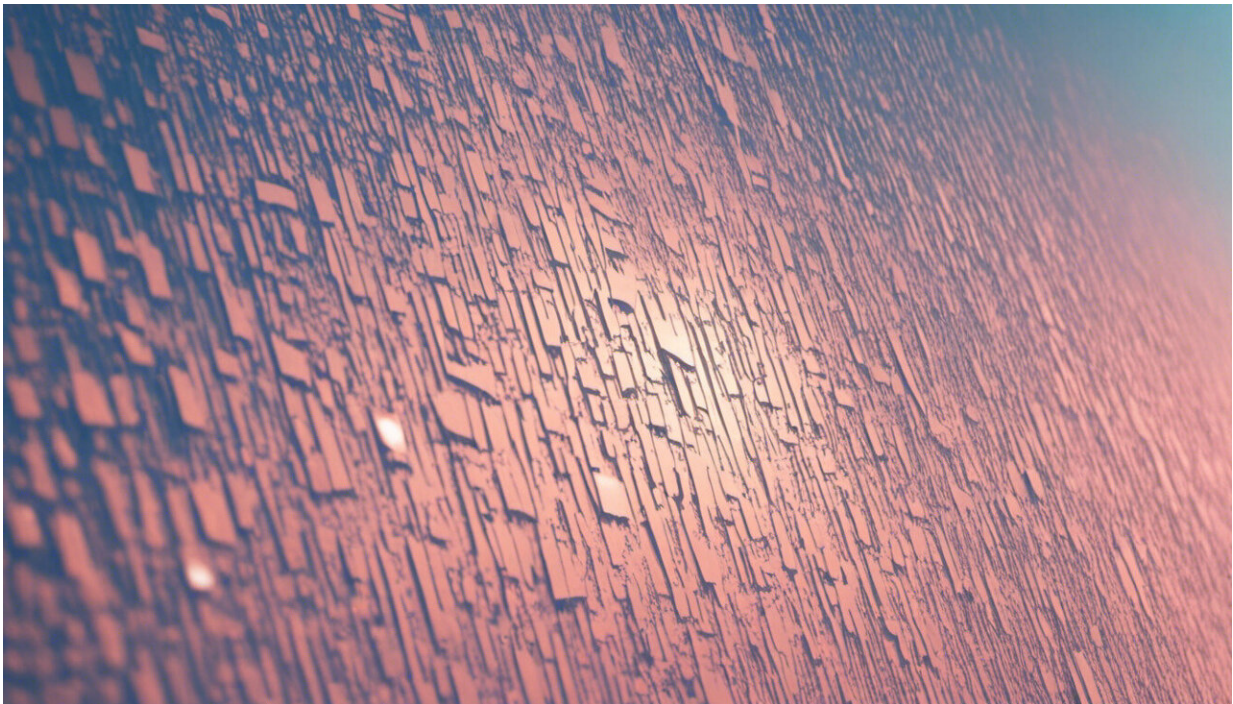


Your job might disappear, but don't blame artificial intelligence for that

October 25 2018, by Anthony Hussenot



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

When we talk about the jobs at risk, artificial intelligence is often seen as the main threat. However, this technology is still at its very beginning, while a lot of jobs are already transforming and even disappearing. Conversely, other jobs seem to resist, even if technologies already exist to replace them.

The extinction of some jobs

You don't need to be an expert to observe how some jobs are already dying, and the supermarket cashier is one of the most typical examples. For some years, increasing numbers of cashiers have been replaced by [self-checkout machines](#), several of which can be run by one employee... The same can be seen in the fast-food restaurants, at the cinema, at the airport, etc. More and more companies are implementing machines based on apps, tablets, printers, and more, replacing people formerly in charge of the ordering, registering or payment processing. The remaining employees only check the machines and assist customers if needed.

The disappearance of these jobs has nothing to do with the rise of [artificial intelligence](#), as the technologies used have been on the market for a while. More precisely, any job based on delimited tasks, following a specific order, and making predefined choices could already be replaced by the existing technologies.

This is not a new phenomenon. [Throughout the last century](#), a lot of jobs were replaced by machines. Who remember the ticket punchers, aircraft listeners, lamplighters or [knockers up](#)? All of these jobs disappeared decades ago, and were being replaced by machines. Actually, they were easily replaced by machines because they were designed as clear-cut, measurable and regularly scheduled tasks. Inherited mainly from the industrial and bureaucratic era, most of these jobs were designed based on the model of the machine. At the end of the day, it was not so difficult to [design machine to replace them](#).

Resisting the rise of automation

However, some jobs resist the rise of automation, in spite of technologies already available on the market. A good example is the

librarian: Even if we can consult or buy any book online, librarians have transformed public libraries to stay relevant. The same applies for booksellers, bartenders, florists and more. For instance, in spite of the implementation of numerous automatic coffee machines in most of the public places (train stations, universities, libraries, etc.), people still go and spend time in coffee shops. In a way, the success of chains such as [Starbucks](#) can seem a bit anachronistic, as it is cheaper to buy a coffee at the automatic coffee-machine.

Of course, there are many reasons to go to the coffee-shop rather than just grabbing a cup of coffee at the automatic coffee machine, and if we put the quality of the coffee aside, one of the main reasons seems to be the social experience we live. In a 2018 book, [Palaces for the People](#), Eric Klinenberg suggests that places such as [public libraries](#) are social infrastructures that play an increasingly important role in our social lives. In a time when people can easily feel isolated, we need more and more places to connect people – and the [jobs](#) that make them possible.

Why do some jobs resist while other are dying?

According to a [2013 Oxford University study](#) are facing the same issue.

Conversely, the bartender and the bookseller provide a social experience that people like. It is unlikely – this is always a risky bet to predict the future – that robots will replace the bartenders as they participate in providing a good [social experience](#) when we go to the bar or the restaurant. This is even, one might guess, one of the main reason why we go to a bar. Of course, the artificial intelligence will sooner or later affect the world of work as this [technology](#) will even be able to perform some creative and cognitive tasks or to express emotions, but we do not need to wait for it to think the future of work.

If you are doing a more technical job than a social one, then your

position is at risk (except maybe if you're doing a [creative one](#)). Not in the next 5 to 10 years, but right now. It means that some people might face unemployment, whatever the evolution of technologies. However, if one considers that the social skills will be more and more important – the technical ones can already be partly or entirely automated – qualities such as the empathy, emotional intelligence, and even kindness could well be rewarded on the job market. At the end of the day, no robot or app will replace a smile, a glance or a friendly gesture. At least, not yet.

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