

Discuss the impact of new technology on the organisation of work

[Technology](#)



In recent years most businesses have begun to invest heavily in 'New Technology'. This investment has led to the introduction of computers and robots and the like to the production process and the workplace. This has had the implication of massive changes in work environments, work culture and in the organisational structure of work.

One area which has seen significant change is the manufacturing sector. In the past manufacturing has very much been run along the Fordist, mass production model. Here, workers very much were limited to a narrow set of tasks that they were required to repeat time after time. Quality control was the responsibility of the supervisors. Now companies have moved away from this basis and aim to be much more flexible in their operations. Robots have been introduced to perform the basic tasks, removing much need for the low - skilled workers who previously performed the operations. The robots work with pinpoint accuracy, which improves the overall quality of the product whilst removing the need for constant inspections of work. With computerised monitoring of stock, stock levels can automatically be recorded and new supplies ordered without vigorous stock check taking place - this allows the Just-in-Time method to be implemented, reducing the firm's storage costs, whilst increasing the firm's reliance on its suppliers delivering 'just in time'.

These changes also have major implications for the staff in this sector. The automation of production removes much demand for low-skilled labour but increases the demand for those who can operate and maintain the machinery which has taken the place of such workers. The average worker is

likely to become much more skilled and trained in a wider range of skills than previously.

The 'office' environment is another where changes have occurred. Here, the implementation of new technology is the introduction of computers to the office - along with networks and access to the internet. The main identifiable advantage to both firms and staff alike is the decentralisation of communication. With features such as e-mail, video conferencing and file sharing both internal and external communications are made much easier. Less time needs to be spent by employees travelling to meetings, searching for information or submitting work - allowing more time to be spent productively. However in some cases the presence of such technology has resulted in much wasted time as workers spend time sending and receiving personal e-mails unrelated to work and browsing internet sites for their entertainment.

In terms of the organisational structure there will be reductions in the number of lower skilled workers required such as office support staff, whose roles have been made obsolete by the introduction of computers. Better trained staff are needed who can effectively use the facilities and make best use of them - i. e. fluency with a particular software package. IT support staff are now in high demand as problems with a company's computer systems can cause many problems and waste many hours of employee's time.

The introduction of IT has had another development in the workplace in the form of some Health & Safety issues. The use of keyboards has led to issues with Repetitive Strain and bad backs from sitting at a computer all day. Also issues arise with headaches from staring at a monitor all day. Developments
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have been necessary in the form of anti-glare monitors and new designs of desks and chairs.

New technology has also been implemented heavily in the sector. Here, one major development is the computerised control of staff activity. Computers are used to record " staff presence, working times and absenteeism" [Adzet & Marginet, 2002]. In some cases performance can also be monitored using new technology. Till records can record how much work is done by employees with roles such as bartender or checkout operator for example. CCTV is now widespread and in addition to providing security can also be used as a tool for monitoring staff. This 'big brother' monitoring of staff is useful to firms in that it motivates to staff to work harder and helps bosses to provide evidence in order to remove under-performing staff. A disadvantage of this system is that it does not provide a very relaxed environment in which to work in and may encourage workers to rush rather than to provide a good quality of customer service.

Retail shops such as Supermarkets can also benefit from computerised stock control as mentioned earlier. This allows reduced staffing levels and minimised stock levels - which in turn reduces storage costs.

There are other implications involved for firms from these developments. With the increase in quality overall from the use of robotics and also from the use of CAD (Computer Aided Design) and CAM (Computer Aided Manufacture) firms are able to become 'more product-orientated rather than process-orientated'. [http://www. oltuk. com] This means they can focus on delivering the product wanted by the consumer rather than the product that can be delivered easiest by the production process.

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With the advantages to be enjoyed by implementing new technologies firms need to invest heavily in such technologies to compete effectively with their rivals. The implementation of ICT and robotics, etc can be hugely expensive and there are further costs involved. Staff training bills will be much larger if they are required to use more complicated equipment and there is also a case of paying for system support and maintenance which is expensive for firms with large networks.

Generally the best advantage new technology has brought to business is the ability to reduce the size of the workforce significantly, or at least re-assign aspects of the workforce to more useful and productive tasks. At the basic level robots can replace low skilled human workers, saving money in the long run. The introduction of such technology also improves the overall productivity of the remaining workers, meaning businesses are getting more for the money spent on wages than they might have previously done. Another benefit is that the enforced training resulting from these investments gives firms a better skilled, more flexible workforce - better equipped to deal with changes in the pattern of demand in the future.

In conclusion it can be said that the impact of new technology has been a positive one onto the overall organisation of work. The investments made have allowed firms to improve productivity and also make reduce costs in the long run. These developments encourage economic growth - in turn increasing the standard of living. The introduction of new technology has encouraged more training and increased demand for higher-skilled workers which in turn encourages the workforce to become better qualified. This is

good for the economy as it produces a more productive and flexible labour force.

The main disadvantage from the impact of new technology has been job losses in the traditional manufacturing areas. In certain areas workers have found it hard to find new jobs as their skills were rendered obsolete by the introduction of new technology. Long-term unemployment in areas like South Wales has had to be addressed by the government.

Bibliography

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