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**Network Machine Learning**  
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**Abstract**

This document introduces background information of machine learning briefly, then explores the potential of machine learning techniques for networks.

**Status of This Memo**

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## [1.](#) Introduction

Machine learning techniques help to make predictions or decisions by learning from historical data. As machine learning mechanism could dynamically adapt to varying situations and enhance their own intelligence by learning from new data, they are more flexible in handling complicated tasks than strictly static program instructions. Therefore, machine learning techniques have been widely applied in image analysis, pattern recognition, language recognition, conversation simulation, and etc.

With deep exploration, machine learning techniques would cast light on studies of autonomic networking, in that they could be well adapted to learn the various environments of networks and react to dynamic situations.

This document firstly provides background information of machine learning briefly, then explores the potential of machine learning techniques for networks functions, such as network control, network management, and supplying network data for upper-layer applications.

Author notice: this document is in the primary stage. It is an ongoing document for the proposed Network Machine Learning Research Group. For now, it is not clear whether it would be published or not.



## **2. Terminology**

The terminology defined in this document.

**Machine Learning** A computational mechanism that analyzes and learns from data input, either historic data or real-time feedback data, following designed model/pattern. It can be used to make predictions or decision, rather than following strictly static program instructions.

## **3. Brief Background of Machine Learning**

### **3.1. Machine Learning Categories**

Machine learning mechanisms are typically classified into three broad categories, depending on the nature of the learning "signal" or "feedback" available:

**Supervised learning** The machine learning mechanism is given labeled inputs and the correspondent desired outputs. The mechanism could learn a general rule that maps inputs to outputs by itself.

**Unsupervised learning** The given input are not labeled. It leaves the machine learning mechanism itself to find structure in its input and output.

**Reinforcement learning** The machine learning mechanism interacts with dynamic environments in which it performs a certain task and receives feedback from its action.

Between supervised and unsupervised learning, there is semi-supervised learning, in which input data are partially labeled.

### **3.2. Machine Learning Approaches**

There are a few basic machine learning approaches. They can be mixed together to complete complicated tasks.

**Classification** With the training data that has been labeled into a number of classes, the machine learning mechanism could assign new unlabeled data into one or more these classes. An example is SPAM filtering, in which emails are classified into "spam" or "not spam" classes.

**Clustering** Without labeled training data, the machine learning mechanism divides data into groups. It is the learning mechanism itself to decide the number or structure of output classes.



**Regression** It estimates the relationships among variables. The outputs are continuous.

**Anomaly detection** It detects specific data which do not conform to an expected pattern or other data in a data set.

**Density estimation** The machine learning mechanism needs to identify the distribution of input data.

**Dimensionality reduction** The machine learning mechanism could simplify inputs by mapping them into a lower-dimensional space.

**Decision tree learning** The learning output is structured into a decision tree as a predictive model.

**Association rule learning** The learning delivers potential relations between variables.

**Artificial neural networks** also called "neural network". It is inspired by the structure and functions of biological neural networks. It is structured by a number of interconnected computational "neurons", each of which has independent deciding ability. The connections have numeric weights that can be tuned according to feedback and trends, making neural nets adaptive to inputs and capable of learning.

**Reinforcement learning** It is inspired by behaviorist psychology. The mechanism take actions in an environment so as to maximize cumulative reward.

**Similarity and metric learning** It learns from training data a similarity function that measures how similar or related two objects are.

**Representation learning** Also called feature learning. It learns a feature - a transformation of raw data input to a representation that can be effectively exploited in machine learning tasks.

This is not a full enumerated list of machine learning approaches. Other approaches may include support vector machines, bayesian networks, inductive logic programming, sparse dictionary learning, genetic algorithms, and etc.

Editor notes: the basic algorithms that machine learning approaches use may be listed as a future work. It may be too detailed and too many to be included.



### **3.3. Successful Applications**

Machine learning approaches have been successfully applied in many areas, such as human behavior analysis, image analysis, nature language recognition (including speech and handwriting processing), conversation simulation, medical diagnosis, structural health monitoring, stock market analysis, biological analysis and classifying, loan and insurance evaluation, game playing, and many other applications.

As for network applications, such as search engines, SPAM filtering, adaptive website, Internet fraud detection, online advertising, etc., have all been greatly benefited from the machine learning mechanism. However, most of those successful stories are in the application layer of network perspective.

### **3.4. Precondition of Applying Machine Learning Approach**

Although it is different from big data or data mining, machine learning does also need data. However, machine learning can be applied with small set of data or dynamic feedback from environment. The quality of data decides the efficient and accuracy of machine learning.

There is no generic machine learning mechanism that could suitable for all or most of use cases. For each use case, the developers need to design a specific analysis path, which may combine multiple approaches or algorithms together. The feature design and analysis path design are the key factor in the machine learning applications.

To achieve autonomic decision or minimize the human intervention, there should be evaluation system for the results of machine learning mechanism. The evaluation system could be the measurement that the results of machine learning mechanism are executed. The evaluation system and machine learning mechanism could compose a close decision loop for autonomic decision.

### **3.5. Limitation of Machine Learning Mechanism**

So far, the machine learning mechanism does not perform very well for accurate result. In most successful cases, it is used as an assistant analysis tool. Its results are usually accepted in fault-tolerant environment or with further human confirmation.





#### **4. Use Cases Study of Applying Machine Learning in Network**

The Network Machine Learning Research Group (NMLRG) provides a forum for researchers to explore the potential of machine learning techniques for networks. In particular, the NMLRG will work on potential approaches that apply machine learning techniques in network control, network management, and supplying network data for upper-layer applications.

The initial focus of the NMLRG will be on higher-layer concepts where the machine learning mechanism could be applied in order to enhance the network establishing, controlling, managing, network applications and customer services. This includes mechanisms to acquire knowledge from the existing networks so that new networks can be established with minimum efforts; the potential to use machine learning mechanisms for routing control and optimization; using machine learning mechanisms in network management to predict future network status; using machine learning mechanisms to autonomic and dynamical network management; using machine learning mechanisms to analyze network faults and support recovery; learning network attacks and their behaviors, so that protection mechanisms could be self-adapted; unifying the data structure and the communication interface between network/network devices and customers, so that the upper-layer applications could easily obtain relevant network information, etc. The NMLRG is expected to identify and document requirements, to survey possible approaches, to provide specifications for proposed solutions, and to prove concepts with prototype implementations that can be tested in real-world environments.

The more knowledge we have, the more intelligent we are. It is the same for networks and network management. Up to now, the only available network knowledge is usually the current network status inside a given device or relevant current status from other devices. However, historic knowledge is very helpful to make correct decisions, in particular to reduce network oscillation or to manage network resources over time. Transplantable knowledge from other networks can be helpful to initially set up a new network or new network devices. Knowledge of relationships between network events and network configuration may help a network to decide the best parameters according to real performance feedback. In addition to such historic knowledge, powerful data analytics of current network conditions may also be a valuable source of knowledge that can be exploited directly. The machine learning mechanism is the correspondent mechanism to learn and apply knowledge intelligently.



## **5. Security Considerations**

This document is focused on applying machine learning in network, including of course applying machine learning in network security, on higher-layer concepts. Therefore, it does not itself create any new security issues.

## **6. IANA Considerations**

This memo includes no request to IANA.

## **7. Acknowledgements**

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## **8. Change log [RFC Editor: Please remove]**

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## **9. Informative References**

[RFC2629] Rose, M., "Writing I-Ds and RFCs using XML", [RFC 2629](#), DOI 10.17487/RFC2629, June 1999, <<http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc2629>>.

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