

The AI revolution – could a robot take your job or is upskilling the answer

Sarah Gilchriest, President of Circus Street, looks at the impact the latest innovation step in generative AI could have on the future of training and upskilling, to make sure employees are ready to work with robots and not be rendered surplus by them.

News reports in recent months about the latest developments of generative AI such as ChatGPT have sparked conversations in offices across the country about what this could mean for people's jobs ten or twenty years from now. People are questioning just how worried they should really be about the danger of being usurped by these threatened robot overlords. It obviously constitutes a major technological step change, with the AI-powered chatbot able to mirror human-like language incredibly accurately (although not perfectly), and answer almost any question, and so it is understandable that people should have concerns about the implications of this. However, I'd argue that people need to move beyond the thinking that humans will be replaced, and instead look upon these advances in technology as an opportunity to improve the way we work. Business leaders should be thinking about how to integrate this technology within their team, and how training should be adapted accordingly so that employees have the skills required to work effectively alongside the latest AI developments and remain relevant in the workforce.

There is broad consensus that the pre-trained, large-scale chatbot phenomenon is one of the most important developments in the field of AI to

date and will play a key role in an inevitable AI revolution. Core to this is maker, Open's AI technological breakthrough in prompt engineering – finally creating a model which enables bots to better understand prompts so that even a basic human input can generate a reasonable output. It can hold conversations, follow instructions, write essays, articles and poetry, and even create images and videos. The result is a potential for radical change in the business world. Done well, generative AI could produce faster, personalised customer communications based on historical data and customer interactions around the clock. Perhaps most attractive though is AI's ability, with programming and machine learning, to process and sort huge volumes of data.

However, looked at another way, these are attributes that can allow employees to do their jobs in a more effective and time efficient way, rather than meaning that a business will become the preserve of just machines. It could help businesses qualify leads and answer common queries much more quickly, for example, and provide the visibility and insights needed from data for businesses to make better strategic decisions quickly. The reality is that no current technology, including AI, can replace humankind's capability of original thought, empathy and ingenuity. Inherently, any AI is trained only on pre-existing material, therefore it can only create new content that is similar to that work. This means that it cannot be impulsive or spontaneous, generate fresh ideas or invent anything, and human oversight will be needed.

But in order for people to be able to maximise the opportunity that AI can undoubtedly provide, business leaders should be looking to future-proof their employees. They need to have a decent understanding of the workings of AI, and the necessary digital skills at their fingertips to allow them to utilise the potential on offer. Far too many workers in the UK are not ready for the changes that are coming, with the World Economic Forum estimating in a recent Future of Jobs Report that 50% of all employees will need reskilling by 2025 as adoption of technology increases. Data analysis skills, for example, will be needed going forward, with the ability to critically and rigorously evaluate the data that a robot might be able to provide.

The benefits do not stop with the ability to make the most of innovations in AI. A workforce trained in a variety of cutting-edge skills is also much more flexible and resilient – people can more easily move between industries and it can be a key driver of innovation. The more people who can understand and use the latest tech, the greater the chance of new applications and consequently breakthroughs which create new industries. For businesses, the commercial rationale is clear. A better trained team is more efficient, creative and effective.

There is still a long way to go in the development of AI technology, and the benefits that it can bring to businesses. But, truly unlocking this opportunity will require a skilled balancing act between robot and employee. Therefore, as we watch the progress unfold, it is important not to fear it, and instead to focus

on the unique opportunity for busy employees and business leaders to offload the monotonous and mundane, and spend more time on the exciting, creative and strategic. It could, in fact, be something to look forward to.

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