

Workforce Of The Future: A Generation Destroyed Or Empowered?

“The biggest opportunity for creating an equitable society is the collaboration between people and technology. We spend a lot of time talking about the rise of technology and the (perceived negative) impact that it will have on work. But the reality is that if we think about it in the context of people plus technology, then we’re going to be able to create more positive opportunities for societies and workforces.”

RENEE MCGOWAN

CEO Asia, Mercer

The growth of advanced technology will have a massive impact on jobs. The economist Daniel Susskind argues in his new book, *A World Without Work: Technology, Automation and How We Should Respond*, that we face a future when most human work will be displaced by machines and that we are vastly underestimating the negative effects of technology. The historian Yuval Noah Harari, author of *Sapiens*, paints an equally bleak picture involving the rise of a “useless class” of the jobless and the aimless.

Whether overall net job losses will materialize is a matter of debate. Some experts stress that technology advancements will lead to more job creation than elimination. The World Economic Forum, for example, says that while 75 million jobs will be displaced by machines and algorithms by 2022, 133 million new roles will be created.⁴

The business leaders we surveyed are aware of the impact that tech-driven growth may have on employment—25% of executives surveyed expect that automation will lead to net job losses, and 20% recognize that their employees are concerned about the future of their jobs.

While businesses may not be addressing the future of jobs as a social issue, many are giving employees technology tools that make their jobs easier or are ensuring employees learn the technology skills they’ll need.

At American Water, field employees directly helped develop digital tools that allow them to immediately reference their customers’ water usage, service information, potential water quality and meter problems and other data to help solve customer issues on the spot.

⁴ “Machines Will Do More Tasks Than Humans by 2025 but Robot Revolution Will Still Create 58 Million Net New Jobs in Next Five Years,” World Economic Forum, Sept. 17, 2018.

“Employees adopt[ed] tools more quickly because they took part in developing them. We also get a tremendous amount of input about the needs of our customers from our frontline employees, and we put that feedback into these tools,” says Story, asserting that strong employee engagement translates into customer satisfaction. “Utilizing our frontline employees and their input to develop these tools, and not have it be top-down, has made a world of difference.”

Businesses acknowledge that they cannot solve all the issues related to jobs, training and education by themselves. Roughly a third of executives surveyed believe that governments and lawmakers need to support tech-driven growth by introducing a basic universal income and obligatory training, reskilling and education requirements for businesses.

However, Renee McGowan, CEO Asia of human resources consulting firm Mercer, told us: “Regulators and governments are not equipped at the moment to keep up with this pace of change across a broad range of industries. Organizations and regulators need to get far more deliberate about working together and recognizing that they’ve got these operating imparities.”