

Debate

Facing Technology's Downsides

ISSUE: Do the positive changes that technology brings to society outweigh the costs?

While technology has led to many advancements for both businesses and consumers, there is always the potential for unintended consequences and undesirable results. Some critics wonder if the costs outweigh the benefits, especially those that are transforming the ways we communicate, solve problems, and accomplish tasks.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has been depicted negatively in movies for decades, and now that advanced AI is readily available for businesses, many critics fear what this means for our future. AI has created many new jobs, but there are also concerns that AI will eliminate more jobs than it creates. These ethical and social responsibility issues require the attention of businesses. Business has a responsibility to help train workers to fit into this changing work environment and develop the soft skills needed in the application of AI technologies. Many people are also concerned that technology has killed face-to-face communication. In the workplace, not having face-to-face communication can hurt the relationship by creating misunderstandings and preventing empathic exchanges between colleagues. This becomes a bigger issue as more people work remotely. Additionally, research has shown that when people ask for something in a face-to-face interaction, it is 34 times more likely to be well received than if the request was in an email.

On the other hand, technology has opened up new avenues for communication, research, and analytics. Ordering groceries, scheduling a ride, buying clothing, and refilling medications are a few taps away, which is convenient for shoppers. Because of the availability of information online, researchers literally have libraries of knowledge at their fingertips. E-commerce and global reach are possible in the modern age in contrast to a few decades ago. Marketers use social media and other digital channels to connect on a more one-on-one basis with customers. And, many companies, such as Southwest Airlines, have social media teams to answer customer concerns quickly, making for a smoother customer service process.

There are two sides to every issue:

1. *The positive changes that technology has brought to society outweigh the costs.*

**This debate issue was developed by O. C. Ferrell and Linda Ferrell © 2021. This case was prepared for classroom discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of an administrative, ethical, or legal decision by management. All sources used for this case were obtained through publicly available material.*

2. *The costs society has incurred as a result of technology outweigh the benefits.*

Sources: David He and Venessa Guo, "4 Ways AI Will Impact the Financial Job Market," World Economic Forum, September 14, 2018, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/09/4-ways-ai-artificial-intelligence-impact-financial-job-market/> (accessed June 26, 2019); Carol Kinsey Goman, "Has Technology Killed Face-to-Face Communication?" Forbes, November 14, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carolkinseygoman/2018/11/14/has-technology-killed-face-to-face-communication/#4aee7be4a8cc> (accessed July 29, 2019); Molly Schleisinger and Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, "The Power of Human: Re-inventing Technology to Prompt More Social Connection," Centers for Scholars and Storytellers, <https://www.scholarsandstorytellers.com/character-blogs-technology/2018/12/29/the-power-of-human-re-inventing-technology-to-prompt-more-social-connection> (accessed July 29, 2019).