition instead of verbalised, conscious rules. Instead, knowledge engineering involves a modelling process where knowledge engineers must interpret and structure domain expertise into computational representations. (Studer et al., 1998). Bridging technical and domain knowledge is not just about getting the two sides to speak the same language, but also a professional practice that requires careful modelling and interpretation of expertise.

Recent work in ontology requirements engineering demonstrates these challenges in practice. Zhang et al.'s (2024) OntoChat study found that domain experts struggled to effectively prompt LLM-based tools for knowledge extraction, requiring researchers to serve as intermediaries who iteratively translated user queries into effective prompts through participatory prompting methods. This intermediary role mediates between domain experts, AI systems and knowledge engineers. It exemplifies how the complexity of AI knowledge elicitation necessitates explicit bridge functions rather than assuming direct expert-to-system interaction.

Feminism and Indigenous Forms of Bridge Building

While the above scholars establish the necessity of bridge roles, critical perspectives from feminist and indigenous scholarship reveal important questions about how these roles are constituted and who performs them. At the time of writing this report, feminist perspectives on AI and peacebuilding are growing, but not as prolifically as needed to counter the male-dominated Technosphere. This is exacerbated by the fact that there are silos of knowledge within AI and feminist domains. As stated in a recent report by UN Women, "Those who have a deep technical or business understanding of AI have only superficial knowledge of the WPS agenda, and, conversely, those leading research and advocacy in WPS tend to have little knowledge of AI" *(Artificial Intelligence and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in South-East Asia,* n.d., p. 32*)*.

Many of the AI methodologies being explored in AI involve the use of 'black box' algorithms, where it is hard, if not impossible, to trace exactly how a decision or output was produced. This lack of traceability is particularly concerning for feminist scholars because structural injustice is characteristically untraceable: harms emerge from the cumulative effects of many ordinary actions rather than from the identifiable wrongdoing of any single actor. As a result, approaches to 'Responsible AI' that rely on traceable liability frameworks are limited in their capacity to address structurally produced harms (Browne, 2024, pp. 328–343). Brown argues that a "lay-centric" way of addressing concerns with AI is needed, which means putting ordinary, non-expert members of the public on AI governance and regulatory bodies, based on their lived experience instead of technical expertise (p. 341). In peacebuilding work, this could translate to including affected communities in the decision-making processes and power structures when implementing AI, rather than trying to devise a system that anticipates all potential ethical shortcomings. There is a critical role that needs to be defined in any AI project, as technical domains and issue-based domains do not always make space for this lay-centric participation in their work.

While curiosity is increasingly celebrated as a key attribute in AI development, feminist scholars warn of its potential dangers when left uncritically defined. Drage (2025) argues that the current emphasis on curiosity in AI engineering risks promoting a masculinised "frontier mindset" that prioritises boundary-pushing innovation over ethical consideration, potentially contributing to both workforce inequality and harmful AI outcomes. Critical thinking and intellectual modesty are cited as key to a more ethical form of curiosity in AI.

First Nations contributions to the field have highlighted the importance of critically assessing consultation processes when implementing AI. While the scholarship above demonstrates that bridge roles are structurally necessary in cross-domain collaboration, it tends to treat these roles as functionally neutral, as if bridging is simply a matter of facilitating communication between equals. First Nations scholars challenge this assumption, revealing how bridge work is always embedded in power relations. Consultation with First Nations groups is often treated as a tick-box exercise at the end of the design process, significantly reducing its effectiveness. Research shows that First Nations feedback is most valuable when integrated at the beginning of a project, before key design decisions are made.

A specific example of this early consultation value is the evaluation of proxy variables: substitute measures used when the actual goal cannot be measured directly. First Nations stakeholders can identify when these proxies are likely to be inaccurate in ways that discriminate against their communities (Animikwan, 2024, p. 5). This insight is directly transferable to other contexts and populations, making it an essential consideration when bridging technical expertise with domain knowledge. This could be positive in the sense that it could bring to the table people who previously did not have as much of a voice. For example, there are initiatives in Kenya looking to train LLMs on minority languages (Esq, 2025). Other forms of knowledge and practice could be incorporated from the outset. For examples, Indigenous communities have a particularly strong knowledge of how colonial systems can be imposed on different communities (Lewis et al., 2024).

Effective consultation requires engaging with authentic representatives. In the context of First Nations groups, this means those with legitimate authority, rather than simply targeting community groups or advisory committees (pp. 42–43). This principle applies broadly. Meaningful stakeholder engagement in any context requires identifying and partnering with the right representatives within a group. Additionally, there is growing concern that AI development teams are highly homogenous, which can lead to bias, inaccuracies, and ultimately less innovative and effective results across all applications (pp. 40–41).

Bridge Roles in Peace and Conflict

In her book "PeaceTech: Digital Transformation to End Wars", Christine Bell talks about an important middle part of a team that contains both domain expertise in peacebuilding and technical expertise in technology. A "creative translator" is someone who can bridge these roles:

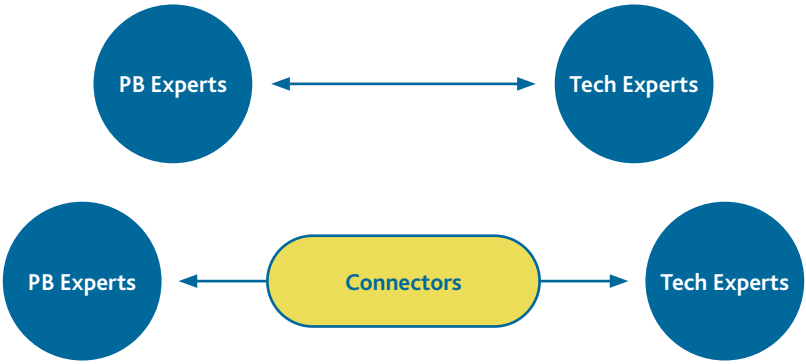

Figure 1. Connector Model Linking Peacebuilding and Tech Expertise
Note: From *PeaceTech: Digital Transformation to End Wars* (p. 171), by C. Bell, 2024, Palgrave Macmillan Cham. Reprinted with permission.

Walisch and Kufus's latest report entitled "Leveraging AI in peace processes: A framework for digital dialogues" makes direct reference to bridge roles within peace and humanitarian organisations in order to sustain their long-term viability.

"In addition to establishing partnerships with private actors, it is essential that peace and humanitarian organizations continue to develop in-house digital capacities. Specialized digital peacebuilding teams, which combine a deep understanding of conflict resolution methodologies with knowledge of technological possibilities, serve as critical bridges between the technical and peacebuilding domains. Such internal expertise enables organizations to more effectively establish and manage partnerships with external technical specialists, accurately assess technological solutions against peacebuilding needs, and independently run digital processes when appropriate. This hybrid approach ensures that technology serves peacebuilding objectives rather than the reverse, maintaining the primacy of conflict resolution principles, especially as digital tools evolve."

The framework above identifies bridge roles as essential to AI peacebuilding success and provides initial guidance for their implementation. Yet as Wahlisch and Kufus note, while their report develops detailed frameworks for other aspects of AI in peacebuilding, the crucial dimension of bridge worker roles presents an opportunity for further development.

Hirblinger's hybrid intelligence framework operates in dialogue with the critical perspectives outlined above. Like feminist and First Nations scholars, he recognises that AI implementation is not politically neutral but transforms power relations and knowledge hierarchies. He rejects both "Human Hubris" (viewing peacemaking as purely human art) and "Machine Hubris" (believing AI could replace human mediators) as overly simplistic. Instead, he advocates for hybrid peace intelligence that combines human and machine capabilities. Hirblinger argues, "we must move away from conceptions of human and machine intelligence as separate, unrelated systems of knowledge production and use, and towards a notion of hybrid peacemaking intelligence" (2023, p. 107). In this system, large amounts of data can be processed while maintaining human judgement and contextual understanding. This includes the handling of objective facts and subjective narratives, and the ability to work with each to achieve peaceful ends.

Hirblinger's framework reveals that AI implementation in peacebuilding is not simply a matter of technical deployment, but requires human actors who can navigate the socio-technical transformations that AI introduces. Understanding hybrid intelligence as a socio-technical system rather than merely a technical tool has direct implications for bridge roles. If AI implementation transforms "who has the authority to make knowledge claims" (Hirblinger, 2023, p. 115), then bridge workers are not simply translating between existing domains; they are mediating fundamental shifts in epistemic power. This makes Hirblinger's methodological approach particularly relevant: to understand what bridge roles must do, we need to examine how AI reshapes the terrain they operate within.

This realignment of authority means bridge workers do not operate on neutral terrain; they navigate contested spaces where AI's introduction has "changed who is at the table in peacebuilding discussions, and who has authority in these conversations" (Hirblinger et al., 2023). Hirblinger states that, "Those who translate between AI and human intellects will become powerful interlocutors in efforts to create conflict resolution knowledge" (2023, p. 117). The human bridge role will be crucial in building interoperability between technical systems and the different stakeholders in peacemaking.

The literature reviewed in this section reveals bridge roles as much more complex and consequential than simple translators between technical and domain expertise. Drawing from organisational theory (Carlile), knowledge engineering (Studer), feminist technology studies, First Nations AI ethics, and peacebuilding scholarship (Hirblinger, Bell, Wahlisch and Kufus), a layered picture emerges of roles that operate simultaneously as: knowledge brokers navigating syntactic and semantic boundaries; power mediators in spaces where AI transforms epistemic authority; and agents of either inclusion or exclusion depending on how they are constituted and developed.

Yet, despite strong consensus on the necessity and complexity of bridge roles, systematic guidance on their concrete functions is limited, especially in peace research. Bell identifies "creative translators" as essential; Wahlisch and Kufus call for "specialised digital teams"; Hirblinger warns these roles wield significant power; but what do bridge workers actually do on a day-to-day basis? How do their functions vary across organisational contexts? What specific capabilities do they require? The following section addresses these practical questions by developing a systematic framework of bridge roles and functions.

III. What Is a Bridge Role?

The preceding review of the literature across different domains highlighted the need for an intermediary role that connects technical and domain expertise. Yet this need remains abstract. There is limited insight into what intermediaries actually do or how they work in practice. To address this gap, this section proposes a framework that systematically articulates bridge role functions. This framework emerged through analysis of both the interdisciplinary literature reviewed above and empirical data from interviews with nine AI and peacebuilding professionals.

In 2025, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with professionals working at the intersection of artificial intelligence and peacemaking. Participants included leading AI researchers, natural language processing specialists, NGO representatives, private sector actors in the AI-for-peace space, and other academics and experts. Special attention was given to ensuring geographic and demographic diversity among participants. The interview data revealed consistent patterns in how practitioners described navigating between technical and peacebuilding domains. When synthesised with theoretical insights from organisational studies, feminist technology studies, and peacebuilding scholarship, these insights coalesced into six distinct but overlapping functions. Themes from the interviews are explored more in section IV.

The framework presented in this section has three purposes. First, to provide conceptual clarity for organisations and practitioners looking to understand what a bridge role entails. Second, it shows the breadth and sophistication involved in this work, rejecting the idea that this is simply a translator between tech speak and domain knowledge. Third, it can serve as a sort of diagnostic tool. In other words, organisations can look at these different modalities and see which best addresses the challenges in their own work when implementing AI into peace work.

It is important to note that these functions are not mutually exclusive. In fact, effective bridge work often involves shifting between the different modalities of this role. But distinguishing the different aspects of the role helps to lay out the diverse demands and clarify the landscape in which they operate.

Definition

Based on the review of the literature and interviews, I have developed the following definition of a bridge role in the peacebuilding domain:

A role made up of individual(s) who understand both peacebuilding practice and AI technical processes, able to translate needs, risks, and insights across teams. This role has different functions.

Functions (What)

- **Translator: Translates concepts across domains**

The ability to translate between digital expertise and domain-specific knowledge across various disciplines could be just as critical to peacebuilding as the design of AI systems themselves. Since the output of any AI process often becomes the input for human decision-making, translators play a vital role in bridging these domains. These translators must define specialised terminology and share knowledge faithfully, ensuring concepts are neither misrepresented nor critical information withheld. (Hirblinger, 2022, p. 116; Waardenburg et al., 2022).

"Those who translate between AI and human intellects will become powerful interlocutors in efforts to create conflict resolution knowledge." (Hirblinger, 2022, p. 116)

- **Integrator: Synthesises across domains to create new frameworks**

In a way, this may be the most intellectually ambitious aspect of the bridge worker, requiring them to take concepts from AI and from the domain expertise and merge them to create a new framework for understanding. They act as conceptual architects. The Integrator does not just translate between fields—they identify unexpected synergies and creative tensions that generate novel solutions. They might recognize that participatory design principles from community development can transform how AI systems are trained for conflict prediction, or that insights from complexity science can reshape how we understand both algorithmic learning and peace-building processes. This role includes 'knowledge engineering' and will be increasingly important as AI systems are applied to complex, value-laden domains where technical performance depends on deep contextual integration rather than disciplinary translation alone.

These generalists face the constant challenge of establishing credibility across multiple specialised domains. They must develop sufficient depth in each relevant field to earn respect from specialists while maintaining the breadth necessary for integration. This often requires building collaborative relationships with deep experts who can validate the domain-specific aspects of integrated approaches.

- **Navigator: Charts pathways through complex systems**

The Navigator operates as a systems cartographer in the complex landscape where AI intersects with peacebuilding. Each domain, whether peace research, conflict resolution practice, AI development, or policy-making, exists within its own institutional ecosystem, complete with distinct organisational hierarchies, funding mechanisms, regulatory frameworks, and operational cultures.

The peacebuilding sector alone presents a labyrinthine environment involving governments (local, national, international), NGOs (humanitarian, advocacy, implementation-focused), academic institutions, multilateral organisations, and community-based structures. AI brings its own institutional landscape: tech companies, venture capital ecosystems, regulatory bodies, ethics boards, and established technical communities with their own norms and gatekeepers.

This role requires sophisticated understanding of how to sequence engagements, time interventions, and build coalitions across sectors that rarely interact. The Navigational Generalist becomes essential for organisations attempting to integrate AI into peace work, as they possess the systems-level expertise to move initiatives from concept to implementation across multiple institutional environments. Funding and donor bodies will require you not only to be reflexive about what you are hoping to achieve by working with AI in your domain, they will also all have different requirements, and overlapping and conflicting priorities.

This role is often distributed among more than one individual because of its complexity and breadth.

- **Situational Generalist: Adopts a generalist stance in context-specific moments**

This happens when someone—because of circumstance—has to take on a bridge role between different parties such as: a technical AI specialist who suddenly finds themselves translating between engineers and community leaders during a crisis deployment; a peace practitioner who becomes the de facto coordinator between multiple AI vendors and humanitarian organisations during an emergency response; a policy official who temporarily bridges academic researchers, tech companies, and field practitioners when developing rapid-response AI ethics guidelines.

Projects do not always get to choose ideal environments for implementing AI into peacebuilding projects. Sometimes the staff involved are required to adapt in order to make the environment more workable. Tech experts typically organise work using prioritisation frameworks (like MoSCoW) and Agile methodologies with defined sprints and deliverables. In contrast, academics and NGO workers often operate within grant-funded cycles where donor commitments make everything feel mandatory, or in adaptive research environments with different iteration rhythms. If there is a breakdown in a project's progress related to these differences, sometimes an individual or individuals may need to adopt a bridging role to help get the project back on track.

- **Reflexive Practitioner: Interrogates role, power, and ethics in bridging contexts**

This function is important as it bridges different power structures, ethical systems and issues of representation, such as gender. Unlike other generalists who might unconsciously reproduce existing power structures while bridging domains, the Reflexive Practitioner makes power critique central to their practice. They are not just asking "how do I bridge these domains effectively?" but "how do I bridge them in ways that do not reproduce harm or exclusion?"

This role should be part of every AI peacebuilding project from inception. The Reflexive Practitioner actively interrogates the political dynamics of hybrid peacemaking and the power relations that characterise human-machine networks producing peacemaking knowledge (Hirblinger, 2023, p. 114). This involves moving beyond the objectivity-bias dichotomy by developing reflexive approaches to knowledge production that acknowledge how AI systems encode particular worldviews and power structures (p. 111). Drawing on feminist AI scholarship, this role resists the masculinised "frontier mindset" that prioritises boundary-pushing innovation over ethical consideration, instead cultivating critical thinking and intellectual modesty in AI development (Drage, 2025).

Crucially, the Reflexive Practitioner ensures that representatives of conflict parties and stakeholders are actively involved in the design and use of AI systems, or are at least able to retrace its operations (Hirblinger, 2023, p. 114). By making power critique and participatory design central practices, the Reflexive Practitioner guards against AI systems that might marginalise specific viewpoints or allow large tech companies to steamroll local stakeholders.

Implementation (How)

- **Distributed -**

Distributed implementation is when one or more of the functions of bridge work is spread across the team to better pool the different talents of team members. This is often the implementation deployed by PeaceRep in adopting new PeaceTech, and has been specifically relevant when working with AI. Many small to medium size teams will find themselves in this position. Adopting a new technology using AI can be daunting, and people in these teams often bring specific domain expertise that alone cannot maximise the potential of AI integration, but combined could do so. This is confirmed by the idea that AI itself does not solve issues, but can be used to assist people using the technology, so responsibility is often distributed.

- **Concentrated -**

Concentrated implementation means the functions of bridge work are embodied in a singular position or in a small core team. This kind of implementation usually happens in smaller teams or when deep continuity and relationship-building across teams is critical. Peace work can be a high context environment, where knowledge of grievances, local power dynamics and cultural nuance are key. Having a dedicated bridge worker can help make sure an AI system does not inadvertently cause harm by not aligning with local context.

These five functions, as well as their implementation, each address the complexities and challenges within an organisation when applying AI to peace work. They are not developmental phases, nor are they ranked in terms of importance. They are different approaches which bridge work may draw upon.

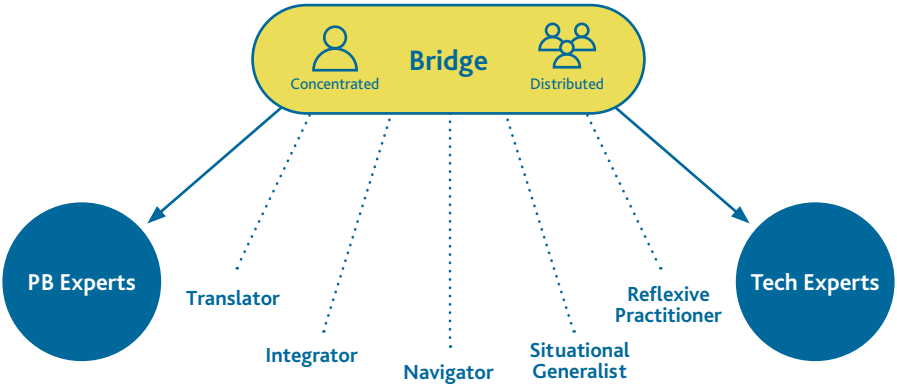

Figure 2. *Bridge Functions Connecting Peacebuilding and Tech Expertise*
Note: The figure shows how the functions of bridge work connect peacebuilding work and tech expertise.

There are patterns that emerge from these functions. First of all, bridging needs can arise unpredictably, as shown by the situational generalist. While organisations would ideally want to plan for implementation challenges in the early stages of each project, they often need to react to moments of transition or crisis. Sudden leadership changes or delays in a project will require people to step up to mediate between different demands in a project. Secondly, these roles operate at different scales, from the micro-level of translating terminology, to the macro-level of navigating institutional ecosystems. Thirdly, effective bridge work involves being reflexive about the role of power, inclusion and ethics.

IV. Peace Practitioner Interviews

As stated in section III, I conducted nine semi-structured interviews with experts in the field of AI and Peace on implementing AI projects. Themes related to needing a bridge between technical expertise and domain expertise came up repeatedly in these interviews. As one participant explained:

"A bridge is someone like myself who has some bit of experience in the topical build... but also understands some bit of the technical."

This analysis follows an abductive approach (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), moving iteratively between theoretical concepts from the literature and themes related to interview data to develop a framework grounded in both interdisciplinary research and empirical interview data.

Of the mentions of these roles, Translational, Reflective and Integrative came up the most. Navigational and Situational Bridge came up the least in the context of the interview (See Figure 2). However, their inclusion in the framework remains justified by the literature review (section II), particularly the work of Carlile (2002) on pragmatic boundaries, Hirblinger (2023) on contested authority, and Bechky (2003) on the undervaluation of bridge roles in practice.

Bridge Type	Quote
Distributed Bridge	"We classify teams into three...you have the topical experts... then we have the technologies who build the technology... and then we have a bridge...the bridge here needs to be someone who has really, like, looked at the boardwalks and you're able to, like, interface between the both." "It's a broad and very colourful mix of people being included in these sessions...local stakeholders, the provinces, even district level needed to be involved. Border Patrol. So it's a, it's a...mix."

Bridge Type	Quote
Translator	"A bridge is someone like myself who has some bit of experience in the topical build of it...But I also understand some bit of the technical...So I become a bridge and the bridge here is the one now who translates between the peace builder, who doesn't necessarily understand technology and the technical person who doesn't necessarily understand the peace building context." "There's a course called translational data and AI ethics, and it specifically focuses on the kinds of translational skills that are needed to work in these kind of cross functional multidisciplinary teams...almost no one is going to be able to succeed without these abilities to translate, particularly across technical and nontechnical languages."
Integrator	"I was amazed and delighted by these theories and all of the academic literature behind them. And what I realized is that you could take them and build an AI analytical model to turn these academic theories into real time tools...we're not trying to develop new tools, new ideas...I'm trying to take the wheel and give it a little bit of an upgrade." "At the level of the agent there is all the way to neuroscience actually, but certainly social psychology, motivational psychology, evolutionary psychology...interactions between family, between outgroups, between in groups is sociology, economics come into play, political theory. So you can integrate theories across the disciplines."

Bridge Type	Quote
	"How can we build a classification system that understands Somali and especially polarising content in Somali language... we engage a couple of annotators...people who are experts in peace building, but also understand the context really, really well. And what we do is basically now train an algorithm together to try and understand these attributes."
Navigator	"Service delivery, especially government services...preliminary government services...are we able to give that information or access to that information in ways that allows for people who don't speak English to be able to get the same service?"
Situational Generalist	"When I started doing my first bachelor's degree, I started in computer engineering, left that after two years, got into peace studies...20 years later here I am building a tech startup. Like I feel like I've gone [sic] circle and you know that tech startup is in peace."
Situational Generalist	"All data-driven AI Technologies...replicate and amplify harmful and unfair social biases and stereotypes...when you have different ethnic groups or different religious groups, the models underlying biases will often float up in its characterization of those groups and their contributions." "We realized that there are couple of posts that were not being labelled to be harmful or toxic...we went back and sat down with annotators and...they told us it's because it's true...you might agree with something, but when you're training a model, it's a matter of is this something, say, a threat...you need to be impartial."

Bridge Type	Quote
	"How do AI systems actually constrain human decisions and limit creativity?...Are specific viewpoints marginalized within this sort of process? Are local stakeholders steamrolled by large tech companies...I worry about those just sort of basic power, structural power dynamics."

Other issues showed up in the interviews that cut across different sections and are worth mentioning here. Trust was repeatedly identified as a make-or-break factor in AI adoption for peacebuilding. Bridge roles emerged as the primary actors responsible for ensuring that AI projects are transparent, understandable, and accountable to all stakeholders.
One interviewee highlighted the stakes:

"Issues of being very transparent with the process... anything that can have some biasness... will broaden that idea of mistrust."

Hirblinger's work on distributed agency emphasises that in hybrid human–machine systems, the balance of power—and trust—shifts depending on how transparent and explainable those systems are. Feminist design principles, such as "Nothing About Us Without Us", argue for embedding affected communities directly into design and decision-making processes, precisely the sort of participatory work bridge roles facilitate.

In this way, bridges act as trust brokers: translating technical limitations and outputs into forms that stakeholders can interrogate, challenge, and ultimately endorse.

Most interviewees underscored the failure of AI tools when deployed without sufficient adaptation to local linguistic, cultural, and infrastructural contexts. Bridge roles often serve as the early warning system for these misalignments.

One participant recounted:

"ChatGPT is not really trained in our local context... we ended up just basically now doing offline interventions."

This points to a wider issue of datafication, where peace and conflict are converted into machine-readable data that may erase local nuance. Feminist and decolonial AI critiques warn that this dynamic can slip into "digital colonialism" when models trained on Global North datasets are deployed unmodified in the Global South (Hirblinger, 2024; Klein & D'Ignazio, 2024, pp. 5–6). Bridge roles play a crucial corrective function here, identifying contextual gaps, advocating for local dataset development, and ensuring that AI tools are trained and tested in the environments where they will actually operate. Mozilla's open dataset guidelines highlight the need to curate high-quality, context-specific training data from the outset, a process that bridges are uniquely positioned to lead (Baack et al., 2025).

V. Skills & Capacities of Effective Bridge Roles

Bridging between two or more domains requires an interdisciplinary skill set which allows individuals to understand key concepts and the language of technology alongside the underlying conceptual core of domain expertise, and to contribute meaningfully to decision-making in both. Collins and Evans (2007) describe this as the difference between "interactional expertise" and "contributory expertise", or "embodiment". Their crucial insight is that one does not need to know how to build the technology in order to help make decisions, communicate to potential users, and ask meaningful questions. In fact, this ability is crucial to a project's success. Evans and Collins draw a distinction between "no-fault ignorance" and "culpable ignorance". In other words, it is acceptable not to know how to code, but it is not acceptable to not know how the system works. For bridge roles, interactional expertise—the ability to understand and discuss technical processes without necessarily being able to execute them—is the foundational competency upon which all other capacities build.

This distinction becomes particularly salient in the era of generative AI. Critical thinking is an increasingly important skill when working with AI outputs that can sound authoritative and comprehensive, yet are susceptible to bias and hallucinations (Larson et al., 2024). Bridge workers must cultivate the capacity to interrogate these outputs, recognising that apparent sophistication in language does not equate to accuracy, contextual appropriateness, or ethical soundness. They serve as critical gatekeepers, filtering AI-generated insights through local knowledge and peacebuilding principles before they inform decision-making.

Effective cross-team collaboration demands patience in communicating complex concepts. Stakeholders often need foundational ideas explained multiple times, even when the project has moved forward to more complex work that depends on those foundations. A bridge worker's ability to consistently and professionally reinforce foundational topics across different audiences significantly impacts project outcomes. This role requires continuous monitoring of comprehension levels across all stakeholder groups and the confidence to proactively request that subject matter experts clarify or reiterate technical explanations when needed. Far from being a sign of inefficiency, this patient repetition is what enables genuinely shared understanding across disciplinary boundaries.

Equally important are listening skills when working with a diverse range of stakeholders. People without technical knowledge can often have critical insights into the more technical aspects of AI work (data engineering, software engineering, machine learning operations).

This knowledge is not always captured in traditional provider/user relationships, and requires the ability to synthesize concepts across domains, as emphasised in the 'Integrative' bridge function. Conversely, technical experts have a role in challenging conventions within domain expertise, where long-held methodologies and ways of working can operate in silos. Bridge workers create the conditions for these bi-directional challenges to emerge productively.

Furthermore, as the peace and AI field remains nascent, valuable contributions will come from diverse sources: professionals at all career stages, Indigenous and Global South knowledge systems, and individuals whose varied cultural contexts and lived experiences inform fundamentally different approaches to both peace and technology. Bridge roles must actively cultivate epistemic humility, recognising that what counts as 'expertise' in hybrid AI-peacebuilding work may look different from traditional credentials in either domain alone. As these interviews revealed, supposed 'non-experts' often surface implementation challenges that specialists in either field might miss.

Finally, institutional positioning matters enormously for bridge role effectiveness. Where individuals sit within an organisation determines their access to decision-making processes, their authority to raise concerns, and their ability to influence both technical and programmatic directions. Bridge workers positioned too far from leadership may struggle to intervene when misalignments emerge; those embedded too deeply in one domain may lose credibility with the other. Organisations must thoughtfully consider how to position bridge roles with sufficient authority and access while maintaining their boundary-spanning identity.

Building on these foundational insights, the following framework organises the specific competencies required for effective bridge work. These capacities map onto the six bridge functions introduced in section III, while remaining interconnected in practice:

Foundational Dual Literacy

- Conceptual understanding of AI/ML systems: how training data influences model behaviour, what outputs represent and how they're generated, and inherent system limitations (technical comprehension without requiring programming skills)
- Ability to ask meaningful questions about design outputs
- Recognition of when technical/AI solutions might not align with peacebuilding needs
- Familiarity with key concepts: bias, hallucinations, explainability, datasets
- "Interactional Expertise" vs "Contributary Expertise" (Collins and Evans, 2007)
- Peacebuilding domain knowledge

Translation and Communication Capacity

- Ability to explain technical constraints to peace practitioners and priorities for peacebuilding priorities to technical teams
- Skills in finding analogies and frameworks that make sense across domains
- Ability to patiently repeat foundational concepts multiple times to audiences across different domains
- Active listening in order to extract key insights and understand concerns from non-technical stakeholders in different domains

Critical Reflexivity

- Understanding of how AI affects power and 'who is around the table' in peacebuilding
- Bias recognition, or awareness of when proxy variables or datasets might discriminate

- Incorporate different ways of knowing such as Feminist, Global South, or First Nations viewpoints, as well as those with vital local knowledge, and critically assess how they may challenge current assumptions

Systems Navigation Capacity

- Institutional mapping, i.e., understanding diverse organisational cultures (NGOs, tech companies, donors, government organisations, local communities).
- Funding landscape literacy, which includes understanding donor requirements and conflicting priorities
- Regulatory awareness
- Build relationships with specialists who can provide deep expertise in specific domains (technical or peacebuilding) when needed

Critical Evaluation Skills and Adaptive Thinking

- Ability to merge insights from different fields into novel frameworks
- Identifying patterns between AI capabilities and peacebuilding needs
- Ability to adjust approach based on situational demands
- Operating effectively despite uncertainty and incomplete information
- Critically assessing AI outputs
- Knowing when and how to verify AI insights against local knowledge
- Understanding limits of AI

VI. Recommendations

For peace and humanitarian organisations implementing AI:

Formalise bridge roles, either through a labelled position or by distributing amongst existing job roles

Invest in Dual Literacy Development:

1. Upskilling existing staff in technical literacy (not coding/technical implementation, but conceptual understanding)
2. Create mentorship programmes pairing domain experts with technical advisors

Establish early integration practices, such as bridge roles, and iterative feedback loops between domains at project conception

Value and protect bridge work within an organisation's culture, and not just a 'nice to have'

For donors and funding bodies:

Fund bridge positions explicitly

Recognise bridge work in grant requirements

Support training and capacity building in dual literacy, contextual AI training and open educational resources for AI peace practitioners

Allow mid-course corrections when technical/domain misalignments emerge

For tech partners and AI developers:

- Embed bridge roles in Technical Teams
- Prioritise localisation and ethics from the outset
- Support Reflexive Design Practices
- Develop an understanding of the Domain Topic
- Take into account 'do no harm' principals at a design level from the start

Areas for further development:

- Create training programmes specifically for AI-Peace bridge roles
- Develop more detailed skill matrices for different bridge functions
- Develop evaluation metrics for effective bridge work
- Document successful and unsuccessful bridge practices across organisations
- Create networks of practice for AI-Peace bridge workers
- Further develop Global South-led approaches to technical bridging

Conclusion

This report has moved beyond stating why bridge roles are important to defining precisely what they are, what they do, and what competencies they require. It provides the first comprehensive framework defining bridge roles specifically for AI peacebuilding. As AI adoption continues at pace in peacebuilding contexts, organisations face a choice: either cultivate bridge capacity deliberately, treating it as essential infrastructure, or hope that effective cross-domain collaboration emerges organically. The evidence presented in this report suggests the latter approach risks repeating familiar patterns of technology implementation that fail to serve the communities they aim to support. The organisations that formalise, fund, and value bridge work now, not as peripheral support but as core project architecture, will be better positioned to deploy AI responsibly and effectively in contexts where the stakes are highest.

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Annex: Questions for Semi-Structured Interview

Guiding Questions for Interview

Opening Questions

- What is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?
- What is not AI (that is commonly associated with it)

Assessment Phase Questions

- In your experience or expertise, how do you evaluate whether an AI (in any way you define it) solution is appropriate for a specific peacebuilding (or other if applicable) challenge?
- Could you walk me through a specific example where you had to assess the feasibility of an AI implementation in a project? (Just assessing whether it is feasible or appropriate, the next question captures the process.)

Implementation Questions

- Could you describe a time you have been involved with implementing an AI related project?
- What worked well and what didn't?

Integration Questions

- Do you have thoughts on how teams working on AI peacebuilding projects should be structured? What roles or expertise do you find essential?
- How do you ensure meaningful collaboration between technical teams and local stakeholders?

Evaluation and Ethics Questions

- Are there ethical concerns around AI that you think would be particularly relevant to peacebuilding?
- To what extent should/shouldn't AI reshape existing debates around the issue they address (in this instance peace).

Closing Questions

- Based on your expertise, what do you see as the most promising future directions for AI in peacebuilding?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share about AI and peacebuilding that we haven't covered?

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About Us

PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform is a research consortium based at Edinburgh Law School. Our research is rethinking peace and transition processes in the light of changing conflict dynamics, changing demands of inclusion, and changes in patterns of global intervention in conflict and peace/mediation/transition management processes.

Consortium members include: Conciliation Resources, Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR) at Coventry University, Edinburgh Law School, International IDEA, LSE Conflict and Civicness Research Group, LSE Middle East Centre, Queens University Belfast, University of St Andrews, University of Stirling, and the World Peace Foundation at Tufts University.

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