

Will AI robots take middle-class jobs?

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Our newsfeeds are filled with talk about the rapid rise of artificial intelligence (AI) in software such as ChatGPT and Stable Diffusion, which can quickly—albeit haphazardly—generate works such as essays and photographs from a text prompt. Reading these, you might be excused for thinking that writers and photographers are soon to go the way of the elevator operator, automated out of existence.

According to political theorist Tom Parr, only some will find themselves out of a job thanks to AI—but many more of us will have to accommodate its new role in our own work.

One question Parr, a professor at the Politics and International Studies institute of the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom, gets asked nearly every day is: "Are the robots coming for my job?"

"Because AI is developing so quickly, it's difficult to make predictions about its impact with any degree of confidence, meaning everything said on this topic must be taken with a pinch of salt," warns Parr. That said, Parr's standard answer to this question is that yes, AI (or technology in general) will take some people's jobs—but probably not your job.

"I think the chances of technology making middle-class workers redundant is relatively low," he explains. "But the chances that this technology will change the kinds of jobs that are available in the future are much higher."

According to Parr, the reason for this is that although technology develops fast, its uptake is rather slow—meaning its impact is gradual instead of immediate. "For people currently working in middle-class professions, the effect AI will have on their job stability is going to be rather limited," he says. "Where we will see this technology have a more

immediate impact is on the fields that the next generation of middle-class workers choose to study."

AI will change the way you work

This isn't to say that today's middle-class workers are off the hook. "While AI is unlikely to take your job, it will definitely change your job," remarks Parr.

As he explains, a typical job involves performing a variety of tasks—research, writing, coordinating meetings, etc. While AI won't eliminate all these tasks, it may eliminate, or at least change, some of them. The net result will be that the nature of one's job will change over time.

"What we often see, especially in middle-class jobs, is that the rote, mundane aspects of a job become automated," he says. The good news is that this frees up time for more high-level, [critical thinking](#) and creative tasks. "I fully expect that AI will change the nature of middle-class professions, increasing demand for high cognitive management skills, good communication skills, creativity, etc.," adds Parr.

In other words, the immediate effect of AI won't be to take our jobs away, but to help us do our jobs better. "In this sense, AI shouldn't be seen as a threat, but as another tool we can all use to help improve the efficiency of the tasks we carry out," notes Parr.

Just don't mention it to the elevator operators—if you ever meet one.

Provided by CORDIS

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