



The Human Impact of Automation and Artificial Intelligence

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Biography

Peter Olive is the Founder and CEO of Vortex 6 (<https://www.vortex6.com>). Over the course of 35 years, Peter has founded several companies in the technology industry across both Europe and Australia. Throughout his career Peter has worked closely with channel partners for many major IT vendors and as a result understands how complicated relationships with these vendors can be, in particular, how difficult they are to manage. This is especially true today when the channel is operating in such a highly competitive and tough environment.

Vortex 6 is a company that specializes in business enablement services in the networking and IT industry. Since it was founded in 2009, Vortex 6 has developed software and consulting services to help support channel partners of major IT vendors including Cisco, Microsoft, Juniper, HPE and others. As the founder, Peter is a key driving force behind the V6 Fusion software and his interactions with major vendors has allowed him to gain an expert understanding of the channel and the IT industry.

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Paper type Opinion

Abstract

Today, many people are talking about artificial intelligence (AI) and just about every new product that gets launched seems to have an AI element to it. However, at the same time there is much fear surrounding the impact that automation and artificial intelligence will have. This is particularly true for those employees directly affected who may fear that their way of working or living will fundamentally change. Self-driving trucks, automated warehousing, smart motorways and the self-checkouts at the supermarket are all replacing the traditional worker with computers that are more efficient and because they are automated remove the likelihood of human error. But does that mean the human worker is no longer needed? No, it doesn't explains the author of this article.

Introduction

In the 1970s major cities, like London, suffered massive job losses and a decline in the resident population. In London's case, over 1 million people moved away to find new work. The decline of manufacturing and the emergence of containerised shipping was the main cause and reason why many workers were becoming obsolete. The city was beset by strikes as workers tried to hold back progress for fear of the impact it would have on their livelihoods. For London businesses, it was a huge challenge, but in hindsight the reaction of the workers was understandable. Their fears came true and, as they left, London went into decline.



Technology and Innovation

Fortunately, this decline throughout London's industries did not last forever. It reinvented itself. Now, London is the leading financial and services city in Europe, if not globally. In 2015 London generated 22% of the UK's GDP. The city contains many businesses (both new and old) and now employs more people than ever before. London went into decline during the 70s and was stuck there for a while. Eventually, the people of London learned to adapt, and the city survived. To avoid a repeat of this decline in the modern day, enterprises need to make sure the impact automation and AI has on the workplace is controlled and not disruptive.

No man left behind

In countries like Japan and the UK, where workers often have a poor balance between their work and personal life, automation could help to reduce the stress of overwork. There are people in these countries who enjoy their work and so don't mind putting in that little bit extra. However, it is often not those employees who face the fear of being replaced by a robot. Instead, it's the workers with the most repetitive and mundane jobs where automation would be most beneficial.

Yet despite this, many companies still employ people for these tasks, even though they could easily be automated. The reason often given to me by employers not implementing automation is that "we get what we need, and we don't have any problems". The issue with this line of thought is that it is incredibly inefficient. It ignores the fact that employees are doing tasks that take hours where using automation they could do the same tasks in seconds. Look at those whose job it is to gather data and compile it into spreadsheets. These spreadsheets go out of date the minute there is a change and the process restarts. This then repeats itself over and over again. This type of approach is inefficient but also prone to error.

Automation is not new, it dates back to the Industrial Revolution and even a little before. Today's automation solutions are coming to us at a much faster pace. Nearly every time humanity has been faced with automation in the workplace, we have had trouble embracing it, although we always do in the end. As in the past, many employees see automation as a threat to their jobs. Employees are saying "what will I do when this is implemented?" rather than, "thank goodness I don't have to do that anymore, now I can start to do something more interesting and add real value to the organisation". Here at Vortex 6 we have experienced this kind of reaction first hand. We have a tool that takes all the mundane work out of partner vendor compliance, automating multi-vendor partner programs and the optimisation of rebates in order to enable channel partners to manage these more effectively, economically and profitably. Yet, still many who work in this area view it with a high degree of suspicion.

In conclusion – taking responsibility

Many organisations will use automation to reduce the size of their workforce, but in most cases, especially as we face a skills shortage, they will only replace the people that they don't believe can adapt and continue to add value. However, humanity naturally puts itself down and most employees will believe they are the dispensable ones. As employers, we must take our employees with us. Rather than replace the workforce with machines, we need to assess their skills and deploy



them where they can be utilised appropriately. After all, who is going to develop the software, implement it, build the robots, maintain the systems, build the motorways and do the jobs that robots can't? Humans. We must show the positives of what this all means, and the consequences of not embracing how automation and AI can improve the value of our businesses and in turn their lives.