



The 5 Paths Available to Calm the Fears of Employees Worried About Losing Their Jobs to Automation

Insights

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It's inevitable. As your organization unveils a driverless vehicle program (or just about any automation or AI platform) designed to promote efficiency and safety, you will hear the same chorus from your workforce: "Are we going to lose our jobs to the robots?" The fear and uncertainty is a natural by-product of the transformation being introduced at your company. It is incumbent on you and your leadership team, however, to manage this anxiety.

You have several options. The first is to dismiss or ignore these concerns. After all, their job is to do the work you have assigned them to do and that's it—right? Wrong. A good leadership team takes into account the natural alarm that will arise during any organizational transformation and adjusts accordingly. The second option is to give your workers a gentle pat on the back and tell them not to worry, that things will always be the same, and they have nothing to fear. But this is essentially a straight lie. In every organization, everyone needs to be prepared to adapt to the changes that inevitably come. Sticking your head in the sand and hoping that everything's going to be OK is a recipe for disaster.

The third option is to help your employees prepare for the future, arming them with the skills necessary for them to succeed in this brave new automated world. As Thomas Davenport and Julia Kerby wrote in [a landmark article](#) appearing in the Harvard Business Journal: "What new feats might people achieve if they had better-thinking machines to assist them? Instead of seeing work as a zero-sum game with machines taking an ever greater share, we might see growing possibilities for employment. We could reframe the threat of automation as an opportunity for augmentation." The authors then present five options that you can share with your workers to inform them about the benefits that automation can bring to them (how technology can "augment" their jobs and help them be done better, not replace them) and how they can adjust their own thinking to capitalize on this shift.

No. 1: Step Up

The first option is to explain to your workers that automation will take care of the kinds of work that is "beneath" them, permitting them to free up their time to engage in "higher-order concerns." By allowing your workers to think more about the broader perspective of their jobs and the "big picture," they will find themselves handling more rewarding and exciting work. As this applies to the automated vehicle world, explain to your employees that less time driving for work will free

them up to handle more interesting and deeper responsibilities, making them more valuable to the organization.

No. 2: Step Aside

Some of your workers, however, will simply not have the option of “stepping up” due the nature of their jobs. For them, encourage them to step aside. This doesn’t mean stepping out the door to find a new job at a new company, but instead getting them to think about ways they can bring strengths to the table—such as interpersonal skills, intuitive strengths, and similar talents. Automation can assist them in getting work done that automation and AI simply can’t do. Encourage your staff to discover their uncodifiable strengths, and then provide them with resources to heighten them.

No. 3: Step In

The third path is training your workforce to step in to become the brains behind the operation. The automated features at your workplace will require many hands behind the scenes getting them to work properly and efficiently. Your workers can ensure the computers are doing a good job, but also figure out ways to do them better. So we’re not just talking about the technicians that will be getting their hands dirty and working directly on the technology, but also those to provide input to those technicians about the best way to get the job done and to operate. So, using automated vehicles as an example, you will still need a fleet of mechanics and technicians to fix and maintain the vehicles. But you will also need experienced drivers who can work with the programmers to share their knowledge about driving techniques and other matters of expertise that will help the vehicles move in a safer and more efficient manner.

No. 4: Step Narrowly

Another option: taking a hard and deep look at your organization and figuring out which functions will not be economical to automate. If your organization takes the lead and identifies the kinds of jobs and tasks for which no computer program has yet been developed, and then trains workers to carry these jobs out, you have a win-win situation on your hands. Some employees might be worried about being typecast into a narrow niche, but you should explain to them the value in specializing in and eventually mastering a field that will have value and longevity. “Although most [workers] have the benefit of a formal education,” the authors write, “the expertise that fuels their earning power is [actually] gained through on-the-job training—and the discipline of focus. If this is your strategy, start making a name for yourself as the person who goes a mile deep on a subject an inch wide.”

No. 5: Step Forward

The final possibility: if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em. The authors aren’t encouraging your workers to become human cyborgs, half-human and half-robot. Instead, the suggestion is that you encourage your workers to accept the inevitable and help to build the next generation of smart machines or the programs that power them. This solution isn’t for everyone, clearly. Workers who take this path will need strong skills in computer science, artificial intelligence, and analytics.

As you unveil the latest and greatest technological feats at your workplace, it is your responsibility to provide the people power behind the machines. If your workers are so scared by the thought of

provide the people power behind the machines. If your workers are so scared by the thought of automation that they naturally inhibit themselves, or—worse still—abandon your company altogether, you will not be in a position to harness the people power necessary for your organization to succeed. But reviewing these five steps and constructing solutions for your employees to match these pathways is the best way to lead your company—and your people—to a successful future.

If you have questions or concerns regarding how automation in the workplace may affect your business, contact [Rich Meneghello](#) or any member of our [Autonomous Vehicles Practice Group](#).

Related People



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