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Championing better work and working lives

REPORT | *July 2020*

Workplace technology

The employee experience

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Report

Workplace technology: the employee experience

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1 Introduction

The impact of the latest technology revolution on how organisations create value and on the way people work spans all industries, economies and parts of society.[1] The emergence of big data, increased digitisation and improvements in artificial intelligence (AI) mean that new technologies can assist with more complex tasks, augmenting roles and potentially changing the nature of work. Employers are investing in new technologies with the primary aim of increasing business performance through improved quality and cost savings.[2] However, the impact of new workplace technology on people's jobs and working lives must be considered, particularly as this will only increase in future as technology plays a greater role in modern work.

Understanding the impact of technology on work and the workforce is a central concern of the modern people profession. People professionals have a pivotal role to play in understanding the human implications of working with different technologies. AI and automation are transforming work, but to see positive impacts, people need to be managed and supported accordingly, so they can adapt to changing roles, reskill if necessary and have their concerns about technology limitations addressed. In view of this, the people profession should be present in tech strategies to ensure technology implementation supports and enhances productivity as well as employee job quality.

This report builds on several studies by the CIPD which explored the rise of technology – in particular automation and AI – in the workplace.[3] This report looks closely at the views and experiences of employees as technology plays an increasing role in their work lives. We investigate the impact of technology on working life, and look to understand how technology is being used by those working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. From these insights, we identify the practical steps people professionals can take to improve the chances of making their technology implementation a success for their organisations and people.

Who are people professionals?
In this report, we use the term 'people professionals' to describe professionals working in the following disciplines: organisational development (OD), organisational design, organisational change, learning and development (L&D), recruitment, compensation and benefits, talent management, human resource information systems/human resource management systems and human resources (HR).

Technology and the modern world of work

The world of work has long experienced the transformative effects of technology. In the modern era, technologies such as automation, robotics and AI have exerted consistently growing pressure on work and the workplace. Jobs are changing as a result of new workplace technologies: data shows that automation and digitisation are transforming jobs by '*substituting, augmenting and creating new tasks for workers*'.[4] While technology has the potential to replace or undermine jobs, the CIPD's recent research suggests that the positive impact – in terms of job enrichment and creating new professional development opportunities – tends to outweigh the negative. These technologies are likely to lead to a net gain in job numbers, with new types of jobs emerging as some disappear. Our previous survey showed that overall, 35% of employers that have introduced AI and automation in the last five years saw more jobs as a result and over four in ten believed jobs most affected by these technology changes had become more secure. In addition, new jobs being created tend to be higher skilled. But as demand for certain skills declines and new ones emerge, workers will need to continuously learn new skills.

Are global economies headed towards technology dystopia?
Widespread fears remain about the adverse impact of technology at a macro level. The OECD's 2019 report suggests that 14% of existing jobs could disappear in the next 15–20 years, and another 32% are likely to change radically as individual tasks are automated.[5] Similarly, the World Economic Forum's 2018 report suggests that the 'human' share of labour hours will decrease from 71% to 58% by 2025, and nearly half of organisations expect automation to drive a reduction in the full-time workforce by 2022.[6] A recent example of this was at Microsoft, where many journalists' jobs had been replaced by software.[7]

The impact of new workplace technology on the labour market is not evenly distributed. Middle-skilled jobs are particularly vulnerable – employment in the manufacturing sector has declined by 20% over the past two decades, while employment in services grew by 27%, leading to more jobs at the high- and low-skilled ends but a hollowing out of middle-skilled jobs.[8] There's a risk of polarised access to new technology since not everyone has the bargaining power or can benefit from better jobs that emerge, resulting in inequalities.

People may be stuck in precarious and low-quality work – for example, the OECD suggested that low-skilled people are less likely to participate in training, and non-standard workers are 40–50% less likely than standard employees to receive any income support when out of work.[9] However, doomsday scenarios are unlikely to materialise. There are more opportunities to participate in the labour market for many who were formerly excluded. Jobs are being created at a faster rate than they are disappearing, and as mentioned, the new jobs created tend to be higher skilled than those they replaced.

Flexible working through COVID-19
While technology advancements have enabled more flexible and remote working over the past couple of decades, the COVID-19 pandemic has driven a dramatic spike in virtual collaboration and homeworking. Organisations have been challenged to rapidly develop solutions that help maintain both productivity and employee wellbeing for an entirely remote workforce.[10] These demands have led to a shift in priorities for the people profession, with a key focus now on retention, health and wellbeing, and employee engagement.[11] While most people professionals recognise the need to step up to support line managers through the impact of the pandemic, nearly a quarter of employers feel that their people teams are not supporting line managers sufficiently.

The CIPD's survey on the impact of COVID-19 on UK workers also showed a number of concerns, including the challenge of maintaining a healthy work–life balance, rising job insecurity, and wellbeing. For example, 30% said their ability to work has been impacted by a change in caring responsibilities since the outbreak; 39% think their financial security has worsened; and 47% are concerned about catching COVID-19 at work. Technology has, however, provided an important tool for continuing productive work through the crisis: 82% of UK homeworkers have said they have the right equipment to work effectively.

Looking beyond the job quantity to job quality

Changes to the nature of jobs and devices such as new types of contracts have brought both benefits and challenges to the quality of working life. This has led to growing interest in job quality in the UK and other developed countries in the recent past.[12]

Governments, policy-makers, and large employers are increasingly aware that measuring the quantity of jobs is not enough – it is also vital that job quality is measured. This is often framed in Western economies as creating 'good work' for the health of economies and societies.

The converse, meanwhile, is hugely damaging to individuals. Poor job quality causes significant problems, including stress, discrimination and in-work poverty. The *CIPD Good Work Index 2020* – which measures job quality in the UK – indicated a worrying decline in health and wellbeing over the last three years.[13] The current public health crisis has heightened the need to protect the wellbeing of individuals and society. Organisations must therefore look holistically at the attributes of good work to inform their own people strategies, policies and practices.

Can technology help to create good work?

Implementing new technology in the workplace without proper consideration of the people implications can negatively impact long-term organisational performance. Factors including job complexity, skills utilisation and workers' autonomy influence the likely success of technology in supporting strategic objectives.[14] The impact of technology on the human experience and organisational performance should therefore be understood as interdependent.

Emerging technologies have the potential to influence job quality in both positive and negative ways. There has already been a rise in alternative employment models with more reliance on contingent workers, driven by digital platforms and tech-enabled remote working. Jobs are becoming more complex and interesting, with greater learning opportunities and increased autonomy for individuals.[15] Business leaders must shift from the traditional model of focusing on redundancies and job automation, to reskilling, redeployment and job reinvention.[16] While technology is providing workers with more flexible ways of working, this can come with lower levels of job security and higher stress due to the blurring of work and home life. This research is designed to understand more about the impact of technology on job quality.

Technology and the people profession: important partners in the future of work

People professionals have a critical role in preparing organisations to successfully implement new technology – by helping the workforce adapt to changing roles, enabling continuous learning, and enhancing the employee experience.[17] Understanding people–technology interactions in the workplace is crucial and integrally linked to people management. Despite this, the CIPD's previous technology survey[18] showed that HR is the department least likely to be involved in decisions on AI and automation.

As experts in employment and people management, people professionals have a leading role to play in creating good work by designing jobs and strategies that improve aspects of job quality. They should partner with other leaders in their organisation to ensure that the impact on the different elements of people's working lives are considered in decisions about introducing new technologies and that any risks that may be detrimental to job quality are mitigated. Technology must be a consideration within people strategy, and practitioners should work closely with other functions as they begin to use new technologies to understand the associated risks and opportunities.

Good work is the core of the CIPD's purpose of championing better work and working lives. Our professional values include the belief that work can and should be a force for good for all: it not only contributes to individual wellbeing and fairness in society, but it is also fundamental for motivated workers, productive organisations and a strong economy.

This era of technological disruption presents an important opportunity for the people profession to lead organisational strategies that consider the relationship between technology and employees and deliver business improvements as well as better quality of work. To explore how emerging workplace technologies are affecting individual employees, we need deeper insights to better understand the employee perspective, which is the aim of this report.

The CIPD has recognised the important role the people profession plays in enabling and supporting technology integration at work by including digital working as an area of core knowledge in the Profession Map.

2 About this research

This report includes data from research conducted between June 2019 and June 2020. First, we conducted a broadly representative survey of 2,414 employees using the YouGov panel. The survey was conducted in 2019, prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. Analysis of the survey was done using weighted data to reflect the wider population.

Second, we conducted four online focus groups of 38 participants between 26 May and 3 June 2020 to understand the experiences of workers and line managers working from home during the pandemic. Focus group participants were also drawn from the YouGov UK panel.

In this research we apply the following definitions for artificial intelligence (AI), robotics and automation, in line with the CIPD's *People and machines* report:

- **Artificial intelligence** – the development of computers to engage in human-like thought processes, such as learning, reasoning and self-correction. It readily includes machine learning, as well as more linear cognitive computing. Functions can include statistical analytics, language and speech processing, and visual processing, including facial recognition.
- **Robotics** – machinery which aids or replicates repetitive human tasks. Robots can aid in performing tasks without any need of outside guidance, including sorting, packaging, and facilitating human actions – for example, surgical robots, which remove trembling. Robots are also integrated with software (robotic software solutions), suitable where there are many data inputs such as in customer relationship management (CRM) systems.
- **Automation** – automation can be viewed as a large area, defined as the performance of tasks or activities by machines, including robots and computers, rather than people. The purpose is often to increase efficiency and reduce variability. Automation can not only perform (routine) physical work tasks better and more cheaply than people, but also includes tasks involving cognitive activity. The purpose of automation can include information acquisition, information analysis, decision and action selection, and action implementation.

In this report we refer to these technologies collectively as 'AI and automation'.

3 Findings

We explore the findings of this report by:

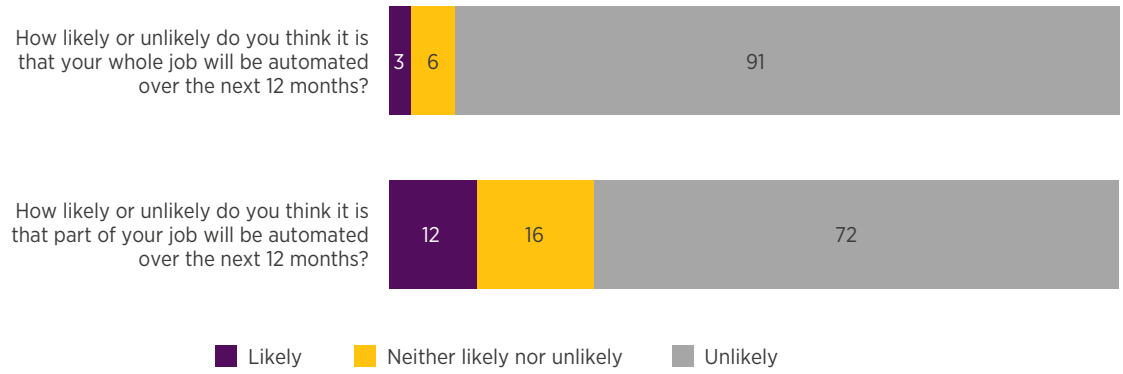
- considering workforce perceptions of AI and automation, workers' expectations and concerns for the future
- investigating the impact technology is having on job quality and employee experience for those who had experienced change in their work as a result of new technologies
- reflecting on the impact of technology on workforce wellbeing and work–life balance
- examining the use of workplace technologies to monitor the workforce, and the importance of employee voice and consultation.

Employee perceptions of automation and its impact

- The great majority of employees think it's unlikely that either part (72%) or all of their job (91%) will be automated in the next 12 months.
- Fewer than three in ten (28%) employees who anticipate some degree of automation in their roles have received training to prepare for the change.
- Thirty-two per cent of employees who anticipate some degree of automation also expect improvements in their job quality.

Our survey asked employees to give an indication of how likely they felt it was that their job would be automated in the next 12 months. The great majority of participants thought it was unlikely that either part (72%) or all of their job (91%) would be automated (Figure 1). This contrasts with the popular narrative about the potential impact of automation on jobs and the labour market of the future. The potential risk highlighted by this, however, is that workers may not be sufficiently aware of, or prepared for, possible future change in their jobs and the wider labour market.

Figure 1: Employee perceptions of likelihood of automation (%)



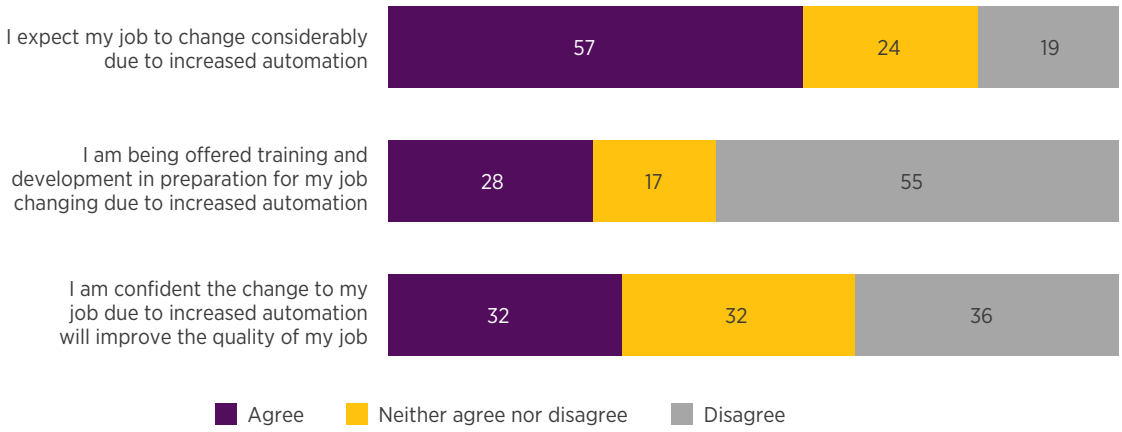
Note: Base size for 'whole job' = 2,337; base size for 'part job' = 2,308.

Of those employees who felt it likely that their job would be automated to some degree, more than half (57%) expected their job to change considerably as a result (Figure 2). Encouragingly, roughly a third (32%) anticipated an improvement in job quality as a consequence of automation, perhaps reflecting the removal of more mundane or repetitive aspects of a role. This finding echoes the perspective of employers, who also anticipate

similar improvements in job quality.[19] Unfortunately, this does still leave a significant minority of employees who expect their job to change considerably as a result of automation, but not feeling the quality of their job will benefit as a result.

Around a quarter (28%) of employees who anticipate some degree of automation of their role report receiving training to prepare for the change. People professionals, such as learning and development experts, can play an influential role in helping employees adapt confidently to the change. In doing so, they can also help to ensure that the organisation reaps the full benefits of investment in technology.

Figure 2: Employee perceptions of likely impact of automation (%)



Note: Base size for 'job change' and 'offered training' = 276; base size for 'improve quality of my job' = 266.

Our findings highlight relatively low levels of consultation with employees prior to introduction of technology (see following **Employee voice** section for more detail), and yet this is clearly important in establishing positive sentiment towards automation and new technology. For example, of all those surveyed who had been consulted about technology change, 70% were positive about its impact on their job quality. In comparison, where employees had not been consulted about technology change, only 20% of them felt positive about the likely impact on their job quality.

Worker perspectives during COVID-19: anxiety about the impact of technology at work

Whereas most employees who responded to our survey do not believe their job will be automated soon, looking to the future, many feel a threat for the survival of their jobs and organisations. However, our employee focus groups highlighted a shared belief that the impact of AI and automation will depend on sector and type of role: most respondents felt that administration roles and sectors including retail and finance would be more affected than others, while those who had regular face-to-face contact with clients felt their skills could not be replaced.

> *'My current role can only partially be automated – a large part is manual. I think new ways [that are] cheaper and quicker will be found for many jobs.'* **Worker, 40+**

There is also some apprehension about new technologies potentially leading to more isolation as a result of a lower sense of community. On the positive side, some people recognise the benefits to job quality, as one manager explained:

> *'Automation/robotics are slowly stripping the mundane, repetitive tasks from our handlers. Ultimately this is going to result in fewer employees being required, but those that remain will be doing quality work that they are skilled in, rather than mundane stuff.'* **Manager, 18–24**

These findings reinforce the importance of organisation change and communications strategies that engage the whole workforce in dialogue about decisions to invest in new technologies and the associated opportunities and risks for them.

Practice pointers: supporting technology adoption

Leaders in the people profession are in a good position to support organisations to adopt technologies which support business and employee outcomes. Leaders should:

- Help employees understand how the use of technology could change in the future and the potential impact on their work. This should include open discussion about how new technology is shaping the tasks they do, and how employees might expect their job to change.
- Ensure they understand the opportunities and risks that technology presents and can both embrace and explain ambiguity to the workforce. People professionals can support this by providing expert consultancy to senior stakeholders, offering advice and high-quality evidence on the quality of technology, its pros and cons, and the likely impact over the short, medium and long term.
- Invest in building digital skills into the people function to ensure they are resourced to support transformation. This can include the training and development of people professionals, supporting upskilling and reskilling, and attracting and retaining digital skills through effective recruitment strategies.

The CIPD *Leadership in the workplace* factsheet includes further guidance on leadership development. Advice and case studies on how HR systems foster effective leadership can also be found in the CIPD *Cultivating trustworthy leaders* report.

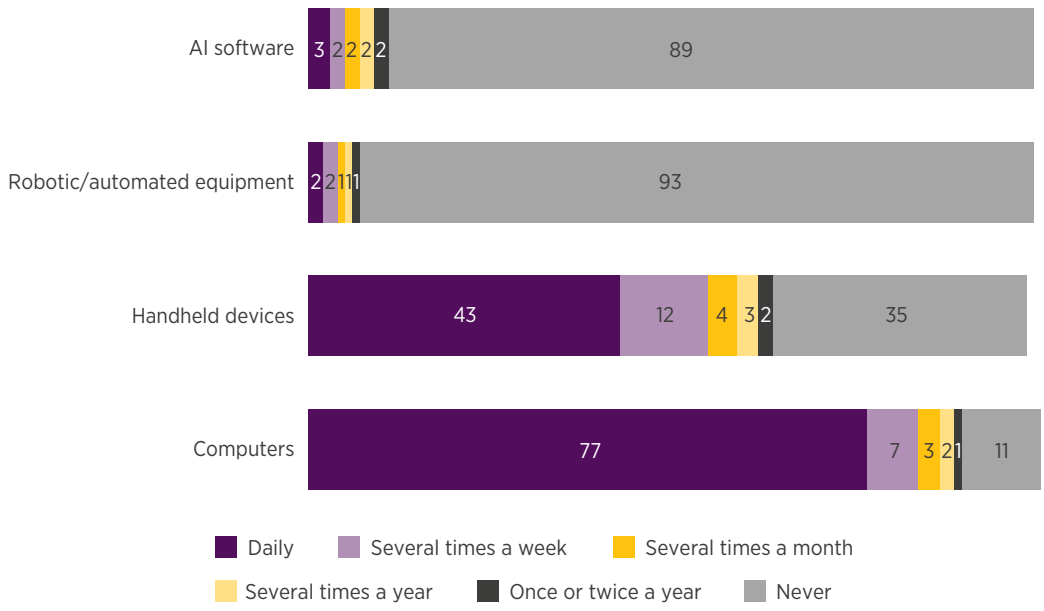
Impact of change in technology use on performance and employee experience

- Thirty-two per cent of employees report a change in their use of one or more technologies in the last 12 months.
- Of those employees reporting a change in their technology use, 50% feel that they now need more skills and knowledge to carry out their role, and 40% feel that their tasks at work have become more complex.
- Eighty to ninety-three per cent of employees do not think that increased technology has improved business performance.

Employee experience is an emerging concept often used to describe the way by which organisations can create a positive work environment where individuals are empowered to reach their potential, driving both productivity and innovation. This includes understanding the role of trust in the employment relationship and fostering a happier, healthier workforce. We measured how frequently employees use four different types of technology at work: computers (for example desktops, laptops); handheld devices (for example tablets, smartphones); robotic/automated equipment (that is, to complete a physical task); software/equipment that uses AI (that is, which is able to learn from data, reasoning or self-correction). We also asked whether employees' usage of any of these technologies had changed in the last 12 months and the impact of that change on aspects of their job quality.

We asked about four forms of technology in this survey. Unsurprisingly, over 80% of employees said that they regularly used one or more of the four forms of technology in their work. Very low numbers reported using robotic/automated equipment or AI software, perhaps highlighting the relative immaturity of this technology in workplaces today. For example, 93% said they never use robotic/automated equipment and 89% never use AI (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Technology usage at work (%)



Note: Base size for 'AI software' = 2,308, for 'robotic/automated equipment' = 2,349, for 'handheld devices' = 2,371, and for 'computers' = 2,372.

Roughly a third (32%) of employees surveyed reported a change in their use of one or more of the four categories of technology listed in the survey in the last 12 months.

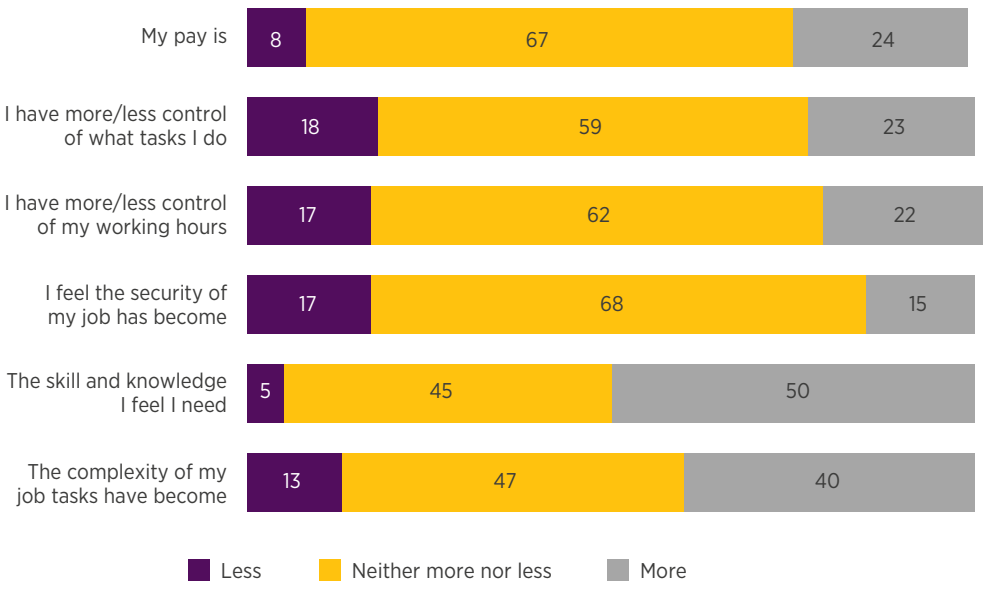
Of those employees reporting a change in technology use:

- Fifty per cent felt that they now needed more skills and knowledge to carry out their role, compared with only 5% who felt they needed less skill/knowledge. This broadly aligns with the employer view highlighted in the CIPD's earlier research.
- Forty per cent felt that their tasks at work had become more complex, compared with 13% who felt their tasks had become less complex. By comparison, more than half of employers (61%) implementing AI and automation found that staff needed more skills and knowledge as a result.[20]

- Twenty-four per cent said that their pay had increased as a result of technology change, with 8% saying it had decreased.
- Twenty-two per cent reported more control over their working hours, with 17% reporting less control.
- Twenty-three per cent said that they now had more control over the tasks they do at work compared with 18% saying they had less.
- Fifteen per cent felt more secure in their jobs, with 17% feeling less secure.

What impact is workplace technology having on job quality and business outcomes?
We found that, on balance, increased technology use is perceived as having a more positive than negative impact (Figure 4). That said, it is clearly a mixed picture, with some employees experiencing benefits while others report being adversely impacted in some way. It also seems that for most employees surveyed and for most of the factors explored, there is neither a positive nor negative impact. What is clear in the data is that a significant minority of employees feel that they need to carry out work that is more complex, and a majority feel they need enhanced skills and knowledge to perform their role. Both highlight the value that people professionals can bring to the table in ensuring that employees are adequately equipped to adapt to increased technology use at work.

Figure 4: Employee perceptions of impact of change in technology use (%)

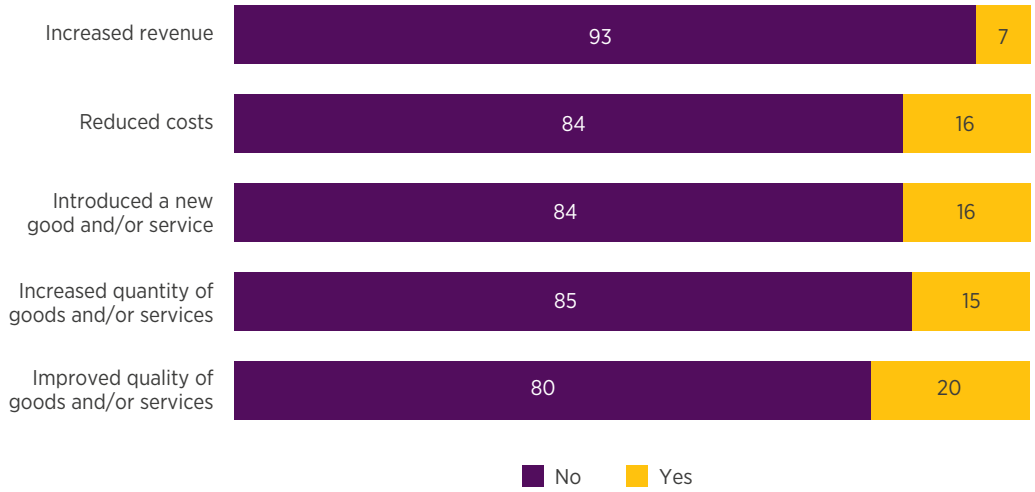


Note: Base size for 'pay' = 764, for 'control of tasks' = 755, for 'control of working hours' = 760, for 'security of my job' = 746, and for both 'skill and knowledge I need' and 'complexity of job tasks' = 762.

We also sought to understand how changes in technology use have impacted key business metrics such as revenue and product/service quality. Dishearteningly for leaders driving technology implementation, the vast majority of employees did not perceive benefits to their organisation. Depending on the particular business metric, 80–93% of employees did not think that increased technology had improved business performance (Figure 5).

These findings offer interesting comparisons with the employer perspective. The CIPD's *People and machines* report showed that half of employers (52%) who invested in AI and automation saw improved quality of goods and/or services, and more than one in three saw reduced costs (37%).[21] Employees have yet to recognise the same benefits as employers.

Figure 5: Employee perceptions of business impact of change in technology use (%)



Note: Respondents were asked about computers, handheld devices, robotics and automated equipment, and AI. Base size: 762.

Worker perspectives during COVID-19: enhancing access and support

People working for organisations that readily embraced change in the use of technology at the start of the pandemic appear to have seen benefits more quickly than others. The biggest issue for many is having the right space, equipment and resources (including internet connection) to work comfortably at home:

> '*I don't have access to all of the systems I need while working from home. Some can only be accessed when plugged into the main computer in the office.*' **Worker, 40+**

This points to the need for people professionals to work closely with IT to ensure that all staff have the appropriate resources to work effectively at home.

For those who regularly worked from home pre-pandemic, the transition has been smoother, as systems and equipment were already in place, and managers didn't need to invest as much time in the initial stages of lockdown as they trusted that workers understood their responsibilities:

> '*The job hasn't changed for me, just the manner of delivery.*' **Manager, 40+**

Others are seeing real benefits in the way in which meetings are run and workers are engaged. Technology has enabled some to connect more inclusively with those who regularly may not be able to speak in face-to-face contexts.

Practice pointers: consulting and engaging employees throughout change

In supporting the implementation of new workplace technologies, people professionals should:

- Be transparent and up front about the organisation's approach to using new technologies, including the processes and impact, to avoid misconceptions or gaps in awareness among employees that could exacerbate issues.
- Evaluate the context to identify aspects that hinder change.

- Design change programmes that align strategy and culture, by using the organisation's new strategic goals as a starting point and identifying beliefs and behaviours to support them.
- Manage the transformation through negotiations and meaningful dialogue with the workforce, rather than leading with authority and control.
- Utilise voice channels to provide opportunities for employees to understand the impact of the change, raise concerns and have their say in decisions through regular consultations.

The CIPD *Employee engagement and motivation* and *Employee communication* factsheets provide further advice on creating an effective internal communication strategy and building trust and engagement.

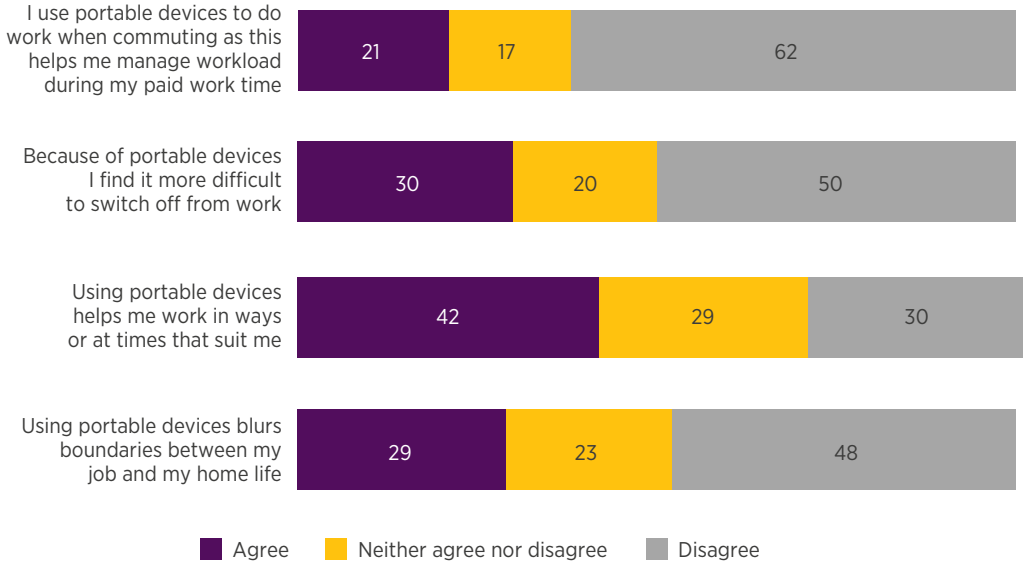
Wellbeing and work–life balance

- Twenty-nine per cent of employees say that use of portable devices blurs boundaries between work and home life.
- Thirty per cent say that their use of portable devices makes it difficult to switch off from work.
- Around a quarter of employees say their work has had a negative impact on either their physical (24%) or mental health (26%).
- Social media use for work has risen since 2013, increasing from 27% to 37%.

Health and wellbeing are an important element of good work. Poor wellbeing negatively affects motivation and job satisfaction as well as increasing healthcare costs.[22] Closely related to this is work–life balance, which concerns how people manage competing priorities in their jobs and personal life. We were interested in how employees used mobile technology and its impact on work–life balance, as well as the extent to which changes in technology use may impact physical and mental health.

How is workplace technology influencing work–life balance and workforce wellbeing?
Our data shows that, on balance, more employees report benefits from using portable devices than experience difficulties (Figure 6). That said, a significant minority of employees (29%) report that use of portable devices blurs boundaries between work and home life. Time away from work is also a challenge, with 30% reporting that their use of portable devices makes it difficult to switch off.

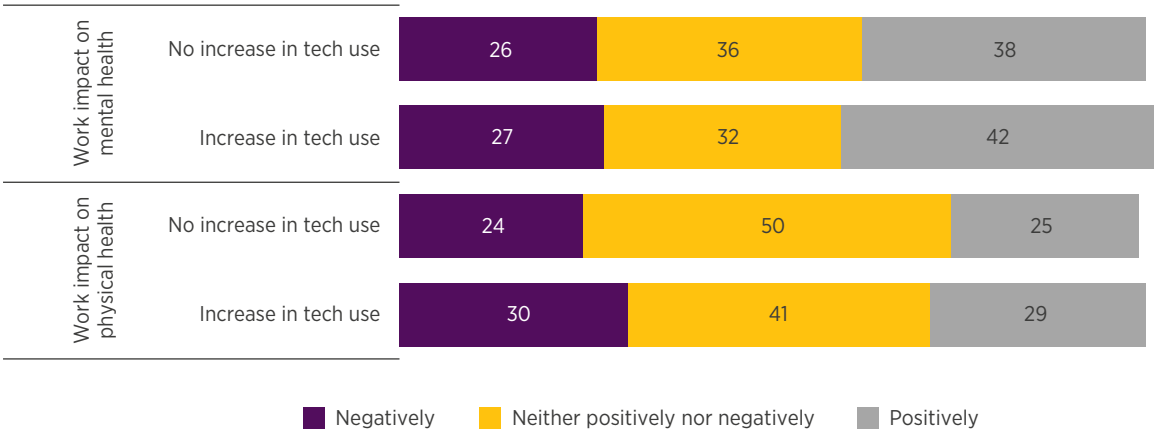
Figure 6: Perceived impact of portable device use on work–life balance (%)



Note: Base size for 'I use portable devices to do work when commuting...' = 2,321, 'because of portable devices I find it more difficult to switch off from work' = 2,334, 'using portable devices helps me work in ways or at times that suit me' = 2,305, and 'using portable devices blurs boundaries' = 2,304.

Our survey asked respondents if either their physical or mental health was adversely affected by their work. Around a quarter reported a negative impact on either their physical (24%) or mental health (26%). Comparing employees who had experienced an increase in technology use in the last 12 months with those who hadn't, reports of work adversely affecting health were broadly similar (Figure 7). This is perhaps contrary to expectations, with increased use of technology often associated with changes in work design that could either improve or diminish health. It is also important to note that the survey was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and so reflects perceptions at that time.

Figure 7: Change in technology use and impact on health (%)

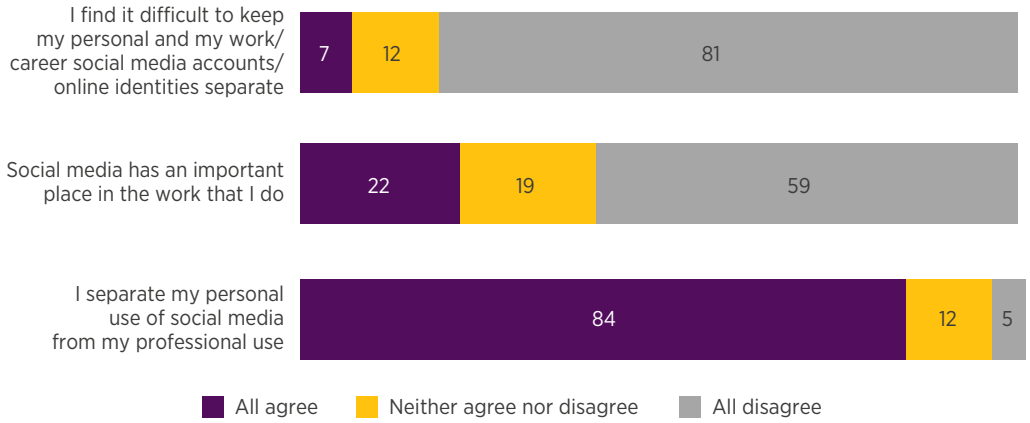


Note: Base size for 'work impact on mental health' with 'no increase in tech use' = 1,468, 'work impact on mental health' with 'increased tech use' = 761, 'work impact on physical health' with 'no increase in tech use' = 1,471, and 'work impact on physical health' with 'increased tech use' = 760.

To what extent has work-related social media use changed since 2013?

We asked survey respondents whether they faced any challenges in separating personal from professional use of social media. On the whole, this did not seem to pose a challenge for the vast majority of workers (81%) (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Use of social media (%)



Note: Base size for 'difficult to keep my personal and my work/career social media accounts ... separate' = 1,962, 'social media has an important place in the work that I do' = 1,964, and for 'I separate my personal use of social media from my professional use' = 1,960.

Comparing our survey data with the CIPD's research in 2013,[23] there appear to have been changes in the usage of mobile technology and social media. More people now use social media for work purposes (increased from 27% to 37%); and, interestingly, more now state that they separate professional and personal social media use (up from 58% to 84%). This may be a response to some of the issues that employees report experiencing in managing boundaries between work and home life and being able to switch off from work.

Worker perspectives during COVID-19: technology fatigue when working from home

Technology has enabled many workers to keep working during the crisis, but there is a very real risk of digital burnout from excessive virtual meetings and project work online. Managing screen time is also a challenge to ensure digital wellbeing. Many respondents we interviewed described how they tried to be disciplined by switching off portable devices and planning breaks, but a lack of divide between work and personal responsibilities, as well as tight deadlines and perceived need to be visible, can make this difficult.

However, many people have been pleasantly surprised by the amount of collaboration that is possible through video platforms, enabling teams to be in regular contact and check in on one another. The downsides are that virtual meetings feel more tiring and clinical:

> '*I do think I have Zoom (or equivalent) fatigue. I lose concentration in longer meetings and become physically uncomfortable*.' **Manager, 18–39**

It can be hard to pick up on body language and expressions in virtual meetings, which can hamper creativity. This also presents a challenge for managers to communicate meaningfully and for leaders to be visible:

> '*As a line manager I really struggle to empathise sometimes and need the visual body language clues to moderate my tone and style.*' **Manager, 40+**

Managers must be mindful of not forgetting about quieter members of the team who may not always be comfortable asking for help. These findings indicate a role for people professionals in providing employees and managers with guidance to support effective use of virtual communication and collaboration.

Team cohesion is also being threatened by lack of face-to-face interactions. Many employees miss casual water cooler conversations that often spark creative solutions to problems and opportunities to use colleagues as a sounding board:

> '*I am really missing seeing other people and the social interaction.*' **Worker, 18–39**

Most focus group respondents felt that they are working longer hours due to a lack of delineation between work and home life, which is particularly a problem for those working with international clients:

> '*I think as we are working from home, senior management expect you to be online all day every day, including weekends.*' **Manager, 40+**

In terms of other aspects of wellbeing, spending extended time at a desk with inappropriate seating is causing physical problems, including strained eyes and bad posture. Managers are also worried about people not taking their annual leave. However, some employees said that they are eating better, saving money and feel physically better as a result of lower pollution.

Practice pointers: supporting healthy and flexible working

Key points for people practitioners supporting the implementation of new workplace technologies:

- Create a holistic framework to support people's physical health and safety, and mental health. This should take into account the underlying factors, such as unmanageable workloads, that are driving unhealthy working practices.
- Offer sources of help such as counselling, an employee assistance programme and occupational health services where possible.
- Ensure line managers have the ongoing guidance needed to support their teams, so they can have sensitive one-to-one conversations with team members and signpost to help where needed.
- Embed flexible working practices such as adapting working hours or temporary job-shares to support employees balancing caring responsibilities with work.

The CIPD evidence review *Developing effective virtual teams* includes further advice and guidance on how line managers can improve flexible working outcomes in a virtual context. Our *Wellbeing at work* factsheet shares more information for people professionals on cultivating a healthy workplace.

Monitoring and surveillance

- Forty-five per cent of employees believe that monitoring is currently taking place in their workplace.
- The vast majority (86%) believe that workplace monitoring and surveillance will become more common in future.
- Seventy-three per cent of employees feel that introducing technologies to monitor the workplace would damage trust between workers and their employers.

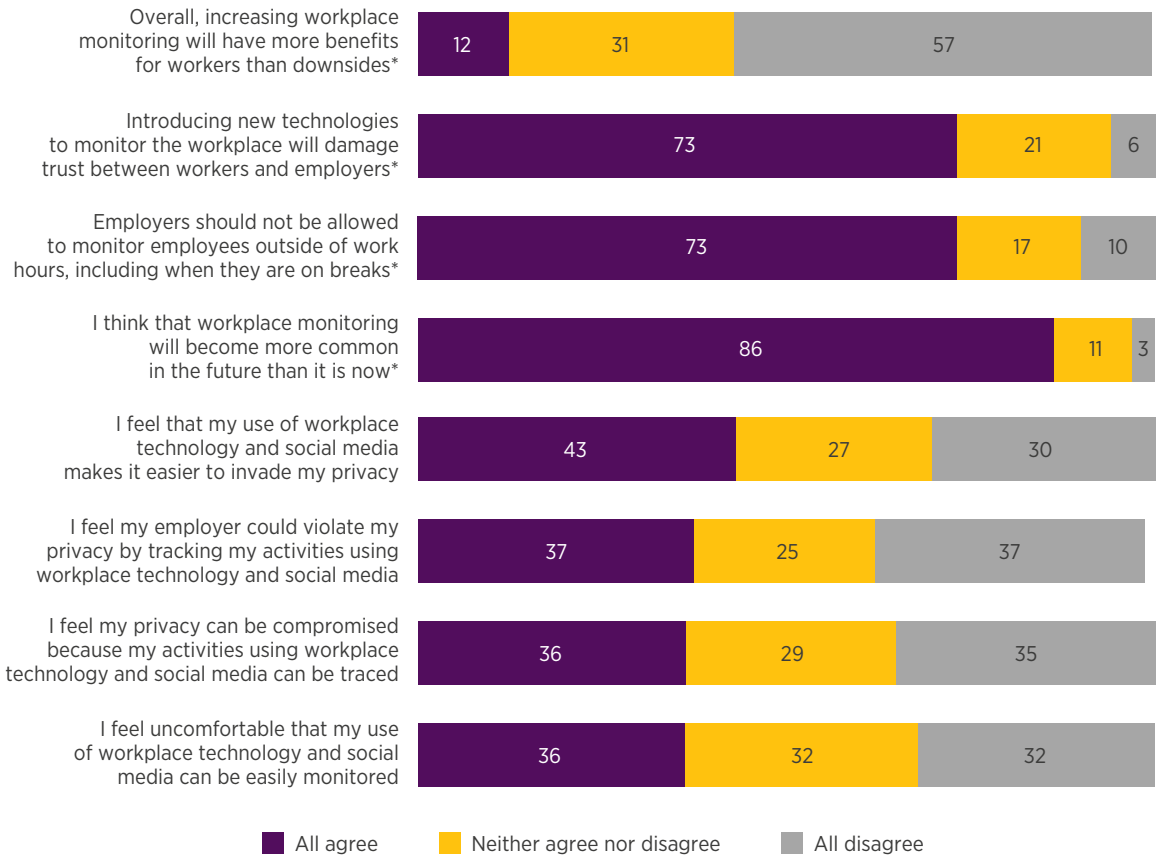
New technologies offer increased opportunity and scope for workplace monitoring. While some form of staff monitoring has been in place in organisations for a long time, employers now have many more ways of doing so, including keystroke logging and monitoring usage of virtual communication platforms. There could, however, be significant drawbacks of overly monitoring workers.

Big Brother at work: employee views on workplace monitoring and surveillance

Our data shows that UK workers have several concerns about the extent and impact of workplace monitoring and surveillance. Just under half of all those surveyed (45%) thought that monitoring was currently taking place in their workplace. This percentage rose to 55% for those employed on permanent contracts. Strikingly, the vast majority (86%) of those surveyed believed that workplace monitoring and surveillance will become more common in future (Figure 9).

As for who benefits from these new techniques, employees are clear: it isn't them. Most (57%) believe that increasing workplace monitoring will not have more benefits for workers than downsides. Only around one in ten (12%) think that benefits will outweigh downsides from a worker perspective. The majority (73%) of employees felt that introducing technologies to monitor the workplace would damage trust between workers and their employers, and around two in five employees (43%) expressed concerns that the introduction of workplace monitoring technology could make it easier for their privacy to be violated.

Figure 9: Perceptions of monitoring and surveillance at work* (%)



Note: Base size for 'workplace monitoring will have more benefits for workers than downsides' = 2,201, 'introducing new technologies... will damage trust' = 2,280, 'employers should not be allowed to monitor employees outside of work hours...' = 2,299, 'workplace monitoring will become more common in the future' = 2,219, 'my use of workplace technology and social media makes it easier to invade my privacy' = 2,256, 'my employer could violate my privacy by tracking my activities using workplace technology and social media'= 2,272, 'my privacy can be compromised because my activities using workplace technology and social media can be traced' = 2,290, 'my use of workplace technology and social media makes it easier to invade my privacy' = 2,294.

*Indicates questions used in TUC (2019).[24]

Worker perspectives during COVID-19: monitoring and surveillance using technology

Our interviews with UK workers highlighted that working from home during the lockdown has created higher levels of trust between workers and managers, with individuals feeling trusted to complete their work independently. Among respondents, both workers and managers could see how monitoring systems could negatively impact this trust:

> '*I don't think my work would do that, and I wouldn't be happy if they started. My manager doesn't really "check up" on me and I feel I am trusted to do my work, which in turn means I work harder.*' **Worker, 18–39**

The idea of heavy workplace monitoring is strongly rejected by both workers and managers, and perceived as stress-inducing, demotivating and dehumanising. As one manager suggested:

> '*I think monitoring would increase my anxiety about my workload and reduce my effectiveness.*' **Manager, 18–39**

There is also a risk of increased monitoring and surveillance by the organisation leading to presenteeism (that is, employees continuing to work while unwell). It's also perceived to be ineffective in measuring productivity – showing quantity rather than quality of work:

> *'I don't think it's appropriate to monitor work productivity unless there are serious and valid concerns. Especially in the current climate when people have many responsibilities at the moment.'* **Manager, 18–39**

Some respondents said that they've left previous roles due to monitoring systems or would consider doing so if they were introduced. Monitoring on a smaller scale, such as using timesheets and aligning to sales targets, is felt to be more acceptable, but a sense of reciprocal trust must be fostered. Stringent monitoring would need to be very seriously considered by employers before implementation.

Practice pointers: monitoring and surveillance

People professionals must play a leading role in the decision-making process during decisions regarding workplace monitoring and surveillance. People professionals should look to:

- Communicate openly and transparently with employees about what workplace monitoring is in place, its purpose, and the potential benefits for both workers and the organisation.
- Ensure that managers and their staff understand relevant legislation relating to data protection and GDPR, and employees are aware of their rights.
- Provide access to employee voice channels to improve transparency and promote active participation in the decision-making process.
- Demonstrate the limitations and risks, as well as the opportunities arising from workplace monitoring and surveillance, and communicate these through clear language to the workforce.

The CIPD report *Where has all the trust gone?* explores why trust matters in the workplace and what can be done to repair it.

Employee voice

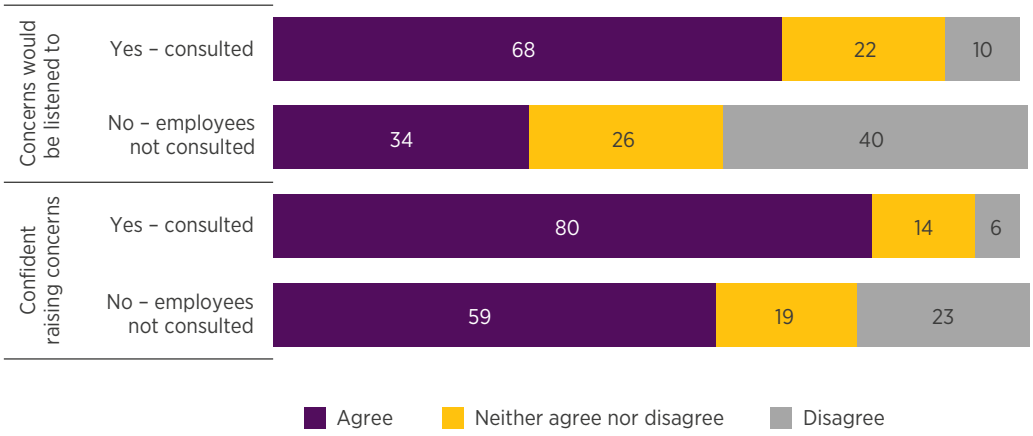
- Only 35% of employees and/or their representatives have been consulted on the introduction and/or implementation of new technology.
- Where employees have not been consulted about technology change, only 20% are positive about the likely impact on their job quality, compared with 70% for those who have been consulted.

Employee voice is the primary way by which individuals have influence over their working conditions, which is important both for organisational effectiveness and individual wellbeing. Technology is both challenging and creating new opportunities for employees' ability to have their say – affecting the balance of power between the organisation and the workforce.[25] Our findings indicate that a minority of employees and/or their representatives are consulted on the decision to introduce, and the implementation of, new workplace technology. Overall, 23% reported that an employee representative or trade

union had been consulted, rising to 34% in the public sector (compared with 21% in the private sector). Less than two-fifths (35%) of employees surveyed said that they had been consulted themselves.

As highlighted in earlier findings throughout this report, consulting with employees prior to the introduction and implementation of new technologies has a positive impact on a wide range of outcomes, including perceptions around the business benefits. Our survey also showed that employees who were consulted about technology change were more likely to raise concerns about new technology, potentially improving the way it is implemented and ultimately its likely success. They were also more likely to believe that their concerns would be listened to, demonstrating higher levels of trust in their employer (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Impact of consultation on perceptions of voice (%)

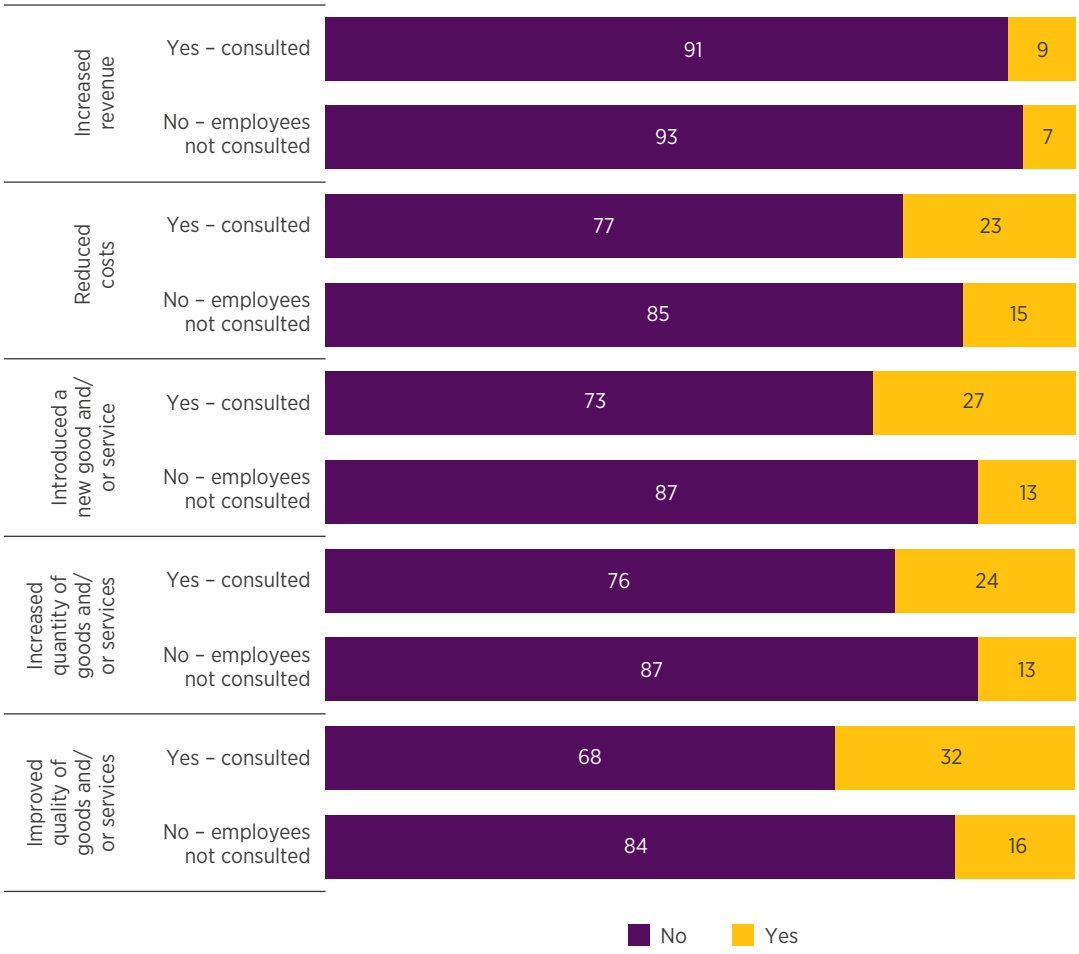


Note: Base size for 'concerns would be listened to' and 'employees were consulted' = 217, 'concerns would be listened to' and 'employees were not consulted' = 400, 'confident raising concerns' and 'employees were consulted' = 220, 'confident raising concerns' and 'employees were not consulted' = 404.

Does consultation and employee voice affect business outcomes?

Employee consultation and engagement throughout business change is vital. Our results show that this is also true for technology implementation. We found that where employees were consulted about technology change, they were consistently more positive about its impact on business outcomes (Figure 11). This may be simply because they were more engaged in the process and willing to embrace the positives, or that consultation had resulted in better technology solutions. It's also possible that those consulted were more likely to have been trained on how to make the best use of the technology, resulting in better outcomes.

Figure 11: Impact of employee consultation on perceived business benefits of technology change (%)



Note: Base size for 'yes – consulted' = 223, for 'no – employees not consulted' = 409.

The CIPD *People and machines* report highlighted that people professionals were often not involved in IT implementation processes and were themselves not very engaged in technology. These new findings further underline the strategic role that people professionals play and the importance of their involvement at an early stage to ensure employee voices are being heard.

Worker perspectives during COVID-19: enhancing employee voice through technology

There are mixed perceptions about whether virtual meetings are democratising or reinforcing organisational hierarchies. Some respondents felt that using these platforms allows junior colleagues more time and space to share their views, but others said it could reinforce shyness for some individuals:

> *'I always find it more difficult to share views when not in person, especially via email, they can be read wrong. Over the phone or one-to-one is okay, but bigger meetings can become a free-for-all.'* **Worker, 18–39**

With workforces not able to come into the office, there may be limited opportunities to feed ideas upwards to or share concerns with leaders, which means the organisation could miss out on help to improve the way things are being done:

> *'Our management team are very open to comments/suggestions, but we haven't had regular personal contact.'* **Worker, 40+**

This highlights the importance of setting up other channels for employees to have a say on any matters affecting them, taking into account individual preferences for communication.

Practice pointers: building trust and enhancing voice

The people profession must play a central role in improving employee voice and enhancing trust before, during and after technology is implemented in the organisation. Steps that practitioners can take include:

- Consult employees affected by technologies on how best to design and implement the new systems, to ensure they dovetail with other processes and reduce the risk of glitches.
- Understand employee attitudes to new technologies, and address negative perceptions that may cause resistance.
- Consider how job design, organisational policies and processes, and values and behaviours can be developed to provide better opportunities for all employees to have a meaningful voice.

The CIPD *Change management* and *Employee voice* factsheets include further guidance for people professionals looking to engage employees during technological change, as well as information on how to improve employee voice and engagement in decision-making.

4 Conclusion

With advancements in technology being developed at an increasingly rapid pace and introduced into workplaces, organisations must prepare their workforces for future change to ensure long-term success. Rather than simply 'leading with the latest technology',[26] people professionals and business leaders should partner to design new strategies that achieve optimal balance between people and technology that meets the needs of the organisation and its workforce. This research highlights the risk that employees are not sufficiently prepared for or aware of the impact of technology-driven change on their roles and working lives. A minority of employees have received relevant training and been involved in consultation around the use of new technologies to help them prepare. This reflects the CIPD's *People profession survey 2020* finding that L&D was a key priority for employers and people professionals before the pandemic, but is no longer an area receiving immediate attention.

Room for improvement: a mixed picture of impact

The findings in this research offer a similar perspective to the *People and machines* study of employers. Much like employers, employees generally feel that the increased use of technology is having a more positive than negative impact. However, there's a mixed picture, with some people experiencing benefits and anticipating better job quality as a

consequence of automation, while others are being adversely impacted. The COVID-19 pandemic illustrates that it is particularly important that employers enable better work–life balance and increase efforts to maintain engagement as people work from home.

Helping individuals manage boundaries effectively and reap the upsides of mobile technology without the downsides is critical to wellbeing as well as productivity. The CIPD's *Health and well-being at work 2020* survey[27] found that many UK workers were dealing with mounting levels of stress before the outbreak, with presenteeism and leavism (that is, using annual leave to catch up on work) being widespread. Health and wellbeing must be even more of a priority in the current climate to prevent these issues being further exacerbated, as was highlighted in the CIPD's latest survey of people professionals.[28] Technology can play an important role in protecting or even improving wellbeing, but only if it is implemented effectively.

Maintaining trust

Those we interviewed were clear that higher levels of trust had started to develop between managers and their staff as a result of homeworking during COVID-19, but there is risk that increased use of monitoring and surveillance technologies would significantly damage trust and create feelings of anxiety among employees. Earlier this year a high-profile case at one company highlighted the risks associated with employee monitoring.[29] New technologies, while promising greater management and insights, can have a serious impact on trust, employee relations, and employee morale.

Our data mirrors the TUC's findings that most employees believe monitoring is likely to become more common in the future,[30] and there are significant concerns about the potential negative impact of its use, including privacy violations and discriminatory practice. To maintain trust, employers must be fully transparent about how any monitoring or surveillance will be used and ensure that all staff are able to challenge it if they feel uncomfortable.

Technology at work: a huge opportunity, but only if workers are involved

The value and importance of employee voice when introducing new technology is evident throughout our research findings. Where employees are consulted about new technology, they feel more positive about it being introduced, believe it will be good for business outcomes and will lead to improvements in job quality. As well as consultations, providing a mix of formal and informal channels is important for employees to have a say on matters that affect them around the use of technology and working during the COVID-19 pandemic. This can foster wellbeing, creativity and performance.[31] It's clear then that employees need to be at the centre of decision-making regarding technology that will impact the work that they do.

In line with our previous work, *People and machines*, we recognise real opportunities to generate mutual gains through the application of workplace technology. Workers can see the value of new technologies entering the workplace to their ability to perform in their job, and also recognise the impact it can have on the quality of their work. Both organisational performance and job quality can be enhanced.

The people profession has a critical role to play in designing and supporting healthy and productive workplaces that make the best use of technology. As experts in the world of work, people professionals are perfectly positioned to take the lead in conversations that marry the opportunity and value of new workplace technologies with the risks and challenges they present if utilised incorrectly. Workplace technologies are not only here already, but they are transforming working practices and the working lives of many UK workers. The time for action is now.

Recommendations for the people profession

We make the following recommendations for leaders in the people profession, and those looking to build workplaces that make the best use of workplace technologies:

- **Play a strategic role in designing and delivering workplace change involving technology.** We know that the people profession risks being left out of the design and implementation stage of new workplace technology, even when technological change is likely to lead to changes in the nature and types of jobs, organisation structure, skill levels, performance, and learning requirements. People professionals must therefore ensure they play an active leadership role in all discussions in which workers and jobs may be affected, and should partner with the business to do this.
- **Prioritise employee voice.** People professionals should act as a powerful internal advocate for the workforce in decisions about investment in new technology. They can bring in-depth understanding of the human aspects of technology use and can positively influence the success of any change by highlighting to other senior leaders the views and challenges raised by employees.
- **Foster trust.** Design change management and communications strategies to help people transition and understand the impact of technology on their day-to-day working lives. Line managers also need to be trained to actively listen to individuals' needs and concerns. Open and transparent communications are particularly important with regards to the use of workplace monitoring, to maintain trust. People professionals must ensure that the intended purpose, outcomes and boundaries of monitoring are clearly explained and supported by policies. Decisions to implement any surveillance technology should be underpinned by strong values and aligned to the organisational culture. Developing metrics for the outcomes of the use of these technologies (both business and people outcomes) can also create transparency.
- **Boost training and development.** Design future-focused learning solutions and support the workforce through training as they transition to using new technologies. Especially with increasing complexity of tasks as a result of changing technology use, employees need training to develop new skills and knowledge.
- **Develop a holistic approach to health and wellbeing that makes good use of technology.** Empower employees to have more control over their tasks and working hours through flexible work practices. Consider how digital wellbeing can be enhanced through managing expectations around being 'visible' online, encouraging breaks from screen time, providing informal spaces for team members to check in with one another, and avoiding virtual meeting fatigue.

5 Appendix

Sample demographics were as follows:

- 76% private sector; 17% public sector; and 7% third or voluntary sector.
- 37% of respondents worked for organisations with fewer than 250 staff; 47% worked for organisations with more than 250 staff; the rest were self-employed (16%).
- 44% female; 56% male.
- 9% of respondents were aged 18–34; 17% aged 35–44; 29% aged 45–54; and 45% were aged 55 or over.
- 61% were employed full-time; 23% part-time.
- 60% of respondents were responsible for managing others.

The CIPD defines good work as work which:

- is fairly rewarded
- gives people the means to securely make a living
- gives opportunities to develop skills and a career and ideally a sense of fulfilment
- provides a supportive environment with constructive relationships
- allows for work–life balance
- is physically and mentally healthy
- gives employees the voice and choice they need to shape their working lives
- should be accessible to all
- is affected by a range of factors, including HR practices, the quality of people management and by workers themselves.

6 Notes

1 World Economic Forum. (2019) *HR4.0: Shaping People Strategies in the Fourth Industrial Revolution*.

2 CIPD. (2019) *People and machines: from hype to reality*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

3 Ibid.

4 *HR4.0: Shaping People Strategies in the Fourth Industrial Revolution*. p9.

5 OECD. (2019) *Employment Outlook 2019: The Future of Work*.

6 World Economic Forum. (2018) *The Future of Jobs Report 2018*.

7 Microsoft sacks journalists to replace them with robots. *The Guardian*. 30 May 2020.

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10 CIPD. (2020) *Developing effective virtual teams: lessons from research*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

11 CIPD. (2020) *People profession survey 2020: UK and Ireland*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

12 CIPD. (2018) *Understanding and measuring job quality*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

13 CIPD. (2020) *CIPD Good Work Index 2020: UK Working Lives Survey*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

14 *People and machines: from hype to reality*.

15 Ibid.

16 *HR4.0: Shaping People Strategies in the Fourth Industrial Revolution*.

17 Ibid.

18 *People and machines: from hype to reality*.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 *CIPD Good Work Index 2020: UK Working Lives Survey*.

23 CIPD. (2013) *Social technology, social business*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

24 TUC. (2019) *I'll be watching you: A report on workplace monitoring*. London: Trades Union Congress.

25 CIPD. (2019) *Talking about voice: employees' experiences*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

26 *HR4.0: Shaping People Strategies in the Fourth Industrial Revolution*.

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28 *People profession survey 2020: UK and Ireland*.

29 Houghton, E. (2020) *Coronavirus and the workforce: 'workplace' monitoring and surveillance*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

30 *I'll be watching you: A report on workplace monitoring*.

31 *Talking about voice: employees' experiences*.

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