Applications of Heuristics as a Scientific Methodology

Introduction

For an artificial intelligence to work, it’s necessary to provide it with an ontology and a heuristic build around it; being so that an ontology is defined as the knowledge or experience pertinent to the field that is previously defined and delimited by a suit of experts in the field; therefore, it can be defined as a: *“Formal specification of a shared ontology.” [1]*

The heuristic is the ability to develop strategies capable of solving problems in a more effective fashion, based on the provided ontology. In artificial intelligence, it strives to develop algorithms that use the rules specified in the ontology to solve problems in a more effective way than by brute force.

To do so in a more reliable way, the heuristic scientific method was developed; it follows heuristical principals, heuristical rules and heuristical strategies.

There are two heuristical principles: on one side, the modelling, which tries to structure the problem in a way that can easily be solved by an algorithm; on the other, the comparison, which analyzes all of the paths to detect if one is following a path that has already been tested or that is exactly the same to one that is being executed, in case this happens, it stops immediately the path and, in this way, avoids unnecessary work.

The heuristical rules are such that must be followed by every algorithm to improve their effectiveness, these establish that: all data must be represented by variables, this variables must be represented numerically (as they are the simplest structures), the searched and the analyzed must be split and saved into different categories, and finally, all problems need to have the capacity to be reformulated as another model.

The heuristical strategy stablishes the organization that must be followed by the algorithm; it states that the starting point will always be the information provided at the beginning and that, while the problem is being processed, all the original knowledge must be compared with it, for it to generate new intermediate knowledge.

This method, was used in a general manner in different work fields such as psychology, medicine, industry, physics, historical, military, etc. Nevertheless, it was applied indiscriminately in all the aforementioned dominions, which led to the use of the same algorithm in the medical field to analyze the behavior of a virus and in the chemical industry, to study the reaction of an element in different testing environments.

The application of the method in such a general way led to the exclusion of a lot of variables that are unique to each work field; for example, while the ethical applications of a decision in a war field are a lot, in the physics side, they are not very relevant.

Because of all which was previously said, this investigation will try to define the applicability of the method in a general fashion to each of the fields that will be analyzed, starting form the hypothesis that it could be more appropriate to develop an independent method for each field, instead of simply changing the used ontology.

To do so, each field will be scrutinized by study cases that analyze the relationship between the artificial intelligence and the heuristics used, against the application of the one specified by the regular scientific method. In all of the occurrences, the advantages and disadvantages of the application of a different method will be noted, and an individual conclusion will be built for each of the fields; finally, all the conclusions will be compared to reach a global conclusion.

Analysis by field

*Industry:*

On the industry, we can encounter diverse cases where the heuristic methodology is effective to optimize processes and supply chains; although, we also find cases where it doesn’t.

In the factories, the artificial intelligence is used to make real time analysis of the production processes; this is made with the purpose of optimizing the processes and correct errors in advance. An example of this is the project ARKUNE, which optimizes the mechanized processes. When it is implemented on a factory, an artificial intelligence analyzes in real time the quantity of generated burr to determine if the burr eliminating process needs to be enacted or not. In these cases, the applicated ontology is the knowledge of the limit of approved burr in each product, as well as the algorithm to determine the amount of generated burr.

Taking this particular case, we can see that the heuristic method is being implemented to carry this process, as the problem is modeled by an algorithm that analyzes the quantity of burr produced by the drill, and once that is determined, it evaluates the burr limit to decide the execution of the next process.

Despite the existence of cases and areas where the heuristic method is applicable and works as intended, there are cases where this doesn’t hold true.

An example of this, are the Chatbots developed by Facebook, where the objective was to test and improve the communication abilities of two artificial intelligences designed to stablish natural conversations. Said program was defined to receive sentences and answer them; nevertheless, there was a moment where the answers stopped to have any semantic logic, which unleashed a barrage of answers without any sense.

In the cases where an artificial intelligence is designed to emulate natural language, the use of the heuristical method is impossible, since the language consists on semantic structures which can’t be represented syntactically (nor numerically) for their analysis, as the meaning is affected by the order and the selected words.

To try and represent this in numerical variables isn’t ideal, as an ontology that can give each word a value and a syntactic meaning doesn’t exist; which makes the heuristic method harder to implement, as there are no values to work with.

As we can see in these examples, the heuristic method can’t be applied in all the models or problems, as not all the problems can be modeled in a numeric fashion. Even if an ontology exists for almost all the fields, the artificial intelligence also requires an algorithm to work over said ontology. To try and apply the heuristic method in cases where the algorithms or the ontology are inappropriate, will cause the failure of the model or a wrong answer.

*Military:*

The conflicts between humans, whether they are direct confrontations or simple displays of power, have always been a strong driving force for the development of technology.

Ever since the invention of telecommunications, refinement of fuels, creations of aeronautical vehicles and foundation of research and development centers for technology have always been of utmost priority to secure the victory over the adversary. The perfecting of the artificial intelligence has become the new space race of this era.

The artificial intelligence promises an improvement over data handling, bringing with it more precise logistics and planning.

Because of this the AI is already a part of National Security, being implemented in cybersecurity to detect weak points, predict future attacks, analyze billions of data to detect suspicious activity, relocate soldiers in areas prone to conflict, etc. The Israeli defense forces use the capacities of artificial intelligence to improve the efficiency of their operations. Actually, the military don’t see a weapon in the AI, but a tool that will facilitate the data processing when it’s submitted to human control. The final objective is to enable the computer to take decisions based on the data provided by the troops, something that is still a dream, but that has seen constant improvement as time goes by.

The communication between the command center and the battle has always been key to achieve victory, the problem lays in the fact that the soldiers are not capable of communicating all the data on the field to the command center and that the command center doesn’t have the capability nor the speed required to process all the data; this is why, the AI has been implemented to work with this data. In this case, the heuristic method has proven to be a great tool, as it receives a lot of numerical data from all the instruments carried by the soldiers that can be thoroughly processed in the central for it to reach a solution, which can be enacted by the commanding officers.

Nevertheless, for the heuristic method to work, the necessary data must have attached the numerical data that reflects the cost of each of the options, and after that, the AI must take the best option among them. This cost (or value) of each of the options must be assigned by a human, as, who is a machine to define the cost of a life, no matter if it’s a civilian or a soldier’s life? More so, if the AI chooses an efficient option where the laws of war are violated or it commits crimes against the humanity, will the option taken by the machine will still be valid?

Finally, we can conclude that the implementation of AI in the military field, can help to perfect the process of communication and data processing to facilitate an operation; but, as war is a conflict between humans it’s important that all the machines are subordinated to the command of a human that has a moral and ethical compass.

*Medical:*

The development of applications oriented to the medical field that implement an AI has been in constant growth since its development; this is partly because the heuristic scientific method is quite efficient to identify the symptoms form a great catalogue of diseases, and in this way, propose possible diagnostics.

Owing to the constant investigation and updates on all the diseases, it’s possible to determine the ontological principles needed to model an application that enables precise diagnosing. In this way, we can see that on one hand, the medical field is inherently scientific, and as such, is highly compatible with the used models for AI.

On the other hand, between the methods more frequently used in the development of these applications, we can find the analysis of photographic patterns, the reduction of problems to find an adequate diagnosis and the constant monitoring of the soulish values of the patient. Also, it must be cleared that in almost the totality of the cases, the development of these applications doesn’t aim to replace the specialist, as its scope is to serve only as a supporting tool for him [7].

After all that has been previously said about this field, it also must be cleared that there are other areas that have a more complex nature, and so, are less attached to the heuristic scientific method; as the determination of ontological principles or the reduction of problematics isn’t easily reached; this has its roots on the fact that the analysis of human behavior isn’t easy to reduce to a number of variables nor is it possible for it to be exactly replicated. Some of the areas that fall under this category would be the psychology and the psychiatry, for these cases, it’s necessary for the patient to undergo a more strict and personal analysis by a specialist [8].

Nowadays, IBM is developing an application called *Predictive mind*, which pretends to diagnose and predict in a timely and efficient manner the psychosis and all the psychopathy’s that a person could develop by running a single test on the patient [9]. This has generated controversy and discomfort in the scientific community, as the absence of a specialist capable of such assertions proves to be a vital problem; this, linked to the fact that drugs must be administered to treat all these illnesses, opens up another problem about the ethics of letting an AI administer medicaments of this kind.

Finally, it’s important to remark the importance of a heuristic scientific method that can simplify reality to a point where adequate solutions can be reached, for it to augment the number of effectively treated patients; but also, its worth noting that the application of heuristics different to the scientific one could be more adequate to model medical systems that can reach solutions of better quality.

Despite all of this, all fields such as medicine can be adapted to a certain degree, but when a subject of utmost importance is treated, such as health, it’s important to have the participation of a specialist in the final diagnosis.

Conclusion

It can be appreciated that in all the three fields, the use of the scientific heuristic method is extremely effective and has almost no flaws in all of the areas of common interest, such as data analysis or modelling of simple events; nevertheless, the method loses almost all of its effectiveness when the problem encompasses data that can’t be represented in a numerical fashion or that when it’s done in such a way, important aspects are lost for the calculations, such as the value of life.

In these cases, a heuristic befitting of the field was developed to improve the effectiveness of the process, which tended to be more efficient than its scientific counterpart; despite that, it was also seen that these new heuristics didn’t completely solve the problem, they just raised their success or usefulness rate compared to the scientific one.

Because of that, simply changing the heuristic proves to be insufficient to solve the most difficult problematics, depending on a human that can understand ethics and morals to take the last decision.

Therefore, it can be concluded that despite the boost in success rate that is presented by a new heuristic, it’s not enough to solve a problem, and therefore, the participation of a human in the problem solving will still be needed, until an AI is capable of understanding more subjective concepts.

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Abstract

This investigation was made with the intention of analyzing the application of the heuristic scientific method to different fields, and through that analysis, determine the applicability of the model to each sector by weighing the advantages and disadvantages from each dominion; in order to propose modifications that could help to improve the effectivity. In the same manner, the results will be compared at the end for each of the cases, to see if there is a correlation between the proposed modifications and, if so, evaluate if there is a way to improve the method as a whole.