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THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

NEXTGEN NETWORK
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BUILDING THE FUTURE: ADDRESSING THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF AN AI-ENABLED WORLD

The Aspen Institute's International Partners launched a global effort, with support from Microsoft, to build a network of NextGen leaders from the public, civic, academic and social sectors to engage in open discussion about one of the most pressing concerns for the present and future: artificial intelligence (AI).

The NextGen Network aims to provide a new outlook from the NextGen perspective on how AI and technology affect our society today, the opportunities it creates, as well as the challenges humanity might face in the near future. Furthermore, it brings the topic closer to the local context. The first workshop for the Network was held in Mexico City on October 18, 2018, where a group of experts from the field gathered to discuss the impact of AI across society and the importance of delivering this new technology in a responsible way, with an emphasis on the social impacts of AI in Mexico.

ETHICS AND AI

Technological advancements change and affect the world every day. These create new opportunities but also raise critical questions and new challenges at a rapid pace. The discussion started by exhibiting two main views that exist around AI today. The first one states that humanity should be aware of not losing control of AI, while the second one assures that we will organically find our way as we have done several times in response to disrupting technologies. For the first time in human history, there is not only an industrial revolution but a cognitive one as well.

Human labor is being replaced by automation across the globe. People around the world use AI regularly without knowing how it works, nor understanding its implications. The group was asked to think about the challenges and opportunities for AI, particularly in the local context. How can Mexico, and many other countries around the world, adopt and adapt to new technology? What should Mexico be doing as a country to respond to the impacts of AI in a proactive way, such as the impact on the private sector and education? How could AI help provide some of the basic requirements in life?

AI cannot always be trusted to be fair and neutral, given that there is a lack of transparency about what goes into the algorithms, not to mention their potential to unfairly discriminate. For example, China's social credit system can determine that an individual is not credible enough to take out a loan, however the individual does not know why the algorithm made those recommendations. It is important to distinguish between consumers using AI that gives people the choice to "opt-in", such as iPhone's Siri, versus an "opt-out" system, such as China's social credit system. When AI affects customers directly, there is a shared responsibility that algorithms should be transparent and checked for biases. Creating a role inside companies, such as a compliance manager for AI, would provide an opportunity to oversee the implementation of AI and check for biases in collaboration with the engineering and business teams.

Many believe that AI is going to take over and replace countless jobs, such as drivers, factory workers, and service jobs. Some members of the group underscored that AI, such as autonomous vehicles, will create new jobs as people feel safe and secure when an individual is helping a machine operate (e.g. airplanes). A more effective way to respond

to the threat AI poses to employment could be to develop a retraining system across the economy for individuals to meet the needs of a changing world, such as skilled labor to develop and repair AI, such as autonomous vehicles.

Despite these challenges, the participants agreed that AI could be a tool for fixing these problems if used correctly, as the technological change will happen whether we engage or not. The group noted that societies must learn to adopt these technologies into our daily lives to improve our tasks. The use of AI must be done in a responsible way to assure human welfare and mitigate the risks.

The group asked important questions regarding the governance of AI: Who has a responsibility to govern AI? Who should regulate it? These questions around AI play a crucial role to establish limits and enforce certain principles. AI needs to be understood within a wide range of fields and consider how it is used in different contexts. The regulation and governance of AI, at both the local and global level, are not being developed and adopted as fast as technologies are. This raises yet another critical question: Should government be responsible for regulating AI? Or should industry? Many participants felt there must be shared responsibility between the government, civil society, and the private sector, and the customers and end users of technology. The regulation of AI has not moved quickly enough to stay ahead of the technology. This was on display earlier this year as many members of the US Congress did not know which questions to ask regarding AI and technology during the hearing with Mark Zuckerberg, creator of Facebook.

One question that the group grappled with to conclude the session was the ethical framework that should guide the development and use of AI. The participants discussed how society should approach the fact that perspective on what constitutes ethical AI varies among individuals and different countries. What may be considered ethical in Mexico may not be ethical in other countries, such as India or Germany. Apart from the government, companies have a responsibility to develop their own ethics protocol and involve their leaders and heads of the company in the process. Customers also need to demonstrate the importance of ethical AI principles to companies through their buying decisions.

AI IN MEXICO

The second session addressed the approach and application of AI within the specific circumstances of Mexico, with the goal to identify the main challenges that the country is facing, what the opportunities are, as well as threats that could arise in the near future if prompt actions are not taken.

Mexico is the first country in Latin America to launch an artificial intelligence strategy, and one of the first ten countries in the world. Yet, AI has not been embraced as swiftly as in other countries. Moreover, the government's decisions regarding AI tend to be political instead of rational. It is predicted that 19% of jobs will be affected by AI in Mexico, most of

which are jobs held by men, according to a collaborative report published by the British Embassy in Mexico, C Minds, and Oxford Insights*. This concern should be addressed proactively. Mexico needs to create the right ecosystem to leverage the benefits AI can bring to the country.

The Mexican government has not given adequate priority to this field, and therefore there is not a specific budget assigned to develop and adopt it into society. Another challenge Mexico faces as a country is education, where there is a lack of talent development and a focused education on technology. Citizens are not informed how to use technology nor how to become developers. This mistake results from traditional education systems as well as from industry and culture itself.

Despite these challenges, Mexico is placed within the top ten countries in the world to be advancing towards a national AI strategy, according to a report made by the AI 2030 coalition, composed of practitioners, academic institutions, companies, startups, public agencies, organizations, media and other key actors of the digital ecosystem and AI in Mexico. This group is pushing for an agenda that provides as much information as possible so that the country can fully understand the wide array of elements that need to be considered for policy.

Most participants agreed that Mexico has the right qualifications to be a leader in high-quality AI.

Mexico is unique for its focus on using AI to achieve social goals, such as financial inclusion, fighting corruption, improving public health, and reducing crime. There is great opportunity in Mexico to leverage AI for the needs of individuals in these important areas.

ACTIONS NEEDED

It is essential that industry and civil society communicate to the government the impact AI can have and put it on the agenda to enhance its development. In addition, the private sector and the government should coordinate and manage their efforts, resources, and time more efficiently towards new strategies to have a broader impact on society.

In addition, we must find ways to identify and develop Mexican talent to develop high-quality AI products. In that sense, the group recommended that different sectors promote and foster education in a wholesome way, not leaving it only to traditional education systems. This will help to improve the quality of jobs and prepare people to engage in a modern economy.

Finally, we must have indicators to measure the impact of policy and technology at the local and global level to determine if these steps are on the right path. At a global level, society must demand, create, and promote these new technologies in an ethical fashion. The first step to do so is by taking these conversations out of the room and out into the homes of all those who will be affected.

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