Covid-19 is changing the way we work. Businesses have been forced to adapt and many have turned to technology in the hope of finding new, more efficient ways of working. Now experts believe that we could be on course for a “robot revolution” over the next five years.

Throughout history, every wave of new technology has caused concerns about workers being replaced by machines. In October 2020, the World Economic Forum (WEF) released its most recent research into 300 of the world’s biggest companies. It showed that over 50% of companies expected to speed up their plans for automation because of covid-19.

The WEF predicts that by 2025, machines could do half of all work, causing 85 million job losses around the world. The workers most likely to be replaced by machines are those in the lowest-paid, lowest-skill jobs. Women, young people and those with a lower level of education more commonly work in these roles.

“However, that doesn’t mean that new jobs won’t emerge,” says Saadia Zahidi, the managing director at the WEF. In fact, technology in the workplace is expected to create 12 million more new jobs than it will replace, in areas such as engineering and artificial intelligence.

The WEF report has advised governments that the key to adapting to the future lies in education and skills - Andy Haldane, Chief Economist at the Bank of England, agrees. He says that to ensure equality, everyone should be given the opportunity to “train, retrain and retrain again” to keep up with the ever-changing world of work.

Look at this resource by Bank of England to find out more: bit.ly/will-a-robot-takeover-my-job
What has happened?

How long has this been going on for?

Who is involved? (people, countries, groups etc)

Where did this happen? Is it still happening?

What has happened?

HUMANS ARE BETTER

ROBOTS ARE BETTER

Could a robot do any job or are some jobs better suited to humans? Where would teaching go on the scale? Mark your opinion with an X. What about making people better? What about other types of work?

LINKS

How does this issue link to...

NEWS CONCEPT: scarcity?

NEWS SCALE

A school subject?

A different news story?

Your life?

A lower-skilled worker

A business owner

C

A

B

C

CHALLENGE: how is this issue developing in the news?
First, limber up by thinking about everything you learnt last week:

- What was the key information about this issue? (Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?)
- Why was this issue news? (How big was this piece of news? How many people does it affect? Is it global or local news?)
- What did you think about it? Did everyone you talked to have the same opinion?
- What have you seen about this in the news? How is this issue developing?

Then, take a ride through this week’s activities.

Experts are worried that the covid-19 pandemic and automation will negatively affect the same groups of people. For example, workers in retail and the travel industry have had the highest job losses during lockdown and these jobs are most likely to be automated.

It is normal for jobs to become extinct as technology improves. For example, switchboard operators, knocker-uppers and lamplighters have now been replaced by smartphones, alarm clocks and electric street lights respectively.

68% of employees have suffered from work overload, with too much to do on a daily basis, and 90% of jobs involve boring or repetitive tasks. If companies could afford the technology, automation could help to solve these problems.

In 2018-19 over 28 million working days were lost to workers taking time off for sickness or injury. This number is set to increase in 2019-20 because of the pandemic.

There are more workers in the North of England than in the South doing lower-skilled, lower-paid jobs such as factory work. These jobs are more likely to be done by machines in the future.
1. This issue is about more than new technology. Can you explain the bigger picture?
2. Whose responsibility is it to make sure people adapt to the future of work?
3. Look at the facts on the previous page. Imagine you are a business owner.
   - Which facts might convince you to automate jobs in your business? Why?
   - Which facts might stop you from automating? Why?
   Support your answers with a fact and explain why.

PUSH YOURSELF

Artificial intelligence (AI) is when a machine can “think” in a more human-like way by taking in information from its surroundings. Smartphones, video games and online shopping already use AI to create a better user experience. Experts think that AI will develop even more in the future. Some researchers are even trying to teach robots about feelings and emotions.

- Why might some people think AI is a good thing? Why might some people think it’s a bad thing?
- Which jobs could be done by a robot with “feelings and emotions”?

TYRE CHANGE

Brakes on! Let’s change the scenario.

A robot was created that could do your dream job better than you?

More robots meant humans could work less?

Some countries took longer to develop automation technology?

Challenge: can you spot this issue in the news? How has the issue developed since last week?