

Touchpoint Change AI Consulting – blog article.

Realistically, will AI take all our jobs?

James Crawford, AI & business transformation practitioner, explores ...



Will AI take all our jobs?

Personally, I don't think so!

Let me explain ...

At the start of 2024, there were 950,000 job vacancies in the UK alone [ONS]. This includes roles in health, construction, manufacturing, retail, hospitality/entertainment, real estate etc.

Add to that the 5 million people who work for no pay in the care sector and another 5 million who volunteer for charities [ONS].

You can appreciate that there is plenty of scope for AI and robots to help us out.

In addition, far too many people work harder than they wish to. 49% of employees do unpaid overtime [Ciphr]. Some must juggle two jobs and a family to make ends meet, many others work 45 hours a week, whilst a few professions (eg. doctors, entrepreneurs) work longer hours than that. Many of us would prefer to work 25 hours, with a lunch break, and to retire at 55 instead of 65.

We are also seeing job creation in growing AI businesses and startups. New services, many enabled by technology, are springing up and creating demand for skilled labour.

It's not just new industries that demand more activity. The UK has consistently failed to meet its house-building targets for decades. That is not all down to labour or supply chain shortages, but if we do manage to ramp up activity, there will be increased demands on site.

Research shows that the global economy is very short of skilled labour. There are currently almost 100 million vacancies in the world. There is a shortfall of 8 million people in Manufacturing [Korn Foundation], 10 million in health [WHO], 60 million in agriculture [ILO], and 2 million in logistics [Deloitte]. Forecasts predict that with growth in healthcare, housing,

re-building war zones, education and green energy, there will be over 400 million job vacancies. Over half of those will be needed for care for the elderly [WEF].

So by my reckoning, if robots and AI services can undertake about 5 million jobs in the UK (or about half a billion worldwide), there will still be more than enough work for us humans. It is hard to predict when that milestone will occur, but adoption of 'must have' technologies is always slower than predicted so don't hold your breath yet.

However, there is a very big *but*!

The excess of supply and demand will be very hard to match. Some technologies will be so compelling that their adoption will be rapid. For instance, I fear that taxi drivers will be made redundant at the rate that self-driving cars come off the production line. Graphic designers are starting to feel the pressure and this will grow, as it will for many others.

Other roles at risk include graphic designers, paralegals, some in the education or advice sectors, administrators and even medical staff. Clinical chatbots are proving remarkably effective at outpatient consultations and are now consistently scoring higher on empathy than doctors! We didn't expect that a year ago.

So how can we re-train and redeploy significant numbers of displaced workers into the other jobs that we desperately need (and that robots or AI cannot fully do yet)? This will be a huge challenge for governments as they support waves of change in the workforce. Historically we have not been good at this.

Many taxi drivers may welcome the chance to leave what was meant to be a temporary job and embark on a new more challenging career. Others will be horrified at the thought and be unable or unwilling to make the change. How can we support and challenge them to move on, as opposed to feeling relegated to the sidelines of society?

Ideas have been proposed such as mass retraining programmes or Universal Basic Income. Whatever we do, there will inevitably be hundreds of thousands of people who will struggle to adapt. We must support them through the transition, but also expect them to meet us halfway.

Part of the solution must be investing in the global priorities we have failed to address. These include more and better housing, a rapid ramp-up in efficient climate solutions, low carbon transport, green energy production and of course better healthcare for pretty much everyone. Thinking globally, there is probably a century of work to do to bring the whole of humanity up to a consistent basic level of comfort, safety, wealth and wellbeing.

Analysis suggests that AI robot companies will be able to charge over \$1k per year for an online bot that has the capability of a human. They will be able to work extended hours without getting tired or complaining about their lunch breaks. Imagine that we eventually have 1 billion of these. That could be a \$1 trillion market per year. And most of us will *still* have to work for a living!

Beyond that, we have ambitions to establish a base in space. This will require huge ingenuity and a vast amount of intelligence and resources. Not to mention a population for bases on the moon and Mars. Elon Musk wants a million people to live on Mars. No wonder he says that the Earth's population is too small! We must wait to see where he creates the jobs.

In a future article, I'll look at some of the resulting challenges for the recruitment industry. As the workforce changes, agencies will be at the forefront of reshaping the economy. Their clients will create new types of jobs with new skills and be looking for their future employees. It will be a double challenge, as AI will be able to undertake significant parts of the recruitment cycle, so the agencies will need to embrace internal change too.

The recruitment industry isn't finished yet.

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