RAISE

RESPONSIBLE GENERATIVE AI FOR SMES IN UK AND AFRICA CO-CREATION WORKSHOP REPORT

RAISE CASE STUDIES

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TRILATERAL RESEARCH
Ethical AI

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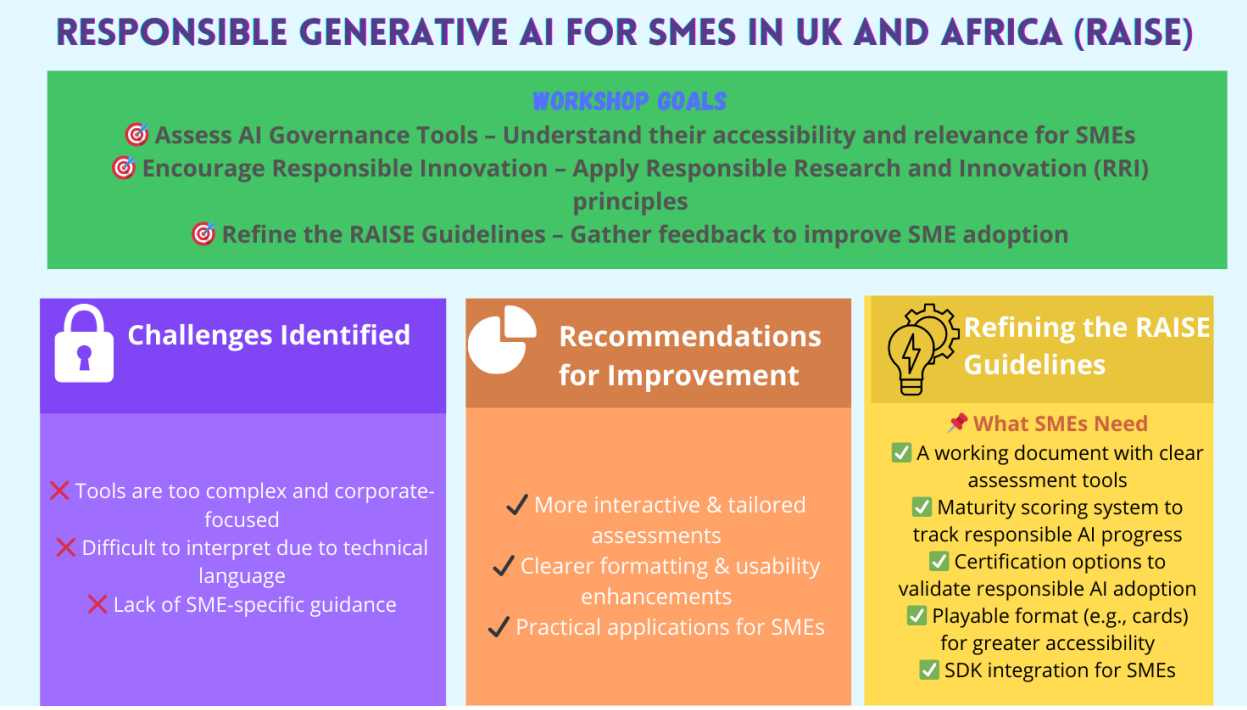
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Responsible Generative AI for SMEs in UK and Africa (RAISE) Workshop, held from 29th to 31st January at The Jubilee Hotel & Conferences, University of Nottingham, bringing together the RAISE case study participants comprising of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and startups from diverse sectors, including Health, Art, Corporate Intelligence, Education & Corporate Training, Financial Investment, Legal Consulting, and Credit Intelligence. The workshop, which is part of the RAISE cocreation workshop series served as a collaborative platform to explore the challenges around the responsible integration of generative AI in SMEs across the UK and Africa.

The workshop brought together participants to explore the practical application of responsible AI principles through hands-on evaluation, co-creation, and critical discussion. The workshop aimed to assess existing AI governance tools, identify challenges faced by SMEs in implementing responsible AI, and refine the RAISE guidelines based on participant feedback.

Participants evaluated AI governance tools, including the UK Government's *AI Management Essentials*, the *Assessment List for Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence (ALTAI)*, and Microsoft's *Responsible AI Impact Assessment Tool*. The assessments revealed that while these tools provide structured frameworks, they often lack accessibility for SMEs due to their complexity, technical focus, and corporate orientation. Common themes included difficulties in interpretation, a lack of SME-specific guidance, and the need for better usability features, such as clearer formatting, interactive elements, and tailored assessments.



The co-creation process encouraged participants to rapidly generate business ideas leveraging generative AI, followed by an introduction to Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) principles using the *RI Prompts and Practice Cards*. This exercise helped SMEs reflect on the ethical, societal, and business implications of their AI-driven innovations. Participants then refined their ideas into responsible generative AI business models, addressing areas such as sustainability, legal intelligence, and digital transformation. A final pitching session fostered further reflection, with top models selected based on their integration of responsible AI principles.

Feedback on the RAISE guidelines highlighted the need for an adaptable, working document that supports SMEs in tracking progress, prioritising relevant aspects, and integrating responsible AI into their development processes. Participants recommended a maturity scoring system, certification mechanisms, and transformation of the guidelines into a more interactive format.

The workshop underscored the challenges SMEs face in adopting responsible AI practices, including resource constraints, the complexity of existing governance tools, and the need for more actionable, SME-focused frameworks. The insights gathered will inform the refinement of the RAISE guidelines and contribute to the ongoing development of responsible AI strategies for SMEs.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Responsible generative AI for SMEs in UK and Africa (RAISE) project conducted its case study cocreation workshop involving small and medium enterprises from the United Kingdom and Africa who integrate generative AI as part of their business services and products. These case studies form the RAISE project ecosystem comprising various startups applying generative AI in various areas and under different business models. With the RAISE project having published the first draft of its responsible generative AI guidelines, the aim of the workshop was to understand the challenges SMEs face when using generative AI while also attempting to adhere to guidance and frameworks to promote responsible generative AI business practices. The workshop adopted a co-creation process to improve the RAISE guidelines. This co-creation process is important as it enables SMEs in the RAISE generative AI ecosystem to share their insights around current challenges in navigating the current generative AI adoption landscape while also proffering solutions in enhancing responsible generative AI adoption and guidance.

1.1 PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

There has been a recent surge in adoption of generative AI by SMEs in order to maintain market competitiveness and entrepreneurial resilience[1]. SMEs often drive societal activities, therefore, people's everyday interactions with generative AI may be determined by how SMEs develop or integrate generative AI systems. However, SMEs face potential challenges which affect the successful integration of generative AI into their products and services. To understand the challenges, mitigation strategies and potential requirements for the successful adoption of generative AI it is imperative to co-create guidelines based on the first-hand experience of SMEs who encounter such challenges daily and try to navigate the hurdles that are presented. The results presented in this report can serve as a catalyst to promote regulatory and policy discussions and guidelines that are underpinned and shaped by the requirements of these SMEs who are at the forefront of applying generative AI under diverse constraints. This report also serves as an important foundation for the promotion of responsible generative AI that is co-designed by SMEs.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

Prior to this workshop the RAISE project organised a series of workshop with SMEs to understand the challenges in adopting generative AI responsibly. The core aim of the Human Centric Design (HCD) workshop was to improve the draft RAISE guidelines which were published as a foundation to promote responsible generative AI adoption by SMEs. This workshop however is unique as it involved only SMEs that form part of the RAISE case study ecosystem. The focus of the event was to get insights into existing issues and concerns using the focal lens of SMEs and test existing frameworks on their suitability for adoption by SMEs, which will provide insights on finetuning the RAISE guidelines. This methodological approach is what we classify as the “co-creation process” as the guidelines will be created together with SMEs.

The workshop took place at the University of Nottingham and participants involved were SMEs who are part of the RAISE case studies drawn from the United Kingdom and Africa. These were recruited using online searches, LinkedIn, SME hubs, and government SME schemes (as in the case of some African participants noticeably from Kenya).

[1] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0166497224001135

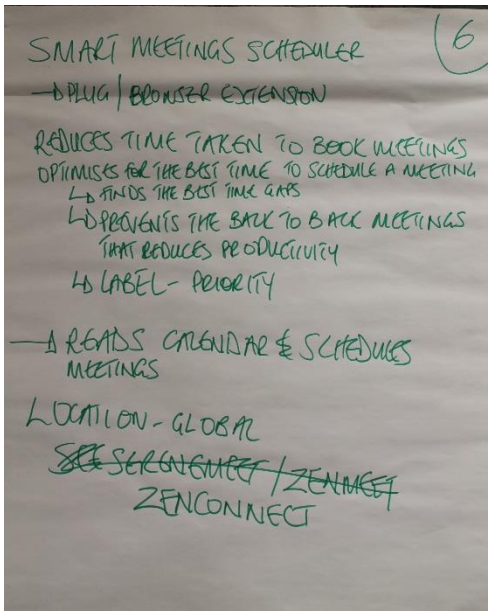
Table 1. Demographics of participants

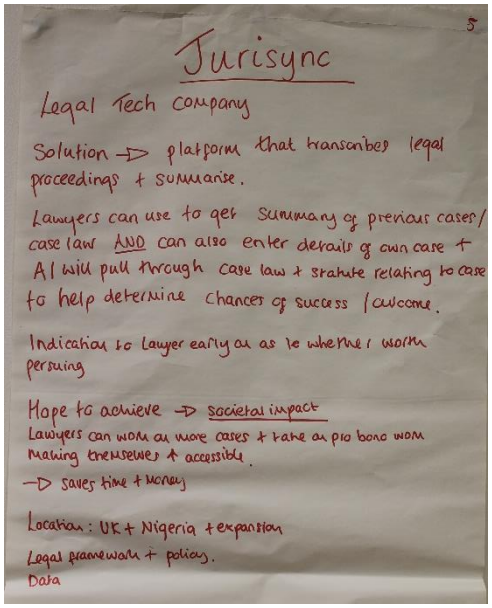
Females	Males	Regional representation
8	5	Africa =3
		UK=9

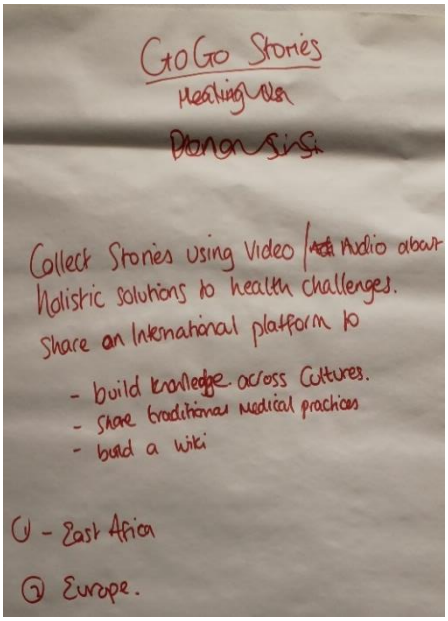
1.2.1 THE HUMAN CENTRIC DESIGN AND CO-CREATION PROCESS

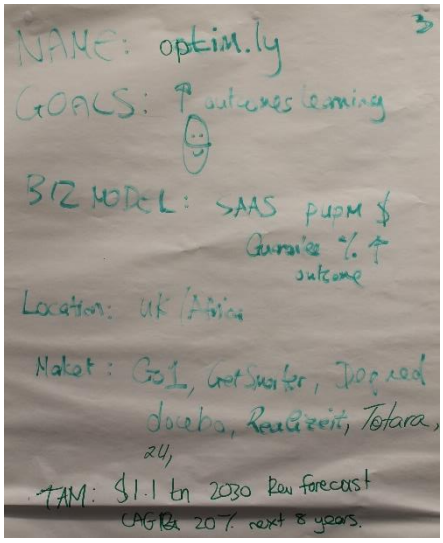
The cocreation process started by pairing participants into separate groups to rapidly spin out generative AI business ideas. This resulted in the generation of various business ideas around different application areas. The aim was to gain greater insight into the thinking process of SMEs as they delve into the world of generative AI to develop products and services, usually without consideration of factors around responsible innovation. As shown below the process generated various interesting business proposals focused on providing real world solutions.

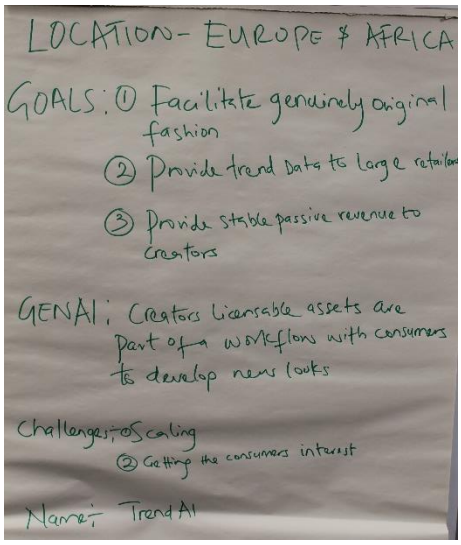
Figure 1: Business Ideas generated by participants without considerations for Responsible Gen AI











1.3 RESHAPING OF GENERATIVE AI BUSINESS MODELS USING RRI

Having developed their business ideas, participants were then introduced to Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI). As part of the introduction to RRI participants were introduced to the Responsible Innovation (RI) Prompts and Practice Cards[2] and were instructed to complete exercise 2 (planning a project) of the prompt cards which enabled the participants to identify RI issues and apply RRI in practice when developing a new project. The purpose of this approach was to equip the participants with the necessary skills to think about the societal implications of their business ideas around RRI. The participants were then tasked to develop pitches for their business ideas focused on the following areas.

- Company name, mission / product and local context
- Problem it solves / Market gap
- Value proposition
- What makes it special, differentiator, underlying magic
- Business model
- What makes it responsible? (participants were instructed to focus on exercise 2 of the RRI cards)

This resulted in the finetuning of responsible generative AI business models such as sustainable fashion design, digital archive, E learning, sustainable building and renovation, automated meeting scheduling and AI-powered legal intelligence for smarter litigation.

[2] http://doi.org/10.17639/nott.7310

Figure 2:Refined business models generated by participants after introducing Responsible Gen AI activities

During the pitching process by the various groups everybody was tasked as a judge and questions were asked about the business models. This also led to a voting process with a focus on the top 3 business models that displayed elements of responsible innovation and participants were then reassigned to the remaining groups.

2 EVALUATION OF TOOLS FOR RESPONSIBLE GENERATIVE AI

As a key focus of the workshop was to understand how tools could help SMEs adopt responsible practices and how to provide guidance (which is a key focus of the RAISE project), participants were introduced to responsible AI tools which included the UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology's (DSIT) AI Management Essentials (AIME) tool[3], the Assessment List for Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence (ALTAI) for self-assessment tool[4], and the

[3]https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/672a5706094e4e60c466d19f/AI_Management_Essentials_tool_Self-Assessment.pdf

[4] https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/document.cfm?doc_id=68342

Microsoft Responsible AI Impact Assessment tool[5]. These tools were selected based on several criteria which include the volume of the questions to be considered in the self-assessment, the applicability to SMEs, and industry/technology provider (e.g the Microsoft tool was selected as Microsoft is a key technology provider).

The participants in their individual groups were then tasked to apply one assessment tool with their business model while collecting/reflecting on the following key insights.

- How does the tool help you gain further insights?
- Why would you (not) recommend the use of the tool to others?

The participants were then asked to provide a short presentation covering the following key points

- How does the tool help you gain further insights?
- Why would you (not) recommend the use of the tool to others?
- How could the tool be improved?
- Are there local contexts (UK/ Africa) that make the tool particularly useful / useless?

The focus was to get any insights around the issues around the applicability of these tools and to understand the gaps that exist in applying these tools to promote RAI which can then be used to extend the current version of the RAISE guidelines.

2.1 SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANT RESPONSES TO THE AI MANAGEMENT ESSENTIALS TOOL

How would you describe the tool?

Participants found the tool dry, intimidating, and text-heavy, making it difficult to engage with. The questions lacked clarity, and where explanations were provided, they were often couched in highly technical or ambiguous language, making them hard to parse. Despite being positioned as broadly applicable, the tool appeared corporate-focused, primarily designed for large enterprises rather than SMEs.

Which further insights did you gain using it?

While the underlying framework was conceptually strong, participants struggled to connect abstract concepts to practical applications. According to participants the tool relied heavily on honesty and transparency, yet many felt that organisations—especially those engaging with the government—might not be fully forthcoming. Also participants pointed out that it had the potential to generate a long to-do list without clear guidance on implementation. Also, even for organisations committed to ethical AI, resource constraints could limit their ability to act. Participants also noted that basic AI questions require an extremely broad knowledge set, making it challenging for individuals without deep technical expertise to navigate the tool effectively.

Why would you recommend it (or not)?

Participants were hesitant to recommend the tool in its current format, especially for SMEs. While it posed valuable questions, the complexity and lack of accessibility made it difficult to interpret. There were concerns about how

[5] https://blogs.microsoft.com/wp-content/uploads/prod/sites/5/2022/06/Microsoft-RAI-Impact-Assessment-Template.pdf

response data would be handled, and some feared that the tool's structure could encourage dishonest or performative answers rather than genuine engagement. Additionally, it assumed a high level of technical knowledge and was not well-suited for organisations using AI rather than developing it. The tool seemed most relevant to companies that had not previously considered AI risks—ironically, these were also the least likely to engage with it.

How could it be improved?

To make the tool more accessible and practical, participants suggested several improvements. It should be low-resource and user-friendly, offering clear definitions of key terms upfront. The presentation and formatting needed enhancements, possibly incorporating gamification elements such as a progress bar or rewards. A more interactive and engaging design could improve usability. Training or onboarding sessions could help users navigate the tool effectively, and multiple response formats could accommodate different levels of expertise. Providing real-world examples and case studies would also make the tool more relatable and actionable.

2.2 SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANT RESPONSES TO ALTAI TOOL

How would you describe the tool?

Participants noted that the ALTAI self-assessment is designed to be completed by a multidisciplinary team, requiring input from AI designers, developers, data scientists, legal/compliance officers, and management. Participants also pointed out that the tool is structured around key AI requirements, providing a comprehensive framework for assessment.

Why would you recommend it (or not)?

Participants recommended the tool because it is available in both document and web-based formats and contains specific, structured questions that guide assessment. However, they also identified usability issues, particularly with the web-based version, which had a poor user interface and free-text fields that many found frustrating and tended to circumvent. The document version was seen as easier to navigate but lacked interactive feedback, limiting its effectiveness.

Which further insights did you gain using it?

Participants found that the paper questionnaire version of ALTAI encouraged important discussions around AI governance, ethics, and compliance. However, when using the web version, they did not gain significant additional insights, suggesting that the format affected engagement and usability.

How could it be improved?

To improve the tool, participants suggested removing free-text boxes, as they were often bypassed. They also recommended a one-question-per-page format, similar to Type form, to improve navigation and user experience. While the paper questionnaire was valued, its format could be refined for better usability.

2.3 SUMMARY PARTICIPANT RESPONSES TO THE MICROSOFT RESPONSIBLE AI IMPACT ASSESSMENT TOOL

How would you describe the tool?

Participants found the Microsoft Responsible AI Impact Assessment tool to be useful for assessing the impact of AI systems and for stimulating critical thinking about different factors influencing a product. It was viewed as a structured framework that requires input from across an organisation. However, they noted that it does not seem tailored for SMEs, which could leave smaller businesses feeling overwhelmed or discouraged by the complexity of the process.

Which further insights did you gain using it?

The tool was seen as a valuable checklist to ensure that all risk areas are covered while also helping to improve the overall quality of a product. However, fully engaging with the tool requires users to imagine scenarios outside their direct experience, which could be challenging. Participants also suggested that the tool could contribute to developing a company's value proposition, providing a structured way to differentiate its AI product in the market.

Why would you recommend it (or not)?

Some participants appreciated that the tool attempts to cover a broad range of issues in a single document. They saw potential for it to serve as an executive summary at different stages of AI development. If used correctly, it could also help companies protect themselves from liability in the event of negative outcomes related to their product. However, concerns were raised about its complexity and usability, particularly for non-technical team members.

How could it be improved?

Participants found the tool opaque, noting that its sections were difficult to interpret without additional guidance. It appeared too focused on technical team members, making it less accessible to business and operational teams. They suggested that restructuring the tool could encourage greater adoption—for example, by presenting it as a staged process that moves from describing the AI application to structured risk management, ultimately leading to certification. Many felt that certification should be an incentive at the end, with an opportunity for review by a certified body to demonstrate compliance and best practices.

3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND REFLECTION

The RAISE workshop provided a valuable platform to critically assess the challenges and opportunities in implementing responsible generative AI within SMEs. Through evaluating AI assessment tools and engaging in co-creation activities, several key insights emerged that highlight the limitations of existing frameworks and the need for a more practical, human-centric approach to responsible AI adoption which sits in line with the overall aim of the RAISE project which is to provide practical guidance to SMEs currently adopting or aiming to integrate generative AI in their products and services. The workshop illuminated critical shortcomings in existing AI assessment tools while showcasing the potential of co-creation and interactive methodologies in fostering responsible AI adoption. The findings emphasise the need for assessment frameworks that move beyond rigid documentation requirements and instead offer hands-on, iterative, and engaging approaches to responsible AI. For SMEs, responsible innovation is not just a compliance exercise but a strategic opportunity to build trust, differentiate their products, and ensure long-term viability in an AI-driven world. A key takeaway from the workshop is that future AI governance strategies or frameworks should prioritise tools that not only assess responsibility but actively cultivate it within organisations.

3.1 THE LIMITATIONS OF EXISTING RAI ASSESSMENT TOOLS

One of the primary insights from the workshop was the inadequacy of current AI assessment tools in catering to SMEs. Tools such as the AI Management Essentials, ALTAI, and the Microsoft Responsible AI Impact Assessment framework were critiqued for their corporate and enterprise-focused nature, making them less accessible to smaller organisations. As the insights shows participants found these tools to be overly complex, text-heavy, and difficult to interpret, with significant reliance on technical language and assumptions about prior knowledge in AI governance. These challenges suggest that while assessment tools offer structured guidance, they often fail to accommodate the practical realities and resource constraints of SMEs.

Furthermore, many of these tools rely on voluntary compliance and self-reporting, which raises concerns about honesty and transparency. As some participants pointed out, organisations may not always be inclined to disclose full details to governmental or regulatory bodies, particularly when assessments feel bureaucratic rather than developmental. This observation reinforces the argument that tools should not only assess compliance but also actively facilitate learning and improvement.

3.2 THE VALUE OF HUMAN-CENTRIC AND INTERACTIVE APPROACHES

In contrast to the structured yet rigid nature of AI assessment tools, the co-creation process and human-centric design activities demonstrated a more engaging and effective approach to responsible AI innovation. The initial generative AI business ideation session revealed the creativity and problem-solving capabilities of SMEs but also highlighted a gap—most participants did not initially consider ethical and societal implications when developing AI-driven business models. This finding underscores the need for integrating responsible innovation considerations early in the development lifecycle rather than treating them as a compliance afterthought.

The introduction of Responsible Innovation (RI) Prompts and Practice Cards served as a crucial turning point, enabling participants to critically examine their business ideas through an ethical and societal lens. This hands-on exercise proved to be more accessible and practical than the AI assessment tools, as it allowed SMEs to directly apply responsible innovation principles to their specific contexts. The structured, yet flexible format of the cards facilitated discussions that bridged the gap between ethical considerations and business viability, leading to more refined and socially responsible business models.

3.3 BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN RAI ASSESSMENT AND APPLICATION

A key argument emerging from the workshop is that responsible AI tools and frameworks should not be passive checklists but rather dynamic and iterative processes that actively guide users toward responsible innovation. The traditional AI assessment tools, while theoretically sound, tend to prioritise documentation and compliance over practical application. In contrast, the co-creation approach emphasised active learning, peer feedback, and iterative refinement, making it a more effective mechanism for embedding responsible AI principles within SMEs.

The structured pitch sessions further reinforced this notion. By requiring participants to articulate not only their value propositions but also the responsibility dimensions of their business models, the process instilled a deeper understanding of the ethical implications of AI deployment. This contrasts with traditional assessments, which rarely challenge users to iteratively refine their projects based on feedback and real-world applicability.

3.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND AI GOVERNANCE AND THE RAISE GUIDELINES FOR SMES

The insights from the RAISE workshop suggest that AI governance frameworks must evolve to become more inclusive, adaptive, and SME-friendly. Policymakers should consider developing assessment tools and guidance that integrate elements of interactive learning, real-world scenario planning, and iterative development. Additionally, given the reluctance of businesses to fully disclose sensitive AI practices, regulatory approaches should balance transparency requirements with incentives for ethical AI adoption.

Another key takeaway is the necessity of embedding responsible innovation training within AI governance frameworks. Many SMEs lack the expertise to navigate the complex ethical landscape of AI, and rigid assessment tools do little to address this knowledge gap. By incorporating human-centric design principles, policymakers and AI governance bodies can develop more practical, user-friendly tools that guide SMEs through the responsible AI development process without overwhelming them with technical or bureaucratic barriers.

4 REQUIREMENT FOR GENAI GUIDELINES FOR SMES

Also, a key highlight of the workshop was participants' feedback on how to improve the current draft of the RAISE guidelines for SMEs. The feedback from participants on improving the RAISE guidelines highlighted the need for greater practicality, adaptability, and measurable outcomes. Participants emphasised that the guidelines should offer a way to assess whether an SME has improved its responsible generative AI practices and provide clear metrics for measuring progress. They suggested that the guidelines should function as a working document, allowing SMEs to adapt them to their specific contexts and prioritise aspects most relevant to their operations.

A key recommendation was the introduction of a maturity scoring system to help SMEs track their development over time. Additionally, participants proposed that the guidelines should incorporate a form of certification to recognise businesses that successfully implement responsible AI practices. To enhance usability, there was a suggestion to transform the guidelines into playing cards, making them more interactive and actionable. Finally, integrating the RAISE guidelines into an SDK (Software Development Kit) for SMEs was seen as a valuable step towards ensuring seamless adoption and embedding responsible AI considerations into product development processes.

Finally, the following requirements for the development of the RAISE guidelines were distilled from the feedback received during the workshop:

- Useful guidelines should not be too text heavy
- SMEs may not have the multidisciplinary teams required to fill in complex questionnaires
- Guidelines that generate a to-do list would be helpful
- Guidance should help SMEs prioritise (e.g. offering a risk assessment)

4.1 NEXT STEPS

Using the insights gathered from the workshop, particularly those relating to recommendations on how the assessed RAI tools can be improved, the RAISE project aims to enhance its current draft of the guidelines for SMEs to incorporate these suggestions. A key focus will be on the practical applicability of the guidance and the ability to prioritise various aspects of the guidance that are relevant to an SME. Additionally, making the guidance a living document is essential for its adoption. A major element underpinning the guidance will be to focus on providing feedback to assess the progress of an SME in adopting Responsible AI practices.

Also, the RAISE project has a series of wider engagement activities line up as part of its project activities. Furthermore, the project aims to continue working closely with its case studies in Africa and the United Kingdom to promote Responsible AI adoption through contextual insights.