

Will we enjoy our work more once routine tasks are automated? Not necessarily, suggests a recent study

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Figure 1. Schwartz (1992) value structure

Research conducted at Åbo Akademi University suggests that when routine work tasks are being replaced with intelligent technologies, the result may be that employees no longer experience their work as meaningful.

Advances in new technologies such as [artificial intelligence](#), robotics and digital applications have recently resurrected discussions and speculations about the future of working life. Researchers predict that new technologies will affect, in particular, routine and structured work tasks. According to estimations, 7–35 percent of work tasks in Finland will be automated over the next 10–20 years or so. Globally, it is anticipated that up to 60 percent of all work tasks will be affected by new technologies.

The discussion has thus far centered around which skills are required in the future working life, or if work as we know it will vanish altogether. A recent study conducted at Åbo Akademi University brings a new perspective to the debate.

"Our values guide many of the selections we make during our lives, including career or occupational choices and the type of competences we value. That's why it is important to understand how the changes brought to work by novel technologies affect future work and if work will correspond to what we today view as meaningful," says Johnny Långstedt, who is a doctoral student in Comparative Religion and a project researcher in Industrial Management at Åbo Akademi University.

Långstedt's study indicates that there is a systematic association between the automatability and the prominent values in various occupations. When structured work is being automated and replaced by other tasks—mainly creative, social and non-regular tasks—the contents of the work may not necessarily fit with the values that have been characteristic of automatable occupations. This could result in a widespread decreased commitment and [job satisfaction](#) if the changes at work are as comprehensive as researchers have estimated.

"To date, we have mostly talked about how nice it is that routine work is

being reduced. But what about those who enjoy such work? This is the first study aimed at understanding the ways our values are linked to the work we are expected to carry out in the future," says Långstedt.

More information: Johnny Långstedt. How will our Values Fit Future Work? An Empirical Exploration of Basic Values and Susceptibility to Automation, *Labour & Industry: a journal of the social and economic relations of work* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/10301763.2021.1886624](https://doi.org/10.1080/10301763.2021.1886624)

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