

The role of ict



Within half a century, computers and information technology have changed the world and affected millions of lives in ways that no one could have foreseen. Here are some of the things that people have said about computers: " I think there's a world market for maybe five computers." (Thomas Watson, the chairman of IBM, in 1940) " I have travelled the length and breadth of this country and talked with the best people, and I can assure you that data processing is a fad that won't last out the year." (The editor in charge of business books for Prentice Hall, in 1957) " There is no reason why anyone would want to have a computer in their home." (President of Digital Equipment Corporation, in 1957)

Contrary to these predictions, computers are transforming the ways in which we learn, communicate, do business, enjoy our leisure and live our everyday lives. Whatever career you pursue in the future, knowledge of computers skills and concepts is likely to be beneficial or even essential. The aim is to make you competent and confident in the use of computers and to give you an understanding of the uses and impact of computers in society today.

Here, we will look at some of the ways that information technology has changed patterns of work. We'll also examine how dependent we have become on computer systems, and what the consequences might be when these systems fail. b) Computers and employment Ever since the industrial revolution, people have feared that machinery will displace workers, and information technology is no exception.

In spite of dire predictions, however, there is no evidence that the introduction of computers has led to mass unemployment - in fact; overall

computers have created more jobs than have been displaced by them. Nevertheless, in some areas computers have substantially replaced the workforce. In the 1980s, thousands of factory workers were made redundant by the introduction of robots on the factory floor making everything from biscuits to cars. In the 1990s, thousands of clerical and white-collar workers saw their jobs disappear with the introduction of company databases, desktop publishing, computerised accounting systems and increased automation in banks, building societies and organisations of all kinds, large and small.

The changing nature of employment Today, most people no longer work in farms or factories but are found instead in sales, education, healthcare, banks, insurance firms and law firms. They provide services such as catering, writing computer software, or advertising and delivering goods. These jobs primarily involve working with, creating or distributing new knowledge or information. Knowledge and information work account for about 70% of the labour force in Britain and the US.

Computers have taken over many of the tedious tasks that humans once performed. Consider that only a generation or so ago: Taking cash out from your bank account involved queuing at the bank's counter, having the cashier give you the money and manually note the transaction in a book; Putting a newspaper together involved picking up individual letters made out of lead and placing them manually in position, with correct spacing achieved by placing a strip of lead ("leading") between lines.