

Report examines automation waves that threaten upward mobility

17 July 2017, by Nancy Owano



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(Tech Xplore)—Remember when there such a thing as the job ladder—do great work and catch the rewards in the form of promotion, or job assurance, or higher salary, or all three in one great moving-up package?

Well, you might want to question your faith on this kind of rainbow and pay attention to what a new Sutton Trust report has to say, as it explores forces governing those who live and work in the UK.

The title is "The State of Social Mobility in the UK," by Boston Consulting and Sutton Trust, dated July 2017. The Trust wanted to know how [social mobility](#) in the UK has evolved through the group's 20-year history, and where it is likely to go in the [future](#)."

The report takes a look at the impact of automation on work—as many of the employed know work to be. They refer to a recent Bank of England study estimating that up to 15 million [jobs](#) in the UK could be at risk of automation.

That is a sobering number, and who are most at

risk? Unsurprisingly, routine-based jobs in predictable environments that can easily be described by rules are most at risk. Sure, one immediately thinks of all those robot advances in picking, sorting, lifting and even executing building construction duty.

The report looks at a gamut of automation, and goes through the numbers likely to feel the impact in a number of categories. Here are just a few examples:

"Around 280,000 book-keepers, payroll managers and wages clerks in the UK could see their jobs disappear following the transition towards cloud based accounting," said the report, "increased use of robots and improved level of automation."

A further 75,000 UK-based paralegals could see their jobs affected by automation through technology.

The wave of technological innovation in the financial sector was not ignored. That wave involves the introduction of robo-advisory, robotic process [automation](#), and artificial intelligence.

"These could reduce the need for middle and back office jobs by up to 50 - 70%."

Obviously, retail assistants, cashiers, salespersons, and telephone sales will feel the impact.

"Automatic cashiers are already supplanting human cashiers. Further rolling out of existing technologies, as well as new technologies such as voice and image recognition and natural language processing (ability to interpret human language, tone, and pitch and take appropriate actions) will put these jobs at risk."

The "mobility" ladder looks as if it will be broken but in an unsettling way where the rich will most likely prosper nonetheless.

Remember the conventional view that technology sooner or later is job-creating, not just in ways that were earlier categorized? The report suggests it might be different this time around. In other words, not everyone will lose the race against machines and technology disruption. High skill workers (typically drawn from higher socioeconomic backgrounds) could disproportionately benefit. Upward mobility will take a hit.

May Bulman in the *Independent* said, "Soft skills" such as confidence and communication, are set to be of higher value, an easier fit for those from higher socioeconomic [backgrounds](#).)

Among the Key Findings, as stated by the Trust:

We may see greater demand for technical skills, and an increased value of essential life skills (such as confidence, motivation and communication). "This will advantage those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, who typically have greater opportunities to develop these skills."

The Sutton Trust was founded by Sir Peter Lampl in 1997. According to the about-us statement, they said, "We are a foundation which improves social mobility in the UK through evidence-based programmes, research and policy [advocacy](#)."

More information:

www.suttontrust.com/research-policy-2017-research/

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