



THE AI TOUCH

AUTOMATION IS SWEEPING ACROSS INDUSTRIES, DELIVERING EFFICIENCY BUT ALSO CREATING JOB LOSSES. WHAT ARE THE SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF ROBOTS REPLACING PEOPLE AND ARE WE PREPARED FOR THEM? ZOFIA DZIK, THE FOUNDER OF THE HUMANITES INSTITUTE, SHARES HER VIEWS ON THE DILEMMAS THAT A WORLD WITHOUT WORK MAY PRESENT

INTERVIEW BY JOANNA RUBIN

WBJ: Do you think we need protection from technology?

Zofia Dzik: Technology has no ethics. It is neither good nor bad until it is implemented. It is us who give it an ethical marker, depending on the purposes for which we use it. What I have in mind is the advanced use of big data and self-learning systems and any devices or solutions which could be installed in human beings and which would allow control over them. Impulses to the brain will make us even more susceptible to influence and manipulation.

Artificial intelligence will take control over us and will consider us to be the weakest link and we may not be able to stop this process, or the love of comfort and an easy life will prevail; we will increasingly choose friendship with a machine rather than with another human being. This is what we discussed, among other things, at the Humanites foundation's conference "Leader in 4.0 Revolution. Leadership and Human and Technology." As much as 65 percent of conference participants pointed to the risk of mankind retreating into the virtual

world because of problems with finding sense and sufficient stimulation in the real world. It is very real, and it is already happening, because today we can influence the way people think; what they should buy, where they should go, who to vote for in elections. And they are not aware that they are, in fact, being manipulated.

This is evidenced by the Cambridge Analytica (CA) scandal.

It shows the power of influence. Based on, apparently, 50,000 Facebook profiles at the beginning (there was talk of 50 million profiles in the final version), various psychological profiles were created – what affects whom, what moves people, what makes them emotional, what they respond to and who is indifferent to what. You can imagine what power that implies if such stimuli are placed directly in the human body, in an individual's brain.

That sounds like science fiction.

It is said, however, that it is a future that is not so far away. There are certainly many projects like CA going on in the world, especially in countries where there are less stringent rules regarding the extensive use of behavioral data and influencing people's subconscious. Ethics and greed will always clash with one another. That is why new regulations are needed urgently. Technological changes are inevitable, and they are occurring more and more rapidly. At present we are in a dormant period when we think we are in control of the situation. However, automation processes have started transforming virtually all industries, and in every sector of the economy investments are being made in this area. The time will come when we will see the effects of automation and more significant layoffs.

What will the benefits and effects be?

From a business perspective, we will gain more effectiveness in automation processes (cost savings), reliability and better results. The possibility of an error being made in many activities by a human being is much greater than the possibility of an error being made by AI. It is a question of reliability. Robots do not get sick, they do not take time off, they do not need motivating, they do not get depressed, they do not get distracted. There are no HR challenges. This is tempting businesswise. But are we prepared for the social consequences of that process? Is mankind today ready for a life without work which, apart from being a source of income, is also an essential element which gives many of us a sense of purpose in life?

Do you think we are prepared for this?

According to the report quoted at our conference, employers are focused on internal processes like restructuring, and they can see that today's market is an employee's market. They do not invest much in projects aimed at retraining employees. Unfortunately, without the chance to retrain, more than 20 percent of the people who lose their jobs may remain without sustainable employment opportunities.

What will happen if so many people suddenly lose their jobs?

Research shows that losing one's job is one of the most traumatic life experiences. This experience is on a par with losing a loved one. This will give rise to anxiety that could foster populism and violent political change. You have to stop, notice the problem and think about who can solve it or who can contribute to solving it.

How should we put this into practice? Where should we start?

Choose awareness, start with yourself. If you are a leader and you manage teams of people or a company, ask yourself if you are ready to lose your job overnight? What could you do for yourself now if you knew that you were going to be out of the job market the next day? Would you be afraid? Would you feel lost and confused or, on the contrary, would it be an opportunity to make a change? What would have to change in the way you live your life so you would not be afraid in such a situation? All of these conclusions and reflections must then be translated into the people we manage. We must prepare them for changes so that they can use their own internal resources; so that they have a life outside work; so that they have their own social ecosystem in which they will feel loved and which will support them, but also with reciprocation, so that they will be able to contribute to this system.

Why do you think that the struggle for humankind is so important?

Because today it is often reduced to consumption; people live in a culture of too many choices. It is obvious they cannot keep up, they are lost and confused and increasingly lonely. This is something that is already being talked about and not only in psychotherapists' offices. Testimony to this, among other things, is the fact that loneliness was one of the most important topics at the latest World Economic Forum in Davos, which showed that in many Western civilizations more than 30 percent of the population already feel the lasting effects of loneliness. The creeping phenomenon of loneliness in young people is also generating a huge cost for the

global economy. This is also discernible in Poland, for example in the growing number of cases of depression. In 2018, even the Supreme Audit Office took an interest in this phenomenon when it was found that the number of suicides in Poland is greater than the number of casualties in car accidents.

What benefits will we gain if we all come together in the discussion about humans and technology?

We will strengthen our responsibility and influence. Let me quote a passage from the book titled Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor Frankl: "Freedom is only part of the story and half of the truth. (...) That is why I recommend that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast." We need to join forces, and not just compete, but also cooperate for higher values, to discuss and share reflections. ●



ZOFIA DZIK

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