How to Get the Most Out of IJCAI-83

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WHEN I TOOK ON THE JOB of programme chairman of IJCAI-83 the trustees presented me with a list of problems with the way IJCAI programmes had traditionally been organised. Some of these problems had been raised by previous programme chairmen, some by authors, some by attendees and some have been subsequently been raised by me. I have tried to organise the IJCAI-83 programme to solve these problems - or at least some of them, I have been unable to devise a scheme which simultaneously solves all the problems. (I leave this as an exercise for the reader.) My plans converged after consultation with many people in the AI community, including the IJCAI-83 conference committee, and they have that committee's approval.

Inevitably this means that IJCAI-83 will be a little different from here-to-fore, and in order for my changes to be also solutions, it is necessary for you, the paying customer, to be aware of these differences and to take advantage of them. The aim of this article is to raise your awareness.

The Problems

But first the problems. The problems whose solution most affects authors and attendees are:

a. Referees sometimes betray ignorance of the field and/or misunderstanding of a paper. Some have been unknown to the author, the programme chairman or the responsible member of the programme committee

b Refereeing standards are very uneven, with more than 50 into the accept/reject category

c. The role of conference papers is unclear. Are they meant to describe finished work, work in progress or research proposals?

d IJCAIs are bewildering With so many parallel sessions, attendees spend their time running from one building to another, or sitting in one talk speculating that the talk they are missing must surely be better than this.

e. Programme committee meetings are bewildering With approx. 600 submitted papers, it is impossible to read them all or even remember which was which. Justice is only done if the referees are present Meanwhile the other members twiddle their fingers Either the meeting is held early, when half the papers remain unrefereed, or it is held late and delays the timetable.

f. Delays in international mailing play havoc with deadlines and timetables

g Traditional divisions of AI into subfields are based on orthogonal classifications, e g by domain (program synthesis, medical applications), by sensory device (vision, speech), by technique (production rules, logic programming), by applicability (theoretical foundations, cognitive science, expert systems). Thus the majority of papers *necessarily* fall under several headings.

Submitted Papers

I want to sharpen the distinction between the "long" and 'short" to remove some of the ambiguity about their role.

Long papers are for finished, high quality work. In fact, IJCAIs are the premier forum for such work. Refereeing standards for long papers will be high, e.g. normally, both referees must recommend acceptance. So getting a long paper accepted will be harder than here-to-fore. On the other hand the acceptance of the paper will be a significant mark of quality.

Short papers are for work in progress, to signal to the rest of the community what you are up to. The IJCAI volumes serve as a kind of directory of the best ongoing work in AI Be sure that your work is represented. Refereeing standards for short papers will be more relaxed, e.g. normally, only one referee need recommend acceptance. Because of the increased difficulty of getting a long paper accepted the maximum length of short papers has been increased to 2250 words (from 1200 for IJCAI-81).

Having despaired of finding a politically acceptable, academic basis for subdividing the field, I settled on a social basis. That is, I looked for groups of researchers who were cohesive enough to hold workshops, run newsletters, or reference each others papers. The subfields are:

- Automatic Programming,
- Cognitive Modelling,
- Expert Systems,
- Knowledge Representation,
- Learning and Knowledge Acquisition,
- Logic Programming,
- Natural Language,
- Planning and Search,
- Robotics,
- System Support,
- Theorem Proving,
- Vision

which is not much different from the usual ones. To save me work and avoid miscarriages of justice, the classification of your paper must be done by *you*, i.e. choose one (or more if you must) of the above subfields and write it prominantly on your paper. A programme committee member, called the subfield chairman, will be responsible for the papers in your subfield. Unclassifiable papers will come to me, so it is in your interest to avoid that fate.

Your paper will be sent to two able and experienced researchers in your subfield, personally recruited by the subfield chairman When they have each read it and formed an opinion they will confer and try to resolve any differences between them To enable this we will try to arrange for pairs of referees to be geographically close. This continuous stream processing avoids the delays and timewasting normally caused by the programme committee meeting, and encourages fairer decisions by letting the people who have read a paper sort out the discrepancies in their judgement If this process does not result in a decision then the subfield

chairman will call for a third opinion, and failing that, I will decide. You should know the outcome soon after April 1st.

Attending the Conference

Assuming the plans described above work out then IJCAI-83 should consist of a mainstream of invited talks, long papers and panels, and some tributaries of short papers, exhibits, program demonstrations, special interest sessions, etc. At any one time there will only be one mainstream session, i.e. there will be no parallel long paper sessions. The obvious strategy for an attendee is to attend the mainstream, unless there is a tributary session which particularly interests him/her. In this way the attendee can expect a high hit rate of excellent and relevant papers. Short paper sessions will tend to consist of small groups of specialists. I will encourage session chairmen to run them on an informal basis, and will try to include time for general discussion. This is the place to meet your cronies and find out what is going on in your subfield.

The conference area at Karlsruhe is conducive to a good atmosphere. All the rooms are within easy reach of each other and there is a central area for casual meetings and drinking coffee/tea. The conference site is surrounded by the city gardens, which contains lakes, flower beds and the open air zoo. The opening reception and banquet will be held in the zoo. If you get carried away in your argument a bavarian cow bell will announce the start of the next session. Karlsruhe is situated in one of the loveliest parts of Germany with the Black Forest and Alsace near by It is also just a short driving distance from the Swiss Alps, France and Italy. Enjoy yourself at IJCAI-83.