

Algorithms for decision making: Free book download from MIT

MIT press has provided a free book on Algorithms for decision making. You can [download it from MIT Press here](#), or alternatively it is available from [this site](#) if the original link fails.

From the data science website:

The book takes an agent based approach

An *agent* is an entity that acts based on observations of its environment. Agents may be physical entities, like humans or robots, or they may be nonphysical entities, such as decision support systems that are implemented entirely in software. The interaction between the agent and the environment follows an *observe-act cycle* or *loop*.

- The agent at time t receives an *observation* of the environment
- Observations are often incomplete or noisy;
- Based in the inputs, the agent then chooses an action at through some decision process.
- This action, such as sounding an alert, may have a nondeterministic effect on the environment.
- The book focusses on agents that interact intelligently to achieve their objectives over time.
- Given the past sequence of observations and knowledge about the environment, the agent must choose an action at that best achieves its objectives in the presence of various sources of uncertainty including:

1. *outcome uncertainty*, where the effects of our actions are uncertain,
2. *model uncertainty*, where our model of the problem is uncertain,
3. *state uncertainty*, where the true state of the environment is uncertain, and
4. *interaction uncertainty*, where the behavior of the other agents interacting in the environment is uncertain.

The book is organized around these four sources of uncertainty.

Making decisions in the presence of uncertainty is central to the field of *artificial intelligence*

Personal Branding - Presentation and Links

I am a believer in personal branding and the value it provides. If you don't manage the perception of yourself

and your value in the industry, it is managed for you, and not always in a flattering manner. Personal branding is about owning that perception and shaping it to reflect the real you – how you want to be seen.

Some time ago, I was asked to give an internal talk on personal branding, as a part of a larger change initiative I was leading in my organization. We are fortunate enough to have access to LinkedIn Learning, which I strongly recommend. Using that as a starting point for references, I then looked beyond that to the public internet and what others had to say on the topic. From that work came the included deck. These materials were based on the great work from others in this space and they are credited in the deck – I encourage you to check out the classes they have provided as well as the websites linked in the materials.

You can download [the deck](#) here, but the bulk of the talk is the conversation around the materials. The linked resources and references are a great start for those conversations.

What makes a good manager?

A [project at Google](#) spent time researching what defines a great manager at Google, and through that identified the top 10 traits to grow. As listed they are:

1. Is a good coach
2. Empowers team and does not micromanage
3. Creates an inclusive team environment, showing concern for success and well-being
4. Is productive and results-oriented
5. Is a good communicator-listens and shares information
6. Supports career development and discusses performance
7. Has a clear vision/strategy for the team
8. Has key technical skills to help advise the team
9. Collaborates effectively
10. Is a strong decision maker

The last two were new additions to the list, and I believe reflect the need to both reach out to your broader organization to expand your thinking, while simultaneously understanding when the time has come to step in and drive to a decision – the leadership courage to make a decision in the face of a constantly shifting landscape, and then stand by and manage through that decision.

as our company grew in size and complexity, demands on our managers and leaders increased as well. From the results of our employee survey we learned that Googlers wanted to see more effective cross-organization collaboration and stronger decision making practices from leaders

As the Google team identified, there is a need for decisive leadership in a time where we are bombarded with more and more data and “facts” or opinions on every decision to be taken – this coupled with FOMO (Fear of missing out) can lead to a situation where teams spend an unfortunate amount of time in the unproductive state of spinning. This leads to a negative impact on moral and reduces productivity. Contrary to that, a decisive leader, who empowers a good team and uses strong communication skills to get thoughts drawn out from the team and discussed, often has the facts actually required for the decision in the first day of deliberation! The ability to collaborate quickly and communicate the rational, get confirmation and drive to the decision is the real differentiator and the combination for real productivity!

Easy ways to tell if an online story is a hoax

I have noted, as I am sure many others have, the significant number of viral stories that turn out to be a hoax. These are perpetuated by people re-posting links they see that have an emotional component (often), while doing little to no verification to determine the veracity of the story or image in question.

There is a good article with some tips here:

<http://gizmodo.com/six-easy-ways-to-tell-if-that-viral-story-is-a-hoax-1732026737> where they offer links to tools that will simplify the process of verification.

Simply put, even a short snopes.com check often debunks stories, but it is bad form to blindly re-tweet, forward, re-post or otherwise propagate controversial (or really any) stories without verification.

I have seen a spike in these with videos and pictures related to the refugee crisis caused by the fighting across the middle east. While not aligning with the politicians and not getting into personal feelings on the refugee “importation” or acceptance, the argument is certainly clouded by the repeated posting of false images of “refugee” malfeasance that turn out to be from completely unrelated conflicts or issues. This noise in the social network is distorting the real dialog, and reducing credibility for those with valid examples or concerns.