Fighting Automation

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Social policies should be put in place to fight against the growth of automated jobs in all western countries to ease the economy for “when large sections of the population [become] unemployable” (Grey). When you think of a future of automated jobs you might imagine a utopia where humans have an abundance in everything and are free to pursue whatever they wish. While this paper will not deny that possibility, it will touch on the problems that we will face as automation increases. Automation can cause high unemployment; for every task automated thousands can lose their job. High unemployment will be caused when a job like transportation and warehousing if automated can cause millions to lose their job. We will start seeing a bigger wage gap as workers will not be able to get a job without being specialized. However restricting automation can slow down innovation or harm businesses. The biggest challenge is determining what counts as automation and how to counter the negative effects. When large sections of population are unemployable through no fault of their own “what to do in a future where for most jobs humans need not apply” (Grey).

The future to come does not look bright for those unprepared and unlucky enough to be in high automatable industries. Around “47 percent of total US employment is in the [high-risk] category” (Osborne, 2013, p.38). The two largest categories being “service”,” office and administrative support”, and “construction”. Most of these jobs handle logistics. For example, Uber for service, scheduling for administrative support, and transfer of goods for construction. A mechanical muscle that never gets tired, a construction crew that never stopped working or a taxi driver that follows the speed limit. Those are the type of tasks

that will be automated first. It is not all bad news however. Automation can make everyday life easier as well. The new Tesla cars have been driven 1.3 billion miles in autopilot and only one death has occurred. To put that in perspective in the United States 12.5 deaths occur per 1 billion miles driven. An almost ten times increase compared to a self-driven car.

As simpler jobs get automated more and more people will need to be pushed through higher education. Not everyone has the resources or the ability to university. “It is quite clear that those with few technical skills or specialty trades will face rough going in the future” (West, 2015, p. 10). Not that complex jobs are not at risk in fact, robots can take some jobs that is considered to be complex such as data analytics and making suggestions for your daily tasks. As Barbara Ehrenreich puts it “the job-eating maw of technology now threatens even the nimblest and most expensively educated” (Ehrenreich). The poor who do not have high-speed internet, computers, or even a smartphone will have the hardest time adapting to an age where manual labor is low paying and low demand. However even if all creative jobs disappear, there is one type that will stay for the foreseeable future; Those jobs will require social intelligence and a human face, for example a nurse. Interacting with others releases a chemical called Oxytocin that when place inside a wound, it causes the “injuries [to] heal much more quickly” (Dobson). With that in mind people who have human interaction in the hospital get better faster than those who don’t and a robot with an emoji face won’t make a difference.

What is considered automation and where should we draw the line. It would be ridiculous to consider a printer as a form of automation but you could argue otherwise. How about ticket gates at train stations? Long ago people used to stand at the entrance and

look over your ticket before allowing you to enter, a job long forgotten. Some automation is more visible than others. For example, you probably think of big robot arms that put together a car or package food but automation is everywhere. It is the light changing red when you drive, the connection you get when you dial a number and, the door that slides open when you get close. These examples show that it is impossible to place policies on every individual job. Some jobs are long gone while others are just starting to emerge.

Once we draw the line will it be fair to all business or will small ones suffer. While it is true that a company like Amazon can make thousands lose their jobs by simply automating a few warehousing tasks it does not mean automation is a bad thing. A small growing business might not have the resources to pay for an employee and the time it takes to train and manage them but if they were allowed to automate the task they would be able to invest and expand.

Possible policies that can be put in place to fight the negatives of mass automation are as follows. Basic income, a policy where everyone receives enough money from the government to purchase all that is necessary for healthy living. Encouraging corporate profit-sharing to help wage equity. Create incentives for volunteerism by giving “income supplements or benefit eligibility” (West, 2015, p. 14).

No country in world has basic income and only a few have attempted pilot program for it. The results showed that in average people started working 10% less but the money was mostly used for necessities rather than pleasure. Basic income faces two mostly two critics. First, “the value of that work adds to human worth” (West, 2015, p. 13). Second,

"people worry about a lack of work incentives in an income guarantee" (West, 2015, p. 13). Despite these worries, evidence shows that people do not get dependent on basic income and the poor benefit more than others.

Corporate profit-sharing does not address those without jobs but it will help with wage equity. It is a way spreading the benefits of productivity to more than just the top executives of a company. Having a workforce rewarded for productivity has been known to work much better than penalties for failing productivity levels, (carrot always working better than the stick). Some formulations show that a good amount to receive is up $5,000 for any employee making at least $50,000. This is a plan that could backfire as a company is more incentivized to also have as few as employees as possible to share the profit with.

One possible solution for high automation is creating a culture of volunteerism. The government could provide benefits to those that choose to help the community rather than pursue fulltime work. It will also help with mental health as "a large number report they are unhappy in their current position" (West, 2015, p. 13). Currently it is found that men and women who are retired and have no hobbies are more likely to get Alzheimer's and other mental diseases. Causation is said to be the lack of brain activity. Something that can be solved by having the young volunteer to help the elderly and having the mobile elderly volunteer. This is just an example of one benefit that incentivizing volunteering can have. This plan will not work however if the majority of the population doesn't have volunteerism as part of their culture, for example immigrants. Having a high immigration intake rate will create push back against any cultural agenda the government is pushing. The immigrants will create their own communities and will slow down the rate of indoctrination.

"There needs to be ways for people to live fulfilling lives even if society needs relatively few workers. We need to think about ways to address these issues before we have a permanent underclass of unemployed individuals." (West, 2015, p. 17) Many problems will occur short term and long term as automation increases. We need to think of efficient and fair policies that will help large numbers of people that from no fault of their own will not be needed. The policies mentioned here are only a possibility out of thousands of others. It's mostly served as an example that any country that experiences an increase in automation will have to think of ways to keep of solution to fight high unemployment or face painful growing pains. Hopefully however no one will have to look at a robot doing a task and think "I wish I could do that" (Yorke, 2013, par. 8)

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