



The Human-Machine Workforce

At Criticaleye's CEO Retreat 2018, senior business leaders discussed how new technology can be implemented in a way that augments the capabilities of existing employees, rather than replace them entirely

In association with

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Major advances in machine learning, augmented reality and automation are making chief executives sit up and think hard about workforce capability. The hope is that this technology will be deployed in a way that both improves productivity and empowers people, freeing them up to pursue more meaningful, higher-value work.

In a poll taken at Criticleye's [CEO Retreat](#), held in association with Accenture and E.ON, 56 percent of attendees said that they expect technology to streamline their workforce over the next five years. It confirms that a shift is underway and that, while job losses are inevitable, these changes shouldn't necessarily cast us into a sullen, apocalyptic funk.

Payal Vasudeva, Managing Director at Accenture Strategy, notes that "automation offers a phenomenal opportunity to invest in training and re-skilling". Drawing on an example from her own organisation, she says: "When we brought in automation to complete some of the more repetitive and mundane tasks in our operations business, we acted to move people up the value-chain of activity.

"Of the approximately 20,000-plus people whose roles were impacted, we have not had a single job loss, because we reskilled our workforce and moved them on to new roles that often involved working with technology."

The case for organisations having a fixed, full-time employee base is weakening. **Payal** predicts a far more fluid workforce, where employees have flexible working arrangements and freelancers are used to tap into different talent pools. "It's

really thinking about sourcing talent from the perspective of what you will be buying, building, borrowing and now 'botting,'" she says.

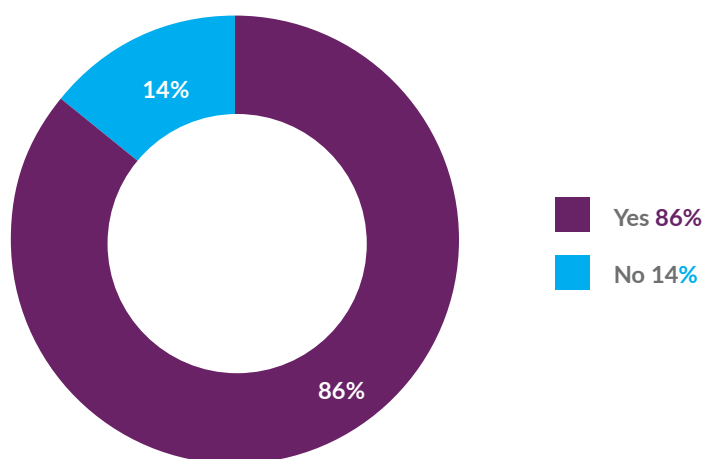
Phillippa Crookes, Senior Relationship Manager at Criticleye, comments: "The new wave of technology coming through presents a unique opportunity for chief executives to completely rethink how the capabilities of their people are deployed.

"This will entail looking at retraining existing employees, bringing in new skills, and re-evaluating the type of leadership approach required to drive high performance."

Better Quality

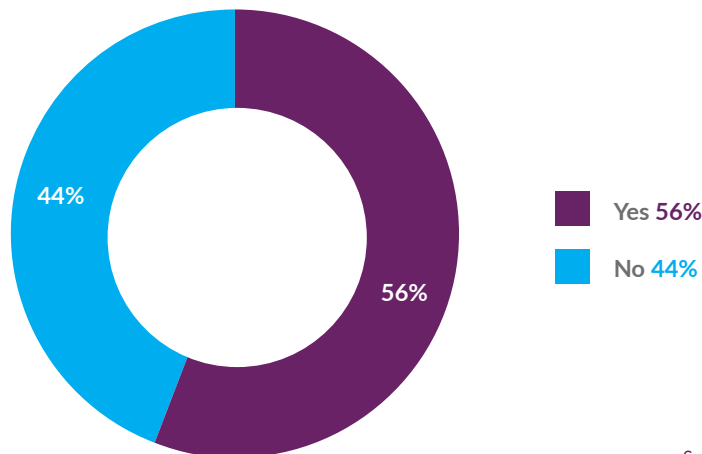
The hope is that technology is going to enhance service by empowering employees. **Michael Lewis**, CEO of >

Is your senior leadership team grappling with business model disruption?



Source: Criticleye 2018

Do you expect new technology to significantly streamline your workforce over the next 5 years?



Source: Criticleye 2018



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energy company E.ON UK, explains: "Ultimately, automation is going to mean that we need fewer people, and so the average skill level of the people that we retain will have to increase. Because automation should enhance and support human abilities, the value of our colleagues will be in providing empathy and creativity."

As E.ON shifts its business model to that of an energy-solutions provider, new skill-sets are required. "We are retraining hundreds of technicians and meter readers so that they can become higher-grade technical workers. This way they will be ready not only for the roll-out of smart-meters, but for all the updates that are going to be required to prepare homes and businesses for the new-energy world, such as the de-carbonisation of energy and the electrification of heating in homes. This will require a large workforce out in the field with the skills necessary to do the job."

Alan Cook, Chairman of insurance company Liverpool Victoria, notes that the impact of new technology needs to be carefully considered. He explains: "I think we do a better job of running a large call centre than the average general insurance company and that has been our source of differentiation from our competitors."

"However, this could disappear due to digitalisation. We will need to work out how to exploit technology in a way that will give us a competitive advantage, rather than just being a part of the pack."

According to **Alan**, technology will mean that businesses will require less people in the future, but you still have to look at

what customers want. He says: "Crashing a car, for example, is a stressful event, and it is not just about how quickly we pay the claim, it's about how we take the stress out of the incident. This requires a speedy, empathetic reaction from us."

"Providing an empathetic response is a job best done by a person, but it is important we find out how far we can go towards achieving this using technology."

This encapsulates the challenge that many companies are facing. As **Payal** puts it: "There are some uniquely human abilities that will continue to be important, including: problem solving, empathy and communication... The future workforce is going to be a human/machine workforce – it is not going to be about technology eliminating people, but about technology elevating people." ■

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Featuring Commentary From:



Alan Cook
Chairman
Liverpool Victoria



Phillippa Crookes
Senior Relationship
Manager
Criticleye



Michael Lewis
CEO
E.ON UK



Payal Vasudeva
MD
Accenture Strategy

Contact the contributors through:
www.criticleye.com