



**UNIVERSITY  
OF WARWICK**

# From Algorithms to Authenticity: Collective Social Work in an Age of Artificial Intelligence.

Gurnam Singh  
Department of Sociology  
University of Warwick



**AI and the future  
of social work  
one-day summit**

**May 2026, Birmingham**



# Plan

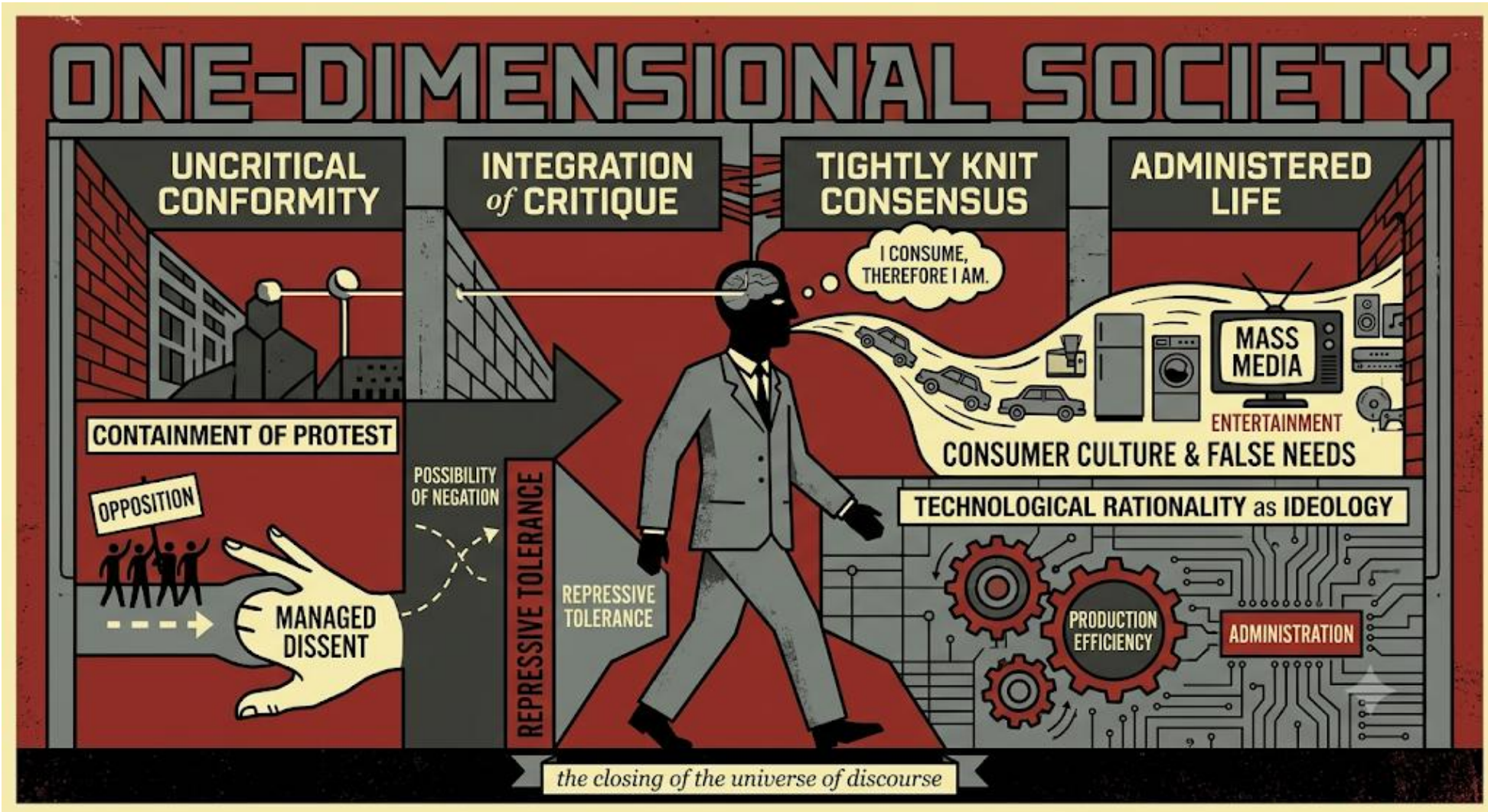
---

- **Historical perspectives** illustrate how technological innovations are never neutral.
- **Algorithmic colonialism** - AI can/does reproduce longstanding patterns of racialisation, hierarchy, and epistemic injustice.
- **Authenticity and relational practice** - limits of AI in replicating core human capacities vital to social work.
- **Professional identity and practice risks** - how AI may undermine social work values if integrated uncritically.
- **Current AI applications** - contemporary tools, their benefits, and the risks they pose.
- **Opportunities for algorithmic sovereignty** - how AI can empower communities when designed and governed ethically.

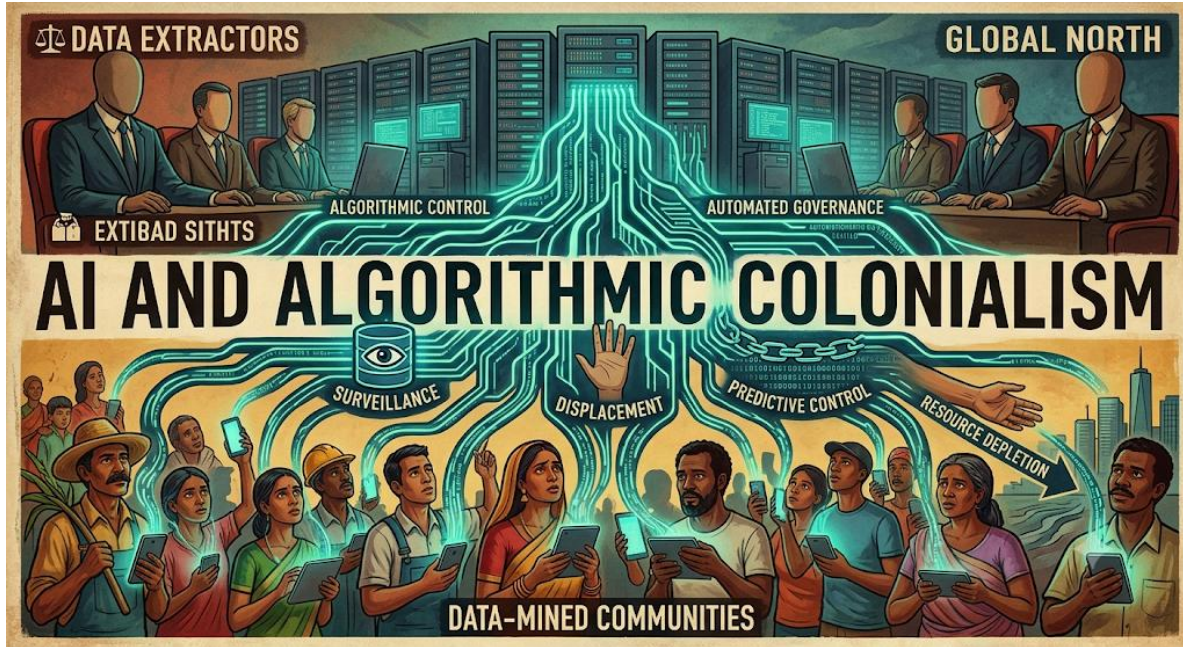
# Begin with a true story



# Lessons from History: Technologies Are Never Neutral.



# AI and Algorithmic colonialism



- **Lack of Ethical Foresight:** AI often ignores the historical trauma of marginalized groups.
- **Asymmetry of power:** The concentration of AI power in a few companies mirrors colonial monopolies.
- **Epistemic Violence:** AI models prioritise Western "rationality" and English-language data, effectively erasing other forms of knowledge.

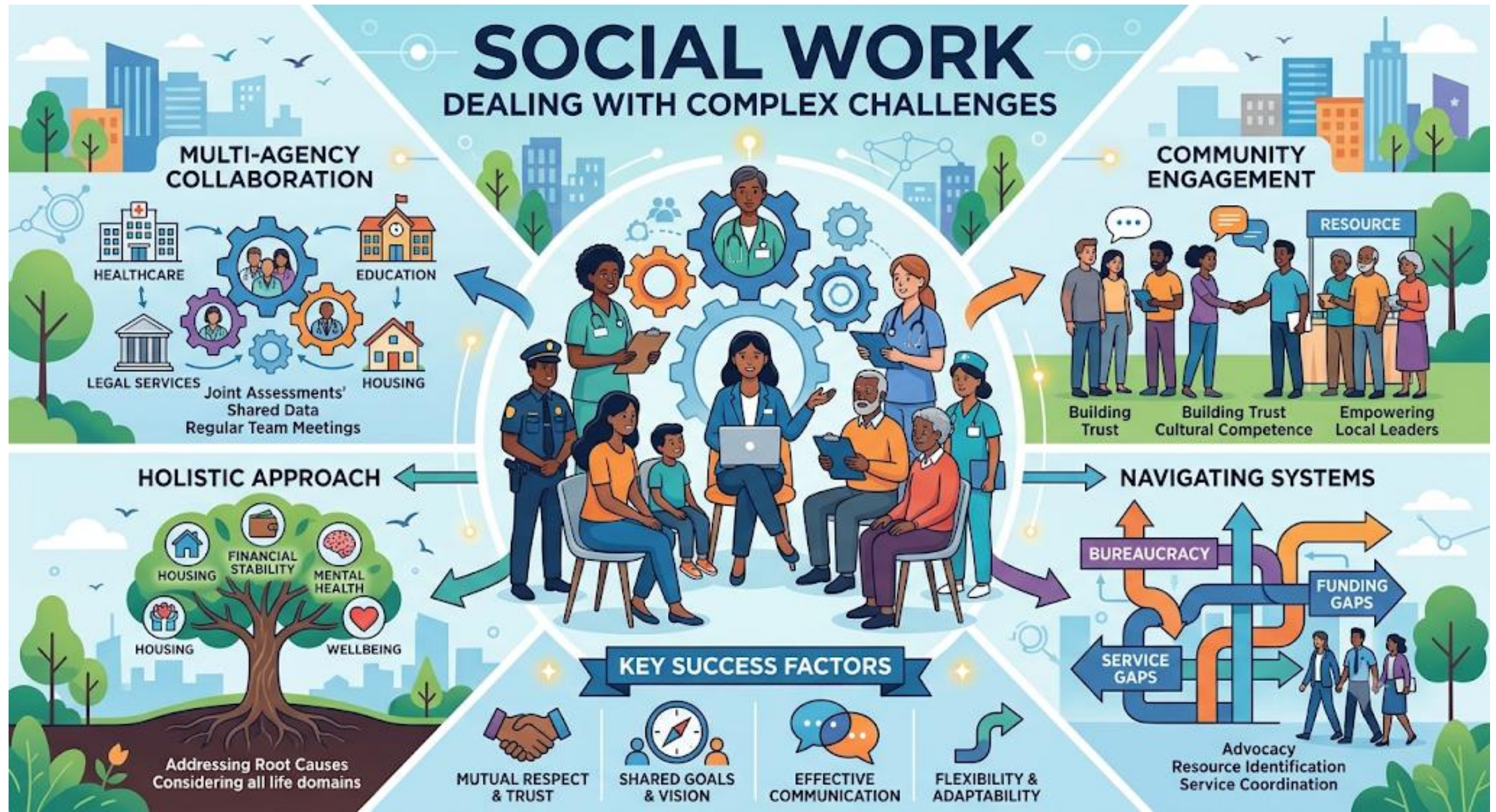
# AI and authenticity

## Key concerns:

- Emotional understanding and empathy
- Moral reasoning and ethical judgment
- Context sensitive interpretation
- Embodied presence, trust, and relational attunement
- Managing ambiguity and making sense of “messy” human realities
- Practice wisdom rooted in lived experience and professional reflection



# Social Work and the role of Technology



# AI APPLICATIONS IN SOCIAL WORK



## PREDICTIVE RISK MODELING (PRM)



Early intervention;  
Resource allocation; Risk mitigation.

## CORE: ENHANCED DECISION-SUPPORT



INTEGRATED SYSTEM:  
Augmenting professional  
judgment with data analytics.

## CONVERSATIONAL AGENTS & CHATBOTS



24/7 client support;  
Information routing; Form assistance.

## FRAUD DETECTION & ELIGIBILITY SCREENING



Identifying anomalies;  
Preventing resource misuse;  
Streamlining processes.

## REMOTE MONITORING TECHNOLOGIES



In-home care management;  
Early issue detection;  
Client independence.

## KEY IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS



ETHICAL USE &  
BIAS MITIGATION



DATA PRIVACY  
& SECURITY

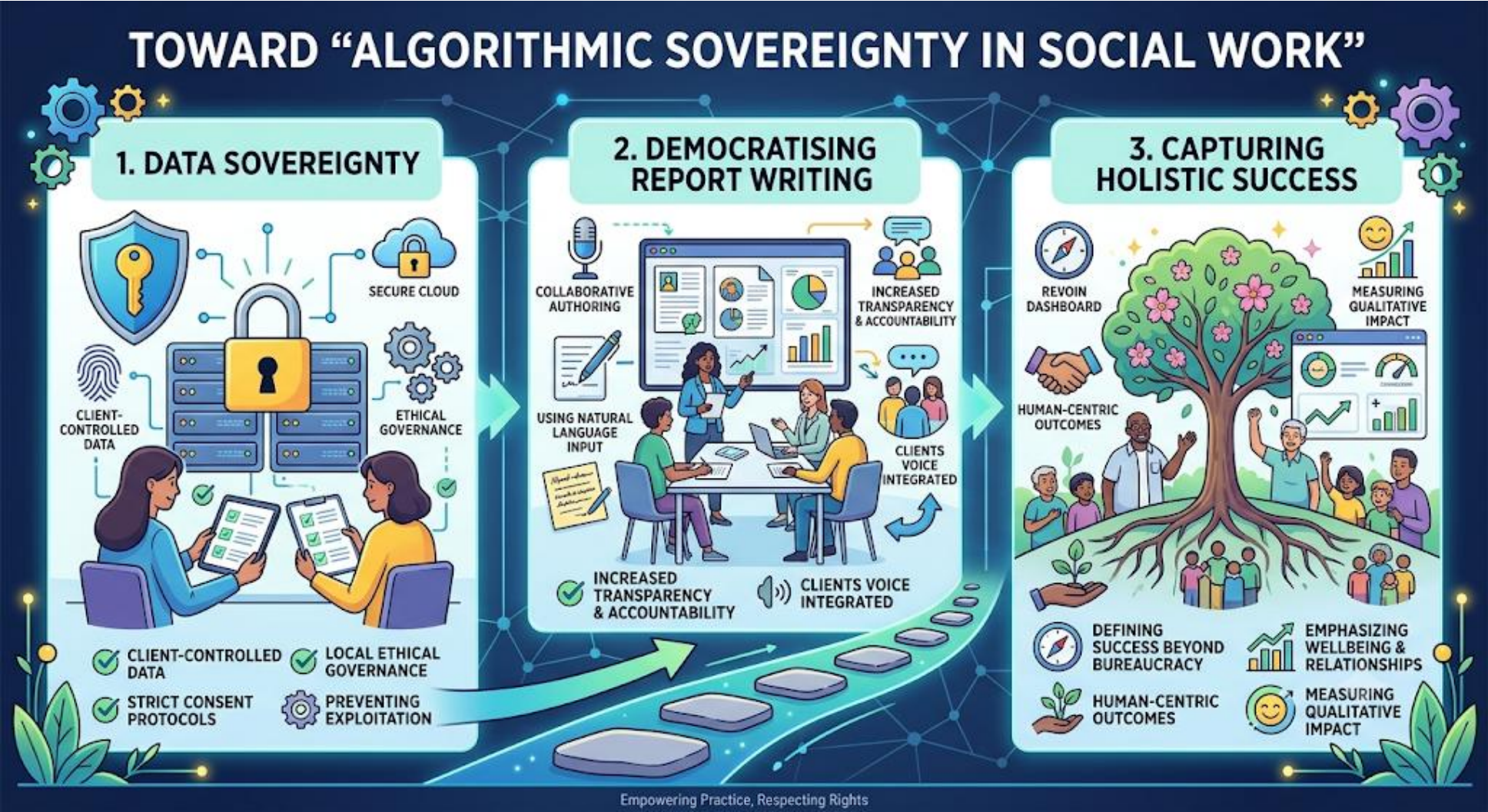


TRANSPARENCY  
& EXPLAINABILITY



USER ACCEPTANCE  
& TRAINING

# The Opportunities: Toward "Algorithmic Sovereignty in Social Work"



# Conclusion

---

Head in the sand is not an option.

---

The question is if but how?

---

Resist false dichotomies between  
“mundane admin” and “real social work.”

---

Critical alignment of Professional and  
Managerial Imperatives.