

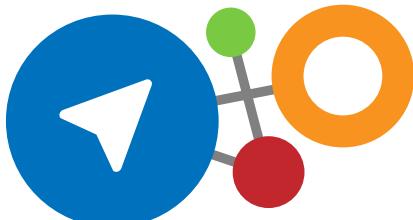


Hospitality workers' experiences of technological change

Key findings from a large-scale study

January 2026

This document summarises the key findings from a large-scale study that involved conducting over 60 interviews with hospitality workers (receptionists, housekeepers, chefs, bartenders, baristas, front-office staff), employers, managers, technologists and industry experts about their experiences and perspectives of technological change.



Interactions with customers matter

Workers value the opportunity to interact with customers. This gives them meaning and brings joy. However, interactions with customers are becoming increasingly mediated, reduced or replaced, by technological solutions (e.g. self-check-in kiosks, in-app messaging). This can make work experiences less personalised and leave workers feeling disconnected from their customers, and therefore less satisfied with their jobs.



Technology can amplify anxiety

Workers reported anxiety about new systems being introduced or upgraded, and worried about how this would affect their work. They were often advised late about the changes and felt unprepared. This anxiety was felt by younger as well as older workers, with employers either under or over-estimating workers skills and preparedness in relation to adopting new technological practices.

Competition for jobs

Workers do worry about new technologies taking their jobs away or reducing the number of staff on shift, more than they let on. Self-ordering solutions and self-check-in systems can make staff more alert about the future implications for their roles. Workers show a good level of critical awareness and reflection, with many being concerned about a decrease in staff on shift.

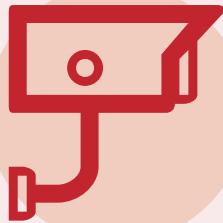


Intensification of work

Workers are absorbing more work. While technology is meant to introduce efficiencies, workers report having more, and not less, work to do, and work is becoming more intense. This increased pressure felt by workers affects their well-being and increases stress.

Solving tech-related issues

Workers spend more time solving tech-related problems. While new technology is promised to free workers' time and allow them more time for interacting with customers, the opposite is often felt, as workers spend a lot of time solving issues caused by the technology, and as a result have less time to spend with customers.

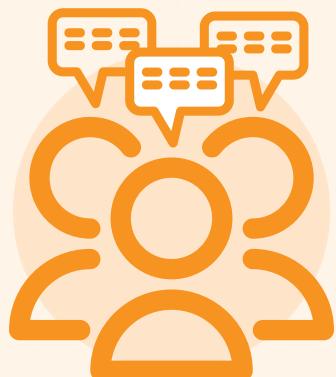


Workplace monitoring

Workers are concerned about the use of metrics and customer reviews to monitor and manage their performance. This affects job satisfaction and decreases their sense of autonomy, while increasing insecurity.

Not all tech solutions are useful and fit for purpose

While there were tools that supported workers well and simplified their work, not all technological solutions were useful and adapted to the needs of their workplace. Many tools were not integrated well within current systems or not adapted to the needs of hospitality workplaces, resulting in more manual work and time spent consolidating information across systems, and correcting errors. Workers felt pressured to use tools they did not feel worked well.



Communication with co-workers and managers

While workers appreciated the digital communication tools used at work and acknowledged that these tools helped them gain access to important information (e.g. work schedules), they also reported that online communication was sometimes overused and replaced important face-to-face comms between workers and managers, making workers feel less integrated within the team. Workers deemed some topics (e.g. discussing customer complaints) inappropriate for posting on group chats and better dealt with in person.

Assumptions are made about technological readiness of workers

Workers, both younger and older, reported limited preparation for technological change. Many received insufficient training and thought that e-learning, while useful to a certain extent, cannot replace in-person training. There was a willingness among workers to gain new skills.



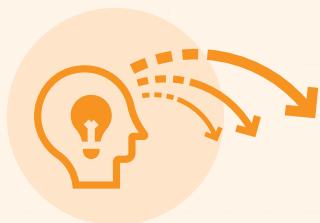
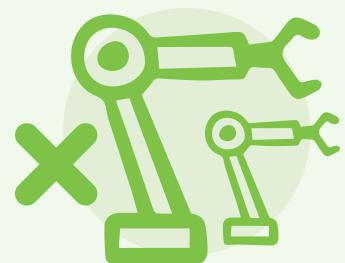


Workers can feel excluded from the process of bringing in new technologies

Workers did not feel they were consulted about the changes or that their feedback was listened to. They did not feel comfortable reporting tech issues as they did not think it would be taken seriously. They felt that the expectation was to just get on with it, rather than having conversations about the implementation of new technologies.

Jobs with too much automation are perceived as less attractive

While many workers appreciated the new technologies they used at work, they were discouraged from applying for jobs where too much automation was in place. They appreciated having technology that supported them rather than intensified their work and created more stress. Some purposively sought jobs with minimal technology (e.g. local pub) and appreciated interactions with co-workers and regulars, arguing that more automation meant less commitment and disconnection.

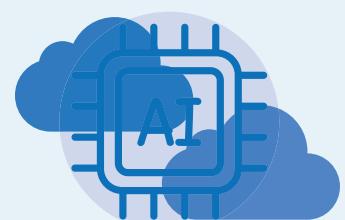


Too much automation can lead to a loss of skills

Certain skills, such as barista skills or chef skills, are at risk of being too automated in pursuit of standardisation and as a result being lost. Workers argued that customers appreciated individualised services and products over standardisation.

AI murkiness

While some workers used AI at work and were encouraged to use it (e.g. in reservations for email templates), many were less aware of its use. Some used GenAI at work without declaring to employers, as they were unsure about the privacy and data protection. Workers were unsure about the usefulness of AI and wanted clearer guidance from employers.



Different groups of workers react differently to technology

Younger and university-educated workers showed more confidence and enthusiasm about technology. However, they also showed critical awareness of negative impacts and implications, and valued workplace interactions. Older and neurodiverse workers were considered as those who adapt more slowly and as those who might feel more alienated due to new technologies, and in need of more support.

About the Author

Dr Agnieszka Rydzik (arydzik@lincoln.ac.uk.uk) is an Associate Professor at the University of Lincoln. Her research focuses on technological change and the future of work; tourism and hospitality workplaces; and making workplaces more inclusive and work more meaningful. Her most recent study, funded by the British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship, explores the ways in which hospitality workplaces navigate technological change and what this means for workers and employers. This document is developed based on extensive data gathered through this British Academy-funded project.

Training opportunities and support

Agnieszka is happy to meet and provide bespoke training about the inclusive use of technologies in workplaces. If you are interested, do get in touch: arydzik@lincoln.ac.uk



Find out more: hospitalityfutures.co.uk/reboot

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