

Member's Quarterly

Spring 2018 Edition

President's Message

Will a Robot Take Your Job?

Start planning for the automation of your workplace

Robots may not be taking over the world — at least not yet. However, they are taking over some jobs, in fact, a lot of jobs. They are taking over jobs in manufacturing plants and factories, even in some labs and hospitals. By the year 2025, some experts suggest that the application of robots and robotics at work could have trillions of dollars of direct economic impact on the economies of the US and Canada.

In some cases, the robots do a better job than the regular workforce. They are reliable, always show up for work and never miss a day of sick time. They cost a bit more upfront in maintenance and fluids, but they won't be asking for a raise and their performance appraisals will be pretty simple. If they ever screw up, you can just remove their batteries. Across North America they are taking spots on the assembly line, mostly spots that no one really wants anymore. Many young people are not satisfied with a factory job, particularly at low wages or minimum rates.

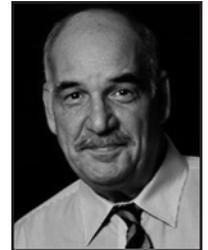
Robots in the workplace are raising a few other issues that some people may not have considered. These include whether or not robots are considered employees and may have rights, and more importantly, if people who are displaced by robots are entitled to additional compensation.

On the rights of robots, it seems like a silly question, since they are machines. Yes, robots are machines, but they are being equipped with complex programming and forms of artificial intelligence that are beginning to muddy the waters between man and machine. For now, they have no legal standing and therefore no rights. But in this rapidly changing technological environment, that could shift and start to move in another direction very quickly. All it would take is a smart lawyer and the right court case. Stranger things have happened.

For employees who face the loss of employment, there is a more tangible and pressing concern. This applies to employers as well. Most employment legislation and employment contracts as well as applicable collective agreements specify that employees may have particular rights and are entitled to severance and layoff payments if their work is declared redundant. Normally, that means you can't lay one person off and hire another without paying some penalty. What happens if their work is automated or robotized? That question is still being debated.

Employee relations and entitlements aside, the growing automation of the workplace will continue to have an increased impact on individuals and society. Where will people work and how will they get paid? One approach that has been suggested by Bill Gates (Co-Founder of Microsoft) is to introduce a robot tax that would come into effect whenever companies replace humans with robots. This would perhaps replace lost taxes but what about the jobs? That's another good question.

Brian Pascal is President of IPM [Institute of Professional Management].



Brian W. Pascal
RPR, CMP, RPT
President

