Future Firsts: Technology forces shaping the future workforce

2013   2017   2019   2021   2023   **2025**   2027   2029   2030

AUTOMATION

Anticipating the disruption caused to modern career markets by robotisation, smart systems and the rise of the people-free delivery service - while considering the consequences for income, leisure and work-life balance.

Is the modern mechanisation of industrial practices and labour markets now of such intensity and scale that there is simply bound to be a devastation of job opportunities across the Western world and a forced swell (whether ultimately socially and psychologically agreeable or not) in human leisure time?

Or are we simply witnessing a form of trade cycle effect, i.e. that as with similar waves of technological innovation (breaking ever since the 19th century) whereupon some sectors and skills will (perhaps abruptly, perhaps brutally) be eliminated while entrepreneurship and new skill evolutions make new markets and restore levels of employment?

Many hard-won professional qualifications are, some allege, on the rim of extinction. And we all face a future in which economic productivity is progressively de-linked from actual employment. An economy can grow, in other words, alongside and in spite of an ever-reducing national payroll.

First it is likely that lower skilled jobs will be at risk, but new technologies are increasingly posing a risk to higher skilled jobs too. This will inevitably lead to new types of jobs being created, with an emphasis on how people and machines can work most effectively together, ergonomically complimenting each other's skill sets.
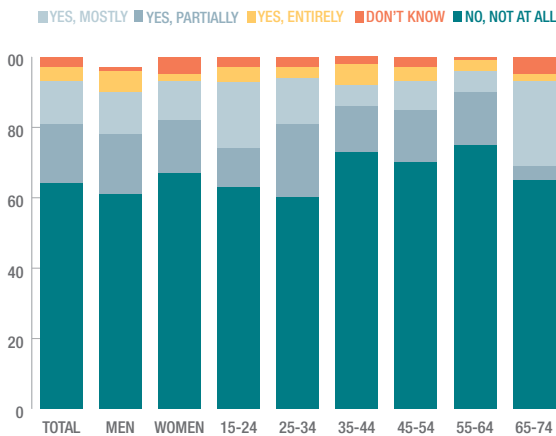
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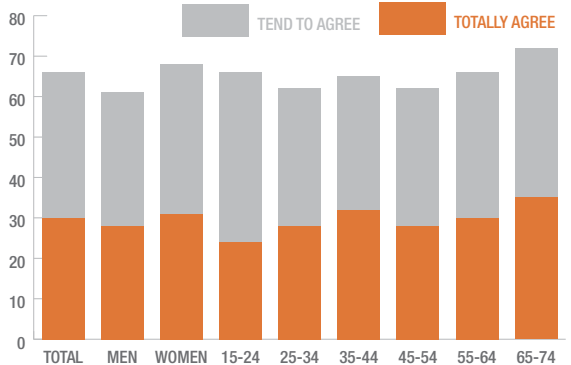2017   2019   2021   2023   2025   2027   2029   2030

Most people in Great Britain do not believe that their current job could be done by a robot or artificial intelligence, an opinion which remains consistent across all age groups. People do however believe that more jobs will be lost than will be created as a result of using robots and AI. This suggests that people are aware of the threat of automation, but they do not perceive their own jobs as being at risk.
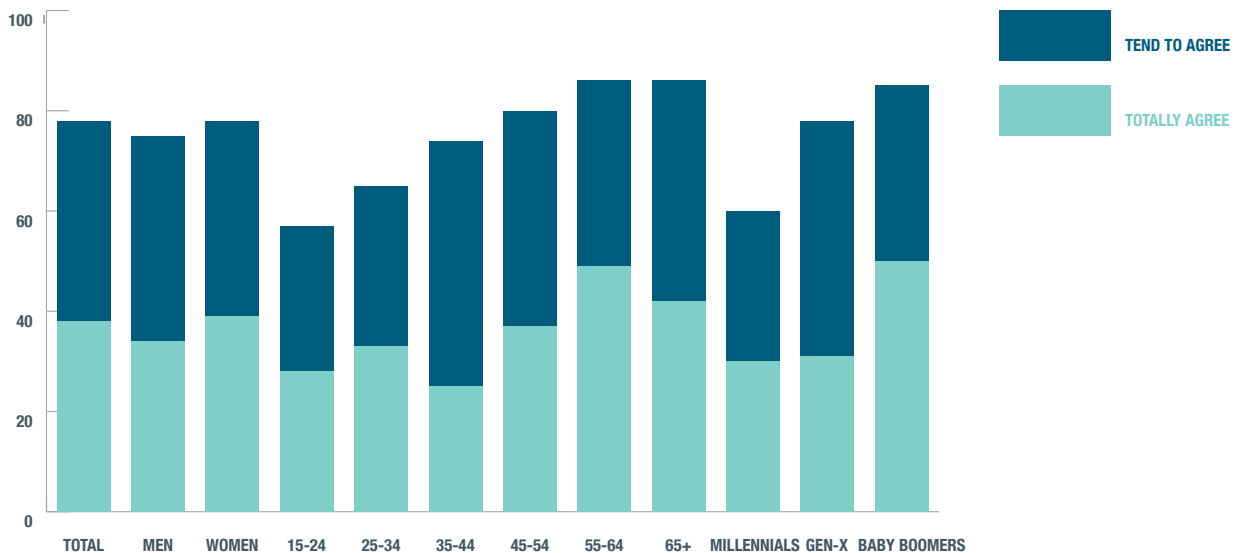
"Do you think your current job could be done by a robot or artificial intelligence in the future?"
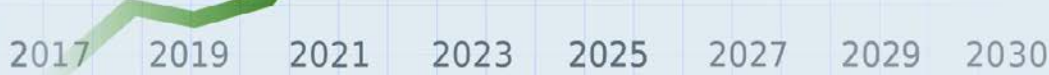
YES, MOSTLY   YES, PARTIALLY   YES, ENTIRELY   DON'T KNOW   NO, NOT AT ALL

Stacked bar chart with categories: TOTAL, MEN, WOMEN, 15-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74. Y-axis from 0 to 100.

"Due to the use of robots and artificial intelligence, more jobs will disappear than new jobs will be created."

TEND TO AGREE   TOTALLY AGREE

Stacked bar chart with categories: TOTAL, MEN, WOMEN, 15-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74. Y-axis from 0 to 80.

"When making a complaint about a product or service I prefer to speak to a human being."

TEND TO AGREE

TOTALLY AGREE

Stacked bar chart with categories: TOTAL, MEN, WOMEN, 15-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65+, MILLENNIALS, GEN-X, BABY BOOMERS. Y-axis from 0 to 100.

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INNOVATORS IN AUTOMATION

No humans needed

Launched in June 2017 to selected media, the Moby Mart shows us an example of a completely automated store. It is an autonomous, staffless, mobile grocery store which sells everyday household products such as milk, bread, toilet roll and cleaning products. This, perhaps unsettlingly, alludes to the demise of the checkout and similar customer facing jobs.

"2.25m jobs at risk in wholesale."

Casual connectivity complimented by chat

CureSkin is an AI driven mobile app that can diagnose skin conditions and advise on treatments and products. This innovation shows us how AI pattern recognition can take on the diagnostic role of dermatologists, and how easy it might be to track and monitor your health without the need of human intervention. Users upload a photo of their skin to the app which then uses AI to analyse it for issues. The app is further complimented by a chat service which feeds the AI and further tailors the machine-led value proposition.

"53% of people in GB think that companies should prioritise employing humans over robots even if it means they have to charge higher prices for their services."

Creative jobs under threat

Even creative roles are under threat from AI. McCann advertising in Japan hired an artificial intelligence creative director in 2016. The AI responds to a product or message with the optimal commercial messaging based on historical data. The system disrupts our understanding of automation solely affecting blue-collar roles, showing that data-driven creativity is also a possibility. This will be particularly effective in roles which require high degrees of pattern recognition.

"30% of current jobs in the UK at risk of automation."

Enhanced by human

San Francisco based tech firm Kindred is building a robot using human 'pilots' wearing virtual reality headsets. The aim is to make both robots and humans more efficient by pairing them together. The robot its tasks based on algorithms and when it is unable to find a solution it will call for assistance from the human 'pilot'. The robot then learns from the human intervention and becomes more efficient - this set up can optimise performance beyond that with a human is capable in isolation. This shows that the sweet spot in the automation conundrum may actually lie in the combination of human-machine skill sets.

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KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE WORKFORCE

Jobs at all levels are under threat

Despite blue collar jobs and repetitive work tasks being the first under threat from automation, recent developments in AI (machine learning and natural language understanding in particular) point to a future in which white collar and even creative jobs come under threat.

New types of jobs are arriving fast

Increased automation is going to spur on new innovation and a completely new landscape of jobs are going to emerge. Although there is always a lag between adoption of new jobs and loss of current jobs, so up-skilling and re-skilling is going to be the key to success in the future job market.

Humans augmented by robots

Although robots and AI will inevitably take a lot of the more data-driven and pattern recognition job functions, there will be change in how humans and machines interoperate for the highest level of efficiency and playing to each other's strengths.

Anti-automation backlash

We are already seeing a cultural backlash to automation, and there will be a growing need for companies to justify their recruitment processes and human employment may well become another social responsibility metric.

Universal Basic Income increasingly popular

Political responses to automation are also going to affect the future of work. With Universal Basic Income (UBI) gathering popularity - especially in Spain and Switzerland - people may not need to work to meet their basic needs in future.

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