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Making an Impact ? A Tale of Two Projects

Friday, October 16, 2:30-4:00 pm
Pacific time

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Abstract

How can AI researchers leverage their specialized knowledge to make a social impact? The notion is beguiling but the reality is complicated. This talk contrasts two strategies that are often employed--loosely described as "write a paper" and "be an entrepreneur" -- gained via two, very different projects in electronic market design.

The first project focused on developing new theoretical ideas for incentivizing local food pantries to honestly report demand to a centralized food bank. The second project was more practical; it aimed to design an electronic market for agricultural commodities in Uganda that could operate over low-end SMS phones. After discussing technical innovations, lessons learned, and lingering disappointments from both projects, the talk will conclude with some overall thoughts about strategies researchers might employ in pursuit of successful AI for Social Impact projects and how these can be taught in our courses.

Biography

Kevin Leyton-Brown is a professor of Computer Science at University of British Columbia and holds Canada CIFAR AI Chair at the Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute. He is also an associate member of the Vancouver School of Economics. He received PhD and M.Sc. from Stanford University and B.Sc. from McMaster University. He studies AI mostly at intersection of machine learning and (1) design and operation of electronic markets; (2) design of heuristic algorithms.

Leyton-Brown has co-written two books, "Multiagent Systems", "Essentials of Game Theory" and over 100 peer-refereed technical articles. His work has received over 16,000 citations and h-index of 49. He is a fellow of Advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AAAI). He and his team won 2018 INFORMS Franz Edelman Award for Achievement in Advanced Analytics, Operations Research and Management Science, described as "The leading O.R. and analytics award in industry". He also received UBC's 2015 Charles A. McDowell Award, 2014 E.W.R. Steacie Memorial Fellowship and 2013 Outstanding Young Researcher Prize from Canadian Association of Computer Science, SATzilla at international SAT solver competitions (2003-15). He and co-authors received paper awards from JAIR, ACM-EC, AAMAS and LION.

He is former chair of the ACM Special Interest Group on Electronic Commerce. He has advised/currently advising Auctionomics, AI21, Qudos, Zynga, Trading Dynamics, Ariba and Cariocas. He was scientific advisor to Zite, an UBC affiliate, until it was acquired by CNN in 2011. Now he is the co-founder of Kudu.ug and Meta-Algorithmic Technologies.