Hundreds of the world's top minds debate ethics at Dstl's AI Fest

Dstl — the science inside UK defence and security — is playing a critical role in helping the UK Ministry of Defence understand how it can responsibly and ethically adopt AI in order to deter and de-escalate conflict, save lives and reduce harm.

Harnessing the power of AI and unlocking the strategic potential of data is one of the great challenges of the early part of the 21st century. Organisations that understand and embrace this have been able to fundamentally alter how they operate and have delivered remarkable changes within their sector, for example in retail, finance, healthcare and transportation.

As part of this Dstl's AI Lab held a hugely successful virtual event called "AI Fest" which shared experience and practical approaches on a range of challenges including the importance of curating and exploiting data for UK Armed Forces, how to ensure that AI systems are safe, robust and trustworthy enough for military use, and creating ethical guidelines for military adoption of AI.

Other topics covered how to design data centric systems that are effective, fair and safe; working with data sets that are scarce, poor quality or biased; building a defence "data architecture" that enables the data to get to where it needs to be and the "AI Building Blocks" — the wider technical, system and organisational components required for an effective AI capability.

The event included more than 1700 attendees who represented over 300 different organisations and 35 partner nations. Attendees were able to attend 23 sessions consisting of 76 technical talks which included a number of talks from world leading AI scientists who delivered keynote speeches. The event also included a large online exhibition consisting of virtual booths from leading AI companies.

Professor Steven Meers, the Head of Dstl's AI Lab, said:

> Collaboration between government, industry, academia and international partners is particularly vital in this rapidly developing area. AI Fest was an extremely successful event that brought the community together to share insights and best practice regarding the how to responsibly harness the power of AI for defence and security.

Keynote speakers included Dame Angela McLean, the Chief Scientific Adviser for the MOD, who has been at the heart of using data to help the UK government manage its Covid response and Professor Chris Bishop, the Laboratory Director of the Microsoft Research Lab in Cambridge, said:

There is a real AI revolution taking place right now that is truly transformational. For the last forty years we have programmed computers, but for the next forty years we will train them.

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