

South Africa's auto industry highlights the social and employment cost of innovation

In South Africa, local operations of international motor manufacturing companies must constantly innovate to meet global demands and offer competitive value. The way work is done is constantly changing.

The current technologies adopted in the workplace are ever smarter than those that went before.

This trend, driven by economic forces, does not always lead to social improvements. Automation and the use of robots in manufacturing, combined with new working methods and systems, can have negative social impacts on workers.

Job automation in South Africa

There has been an increase in technology in South Africa's automobile sector since 2003. Most of the work in vehicle manufacturing has been automated, which makes manufacturing easier, faster, and more productive. More units of cars are produced daily. Companies used to manufacture only 20 units of cars hourly. Now they are manufacturing over 100 units an hour using the same number of autoworkers.

Study of the industry found that automation is well advanced. The sector's body shop is fully automated. The paint shop is 80% automated. There is about 20% technology utilisation in the car assembly line. And logistics is making a lot more use of machines than before.

These percentages are an indicator of how workers have lost the contest with technology in the industry. Many workers are being deskilled: they no longer fully use their skills to do their job, because robots do most

