

# The robots are coming! Shouldn't we be more worried?

June 20 2016

---



Nearly 90 per cent of people surveyed said they did not think a robot could take their job – but is that just blissful ignorance? Credit: Massey University

The potential for new technologies to cause mass unemployment is becoming a much-discussed issue in the media. Yet, according to new

Massey University research, few New Zealanders are concerned about the future of their jobs.

Dr David Brougham from Massey University's School of Management has completed an exploratory study to gauge the the extent to which service sector employees are aware of the potential impacts of smart technologies, robotics and artificial intelligence. He was surprised by the results.

The survey found 87.5 per cent of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement 'Smart technology, [artificial intelligence](#), robotics or algorithms could take my job'.

"Despite experts like Bill Gates and Stephen Hawking warning about [mass unemployment](#) in the future, it seems very few New Zealanders are making any plans to change out of [jobs](#) that might disappear over the next five to ten years," Dr Brougham says.

"It was interesting that those who most strongly denied the possibility of a machine doing their job were often from the sectors most at risk, like checkout operators, drivers and analysts. These are all areas where we can already see technology having an impact."

His interview notes show, for example, a storeroom assistant stating, 'It won't affect my career at all' and a business support employee saying, 'We work in the service industry, robots are irrelevant'.

"It was bizarre reading some of the interview quotes, but I guess ignorance can be bliss," he says. "People think their jobs are harder than they actually are. Often jobs actually consist of a set of repetitive actions that can be codified and done by a robot. This applies to many jobs currently considered high skill, like accountants, lawyers and researchers. There is report writing software now available that is

practically flawless."

## **Age brings big differences in attitude**

The study showed younger employees are generally more concerned about smart technology and automation than older employees. Young people who are aware of the potential impact of technology also report a significant drop in organisational commitment and career satisfaction.

"The younger generation is definitely more concerned," Dr Brougham says. "They are both more aware of the coming changes and more likely to care about the impact of those changes because they have a longer working life ahead of them.

"Realistically, if you are someone in your 60s you probably won't care if you are made redundant in five years because you are nearing retirement anyway."

Dr Brougham says it is important for people to research the impact technology is having in their sector and to move away from the expectation of a linear career.

"For many of us, the future is uncertain and, sadly, we are moving away from permanent jobs that give employees a reasonable amount of stability in their lives.

"There is going to be a huge displacement of people in the workplace and a large number of jobs may disappear. I don't think we are prepared for it at any level, whether we are talking about education, employment or social equity and stability."

Provided by Massey University

Citation: The robots are coming! Shouldn't we be more worried? (2016, June 20) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-06-robots-shouldnt.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.