

Towards an artificial intelligence that is both controlled and ubiquitous

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It is quite some time now since the term artificial intelligence (AI) broke free of the confines of science fiction and became part of current IT vocabulary. Indeed authorities and personalities as well-known as Leon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg frequently opine on the implications of this technology.

Artificial intelligence is the theory and development of computer systems able to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence. The rise of this technology is due to the exponential growth in available data and the evolution of computing capacity, which allows huge quantities of information to be processed, conclusions to be drawn and actions performed which not long ago seemed impracticable, such as interacting naturally with a device by voice, which is now possible thanks to Google Assistant, Alexa and Siri.

Although in most cases AI is simply another technological tool, we should not underestimate its great disruptive potential. For example its application opens up new ways of solving global problems like climate change or famine, but also unleashes a new wave of automation that could lead to unemployment, social inequality and falling tax revenues. Nonetheless, there are reasons for optimism as regards the final outcome, since while each innovation is different, historically technological advances have meant net increases in aggregate wellbeing and employment.

In any case, various authorities and national and international organisations are aware of their role in this technological transition, and of the importance of promoting the controlled use of AI. There is a political consensus on the importance of assessing the ethical aspects, the potential impact on the economy and the development of new skills relating to AI.

The US, the EU and other countries with economic weight have formed working groups to study these matters, as has Spain recently. As a consequence of this work, many countries have already published national strategies, earmarked funds for AI research and development and started to develop rules seeking to ensure the availability of the raw material for this technology - data, while at the same time addressing matters such as privacy, transparency, civil liability of AI systems and the functioning of the markets.

Nonetheless, given the global nature of this technology, the assessment of its impact, the defining of the strategy to be followed and the regulation of AI should not be carried out in isolation by any particular country or region. On the contrary, there is a need for cooperation between governments and private sector players to ensure that we make the best of the opportunities offered by AI while mitigating the risks it may entail.

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