



Because
Experience
Counts

Technology and the future of work: Topline research findings

Outline

On 20th May 2024, British Safety Council commissioned YouGov to undertake two concurrent research projects, seeking to capture the views of **employers** and **employees** around technology and the future of work, with particular regard to people's jobs and safety.

To capture attitudes towards artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) in the context of workplace safety, 2006 respondents in **employers** were surveyed and 2012 respondents in **employees**.

Topline findings

- **63%** of 2000 **employers** and **41%** of 2000 **employees** report optimism about the impacts of AI on their workforce and workplace respectively.
- Over a quarter (**26%**) of **employers** and **employees** alike reported a belief that AI would make the workplace less safe over the next decade.
- **26%** of **employers** also believe that AI could make workplaces safer, a belief shared by only **13%** of **employees**.
- **48%** of **employers** feel optimism about the impacts of augmented reality (AR) on their workforce and **33%** of workers report optimism about the impacts of AR on their workplace.
- When asked what proportion of workers would be replaced, by AI, over the next decade, **20%** of employers foresaw that less than **10%** of their workforce would be replaced by 2034.
- **6%** of **employers** foresaw that over **50%** of their workforce could be replaced by 2034 and **19%** of **employers** foresaw no role replacement, at all, by 2034.

Summary

When assessing findings across both panels, areas of alignment as well as divergence can be found. Some contradictory findings are present, both within and across panels, which supports wider conclusions that responses reflect differing degrees of uncertainty about what the future will hold and what role technology will play in shaping the safe workplaces of the future. Whilst the findings support a general optimism around the role that technology will play in improving workplace safety, clear concerns about role replacement and whether new and developing technologies will contribute to safer or less safe workplaces are clear throughout the dataset (and from both audiences).

In unpicking why divergence may exist, we understand the existence of differing perceptions of workplace safety, influenced by the responsibilities held by respective parties. Employers are legally responsible for the health and safety of their employees, meaning that employers should be more likely to prioritise workplace safety protocols and risk management. This should mean that employers employ a strategic approach to workplace safety, understanding risk and mitigation across the wider workplace (and understanding how different control measures work in conjunction to respond to individual and accumulated risk).

Employees are less likely to share the same perception of safety, perceiving personal risk but not synthesising risk (or mitigation or control measures) outside of their role or area/s of business.

Attitudes towards AI

Both panels report similar findings around the possible impacts of AI on the workplace/workforce respectively. 26% of both audiences report that AI could make workplaces less safe. 26% of employers report that AI could make the workplace safer, and this is compared against 13% of employees reporting optimism around AI and workplace safety.

While the collected data is unable to explain the reason/s for this divergence, wider inferences can be drawn around the impacts of role replacement and the prevalence of public and media discourse around AI, which leans heavily towards extreme scenarios (e.g., mass job displacement due to AI) rather than a more nuanced view of the future.

Objectively speaking, employees are more likely to be impacted by role replacement and this may contribute to the greater presentation of negative views reported in the dataset. As employers are less likely to be replaced by new and developing technologies (certainly within the parameters of the question) employers may be able to take a more nuanced and balanced view that weighs risk alongside anticipated reward.

Change

Employers are more likely to be drivers of change, rather than passive actors and are more likely to display a greater awareness of the pace and impacts of change. Typically, employees are not involved in the strategic process of change and are likely to be unaware of the pace and/or possible impacts (on micro and macro level). This can fuel uncertainty and could be a contributing factor to responses in the dataset.

Optimism/Pessimism around new and developing technologies

Employers and employees report having less optimism about the safety impacts of AR and VR, than AI. This, again, may be a result of the place of AI in public and media discourse. Divergence can again be found within the dataset, which shows net employer optimism 15% and 12% higher for AR and VR respectively.

Both panels displayed some degree of optimism about the potential impacts of AI on the workplace. Net optimism was greater with employers (at 63%) than for employees (at 41%), reflecting earlier commentary.

Gaps in the data

Questions to both our panels did not ask whether respondents had experience with the introduction of new and developing technologies into their business/es. Employers may have experience (both positive and negative) of introducing new and developing technologies into their workplaces, particularly with AR and VR, which have a longer history of use in the workplace than AI.