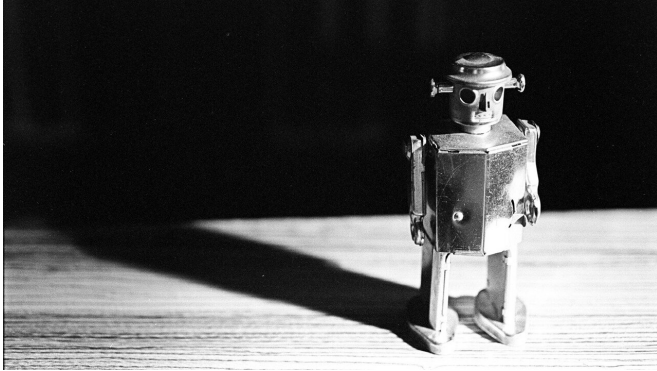


Darn you, R2! When do we blame robots?

17 October 2019, by Matt Shipman



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A recent study from North Carolina State University finds that people are likely to blame robots for workplace accidents, but only if they believe the robots are autonomous.

"Robots are an increasingly common feature in the [workplace](#), and it's important for us to understand how people view robots in that context—including how people view robots when accidents occur at work," says Doug Gillan, a professor of psychology at NC State and corresponding author of a paper on the work.

To explore this issue, researchers conducted a study where 164 people were shown several workplace scenarios in which an accident occurred involving both a human and a [robot](#).

When told the human was operating the robot, study participants usually blamed the human for the accident. When told the robot was autonomous, and that the human was only monitoring it, study participants usually blamed the robot.

"The finding is somewhat intuitive, but it addresses a fundamental issue: when do we transfer responsibility for an error from a human to a

robot?" Gillen says.

"The study also raises questions about how quickly [autonomous robots](#) may be assimilated into the workplace. Do employers want to buy robots that may be more efficient, but can be blamed for errors—making it more difficult to hold human employees accountable? Or do employers want to stick to robots that are viewed solely as tools to be controlled by humans?"

The paper, "Attributing Blame to Robots: The Influence of Robot Autonomy," is published in the journal *Human Factors*.

More information: Caleb Furlough et al. Attributing Blame to Robots: I. The Influence of Robot Autonomy, *Human Factors: The Journal of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/0018720819880641](https://doi.org/10.1177/0018720819880641)

Provided by North Carolina State University

APA citation: Darn you, R2! When do we blame robots? (2019, October 17) retrieved 4 December 2020 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2019-10-darn-r2-blame-robots.html>

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