

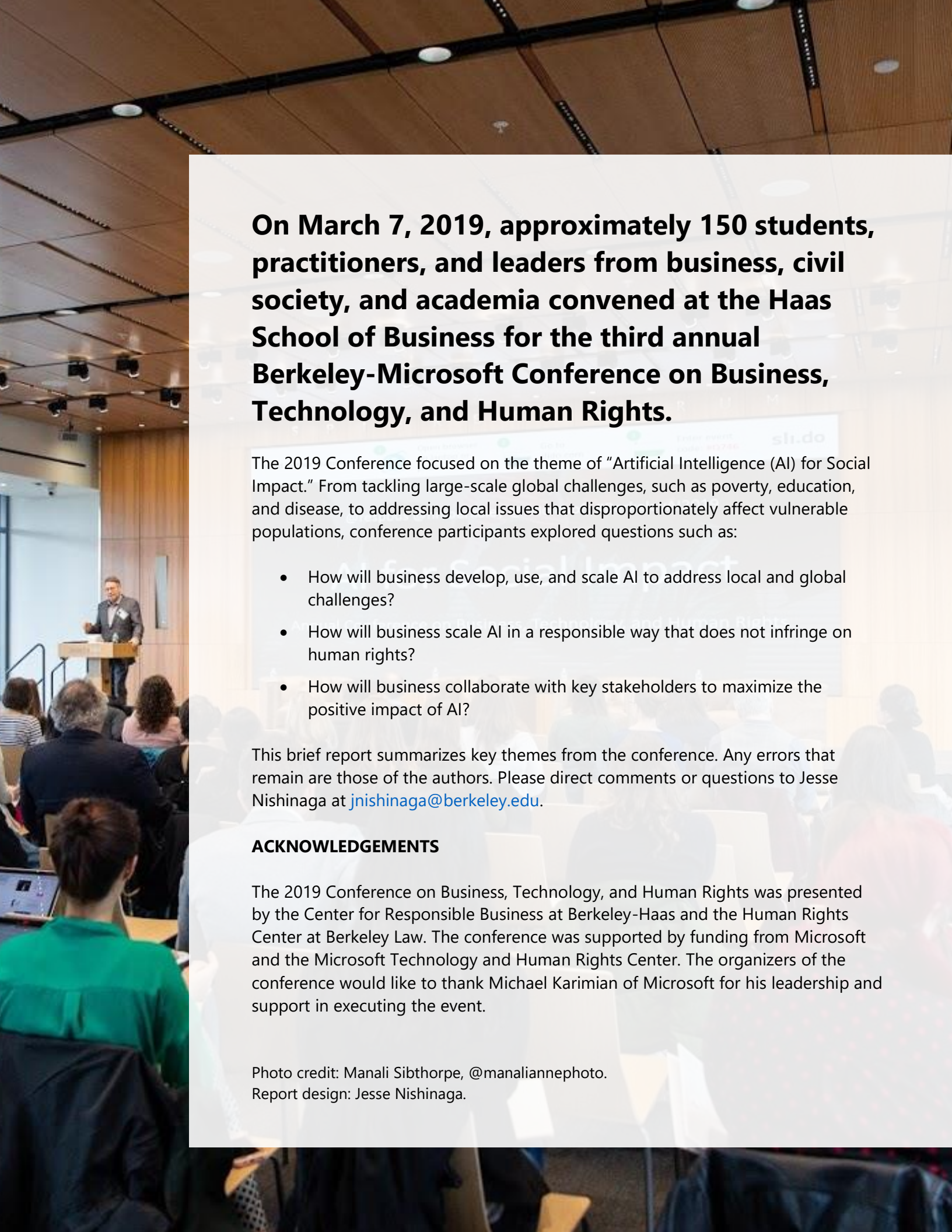
# AI for Social Impact

2019 Conference on Business, Technology,  
and Human Rights

Executive Summary



March 7, 2019  
Spieker Forum, Haas School of Business



## **On March 7, 2019, approximately 150 students, practitioners, and leaders from business, civil society, and academia convened at the Haas School of Business for the third annual Berkeley-Microsoft Conference on Business, Technology, and Human Rights.**

The 2019 Conference focused on the theme of “Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Social Impact.” From tackling large-scale global challenges, such as poverty, education, and disease, to addressing local issues that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, conference participants explored questions such as:

- How will business develop, use, and scale AI to address local and global challenges?
- How will business scale AI in a responsible way that does not infringe on human rights?
- How will business collaborate with key stakeholders to maximize the positive impact of AI?

This brief report summarizes key themes from the conference. Any errors that remain are those of the authors. Please direct comments or questions to Jesse Nishinaga at [jnishinaga@berkeley.edu](mailto:jnishinaga@berkeley.edu).

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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The goal of the 2019 Conference was to build greater understanding of the positive social impact of AI, but also recognize the potential downsides, risks, and unintended consequences of this technology. Speakers from across industries and sectors offered ideas, examples, and suggestions on how business can develop and deploy AI to generate positive social impact across the value chain.

Here are some of the key takeaways and recommendations from the discussion:

### **FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS, BUT BE MINDFUL OF RISKS**

As one speaker proclaimed, “AI is potentially one of the most transformative technologies we’ve seen and we are trying to find more and more scenarios where AI can better the human condition.” Business, technologists, and users of AI, while being mindful of the risks that come with this technology, also should see the potential upside that it can bring to local and global challenges, such as climate change, that would benefit from the massive computational and predictive power of AI.

There are many scenarios that could benefit from AI. One speaker described bringing the power of AI to the Internet of Things (IOT) to improve pattern identification and detect anomalies in the work environment. AI also can power virtual-reality training solutions that help lower rates of injury and better able to predict risks to humans. These solutions can be particularly useful in industries, such as apparel and oil and gas, where ensuring good working conditions

and protecting worker health and safety are salient challenges within these industries’ supply chains.

In the case of refugees and migrants, human rights defenders are leveraging AI to generate insights for and help protect advocates who are working on the ground. AI can provide these advocates with objective tools to raise concerns or ask for investigations of abuses, or alternatively, to identify opportunities to provide better services where they are needed.<sup>1</sup> AI also can empower people with disabilities with tools that not only support their independence, but also amplify their voices and ensure their perspectives are included in decision making at work and throughout society.

At the same time, companies need to make sure AI does not create more risks and unintended consequences for society. For instance, companies need to help ensure AI technologies are not used for surveillance in ways that infringe on an individual’s rights to privacy and security or on children’s rights. Companies also must help make sure these technologies are not being used to incite violence by oppressive regimes, hate groups, or sole individuals with harmful intentions.

In the context of work, AI may generate entire new categories of work, which can bring positive economic and social impact for many, but also may lead to job displacement for millions of people who may not have the ability or skills to quickly adapt and transition into the jobs of the future. There are several leading organizations that are training and

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Hartsough and Ada Maksutaj, Center for Responsible Business, [blog](#), April 2019.

upskilling workers for the AI-based jobs of the future, but there also is recognition that companies cannot solve this challenge alone and will need to collaborate with policy makers and governments to help workers, especially those from the most vulnerable populations, make this transition relatively quickly and with dignity.

### **USE INCLUSIVE, HUMAN-CENTERED AI DESIGN PRINCIPLES**

A fundamental challenge of AI is how this technology could take away human agency from the very systems and institutions designed by and for humans. One of the ways to address this challenge, as several speakers suggested, is by adopting “human-centered” design for technology, which, in short, is about building a deeper empathy with the people that technology is being designed for.<sup>2</sup>

Applying this human-centered concept to AI, as many speakers believed, will be critical to generating lasting, positive outcomes. Several speakers also emphasized that human-centered design must be done in an inclusive way. As one speaker stated, “people are going to be the greatest resource, and through diversity and reaching out to as many communities and including them, we will make ourselves and what we are trying to accomplish much more successful.”

An inclusive, human-centered approach to AI will help bring the full diversity and understanding of human needs, perspectives, opportunities, and risks into the development and deployment of AI, which, in many cases, has been shown to

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reinforce certain biases and stereotypes and even create new avenues for discrimination, particularly against marginalized and underrepresented groups.

For instance, some are already observing AI-based surveillance technologies disproportionately impact communities of color in the U.S.—technologies that are trying to predict things such as a workers’ qualification for employment or even where crimes might occur. Furthermore, these algorithmic biases are often hidden from public oversight, making it challenging for anyone to test these biases and ensure accountability. An inclusive, human-centered approach to AI could eliminate these biases from the start.

Several speakers also discussed the importance of existing human rights principles and frameworks, such as the UN

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<sup>2</sup> [Ideo.org](https://www.ideo.org/).

Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, as key instruments to help bring diverse stakeholder voices into the design and application of technology, including AI. These human rights principles have worked across technologies, geographies, cultures, and various challenges for many decades and should continue to be viewed as critical components of a larger toolbox of human-centered solutions.

**ELIMINATE SILOS AND COLLABORATE**

One speaker suggested that “once we close the space between the silos that exist around technology and human rights, we can all get better at our jobs and improve outcomes.” As this implies, greater and more effective collaboration among business, technologists, and human rights advocates is a key opportunity that some leading organizations—from industry groups focused specifically on AI partnerships to multilateral institutions that are working across geographic, political, and cultural boundaries—are already pursuing.

Ironically, AI can play a direct role in breaking down barriers and eliminating

silos. For example, when it comes to breaking down communication and language barriers that often prevent successful collaboration, AI technology can augment the way in which humans exchange information and speak and listen to one another without losing vital context.

For some of the biggest, most complex challenges in the world today, speakers agreed that a multiplicity of solutions will be needed and business can play an important role in bringing diverse groups together to generate differentiated, but mutually reinforcing solutions. Technology and AI can be at the center of solving many of these challenges and, therefore, should be viewed as a tool that organizations use to maximize inclusive, human-centered problem solving.

Ultimately, AI should be used to enhance human ability to generate better outcomes and positive social impact for as many people as possible. As one of the final speakers argued, “we must look at the problem first and apply technology rather than have technology shape the conversation.”





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