

The rise of the digital colleague?

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Experts are calling the soaring advancement of technology an Industrial Revolution and understanding how your business workforce could take advantage of these new technologies is becoming critical to futureproofing your business against looming competition.



It is now commonplace when visiting a business's website to be welcomed by their chatbot, whose purpose is to support and scale the organisations' relationship with customers. With the growth in artificial intelligence, these digital assistants are rapidly improving from basic computer programs designed to answer questions and perform simple tasks to fulltime team members, with incomparable accuracy and work ethic from their human counterparts.

An increasing number of organisations are using robotic process automation (RPA), which is highly sophisticated software that replicates manual and repetitive processes in an automated, reliable and consistent way. Processes suitable for RPA vary from

reconciling customer invoices through to payroll processing.

Sam Osborne, Managing Director of Virtual Blue Limited, who specialises in intelligent automation consultancy, and RPA delivery and implementation shared an example at a recent ASB Bank robotics and artificial intelligence event, where a health care provider had programmed a digital assistant to reconcile patient ACC invoices. Prior to implementing RPA, ACC invoices were reconciled by a team of three people in the organisation on a rotation basis, the process involved several manual steps between a web browser and the internal patient management system and was highly repetitive. Due to the significant volume of transactions and lack of integration between



the two systems, there were often errors and delays in processing the information. Virtual Blue used RPA, which in many cases can be done for under the cost of hiring a person, to train a digital assistant that the business named “Matilda” to reconcile the patient ACC invoices. Like the human staff, Matilda had her own username and password to login to the patient management system but was capable of reconciling the ACC invoices 24/7 with an accuracy of almost 100%.

One primary concern, which could result in significant resistance of a digital assistant-driven workplace, is job replacement. However, digital assistants are helping staff do their jobs more efficiently by increasing productivity. In terms of what the future of work will look

like, if managed effectively, digital assistants should be able to take over the boring, tedious or dangerous tasks. As a result, staff are free to focus on more difficult activities, requiring greater creativity and hopefully leading to more fulfilment in their jobs.

Just as technological innovations such as the personal computer are now a regular addition to the business environment, so too will be sophisticated digital assistants. Therefore, it is important we plan for how this technological revolution will change business models, using this opportunity to consider not how we take the human out of the workforce but rather how we take the robot out of the human.

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