# e-musing

## Philanthropy A. I. ??

by Gary Hubbell

I'm constantly watching trends to help me think about how organizations and development professionals will have to respond differently in the future. A juicy little tidbit from the World Future Society[1] landed in my email today. Check this out:

> "If you had a severe stroke and couldn't speak for yourself, would you trust a computer to predict whether you'd want life-support treatment or not? One study now suggests that an advanced computer-based decision tool can predict your preferences as accurately as a family member.
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> The decision tool, developed by David Wendler of the National Institutes of Health and colleagues, uses the incapacitated patient's circumstances (e.g., Alzheimer's patient with pneumonia) and personal characteristics (Native American, male, over age 60, well-educated). The program analyzes treatment preferences of similar individuals in these circumstances and predicts how likely this patient would be to accept antibiotics to treat his pneumonia.
>
> Wendler's team analyzed how well the decision tool performed compared with surrogates (i.e., loved ones) who were queried about a patient's choices in a hypothetical scenario involving terminating life support. Both the surrogates and the computer were roughly 68% accurate in predicting the patient's choice.
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> Ideally, all individuals should make their treatment preferences known through advance medical directives. However, when no such directive exists, Wendler believes that improved computer-based decision tools could surpass the decision-making abilities of loved ones, who may be burdened by stress."

If this capability now exists, how far away are we from predictive modeling around donor behavior? If computer decision modeling can now address one of the most fundamentally personal decisions (end of life), how much more difficult could it be to model a giving decision? Might we expect Blackbaud, Kintera, Convio, and others to demo this product at next year's round of conferences? Prospect research, wealth screening, "target tags", donor histories, gender differences, age profiles, the study of generational personalities, and social network mapping already exist. Therefore, how far can we be from a modeling tool that correctly predicts –68% of the time—what a donor will decide about a specific major gift?

Perhaps the bigger question is not *when* this capability will exist but *whether* it's really a benefit to the practice of philanthropy. Potentially, such tools could remove development professionals one more step from close interaction with these fussy, demanding, interesting human beings we call donors. Worse, these tools could unintentionally—and incorrectly-- reinforce attention on the *gift* instead of on the *donor*.

Both the inevitable tool development and the subsequent debate will be fun to watch.

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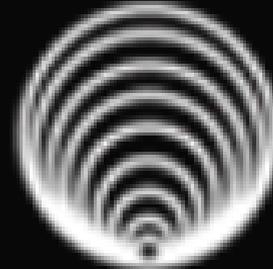
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