



Towards Technological Change with Workers in Mind:

Insights from a study into hospitality workplaces
navigating digital transformation

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More about this project: www.hospitalityfutures.co.uk/reboot

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Executive Summary



- This report presents key findings and recommendations from the first large-scale qualitative study to uniquely examine the ways in which UK hospitality workplaces navigate technological transformation, and how accelerated technological change is altering the nature of hospitality work and reshaping workplace interactions.
 - Funded by the British Academy, this study explores technological change in UK hospitality workplaces from the perspectives of workers, employers and industry stakeholders.
 - The hospitality sector – hotels, bars, restaurants, cafes and fast food outlets – is rapidly embracing technological change. While offering numerous affordances, this can be unsettling for workers and lead to a range of unintended and undesired consequences. These changes, which can seem minor, risk negatively affecting worker well-being, amplifying anxiety and intensifying work.
 - This timely and important study seeks to understand the variegated implications of accelerated technological transformation for workers, employers, the future of hospitality work and wider society, and identify the ways in which workers respond to technological change, and how they can be better supported in navigating the technology-driven reshaping of hospitality work.
 - The study draws on 65 interviews with hospitality workers (chefs, receptionists, reservation staff, housekeepers, bar, café, restaurant and pub workers) as well as managers, employers, technologists, and union and industry representatives.
 - Alongside presenting key findings, the report provides policy and practice recommendations for anticipating and mitigating technology-related challenges; developing a more collaborative approach to addressing issues emerging from technological acceleration; and embedding technology in more responsible, ethical and worker-considerate ways.
 - The study provides a large evidence base to identify and problematise challenges stemming from digital transformation that can be used to influence public and policy debates and provide thought leadership around workforce implications of digital transformation.
 - While the report draws on data collected from the hospitality industry, the findings and recommendations are also applicable to the wider service sector that faces similar challenges.
- ## **Economic and societal importance of the hospitality sector**
- The UK hospitality sector plays an important economic as well as societal role. It generates nearly 3 million jobs, making it the 6th largest sector in terms of the number of jobs in the UK.
 - The sector provides opportunities and supports the livelihoods of many workers. In particular, less privileged workers who often find themselves excluded from other sectors, such as young workers in their first jobs, students, workers with caring responsibilities, as well as migrant and older workers.

- The sector has been significantly affected by years of disruption and uncertainty, including the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, energy crisis, cost of living crisis, and growing operating and labour costs (e.g. rise in National Insurance Contributions).
- This has resulted in the loss of a significant number of hospitality jobs, with an estimated 100,000 hospitality jobs lost between October 2024 and October 2025, and more jobs projected to be lost in 2026. It has also led to the closure of nearly 16,000 hospitality businesses since 2020 (chains as well as independent enterprises).
- Hospitality employers are increasingly seeking technological solutions to make cost savings and increase productivity.
- The significant job losses in the service sector are not all down to automation and digitalisation but new technologies do play a significant role in the process of reshaping the industry, reducing reliance on human labour and intensifying work.
- To date, little is known about how these compounding changes are affecting workers, and what can be done to mitigate negative impacts and minimise sector-specific workforce challenges, highlighting the timeliness of this study and the importance of gaining an understanding of worker experiences.
- The sector is too important for too many workers, particularly those less advantaged, and local communities, to ignore the wide-ranging implications of technology-driven reshaping and what may potentially be lost. While we should not stop technological progress, more can be done to do it in a worker-supportive way that seeks to mitigate negative impacts and ensure meaningful interactions remain at the centre of hospitality.

Key findings

- The study's findings show that many workers enjoy using new technology at work, generally find it useful, have a good level of digital skills, and are confident when using technology at work.
- However, beyond simple affordances, many workers simultaneously struggle with navigating technological change and observe worsening working conditions and impacts on job satisfaction and wellbeing.
- This demonstrates the importance of and the need for considering technologies as a significant element contributing – both positively and negatively – to workers' everyday experiences of work. In particular, more attention needs to be paid to adverse impacts.
- The findings show that when implemented well and with workers in mind (i.e. tools chosen are worker-considerate and workers are consulted), new technologies can meaningfully support workers, while mitigating some of the negative impacts accompanying technological change.



Key Findings

Hospitality workers value workplace interactions

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 is rising

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.

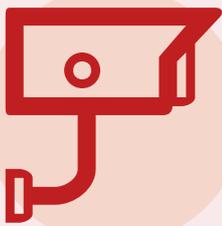


Work is intensifying

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.

Tech-related issues absorb more work time

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.

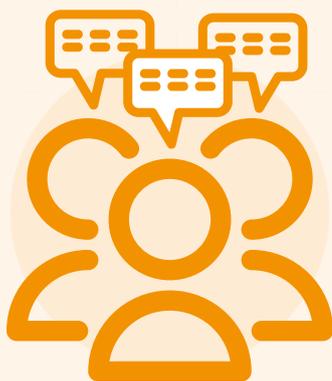


Workplace monitoring causes additional pressure

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 technologies 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.



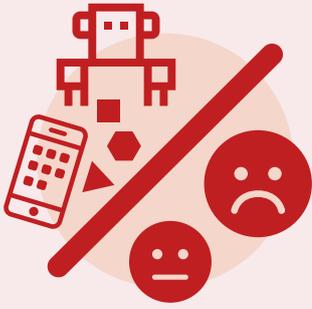
Communication with co-workers and managers is becoming more digitally mediated

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.



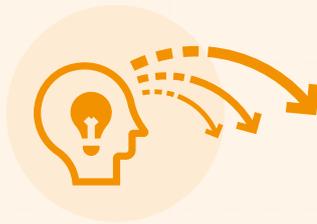
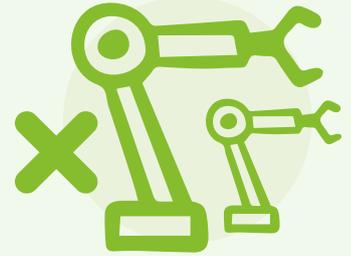


Workers can feel excluded from the process of bringing in new technologies

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 purposely 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.

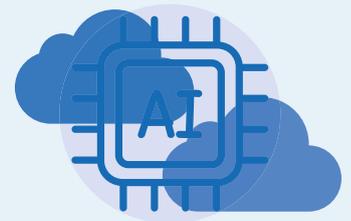


Too much automation can lead to a loss of skills

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.

More clarity is needed around AI use

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.

Key Recommendations

Employers

REPAIR Framework: Six principles for a worker-considerate and employer-friendly technological change in hospitality workplaces



10 questions to consider when choosing a new technology



How to better support workers with technological change



Professional bodies



Trade unions and organisations supporting workers



Educational institutions



Government and policymakers



1. Context



1. Context: Why we need to know more about how new technologies are transforming hospitality workplaces?

This report presents key findings and policy and practice recommendations from the first large-scale qualitative study to investigate the ways in which UK hospitality workplaces navigate technological change and to explore the implications of technological change on workers and workplace relations.

The under-appreciated socio-economic role of the hospitality sector and the value of hospitality jobs

- **Hospitality workplaces play a crucial economic and societal role in local economies and the lives of local communities.** The hospitality sector generates millions of jobs in the UK and globally. In June 2025, there were 2.6 million jobs in the UK hospitality industry, accounting for 7.3% of all jobs and making hospitality the 6th largest sector in terms of the number of jobs (Murray, 2026).
- The sector supports the livelihoods of less privileged workers – such as young workers taking on their first jobs, student workers, migrant workers, workers with caring responsibilities, and older workers – who rely on hospitality jobs to support themselves and their families. Compared with other sectors, hospitality has a high proportion of younger workers, migrant workers, part-time workers and workers from minority ethnic backgrounds (Murray, 2026).
- It is estimated that around 100,000 jobs were lost in hospitality between October 2024 and October 2025, with a further 100,000 jobs projected to be lost post-2025 budget announcement (Owen, 2025; UK Hospitality 2025a). This has significant implications for young people, who strongly depend on employment in hospitality as their first-ever jobs or to combine with studies. Workers aged 16 to 24 years make up around half of hospitality roles (ONS, 2023). In November 2025, youth unemployment reached a new high (Inman, 2025). In September to November 2025, 729,000 people aged 16 to 24 were unemployed, an increase of 103,000 from the previous year (Francis-Devine, 2026). Further entry-level job losses are anticipated to affect young workers due to AI-related efficiencies (Partridge, 2025).
- **Hospitality workplaces are at the heart of local communities.** They provide third spaces, facilitate human connection and act as a social fabric and glue for local communities. Scholars have long argued that ‘the pub plays an important social function by providing a place for people to come together in pleasurable and meaningful social interaction’ (Thurnell-Read, 2021: 41). People – and providing them with memorable and meaningful experiences – are at the centre of hospitality. **This important societal and placemaking role of hospitality workplaces is often under-appreciated and at risk of becoming victim to technological change.**
- **Hospitality jobs and workers are not sufficiently valued.** This is partly due to the highly pressurised nature of these jobs and a non-unionised workforce. Many hospitality jobs are entry-level roles, considered as lower-paid and lower-skilled, with many workers on precarious contracts. Hospitality workplaces are often critiqued for their slowness in improving working conditions, job insecurity, limited development opportunities, high staff turnover, and normalisation of sexual harassment, all of which contribute to hospitality having an image as a less-than-desirable employment sector (see e.g. Baum et al., 2020; Curran, 2021; Green, 2022, 2025; Hadjisolomou et al., 2023; Mooney, Ryan and Harris, 2017;

Robinson et al., 2022; Rydzik and Anitha, 2020; Rydzik and Kissoon, 2022a; Rydzik and Bal, 2023).

- Despite challenges, hospitality jobs are valued for offering opportunities to socialise and enabling labour market participation. Although perceived as less skilled, scholars have demonstrated that hospitality roles do require, and help develop, a range of skills and therefore should be more valued (Lugosi and Ndiuini, 2022). Indeed, employment in hospitality can act as a springboard to employment opportunities in other sectors, can help workers develop a range of transferable, communication and problem-solving skills, and develop an ability to work under pressure and gain time management skills.
- **The critical economic and societal role of hospitality is often overlooked. The key question for a sector so instrumental for many workers and for community cohesion is what can be done so that it continues playing an important role for local communities and economies?**

The hospitality sector is in crisis: Are new technologies the real solution?

- Over the past decade, the hospitality sector has been affected by a series of crises, including Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, rising taxes and national insurance contributions (NICs) (Partington, 2025), alongside the sector's continuous struggle with high staff turnover and skill shortages. This has resulted in many establishments, SMEs as well as chains, closing. Since March 2020, nearly 16,000 hospitality businesses have closed, with 11 hospitality venues shutting per week in 2025 (nearly 600 in 2025) (Witts, 2025; UK Hospitality, 2025b). One pub a day was permanently closed in England and Wales in 2025 (Goodley, 2025). Together with these closures, many jobs also disappeared.
- In those establishments still operating, efficiencies are continuously brought in to lower the costs of labour and ensure survival. **The sector, and its future, is at a crossroads, facing an existential crisis and**

in need of support, with many challenges ahead and pressures to mitigate.

- **New technologies are increasingly seen by the sector and the UK government (e.g. AI Opportunities Action Plan) as the main solution to address pressing challenges.** New technologies are framed as a way of bringing efficiencies and evidencing innovation in a sector often considered to be behind the technological curve. New technologies are often presented as having the potential to improve productivity, cut costs, speed up operations, and automate repetitive tasks. While technologies do achieve these to an extent, it is important to consider what the side effects of technological change are for the nature of and future of hospitality work.
- **Numerous digital tools are being introduced into hospitality workplaces.** From hotel receptions, reservations departments, restaurant kitchens, to housekeeping departments and fast food outlets, both front-of-house and back-of-house technological tools are being implemented. Examples include self-check-in or online check-in solutions in hotels, self-ordering machines in fast food outlets, QR codes, mobile or in-app ordering in restaurants, Hoover robots in housekeeping and service robots in restaurants. These are customer-facing as well as back-of-house systems, ranging from mundane and simple tools to sophisticated systems. AI is positioned to further transform the ways in which businesses operate (Price, 2024, 2025).
- **Techno-solutionist (and more recently AI-solutionist) approaches currently dominate in UK hospitality.** The findings from this study show that new technologies bring many benefits and can be deployed to meaningfully support workers. However, these can be accompanied by numerous unintended consequences and negative impacts on workers and their well-being. This study, therefore, argues that the techno-solutionist discourses need problematising, and the complexities of new technologies need to be unpacked in order to get a sense of what is really happening on the ground (see also Rydzik and Kissoon,

2022b). It is unlikely that solely bringing in new technologies will by itself be sufficient for the sector to overcome the crises it has been experiencing. A more critical analysis is needed.

- **The future of hospitality jobs:** Some might argue that there are advantages to hospitality jobs (particularly entry-level, lower-skilled, lower-paid roles) being automated out through bringing more technologies in. However, to date, alternative employment routes – particularly for less privileged workers – are limited. Rather than automating hospitality jobs out, there is a need to actively and collaboratively work towards improving working conditions and making hospitality work fairer. Without wider structural changes, technological transformation is unlikely to solve the sector’s deeply rooted issues. The industry has long been striving to make hospitality jobs more attractive and change the image of jobs in the sector, with technological advancement considered a way to improve the image to attract more skilled workers. However, as findings from this study show, without structural change and adopting a more worker-considerate technological change, the sector is unlikely to significantly transform its reputation. This report makes a series of policy and practice recommendations on how to implement technological change with workers in mind in order to more positively shape the future of hospitality employment.

‘I think making sure that workers and employees are comfortable with how everything’s being rolled out should be a main focus in a sense, because without employees, there are no customers, which I feel sometimes can definitely be overlooked, especially in hospitality’

Front-of-house and housekeeper

Technological transformation has significant implications for workers and wider society

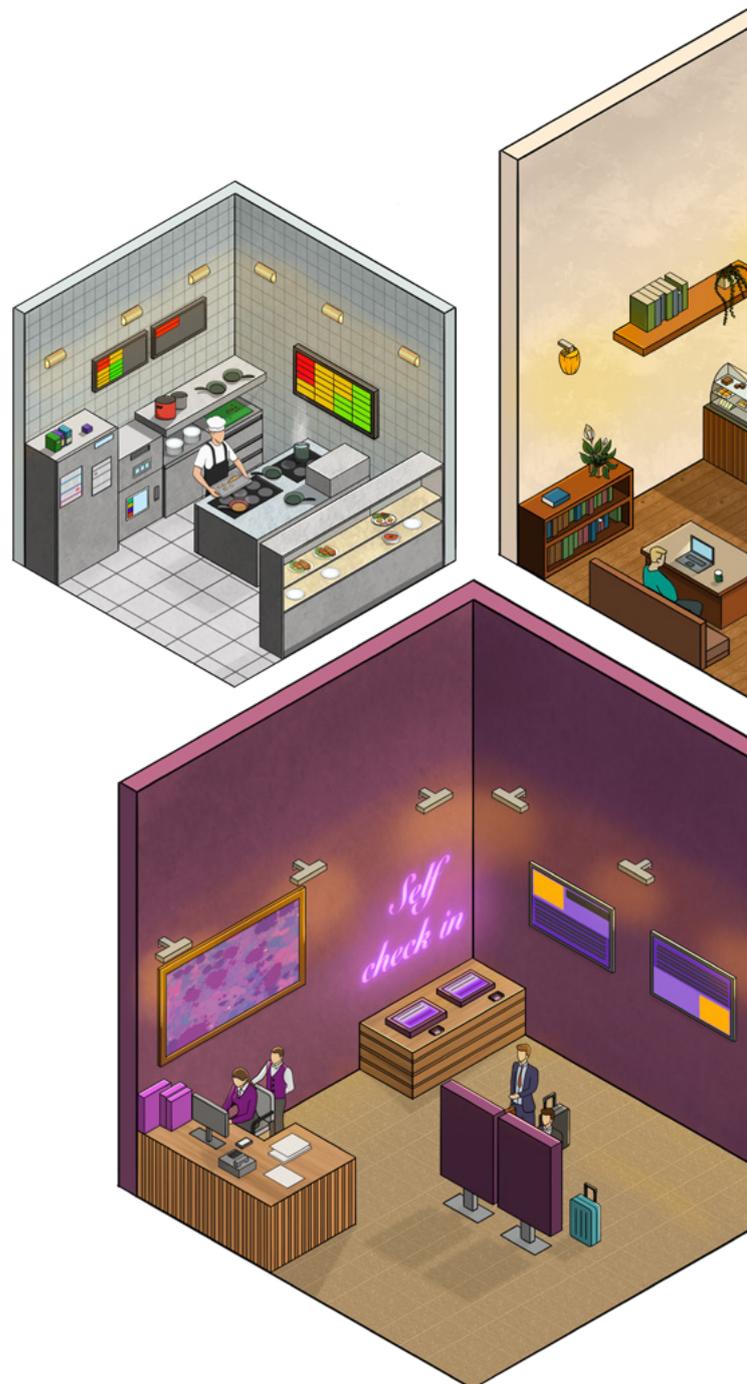
- **The accelerated pace of technological transformation can have significant implications not only on workplace operations and management of staff but also on workers themselves.** Increased digitalisation and automation can have direct and indirect, both positive and negative, impact on worker wellbeing, the nature of work as well as workplace interactions. Yet, to date, little is known about these pressing technology-induced workforce challenges, and workers’ experiences of and responses to technological changes. Hospitality workers’ experiences remain under-explored, leaving a gap in knowledge and a need for deeper exploration.
- A common rationale among employers for bringing in more technology is that new systems can free staff time for more meaningful interactions. Yet, as this study shows, this relationship is much more complex, and the introduction of new technologies has multiple implications on workers, workplaces, the visitor economy as well as having wider societal implications. In order to avoid exacerbating social inequalities, technological change needs to be done in a conscientious way, with awareness of potential unintended consequences.
- **Societal change manifests in multiple forms, including on micro-scales through everyday interactions.** Analysis of ongoing technology-induced workplace change, in particular in service sector workplaces, provides an opportunity to gain insight into the ways in which humans interact, how technology mediates these interactions, and the implications this has on social fabric and social connectedness. In this way, these micro-changes in workplace interactions offer a mirror into wider societal changes. Yet, to date, there exists limited evidence and understanding about the implications of rapid technological changes on workers, their lived experiences and responses, and wider society.

- **Hospitality spaces are undergoing significant reshaping.** These third spaces, so important for the local communities, have traditionally sustained social interactions, provided structures for placemaking and facilitated the social fabric of the local communities. However, the recent changes, and the reshaping of hospitality spaces, raise a question of what it means to be hospitable in the age of technological transformation, and what is the role of hospitality spaces in the local community?

Why it matters

- The pressing question is, therefore, what can be done to facilitate more ethical and responsible technological change and with greater consideration of impacts?
- It is critical to gain an in-depth understanding of the ways in which the recent technological changes affect workers and their everyday realities. Workers are the ones using the tools and having to adapt to the constantly evolving world of work. It is thus crucial to identify the key challenges they experience in the face of technological transformation and their responses to these.
- Better understanding worker perspectives offers the kind of invaluable insights that are missing from current conversations and are necessary to meaningfully influence policy and practice in more ethical ways. It can help employers and businesses manage technological change in a more supportive way, with workers in mind, and in this way to better anticipate unintended consequences and mitigate negative impacts. In the longer term, a more supportive and worker-considerate approach can facilitate improving working conditions, mitigate job losses and improve the image of the sector, making it more attractive for prospective workers. It can also help protect the value hospitality jobs have for many workers and the societal role hospitality spaces hold for local communities.

- The sector is too important for too many workers, particularly those less advantaged, and local communities, to ignore the wide-ranging implications of technology-driven reshaping and what may potentially be lost. While we should not stop technological progress, more can be done to do it in a worker-supportive way that seeks to mitigate negative impacts and ensure meaningful interactions remain at the centre of hospitality.



Research Questions

- Considering the above challenges and complexities, this report aims to provide new evidence on the implications of technological change in hospitality workplaces for hospitality workers, employers, the service sector and the wider society.
- The report addresses the following research questions:

- » *How are new technologies reshaping hospitality workplaces and workplace interactions?*
- » *What are hospitality workers' experiences of technological change, and what implications does technological transformation have on their everyday experiences of work and workplace relations?*
- » *What can be done to manage technological change more ethically, with benefits for employers, workers and society as a whole?*

- These questions are explored through situating the workers and their needs at the centre. Adopting a 'with-workers-in-mind' approach enables a new way of problematising, analysing and conceptualising technological change, and offers a means of reshaping and reframing policy and practice, and in the longer term facilitating positive change for all.
- Understanding the implications of technological change – and how it intersects with other sectoral and structural challenges – should be at the heart of any policy and practice efforts for making hospitality workplaces fairer, more sustainable and more worker-considerate.

- This study produces new evidence about the contradictions, complexities and the shifting landscape of hospitality workplaces in the age of accelerated technological change. The findings demonstrate the variegated impacts of technological change on workers, their everyday work realities and responses to change, with timely recommendations for policy and practice.
- This study provides a large evidence base that can be used to further understanding, influence public and policy debates, and provide thought leadership around workforce implications of technological transformation.



2. Research Methods



2. Research Methods

- This is the first large-scale qualitative study conducted on technological change in UK hospitality workplaces.
- In total, 65 interviews were conducted between January and December 2025 with hospitality workers, employers, technologists, unions and industry experts, providing unique insights into their experiences and perspectives. The semi-structured format allowed for covering the same topic areas across the different interviews but also gave flexibility and space for uncovering participants' unique experiences and following their distinct trajectories and subjective reflections.
- The aim was to gather rich and in-depth insights into the lived experiences of technological change, uncover perspectives on the changing landscapes of hospitality workplaces, and examine the complexities and implications of technological acceleration for workers and employers, with the goal of shaping debates on the future of service sector work and providing policy and practice recommendations.
- **Research Ethics:** Ethical approval was gained through the University of Lincoln. Ethical guidelines of informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and voluntary participation were followed.
- **Sampling and recruitment:** Participants were recruited through purposive, snowballing and self-selection sampling:
 - » The study was advertised via LinkedIn, with general posts and direct messages sent.
 - » Leaflets were left in hotels, bars, restaurants, fast-food outlets, cafes across the UK, including in London, Manchester, Newcastle, York, Lincoln, Scarborough, Nottingham, Leeds and Cardiff.
 - » Emails were sent to industry contacts and organisations.
 - » Contacts were made during industry events and conferences.
- **Interviewing process:** Most interviews lasted approx. 1 hour, with some going beyond. Interviewees were given an option between an online and an in-person interview. The vast majority opted for an online interview.
- **Overview of the sample:** The sample covers a diverse range of hospitality workers, managers, employers and industry experts, as well as representatives of the trade union and various industry organisations:
 - » **40 interviews with hospitality workers** (receptionists, reservation staff, front-of-house staff, chefs, bartenders, baristas, housekeepers, fast food workers), including 3 repeat interviews.
 - » **15 interviews with managers and employers** (HR and operations managers, hotel managers, hotel owners, directors)
 - » **10 interviews with industry representatives and experts** (technologists, industry experts, professional body and union representatives).
- **Data analysis:** Interviews were recorded and transcribed via MS Teams, an institutionally approved platform. Notes were taken during and after each interview. The automated transcripts were tidied up and verified for accuracy. The data gathered was analysed using thematic data analysis to identify commonalities, differences, emerging themes and patterns.
- The following section synthesises the key findings about worker experiences of technological change in hospitality workplaces and the implications of technological transformation. The report concludes with a series of recommendations for employers, organisations supporting workers, industry organisations, educational institutions and government.

3. Findings



3. Findings: Worker experiences of technological change in hospitality workplaces

Hospitality workers value workplace interactions



- Everyday workplace interactions are at the heart of hospitality work.
- Workers value the social nature of hospitality work and see it as an important aspect of their jobs.
- The opportunity to interact with customers as well as co-workers and suppliers is important to workers.
- Workers feel that they can make a difference and positively contribute to customers' experiences, develop good relations with suppliers (e.g. important for chefs) and co-workers.
- Everyday interactions give workers meaning, offer learning opportunities, bring joy and help release work-related pressure.
- However, in many hospitality workplaces, interactions with customers – once so central to hospitality work – are becoming increasingly mediated, or replaced, by technologies.
- These technologies include self-check-in kiosks, self-ordering machines, various apps and systems that automate tasks previously done by human workers.
- Workers are thus feeling less needed and more disconnected from customers.
- This disconnection is not only affecting front-of-house staff (e.g. waiters, receptionists) but also back-of-house roles. This includes chefs whose collaborative work becomes more individualised through a more prevalent use of screens in kitchens, and housekeepers whose workload is increasingly being allocated and communicated via systems, making housekeepers' work even more isolated.

'I enjoy it because I really like the face-to-face, I've built up a really good relationship with a lot of regulars now. And it doesn't feel like work. ... I just like learning about people'

Pub worker

'It probably also helps with the supplier ordering, because it automates some of it. You might argue that it automates and thus makes it more efficient, but it takes away that human touch between the supplier and the chef. I sometimes wonder what impact it has on the relationships we have with the people who are part of our ecosystem'

Chef

'I enjoy the banter that I get – those little moments of joy with my [work] friends who I feel can only understand what I'm talking about and having shared experiences whilst you're at work'

Reception, bar and restaurant staff

'You just do it on your phone and you don't even have to speak with anyone at reception. Your key card is on your phone for your room. ... You just do it all yourself'

Waiting staff



Technology can amplify anxiety

- Many workers, in particular younger workers, feel confident about using new technologies at work and support bringing more systems into hospitality workplaces, seeing it as a positive aspect of work (e.g. saving time, simplifying tasks).
- If the systems work well and meaningful training is provided, workers find them easy to use and see the benefits of bringing in new technologies.

'I'm a young person, so I am very enthusiastic about technologies and I think they make our life much easier. ... I am a big advocate of using AI at work'.

Hotel events planning team

'I'll say I'm quite confident using technology, be it a new interface, something that just came out. I think I'm this type of person who can easily navigate through it. It might take a little bit of time but I'll get used to it easily enough'.

Bar worker

- However, many workers, including young workers, find adapting to technological change difficult.

'I am 22 and I've worked in the hospitality industry for a very long time. I would say, maybe since I was 16. I've had a few jobs, but not a lot of them have actually used technology. The first fear that I have going into a hospitality job is the technology. I often wonder if it's good, if it's useful or if we are going to have any'.

Reception, bar and restaurant staff

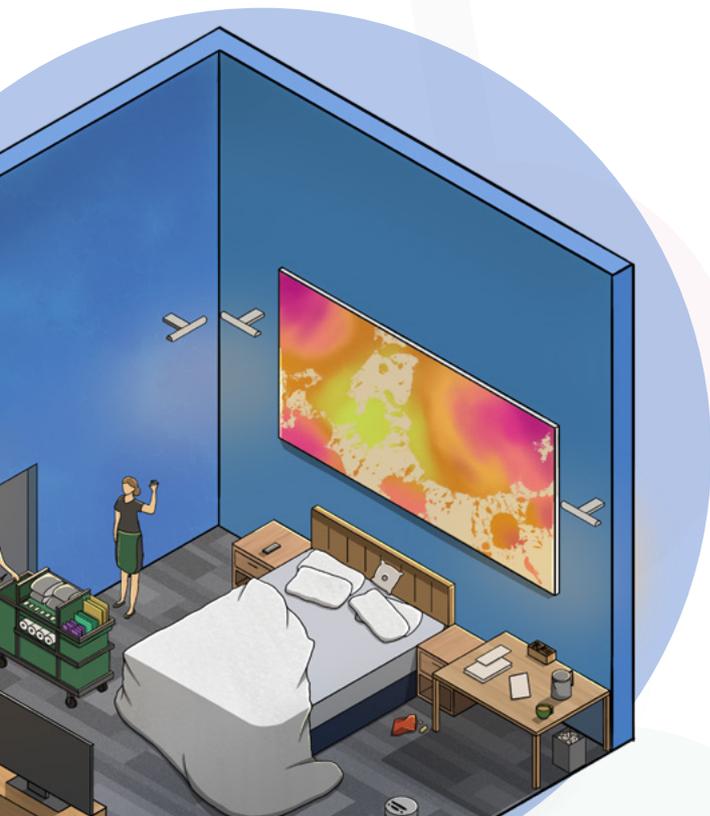
- New technologies can become a source of anxiety and concern, as not all workers feel adequately prepared and skilled.
- Workers report anxiety about new systems being introduced or upgraded, and worry about how this will affect their everyday work. For example, receptionists are often anxious when a new system replaces an old one, or a significant update is due, as it affects their work significantly, particularly when doing check-ins and check-outs.
- A contributing factor to tech-related anxiety is that workers are often informed late about the changes and feel unprepared (e.g. limited

'Every time there's an update, I need at least 3 days to get used to it because I'm used to where all the features are. ... Sometimes we receive an email that maybe soon something will be updated, but usually we just log in in the morning and we see that it has changed'.

Hotel events planning team

training offered).

- This anxiety is 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.
- Offering meaningful training, being transparent about technological changes, giving workers time to adjust and offering alternatives is key in ensuring workers feel more comfortable with change.





- In heavily digitalised hospitality workplaces, workers not only worry about the everyday impacts of new technology on their work, but are also alarmed about the broader implications of new technologies on their job security.

'I remember conversations about whether or not this would mean that we didn't need to do our jobs anymore. I think everyone was a bit concerned that if we suddenly had six self-check-in machines, does that mean we don't need reception anymore? I think we were all a bit worried about that.'

Reception staff

- Workers are particularly concerned about the disappearance of, or reduction in, hospitality jobs due to more automation and digitalisation that they see becoming more commonplace in hospitality.
- Workers are alarmed about a reduction in the number of staff on shift, and how this can affect their job security, working conditions, health and wellbeing.
- Innovations such as self-ordering and self-check-in systems, service robots and AI chatbots can make staff more reflective about the implications for their roles, particularly if they rely on hospitality jobs.

'I think there is eventually going to be less jobs available. Because if people are getting robots and things taking orders out, and I know that's quite complex, but now with a lot of the ordering online, there's just not as much need for people to go up to the bar and order. So all they need to do is take the food out really. And they're even finding robots to do that. I don't think it will become completely obsolete, but I think there will be less demand. Probably not too long away.'

Waiting staff

- This can manifest in increased job insecurity and more competitive working environments.
- Technological tools are increasingly used in hospitality to increase competitiveness. For example, by ranking workers according to their performance, which can in the longer-term impact shift allocation, promotion opportunities and reduce collegiality.

'I think for [multinational fast food company] it's a bit hard because they are a very fast-paced environment. There is a lot of pressure put on being put on it and it is very competitive. I don't think it should be as competitive as it is. I think there is a standard and it should be kept to that standard, but it shouldn't be as competitive as having rankings and constantly hearing about the time that you're taking.'

Chef

- Workers show a good level of critical awareness and reflection, with many actively observing changes and expressing concerns about technology-infused changes. They show awareness of the implications, particularly on young workers and students.





Work is intensifying

- A key argument for introducing new technologies is to free up time for workers to do more meaningful tasks, such as interaction with customers, with the aim of enhancing customer experience.
- In practice, due to workplaces being understaffed and the imperfection of technologies implemented, workers are absorbing more work and feel more pressurised.
- Many workers see fewer staff on shifts or see their job roles expanding to absorb other tasks, which in reality means intensification of work.

'In my workplace we have three kiosks, which never work. ... They're supposed to be used instead of employees. But they never work, so I don't understand why we're still short-staffed, if the kiosks never work. ... I'm cross-trained and I have to be in the bar and I have to be in the restaurant which is in a different part. It's hard to be in three places at all times'.

Reception, bar and restaurant staff

- While technology is meant to introduce efficiencies, speed up processes and save time, workers report having more, and not less, work to do.
- Hospitality work is thus becoming more intense and less enjoyable, with less time to interact with customers and co-workers, an aspect hospitality workers enjoy most.
- Workers in highly digitalised fast food outlets, restaurants and housekeeping departments report growing pressure around tightly-controlled and metrics-driven time management, resulting in continuous intensification of their work and a feeling of being constantly controlled by technological systems.

'If you're 100%, you're obviously a Gold Star cleaner. Anything under to – I think it's 80% - you're a silver cleaner. Anything under 80%, you are a bronze cleaner. but it's a bit humiliating and a bit embarrassing if you're a little bit of a poorer cleaner. You're seeing all these cleaners always been 100%, then you're just at the bottom. It's a bit humiliating and I don't like it. But they are ranked as in gold, silver and bronze'.

Reception and housekeeping staff

- This increased pressure felt by workers affects their well-being and increases stress, and as a result makes hospitality work less desirable.
- More efforts are needed from employers to address the intensification of hospitality work and related impacts on worker wellbeing.

'At [multinational fast food company] it was quite stressful because we did have goals in terms of how long it should take for food to come out of the kitchen. ... So you get an average for how long it takes for food to come out of the kitchen ... our times were 150 seconds or below per order, which is ridiculously low. ... Our average actually used to end up being closer to 120 seconds. Two minutes bang on. ... we'll try and keep the times down as much as we can. ... Being such a fast-paced environment was mentally draining.

Chef



- When technology works well, is fit for purpose, well-integrated and quality training is provided, workers enjoy using technology at work and see benefits.
- However, often new technologies come with a range of challenges and complications, some anticipated and many underestimated, overlooked or downplayed.
- Workers often feel that they are left to absorb and solve the issues themselves, with limited support, including dealing with tech-related customer frustrations and reconciling numerous, often unanticipated, tech-related challenges.

'Our main cause of complaints is key cards not working, which is a technology fault. I tell people on check-in that I'm really sorry and that the key cards are quite faulty: "Don't try not to put them next to your phone or any of your bank cards and you won't have to be back here three times trying to get them fixed." ... It's very common. So I prepare them. And when I see them walking to reception and I recognise their face and I know that I've checked them in, I say: "Is your key card not working?" It shuts down everything, because they already know. Because I've already told them and I know what they're coming back for. ... Since this new system, the key cards have been a significant problem.'

Reception, bar and restaurant staff

'It [the system] was being slow. I mean really slow. It would just crash for a good ten seconds. But that would be constant. So you had to swap computers. And then even if I wanted to use my friend's computer, my colleague's would still crash out too. ... It was mostly when you would leave the system for a good three to four minutes, and then you would start working and clicking all the time and that would be when it would crash out or be slow for a good 10 minutes. ... It did affect the [check-in] time a bit, like the smooth process of the check-in would take a bit longer. Not too long. I would say like a minute extra. But to us, when you're trying to get the guest in the room, it feels much longer.'

Reception staff

- While new technologies promise to free workers' time, simplify tasks and speed things up, allowing workers more time for interacting with customers, the opposite is often felt. New technologies can add a significant amount of work and, due to being imperfect, can make work more stressful.

- The everyday reality is that hospitality workers spend more and more time using technology at work and solving issues caused by the technology. As a result, workers have less time to spend with customers, resulting in lower customer satisfaction.
- These often unintended consequences can have a profound impact on workers' experiences and working conditions, and require employers to acknowledge the impacts and provide more support.



Workplace monitoring causes additional pressure

- New technologies often come with potential for monitoring staff performance.
- Workers are concerned about the use of technology for staff surveillance and performance management.
- This is also related to the prevalent use of customer review ratings – and the importance these are attributed – to monitor and manage staff performance.
- Hospitality employers monitor staff performance through a range of rewards and incentive systems. If managed well, these can positively motivate staff and bring them tangible benefits (e.g. additional pay, vouchers, financial rewards). However, if not managed carefully, such systems can increase pressure and introduce unhealthy competition.

‘They [the manager] watch the cameras a lot [from home]... I don’t really like it because I feel like I’m being watched all the time. ... sometimes when they see something they don’t like, they call immediately. ... I didn’t realise how much they were watching it. I wouldn’t even know if it weren’t for my colleagues telling me that they are watching all day. ... I obviously just have to make sure that I’m doing something all the time. ... I can’t just stand around ... I have to be careful. If someone wants to do something they shouldn’t do, I’ll say: “Just be careful because you’re being watched”.

Restaurant front-of-house staff

- This is often related to the potential of new technologies to generate detailed individualised metrics (e.g. in relation to the time housekeepers take to clean a room or how long it takes for the food to come out) and how employers use this granular data.

‘The cleaners are pressured for time. It’s 20 minutes for a double room, 23 minutes for a family room and an extra 3 minutes for two beds. ... But it’s “Keep up the pace, otherwise you’re not welcome here”, if that makes sense. Like you need to find a better job because we need these rooms back as quickly as possible. ... The only way to be digitally monitored is the time that you sign in and the time that you sign out, and the amount of rooms that would have been. So if I give you 10 rooms and you came in 9:30 but finished at 3:30, there would be questions. “What are you doing? Because you’re not doing 20 minutes of room”.

Reception and housekeeping staff

‘If names get mentioned for example, [in customer review], then that comes up and a lot of what we do and a lot of what the management actually say is based on the reviews. And so we need to have like hit certain targets and hit certain percentages. And so it’s a lot of pressure’.

Reception staff

- While hospitality employers have the opportunity to gather detailed staff performance metrics, more awareness is needed about the potential negative consequences and more ethical data analysis skills are required for managers to use the data responsibly, taking the wider context of the workplace and workers’ abilities into account.

Not all technologies are useful and fit for purpose



- Many new technologies support workers well and simplify their work.
- Overall, workers are not against using technology in hospitality workplaces, whether front-of-house or back-of-house, and acknowledge that the trajectory of the sector is towards greater technological innovation.
- However, workers do not find all technologies useful, well-chosen and sufficiently adapted to the needs of their workplace.
- Despite the deficiencies of new technologies, workers feel pressured to use tools they do not feel work well. This is often due to workers not feeling they have a choice or power to challenge the choice of technology and report issues.
- Nonetheless, some workers do find workarounds to overcome technological hindrances.

‘There are little iPads on the counter so that people can digitally sign their own registration forms. ... But none of the staff understand how to work it and none of the guests understand how to work it. So we don’t use them. ... We’re supposed to use them, but I mean, nobody knows how. The managers don’t understand it. Nobody bothers. So we just all still print off the sheet of paper and get people to sign them, so that’s good.

Reception staff

‘When it [key printer for those who checked in online] was installed, we were supposed to be pushing it, but since it’s been a bit of a hindrance, we don’t. At first, when people came to us and said “I’ve checked in online”, we were supposed to say “Great, if you’ve got your QR code, just go and scan it and it’ll give you a key”. But now because we all know that it’s just more hard work than it needs to be, we say “OK, brilliant. Let me have a look and I’ll get you some keys cut”.

Reception staff

- Some tools are not integrated well within current systems. This can result in workers having to absorb more manual work, spend more time consolidating information across systems or correcting tech-related errors.
- To support managers with choosing fit-for-purpose and worker-considerate technologies, please see [Employer Recommendations](#).



Communication with co-workers and managers is becoming more digitally mediated

- Many workers appreciate the digital communication tools used at work and acknowledge that these tools help them gain access to important information (e.g. work schedules).

'We just have one WhatsApp group. All the rotas get posted there. ... I think it works quite well. It's good because everything is put in one group. So if a staff member forgets their shift, it can be like: "Well look, this has been sent to you on this day and also everyone can see it. So there's no reason why you can't." For example, if we're doing the new cocktail for that day or something's happening or a shifts going. It's one kind of group for everything, so it works quite well in terms of communication.'

Bartender

- However, workers also report that online communication tools (e.g. WhatsApp or bespoke internal comms platforms) are sometimes overused, over-relied on and replace important face-to-face comms between hospitality workers and managers, making workers feel less integrated within the team and more isolated.
- Due to the nature of hospitality work, irregular working patterns and non-standard working arrangements and contracts, workers can struggle with managing work-related comms outside of their working times or feel the pressure or necessity to check digital work platforms outside of work.
- Not all workers feel confident about disconnecting from digital communication platforms when not at work, often due to fear of missing out or not thinking they have a choice.
- However, receiving work-related messages outside of work can have implications on mental health and impact workers' ability to rest and disconnect.

- Workers express a preference for more face-to-face comms (even if more time-consuming), particularly when it comes to important information and significant changes that directly affect them.
- Workers deem some topics (e.g. discussing customer complaints) inappropriate for posting on group chats and better dealt with in person.

'[W]hen you're wanting to talk to someone about what's happened at work, maybe they'd expect you to text. But if you're struggling, you kind of want to do it in person. But because a lot of it is done by the app or WhatsApp chat or whatever, it's harder to communicate how you really feel, whereas in person it's quite obvious from someone's body language or the way they're speaking how someone might feel. So I think in a way that could like, affect someone's mental health. ... especially in housekeeping because you do the rooms by yourself, so you're alone the majority of the time that you housekeep.'

Front-of-house and housekeeper

- More digital literacy training is needed for workers and managers around the ways of using digital tools for internal communication, taking into consideration worker wellbeing and the need to disconnect after work.
- Employers should be much more transparent with workers about expectations around engaging with digital communication platforms and should clearly communicate these to workers.
- Additionally, in some workplaces, in particular in housekeeping departments, workers need to use their personal devices for work purposes. This can exclude workers, particularly older workers, who might not have devices that meet the required tech specs.



- While many hospitality workers do feel confident with technology, others feel unprepared.
- Workers, both younger and older, admit to sometimes feeling unprepared for technological change at work.
- This can particularly affect young workers in their first-ever jobs. These workers, being GenZ, are often assumed to have the confidence and digital skills needed to cope with expectations in relation to digital skills. While in many cases they do have the skills and confidence needed, many also have a lot to learn and feel less confident. At the same time, due to certain expectations around their skills, they can be afraid to acknowledge challenges and reluctant to seek support.

“Especially when I’m new I don’t like to ask too many questions to do with technology. Because we are kind of expected to know how to do it anyway, and because I’m quite lucky to be able to use technology before working at the job, it gave me that advantage. But yeah, I think I’d always ask employees, but if they didn’t know, I would then ask the managers. ... Sometimes it feels a bit stupid to ask in a way’.

Front-of-house and housekeeper

- Experienced hospitality workers, including managers, whose workplaces undergo rapid technological change, can also struggle with change. Post-pandemic, they have had to rapidly adapt to new ways of working. Yet, depending on the level of tech confidence, this can take time.
- Not all workers receive sufficient training on new systems. Training is often delivered via e-learning courses but while workers find it useful to a certain extent, they believe that online training cannot replace in-person training.
- Workers are open to doing more training. There is a willingness among workers to

[M]y supervisor, he’s the same age as me, he struggles with some stuff that I’ll help with. I’ve got two members of staff who are much older than me. About 20 years older than me, and they struggle with stuff in the day. It’s a joke that I’m their PA. I help sort their computer stuff out for them. ... One of them got locked out of our system and it wouldn’t let her reset our password at all, and even our ops director didn’t have a clue what to do and I was just like: “Give me 20 minutes.” 20 minutes later I had it done and they were like: “How have you done that?”.

Front-of-house staff

develop and gain new skills, including digital literacy and communication skills.

- Some workers feel that they could be trusted more when it comes to access given to the systems. Those who are skilled and confident feel that they would benefit from being given extended access to the systems, rather than always having to ask their managers.
- Workers cope with tech-related changes thanks to collegial working environments and support from co-workers. Creating supportive and nurturing environments is thus very important, particularly in diverse teams where digital capabilities vary.
- Employers need to reflect on assumptions made about the technological readiness of workers and introduce supportive mechanisms.

‘I think just support [workers] through being able to use the technology and how to use it and having group meetings on how to use the new tablet that they’re bringing in and just things like that makes it a lot easier for everybody and makes it easier in the long run. Rather than if you just throw it at everyone and expect them to know how to do it. ... there would less likely be a pushback from the technology if you’ve given that initial support from the start’.

Front-of-house and housekeeper



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

- Top-down approaches are common when it comes to choosing new technologies. Workers often do not feel consulted about technological change.

'[employers need] To be more open-minded about what technology can do. Be more open-minded about the feedback that younger employees are giving, who might be more aware of technological features'.

Hotel events planning team

- Even though workers are the ones using the systems most, their feedback is not always considered when making choices regarding new tools.
- Excluding workers from decision-making, however, can have a range of negative consequences on workers as well as businesses, which could be avoided if workers' voices are taken into account.

'I'm not really sure because I think what I've noticed from working in hospitality is until something is launched, you don't get told about it. ... Unless you have a personality that finds it easy to adapt to change, then you will just struggle. ... I just think you need better training and better development for the older generation that don't quite understand technology as much. Because I think it was just assumed when the QR code came in that everyone would know how to use them. ... But to actually know if the people who are using it are using it well, they need feedback and to actually ask the employees'.

Waiting staff

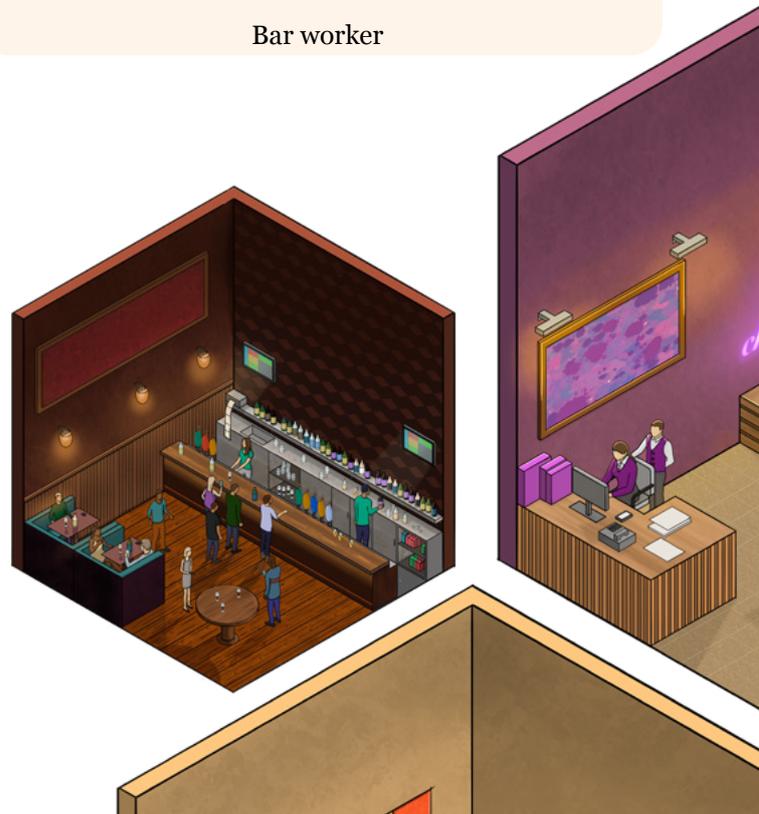
- Workers do not always feel comfortable reporting tech-related issues as they do not think it would be taken seriously or that anything can be done to change practices.

- Workers feel that the expectation is to just get on with it and make it work, rather than having conversations about the implementation of new technologies, and challenges related to bringing in new tools.

Employers need to reflect on the processes in place to bring in new technologies and consider increasing worker participation in decision-making to anticipate and avoid unintended consequences. See [Employer Recommendations](#) on how to implement technological change with workers in mind and for maximum benefit.

'There is a barrier between us [workers and employers]. ... the workers are the ones taking all the heat. I think it is important, very important, to take into consideration the workers' perspective because they are the ones who actually are in it. ... [T]hey should incorporate us into everything and you know we should be in the middle to make these decisions and going forward. ... You should care about the person who has been working for you. I have someone who has been working in this particular place that I am presently for over 15 years. So if something should happen and you just lay the person off, that is bad'.

Bar worker



Jobs with too much automation perceived as less attractive



- Many workers show critical awareness of the negative implications of technological transformation, value workplace interactions and are more deliberate in choosing workplaces.
- Workers appreciate workplaces equipped with technology that supports them rather than intensifies their work and creates more stress.
- While many workers appreciate the new technologies they use at work, they feel discouraged from applying for jobs where too much automation is in place, considering these jobs less attractive and too intense, and feel the extra demands should be reflected in higher pay.

'If I was at like X [a chain pub with a lot of automation built in] for example, and you had all the automation of all the tables and you're just running drinks and someone's just making drinks solid for like half an hour without the experience of interaction, it's very inauthentic. I think it goes against what you think either bar work would be like. ... It would [determine whether I apply for the job]. I think it would depend on what level. Because if there's Z pub [chain pub] and because of all the automation they have only two people on, 2 bartenders but also supervisors, or something like that, and they just have two of them on for a whole evening for basic pay? Absolutely not. I wouldn't do that at all. ... If I get a bit more pay per hour, I would see that as actually really reasonable and I'll be happy'.

Bartender

- In response to varying working conditions, hospitality workers tend to change jobs often. This allows them to gain wide experience around what to expect and develop a barometer of what constitutes a good working environment.
- Increasingly, the use of technology becomes an important aspect when selecting a workplace (and can alienate some workers)

'I'd be looking at it like: "I don't want to look at the screen anymore." Because I would have one that was red, one that was yellow, one flashing, but it just gave me a headache. That screen – I think it is the worst thing I've ever seen. If the food's not ready, I can't take it. ... I was there for a year. I don't know how I made it through a year. I said: "I've been here for a year. I'm over this." [Now] When it gets busy, it's stressful, but it's not the same stressful. It's fun. "Yay! Let me go! Let me speak to these people. Let me seat these people!" Before it was like: "I need to do this. I need to do that. No, no, no! Stress!" But it's not like that anymore. I feel like I've become a much more relaxed person'.

Waiting staff

- Some workers purposely seek jobs with minimal technology (e.g. independent local pub) as opposed to highly digitalised fast food outlets, appreciating the opportunity for greater interactions with co-workers and regulars, and as a result showing deeper commitment to the workplace (i.e. staying longer).
- For some workers, witnessing an overly digitalised working environment acts as a discouraging factor, making some hospitality workplaces less attractive. This can lead to greater competition for hospitality jobs and the creation of a hierarchy of more and less desirable hospitality workplaces, with technology being one of the contributing factors.
- While GenZ are said to be more tech savvy and have more advanced digital skills, this generation is also more mindful about choosing good employers and workplaces with good working conditions.
- To keep hospitality jobs attractive to young people, employers need to reflect on the impact of excessive automation and digitalisation on the perceived attractiveness of jobs.



Too much automation can lead to a loss of skills

- For many workers, their first ever job is in hospitality.
- Despite perceptions of some hospitality jobs being entry-level and temporary jobs, many workers stay in hospitality for many years, are passionate about working in the sector and plan to develop their careers in hospitality.
- Workers are proud of the skills they gain in hospitality, such as barista, bartender, cocktail making and food preparation skills. This includes communication as well as digital skills workers acquire when working in hospitality. This learning process and skill acquisition are important to workers and are a source of pride.

'There are a lot of people that take a lot of pride in cocktail making and they're masters of it and this, that and the other. So they wouldn't want to adopt a system because they think that it takes away from the art of the person. Now a machine's doing it. ... I also do think it takes away a person's ability sometimes when machines come in too much.'

Restaurant supervisor

'When I came to this country... because in my country we don't have a coffee culture. We are more focused on tea than coffee. So when I came over here, [chain international coffeeshop] was the best coffee in the world for me because I was having coffee for the first time in my life. But then, when I joined this workplace, I learned about coffee as a different world.

Over here, you just don't press a few buttons and make coffee. Over here you need to know kind of everything from scratch – how you grind it, how your grinding will affect the taste, then after grinding it, which recipe you are using to make the coffee, how much coffee you are using to make the coffee and after doing everything perfectly, how much coffee you are extracting from the coffee beans and for how long you are extracting it. Is it tasting sour or bitter? These are the things I think [about]... Maybe robots might not be able to do this now, maybe in the near future. If this is achievable by robots or AI, then there is no point of human existence. ... It took me quite long [to learn the barista skills]. it took me around three months to be honest'.

Barista

- However, some workers express their concern about certain skills becoming automated out in the organisation's pursuit of standardisation.
- Workers are worried about some skills being at risk of being lost to technology, e.g barista skills replaced with advanced fully automated coffee-making machines, chef's tacit skills replaced with advanced cooking equipment, or workers losing communication skills, which used to be at the heart of front-service roles.
- Workers argue that customers appreciate individualised services and 'human touch' over standardisation, and that knowing that humans create the product or provide the service is important to their experience, making it more meaningful.
- This calls for employers to reflect on the importance of skills and the ways in which technologies can affect skills that workers consider valuable.



- Many workers have limited awareness of how AI is used in hospitality workplaces. They may not be fully aware of how AI is built into hotel management systems or how it feeds into other systems used. This might mean that workers use AI unknowingly.
- When discussing AI, workers often think about generative AI (GenAI), such as ChatGPT or Co-Pilot.
- Employers do not necessarily have oversight of whether and how employees are using AI in the workplace.
- AI practices in hospitality workplaces vary:
 - » Many workers declare using GenAI in their private life but are unsure about the usefulness of AI in their jobs or are sceptical.
 - » Some workers use GenAI at work frequently (for emails, event planning) or from time to time (e.g. to search for recommendations for guests, find cocktail recipes) without being encouraged by employers.
 - » Some workers, often in supervisory roles, are actively encouraged to use it by employers (e.g. reservation teams).
- Workers are not sure about the company policy in relation to AI use. Unsure about the privacy and data protection in relation to AI use, some workers engage in shadow use of AI, i.e. use AI without declaring to employers and co-workers, taking the initiative and using AI despite employers not actively encouraging them.
- Workers want clearer guidance from employers about the use of AI and are open to receiving training, although they are also sceptical about AI and concerned about implications on jobs, seeing it as a threat.

'I would say [I use ChatGPT] every day. So it depends on the e-mail. Usually I'll use ChatGPT if I have to tell the customer that I won't be able to cancel free of charge. I have to write something that is [more polite] than I will use ChatGPT, but for normal e-mails I don't have enough time. If you put every e-mail through ChatGPT, you won't have enough time for it. ... I would say it doesn't speed up my work actually, but when I really need to make it more professional and formal, for example, like some long apology for the guest or something we send to a VIP where the general manager is also copied in. ... I always have to write it first anyhow, then I put it in to ChatGPT to make it better and more professional ... I just use because it's useful for me. ... [W]e do not get trained on that'.

Reservations team

'Some colleagues use ChatGPT for answers, but I don't like doing that ... I'm used to just sending emails like that. With AI, when it comes to emails, I have to go through the email and I have to read it and see if something is wrong and it just takes so much time. ... It would have to be something very specific that I have to use AI for, but I haven't used it yet. I don't really need to. I have seen it happening in other hotel - I have heard from friends that people would use AI and they would send the message and then they wouldn't change the name of who they're referring to, and it could be a bit awkward, because the guest would reply to that'.

Front-of-house staff

- Overall, AI training in hospitality workplaces is limited. Those interested in using AI, learn outside of work.
- Managers are more enthusiastic about the use of AI and its potential for bringing in efficiencies. They are open to bringing more AI tools, seeing it as an opportunity rather than a threat, although acknowledging that some roles – e.g. middle-management, reservations, sales – might be at risk. AI seems to be a subject of discussion in organisations, but there is limited evidence of widespread implementation of AI.
- There is a need for more AI literacy and critical AI skills to help workers and managers navigate the complexities and potential unintended consequences of using AI.



Different groups of workers react differently to technology

- Hospitality workplaces are very diverse working environments.
- It is therefore important to recognise the diverse needs of different workers in general but also in relation to technologies, which to date has been an overlooked aspect.
- Younger and university-educated workers show more confidence and enthusiasm about technology but still need support with adapting to workplace technologies (particularly when in first-ever jobs).
- Older and neurodiverse workers are 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.

“One of my mum’s friends worked there whilst I worked there as well. I think it was very hard for her to go from pen and paper to the tablet [taking orders electronically]. To the point where she would still write on pen and paper and then afterwards she’d take the time to then put it into the mobile or tablet or whatever it was. Because it was just too much stress for her to find everything and it was in front of the customers. She still did that for a while after it was rolled out to just get used to it. And because it was faster for her to just write it down, and because that’s how she’s always known how to do it’.

Waiting staff

- Workers find ways of coping with tech-related challenges and often do not report issues as they do not want to expose their perceived weaknesses.
- International workers might experience a language barrier when dealing with complex systems but technology is also seen as helping them in their everyday work, e.g. some systems have built-in translation functions into multiple languages, which can support international workers.

‘He [my colleague] is just getting to know the system and English isn’t his first language, it’s Italian. ... Well, obviously there’s also that language barrier on some of the words where we’ll help him or explain what they are or spell the words just to get him to know what the systems are. ... [T]hankfully, I think we’ve managed to work out where the settings are. So when he’s doing his training, he changes it to Italian so he can understand it fully. ... obviously we have a lot of staff whose first language isn’t English and if the digital information is in their home language, then they are quite confident with it’.

Front-of-house staff

- It is important to create supportive workplace environments where workers feel comfortable sharing challenges they encounter when using technology and are able to communicate their needs with the assurance that these needs will be taken into account.
- Employers need to be mindful of the challenges workers, including young workers, might encounter when dealing with new technologies and be ready to offer support and alternative solutions.

‘I think some people, you know, you could give them all the technology in the world and they’d rather use pen and paper because they’re more efficient that way. ... Do you bring the technology in temporarily at a smaller scale to test it out and see how people are responding to it? And then actually does the technology reflect the work that’s being put in? Is it making the work more efficient? ... And so actually the best way to optimise the operations is just to understand that everybody works differently and having that consultation saying what’s going to work for you and having that middle ground, OK, that works for you, what we need doing. So let’s find a middle ground’.

Reception staff

4. Conclusions



4. Conclusions: Towards better practices in managing technological change in hospitality workplaces

- New technologies are playing a significant role in the (re)shaping of hospitality workplaces.
- To date, limited research has been conducted into the everyday realities and experiences of hospitality workers of technological change, and their responses to these changes.
- Based on the first-of-its-kind large-scale qualitative study, this report has provided new evidence on how UK hospitality workers and employers navigate technological transformation.
- It has identified the affordances of new technologies as well as the negative implications for workers, businesses and customers.
- To help better manage technological transformation in hospitality workplaces, a range of worker-considerate and employer-friendly recommendations have been produced.

A central finding of the study is that technologies can bring benefits for employers and workers, but only if well implemented, fit for purpose and rolled out with workers in mind. Without mindful consideration of the potential negative implications for workers, technologies can intensify work, increase pressure and result in disconnection from work, with consequences for staff retention as well as customer satisfaction. Workers in highly digitalised and automated workplaces are more likely to experience negative impacts on well-being and report issues with stress.

What hospitality workers most enjoy are opportunities for human interactions with customers and co-workers, but this is at risk of being eroded. The social aspect of hospitality work increases workers' enjoyment of work. Yet, technologies are increasingly mediating these important workplace interactions in a consequential way. Workers increasingly experience a reduction in human interactions, often a result of introducing new technologies such as self-check-in kiosks in hotels or self-ordering systems in restaurants. Discursively, the value of human interaction and the spirit of hospitality remain central to

the functioning of hospitality businesses, with technology framed as a means to free workers' time for customer engagement. In practice, however, workers find themselves having less time for interactions, resulting in reduced job satisfaction. For example, customer reviews are important for business reputation. Yet, workers are having fewer opportunities to interact and positively influence customer experience.

The intensity of hospitality work is rising for many hospitality workers across various roles. New technologies often introduce more pressurised workplace practices, with workers feeling overworked, more stressed and losing autonomy. Workers are often made responsible for adapting to new tools and absorbing tech-related issues, which can exacerbate already precarious working conditions. Workers have to dedicate more time to using technology, fixing issues related to imperfect systems and dealing with frustrated customers due to their negative experiences with imperfect technology. New technology can add more work, create new unanticipated hard-to-solve challenges and increase administrative burden. This makes hospitality work more mundane, repetitive and

stressful, with workers experiencing alienation and fatigue.

New technologies are often implemented with limited transparency regarding the use of data gathered through systems.

This results in more employer control and workplaces using technology to monitor workers and their activities. Increasingly, data gathered through new technologies is used for performance managing already pressurised hospitality workers, with worker surveillance becoming more common (e.g. geolocation of housekeepers, timing of food production and monitoring of food wastage in kitchens).

Hospitality workplaces represent a wide range of worker groups with diverse needs. This includes international workers, young workers, older workers, neurodiverse workers, workers with caring responsibilities, and part-time workers. The needs of such a diverse workforce ought to be more carefully considered when implementing new technologies. Workers' experiences in increasingly digitalised and automated hospitality workplaces are often dependent on localised practices (e.g. more or less supportive managers, more or less training), and therefore more training and awareness raising is needed to support workers and managers with change.

Assumptions are too often made about workers and their skills, particularly younger and older workers. Hospitality work is particularly popular among young workers (students and young people in their first-ever jobs). Assumptions are made about this new generation wanting more technology and having high levels of tech confidence. Yet, many young workers voice concerns about rapid technological change, express fear about jobs disappearing, and jobs becoming mundane and overly automated. GenZ is more tech-savvy and often has better digital skills than other generations, but they also have more critical awareness of some of

the negative implications of technologies on lives and jobs, and support the fight for digital justice (Rose, 2025). While many young workers accept the new highly digitalised workplace reality without questioning (often due to financial necessity), others are reluctant to work in overly automated environments.



Moving forward: Directions for the future

The study's findings offer important new evidence on the limits and complexities of technological transformation in hospitality workplaces, and the need to rethink the role new technologies play in shaping working conditions and workplace interactions as well as the societal value of hospitality work.

With the creation of the UK government's Fair Work Agency, in order to achieve the ideals of fairer work, it is imperative to create conditions where technology is implemented to support workers and add meaning to their work. If technological transformation is to help businesses in the shorter- and longer-term, then it needs to be implemented with more consideration of workers and their needs than hitherto.

Poorly considered digital transformation and technological overload in a workplace can have significant unintended consequences on several levels. For workers, this can result in worsening working conditions, increased job intensity, higher stress and lower job satisfaction as they become more disconnected from their work. **For customers** who value the interactive nature of hospitality, increased digitalisation can lead to a poorer customer experience and changes in customer loyalty. **For businesses**, there is a need to recognise that digital transformation can increase the risk of losing customers, losing valued staff, and inefficient operations.



To support employers, managers, workers and industry stakeholders, a range of guidance materials have been developed:

- [A toolkit for hospitality employers with useful recommendations](#)
- [REPAIR Framework: Six principles for a worker-considerate and employer-friendly technological change in hospitality workplaces](#)
- [Checklist for hospitality workers experiencing technological change in their workplaces](#)
- [Recommendations for trade unions and organisations supporting workers](#)
- [A toolkit for hospitality workers, trade unions and organisations supporting workers](#)
- [Recommendations for professional bodies](#)
- [Recommendations educational institutions](#)
- [Recommendations for government and policy makers](#)

A need for departure from techno-solutionism: There is a need to move away from the one-dimensional efficiency agenda that dominates discussions about technological change. This study has highlighted significant deficiencies with the predominantly techno-solutionist approach. Through adopting a more cautious and techno-critical approach, acknowledging the limitations of technologies, and choosing tools more purposively and with workers in mind, businesses are more likely to achieve their goals.

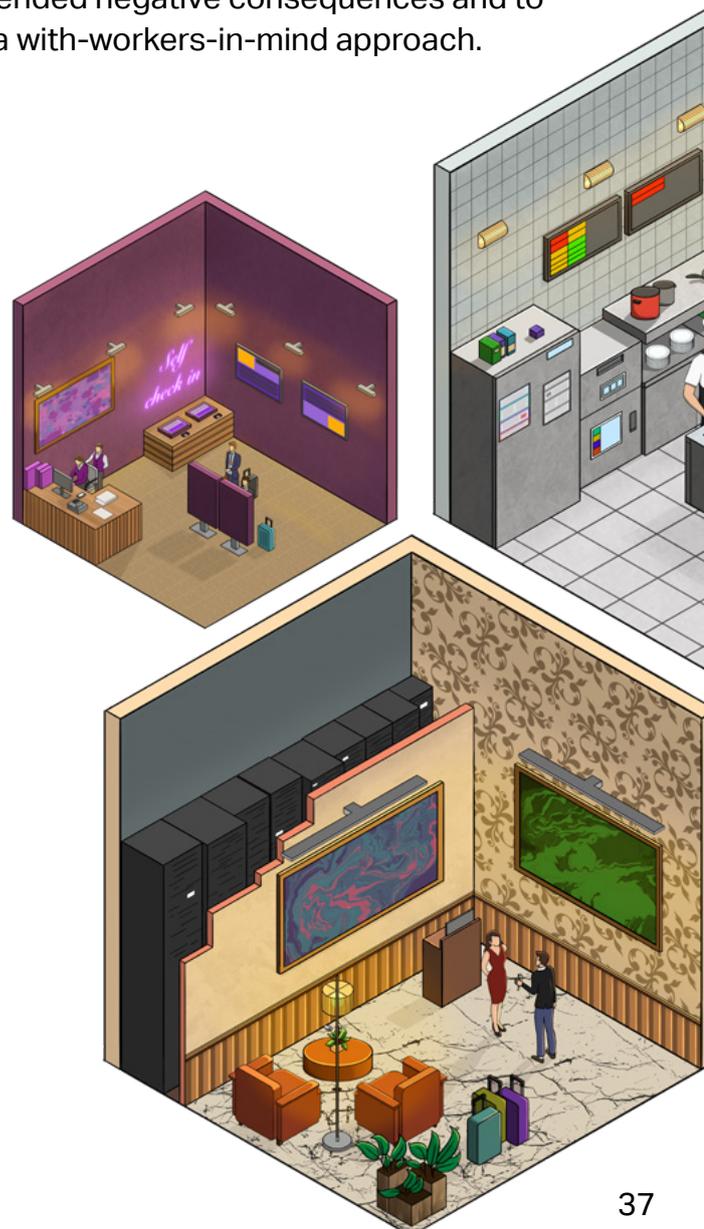
The challenges in the sector are real, but technology should not be seen as the only solution to complex problems. The report proposes a move towards giving more consideration to improving working conditions in order to better navigate the complex external climate that hospitality businesses currently function in.

There is a need to reframe the role technology plays in hospitality workplaces, in particular in relation to mediating human interactions. Creating opportunities for greater and more meaningful human interaction can help meet the industry's ambition to make hospitality workplaces more relevant and attractive to the workers of the future, rather than technology eradicating jobs and making the industry less attractive.

It is important to bring human connections back to the centre of hospitality. Hospitality workplaces play an important societal role in supporting less privileged workers as well as helping combat societal disconnectedness, growing social isolation in local communities and the mental health crisis. In the face of rapid technological transformations and more highly automated hospitality spaces, an honest discussion is urgently needed to acknowledge and address the scale and nature of negative implications of this not only on hospitality workplaces, jobs and working conditions but also on the societal level.

Collective effort is needed to meet the ambitions of the fair work agenda: There is an opportunity to collectively work towards achieving this with the government, industry and employers on board. This will require acknowledgement that technology needs to be implemented more care-fully and meaning-fully. The report argues for a shift in state policies towards less techno-solutionist and more worker-considerate ways of using technology in order to protect and generate new jobs (particularly for young people), and improve working conditions.

The question of technological change and its role in shaping experiences of work will become even more timely as technological changes accelerate and AI-solutionist discourses become more prominent. It is therefore imperative for researchers, policymakers and industry to be mindful of unintended negative consequences and to take a with-workers-in-mind approach.



5. Policy and Practice Recommendations



5. Policy and Practice Recommendations

- Based on the study findings, a range of **policy and practice recommendations** have been developed, aimed at maximising opportunities that technologies can bring for workers, employers and customers as well as anticipating, mitigating and addressing some of the challenges arising from technological change, including negative workforce and societal implications, and unintended consequences.
- There is a need to reorient the focus of technological transformation in hospitality workplaces away from a rather short-term view of efficiencies and cost savings, and towards considering how new technologies can meaningfully support employers and workers in providing good quality customer experience and improving working conditions over the longer term.
- While the research focused on hospitality workplaces, many of the findings and recommendations are highly relevant to other sectors, in particular to the service sector.
- **The recommendations proposed here provide an opportunity to reshape, reframe and repair workplace approaches to technological transformation.**

Recommendations for employers

REPAIR Framework: Six principles for a worker-considerate and employer-friendly technological change in hospitality workplaces

This future-oriented and worker-considerate **REPAIR Framework** aims to encourage hospitality businesses to implement technological change more mind-fully and care-fully in order to anticipate, mitigate and avoid unintended technology-induced negative consequences, and meaningfully support workers with change.

By adopting the REPAIR Framework, hospitality employers can play an important role in improving workers' experiences with technological change, and enhancing workplace culture and workplace policies around new technologies, with benefits for all.

REPAIR Framework

R

RECOGNISE: Recognise the diverse needs of workers and acknowledge that technological change can have unintended negative implications for workers.

E

EVALUATE: When choosing a technology, be mindful of how the change might affect workers and include them in decision-making.

P

PREPARE: When implementing a new technology, prepare workers for change, build their capacity and respond to their needs.

A

ANTICIPATE: In collaboration with workers, try to anticipate and mitigate potential unintended negative impacts on workers and workplace interactions.

I

IMPROVE: Use technological change meaningfully to improve working conditions and support workers better.

R

REFLECT: Engage in continuous evaluation of new technologies, give workers opportunities for feedback and be mindful of the wider societal implications of technological change.



10 questions to consider when implementing technological transformation



Can be downloaded here



1. What problem does it help solve? Will it help save time or add more work?

When choosing a new tool it is important to be clear on what problem it's going to solve and how it's going to bring positive change. Reflect on whether it is fit for the needs and peculiarities of your hospitality business. Critically evaluate the tool in the context of your needs. It's best to avoid gimmicky solutions and not innovate for the sake of innovating. Technological solutions are expensive and you don't want to be stuck with something that is too complex for workers to use.

2. What are the alternatives to bringing in more tech?

Try not to get into the techno-solutionism trap. Be critical and reflexive when making decisions. Is there another way? New solutions bring new problems and can have longer-term consequences. So choose wisely and in consultation. Don't automatically assume more tech is better.

3. How does it integrate with your current systems?

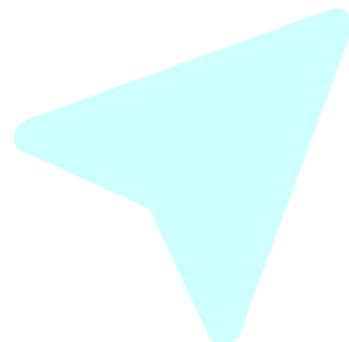
When choosing a solution, consider whether and how it integrates within your existing suite of programmes/tools. If it doesn't, will it cause new issues and require more staff time to do manual tasks of copying information over?

4. How is this tool going to meaningfully support my team?

Choose tools that will support your staff and not replace them or remove tasks they enjoy. You do not want to leave staff with the most mundane, repetitive tasks or solving issues caused by technological limitations. Adopt a worker-centred approach when choosing new tech. It will help you in the future and the workers will be appreciative and more committed.

5. Is it worker-friendly and not only customer or-manager-friendly?

Evaluate new technology in light of its user-friendliness, not only from the customer perspective, but most importantly from the worker perspective. Your workers will be the ones who will be using it and impacted by it on a daily basis. This will help you get workers on board, save time and frustration.



6. Have you asked your workers for feedback? Has your team had a chance to test it?

It's crucial to involve staff in giving honest (anonymous if possible) feedback on the usability and usefulness of new tools, and how these will affect their work and customer experience. Consult your workers and they will appreciate having a voice in decision-making. Make sure your workers feel valued. Early participation and inclusion are key.

7. Have you spoken to other hospitality workplaces?

Approach other hospitality employers about their experiences of bringing in new tools. Exchange knowledge and share experiences with others. Foster a culture of critical evaluation of new technologies beyond discussions of efficiency and productivity.

8. What is the opportunity cost?

Anticipate challenges. Consider what the opportunity cost of automating and bringing in more technologies is (e.g. less interaction, less customer loyalty, lower satisfaction, higher staff turnover, loss of skills).

9. Could the new technology have an adverse and unintended negative impact on your workers and their wellbeing? Could it be deployed in an unintended way against the workers?

This is a very important and underappreciated aspect. Reflecting on how a technological solution will affect workers and their roles, and what the often unintended consequences could be (e.g. too much monitoring, losing autonomy, depersonalisation, losing opportunity to interact with co-workers and customers) is key. Being mindful of these can reduce staff turnover, and improve worker well-being and satisfaction.

10. What if it doesn't work out? Is there a way out?

Ensure, if possible, that you have options to exit agreements if the tech is too inaccessible and counterproductive for the team and creates inefficiencies. Exiting needs to be both practically possible and not just contractually possible.

How to better support workers with technological change



Can be downloaded here



Prepare your team and build capacity

1. Prepare your team: Inform workers early about the changes. Give them time to prepare mentally and technically. Answer their questions and worries transparently (e.g. are their jobs at risk of being replaced? Will their work intensify?). Work with workers rather than imposing on them. Explain clearly how the new tool will support their work.

2. Training is key to managing change: Make sure workers receive enough training. Online e-training is fine but what workers value most is in-person and hands-on training, giving them a chance to ask questions and make mistakes. Giving workers sufficient training will pay back later with a more efficient use of technology.

3. Support new starters: Provide sufficient information and dedicate time to training new staff. Some of your workers may have never used any of the systems before, and it might be their first-ever job. This care-full approach will pay back in the future.

4. Create opportunities for continuous learning and development: Enable the development of skills. Both digital and interaction skills are important, one should not replace the other. Keep workers interested, curious and inspired. As a result, they will stay longer.

Anticipate issues, be ready to acknowledge and mitigate challenges

1. Anticipate challenges and acknowledge issues: If the tool is not working as anticipated, acknowledge issues and actively work with the team to provide solutions, giving more resources if needed and helping workers deal with these.

2. Be mindful of using data for worker evaluation and performance management: Consider how introducing performance management tools can be detrimental to your team rather than helpful. Numeric performance data has many limitations and needs to be critically evaluated. Metrics are context-blind, often incomplete and fragmented, with numerous gaps and glitches. When evaluating staff performance, nuances and context need to be taken into consideration, and data looked at with a critical eye.

3. Be mindful when using digital communication platforms: Online group chat platforms can be valuable communication tools if used well and positively. Keep important information for in-person meetings. This will help you mitigate negative impacts digital communication platforms can have on worker wellbeing (e.g. messages can come across the wrong way, workers might be off work when receiving communications). Reflect on how interactions between co-workers and managers are mediated via technology and whether there is enough face-to-face contact. Inform workers about the right to switch off after working hours.

Be worker-centric, flexible and inclusive

1. Be inclusive: Acknowledge that different workers deal differently with change and support them through it, e.g. older workers, international staff and new starters might need additional support. Do not assume digital abilities in workers; not all young workers are good with tech and not all older workers lack confidence with tech. Offer support where needed as different workers will react and adapt differently. Be aware that some workers might need more time and support.

2. Be flexible and give workers choice where possible: For those who struggle more with technology or prefer alternative ways of working, give them choice where possible and consider allowing for different ways of doing things.

3. Be aware of potential negative impacts of technology on well-being and mental health: Be aware of what brings workers joy at work and enable that so that work does not become too mundane and too disrupted by technological tools.

4. Create meaningful quality jobs to make hospitality jobs more attractive: Make sure your workers are valued and visible, their jobs are meaningful and challenge them in positive ways.

Observe, reflect, listen and act

- 1. Listen to your workers, seek feedback and act on it:** Action feedback when tech issues are reported so that staff feel they can raise problems. Make sure they know how and where to raise tech issues. Do not assume they will just get on with new technologies. Collect (anonymous if possible) worker feedback and act on it.
- 2. Drop tools that are detrimental to the team:** If the tool is having a negative impact on the team (e.g. not working as expected or causing staff more work), explore ways of dropping it.
- 3. Get customers' views** on customer-facing systems (e.g. digital key cards). Do they want a more personalised contact or prefer using technology? What matters to them? While some customers want speed and low cost, others appreciate interaction with workers and a personalised approach.
- 4. Evaluate regularly and watch out for the unintended consequences:** Do a pulse check with your staff every so often to see how your team is getting on with new tools. Evaluate, identify unintended consequences and assess whether the tools are bringing anticipated benefits or are adding more pressure. Enable anonymous ways of feedback for staff to express their views and concerns. Engage in continuous reflection. Identify how tech helps and supports workers, but also how it distracts or disrupts work and workers.

Create a supportive and collegial environment

- 1. Create a collegial environment:** Nurture a collaborative environment where staff can help each other and support each other with tools. Make sure to maintain a strong social element in your workplace, providing opportunities for the team to come together and support each other.
- 2. Enable human interactions:** Make sure that in-person interactions with customers and co-workers remain at the centre. This helps keep the spirit of hospitality and puts community at the core, which in turn will make workers and customers more loyal and committed.
- 3. Celebrate good practice:** Do recognise and reward workers. However, be mindful of not creating an overly competitive environment that can negatively affect the team.

Be transparent

- 1. Transparency is key:** Be transparent about the reasons why the new system/tool is being brought in and how it will be used. In particular, be open about what performance data it collects and how that data is used or not. Give workers a chance to ask questions and reassure them about fair use of data.
- 2. Be transparent about using incentives:** If using incentives and rewards, make sure these are inclusive and not just data-driven and metrics-driven. Reflect on how the system introduces competition and its impact on team spirit and collaboration.
- 3. Have a clear policy on AI use at work:** This will help workers avoid issues with data privacy etc. If relevant, provide training and foster critical reflection on AI tools and its negative aspects. This will help minimise hidden use of AI in the workplace and AI-related errors.
- 4. Share learnings with other employers:** In this way you can create a community of learning and support as well as enabling critical discussions about technological change.

Recommendations for professional bodies



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP: Champion ethical, responsible and worker-considerate use of new technologies and data in hospitality workplaces.



CHAMPION FAIR WORK: The industry needs thought leadership and championing of good practices and improvement in working conditions. Acknowledging the need for change and addressing the needs of the most precarious workers is key.



ADVOCATE for employers to monitor and critically evaluate technological tools and their impacts on workers.



QUESTION AND EVALUATE: Ensure a more balanced conversation in the sector on technological transformations. Question the default pro-technology stance and adopt a more critical stance, acknowledging positive and negative consequences of new technology.



RAISE AWARENESS AND SHARE KNOWLEDGE: Conduct research into the worker perspective and collect data on the impacts of technological innovations on workers' experiences. Produce white papers to help businesses adopt a more worker-considerate approach.



TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT: Help employers develop awareness of the unintended consequences of digital transformation and build critical skills to evaluate digital tools, adopt a more worker-considerate approach, and use data more responsibly.

Recommendations for trade unions and organisations supporting workers



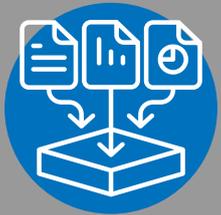
ACKNOWLEDGE: Recognise that new technologies increasingly play a key role in reshaping working conditions in hospitality and can have significant consequences for workers and workplace relations. Create working groups to explore this.



MAKE AWARE: Raise awareness among hospitality workers of the potential negative implications of new technologies on their work and well-being, and the often invisible ways technology and data can be used to monitor workers. Provide workers with information about common issues and how these can be mitigated to help them navigate the technologically-driven shifting workplace landscape.



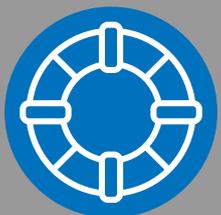
UPSKILL: Train workers on how to ask questions and identify issues related to digital encroachment on their working conditions. Equip workers with critical knowledge and evaluation skills to be able to address issues arising from technological change at work.



MONITOR: Collect worker data and feedback to actively monitor the implementation of new technologies in hospitality workplaces. Where possible, communicate findings to employers and seek opportunities to get involved in consultation on bringing in new technologies.



SHARE KNOWLEDGE: Use the data gathered to share knowledge across workplaces to anticipate and mitigate common issues. Make visible the intersecting challenges faced by hospitality workers, including insecure contracts, financial difficulties, poor working conditions and technology-infused monitoring.



SUPPORT: Provide support on dealing with issues related to intensification and loss of autonomy at work due to technological change.

For more guidance, see the [Checklist for hospitality workers experiencing technological change in their workplaces](#) and the [Scale of good practices: What to watch out for when employers bring new technologies into hospitality workplaces](#).

Recommendations for educational institutions



DEVELOP DIGITAL LITERACY SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE: Embed digital skills development in curricula, develop adaptability and problem-solving skills among future workers so that they are able to adapt to changing workplace landscapes.



DEVELOP CRITICALITY: Develop analytical and critical evaluation skills among students so that they are aware of potential negative implications of technological transformation on workers, workplaces and communities, including developing a critical approach to using AI tools.



EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND SOCIAL SKILLS: Social and interpersonal communication skills remain important in hospitality and the wider service sector economy. This research showed that human interaction is highly valued by all workers of all ages. It is important to develop emotional intelligence and social skills to ensure that workplaces remain spaces of support and social connectedness.



RAISE AWARENESS OF WORKER RIGHTS: Prepare future workers for the often messy realities of work (see also Rydzik and Kissoon, 2022a). This includes equipping them with knowledge of worker rights and the confidence to report issues, including those around the use of technology.



DEVELOP FUTURE LEADERS AND AGENTS OF CHANGE: Develop students towards becoming ethical, responsible future leaders, able to evaluate technologies, identify issues, support others with change and accommodate the needs of diverse workers.



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP: Fund research and lead the debate on the complex and multi-layered implications of technological change. More research is needed to understand the ways in which technologies are (re) shaping workplace relations and power dynamics, and what this means for the future of work.

Recommendations for government and policymakers

- Taking into consideration the wider socio-economic context of contemporary post-Brexit Britain as well as longstanding structural issues in hospitality workplaces, the below recommendations necessarily focus both on technological transformation and more general policy recommendations.
- The complex situation that the UK economy, workers and hospitality workplaces are in requires a holistic approach where specific technology-related policies exist alongside policies addressing existing wider structural inequalities and socio-economic challenges. This is not only about regulating the use of technologies but also improving working conditions in the service sector, while acknowledging the growing role of technology in shaping the future of work and society, and anticipating wider societal implications.
- The role of technology in shaping the future of work and working conditions can have significant compounding societal consequences. To truly reap the benefits of technological transformation – and minimise the negative impacts resulting from change – requires not only improving working conditions, protecting jobs and supporting the hospitality sector during its current crisis, but also ensuring adequate regulation of new technological innovations in workplaces and acknowledgement of impacts on workers.

1. The hospitality sector is in need of greater and sector-specific government support.

The hospitality sector is in crisis, with many jobs disappearing and businesses closing. Yet, the sector plays an important role in supporting local economies and communities, providing jobs for millions of workers, in particular young people, and offering third spaces for people to socialise. There is a need to acknowledge the value of the hospitality sector and its societal role, and to recognise

its importance in creating jobs, supporting local economies and less privileged workers who rely on hospitality jobs. This will require strong sector-specific policies and packages that protect the industry (e.g. reduction in business rates) (Institute of Hospitality, 2025) in order to reduce the uncertainty in the sector, incentivise job creation and encourage the implementation of good work initiatives that enable employers to prioritise working conditions over technological innovation.

2. Worker protection policies need to prioritise the least advantaged workers in hospitality.

Many hospitality workers can be considered vulnerable. They are often excluded from other sectors and are thus over-reliant on hospitality for providing jobs. Compared with other sectors, hospitality has high proportions of younger workers, foreign-born, part-time workers and workers from minority ethnic backgrounds (Murray, 2026). For the societal good, it is imperative for the UK government to monitor hospitality job losses among less privileged workers, determine the factors contributing to these, and account for technology-related impacts. This means policies providing greater protection for the most vulnerable workers to ensure thriving local communities and local economies, and a longer-term reduction in social deprivation.

3. A greater focus is needed on creating meaningful quality jobs for young people and not only jobs that fill the gaps technology cannot.

Young people depend on hospitality jobs for a variety of reasons, including to support themselves while at university (Rydzik and Bal, 2023). Job losses in hospitality (and beyond) are significantly affecting young workers, with further entry-level job losses anticipated to

affect young workers due to perceived AI-related efficiencies (Partridge, 2025). This requires closer monitoring of hospitality job losses among young workers, in particular in relation to new technologies, and designing policies to address technology-induced job dislocation. The government commissioned Alan Milburn Review (McFadden, 2025) into rising inactivity among young people should also consider the impact of technological change and specifically address job losses in hospitality. Employers need to be encouraged to create roles for and better support young people with transitioning into the world of work (Rydzik and Kissoon, 2022).

4. There needs to be a genuine commitment to prioritising fair work and an honest acknowledgement of the role of technology in shaping working conditions.

Hospitality roles enable workers to develop a range of skills, despite often pressurised working environments and misplaced assumptions about hospitality jobs being lower-skilled. Findings from this study show that workers value hospitality jobs for providing opportunities for interaction and social connectedness, giving them meaning and providing joy. Despite perceptions of hospitality jobs being transient, many workers spend their working lives in the sector and develop long-term careers. At the same time, there is a need to improve working conditions in hospitality and address issues of safety, precarity and exploitation engrained in many hospitality jobs. Replacing jobs that thousands of workers rely on with new technologies is not a solution to the problem of poor working conditions. Rather than replacing workers with new technologies, there is a need for the government to ensure decent work opportunities, in this way addressing structural inequalities and the negative impact work can have on workers and their well-being.

It is critical to carefully consider technology as a mediating factor and monitor the ways in which new technologies are reshaping the nature of hospitality work, affecting working conditions, workplace relations and impacting worker wellbeing in order to avoid exacerbating inequalities, widening societal gaps and worsening working conditions through technology-originated alienation and intensification of work. This means acknowledging that technological innovations play an important role in affecting work and workplace relations, and designing policies to monitor this.

With the new Fair Work Agency being established in 2026 (Department for Business & Trade, 2025), it is important that the implications of technological change are properly considered in order to protect workers. The Employment Rights Bill has potential to positively influence the future of work and skills, and improve working conditions for less privileged workers. For hospitality, this can mean less precarious employment conditions, more attractive jobs, less staff turnover and increased job security. But it is important to consider the distinct needs and challenges of hospitality workers, and to acknowledge the growing role of technology in shaping hospitality workers' realities.

5. There is a need for properly regulating technologies in hospitality workplaces with workers in mind.

One of the aims of the Employment Rights Bill is to 'modernise the employment rights framework to suit the economy of today' (Department for Business & Trade, 2024). Technological change and its impact on workers should become one of the core dimensions. There is a need for pro-worker regulations in relation to technological transformation to strengthen worker protections and address the ways in which

new technologies are negatively affecting workers. The nature of hospitality and service sector work is being reshaped through new technologies. Therefore, in consultation with unions and workers, conceptualisations of fair work need expanding to factor in technology-infused changes, anticipate challenges, effectively monitor impacts on workers and working conditions (e.g. through impact assessments), including unintended consequences and technology-induced side effects, and mitigate these with workers' needs in mind. Workers and employers need stronger guidance to navigate technological change mindfully. Clear worker-considerate policies are needed around the use of technologies in workplaces, particularly in the service sector economy and closer collaboration with the industry is required to mitigate negative impacts.

6. There is a need for AI regulation to be more informed by AI-critical perspectives and more worker-considerate.

The Government's 2025 AI Opportunities Action Plan (Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, 2025) needs to better acknowledge the potential negative impacts of AI on workers and ensure decent protections are in place (see TUC's Artificial Intelligence (Employment and Regulation) Bill, 2024). As the hospitality industry is figuring out the ways in which AI can be more embedded in workplaces, it is important for the government to provide worker-considerate guidelines and policies on its use in workplaces and for these to be developed in consideration with workers and trade unions, anticipating potential negative consequences on service sector jobs, the most vulnerable workers and working conditions. To ensure AI tools are used in an ethical and responsible way, working with businesses and industry organisations on establishing a clear set of principles of fair and inclusive technological implementation in workplaces for employers to use is crucial and could bring benefits for all.

7. A more muscular approach to regulation is needed to ensure transparency, and ethical and responsible use of technologies and data in workplaces.

As more technologies are being constantly introduced into hospitality workplaces, it is important that these tools are not used for worker surveillance but that employers are transparent about the use of data and the potential of tools for monitoring worker performance, with workers given adequate protections.

8. Discover and develop effective new mechanisms for hospitality worker voice and worker consultation.

Unions have been critical in examining the role of technologies, monitoring and making visible the impacts on workers (e.g. TUC, 2022, 2024, 2025) and creating worker-considerate policies in collaboration with workers and other stakeholders. While important work is being done by UNITE Hospitality, one challenge is that hospitality workers are largely non-unionised and therefore other mechanisms for including worker voice and ensuring worker consultation need to be created. More opportunities for dialogue and co-creation are needed for hospitality workers' realities and technology-induced impacts on their work to be made visible. This project aims to fill this gap in knowledge.

9. Research funding into the implications of technological change on jobs, workplaces and working conditions needs to be prioritised.

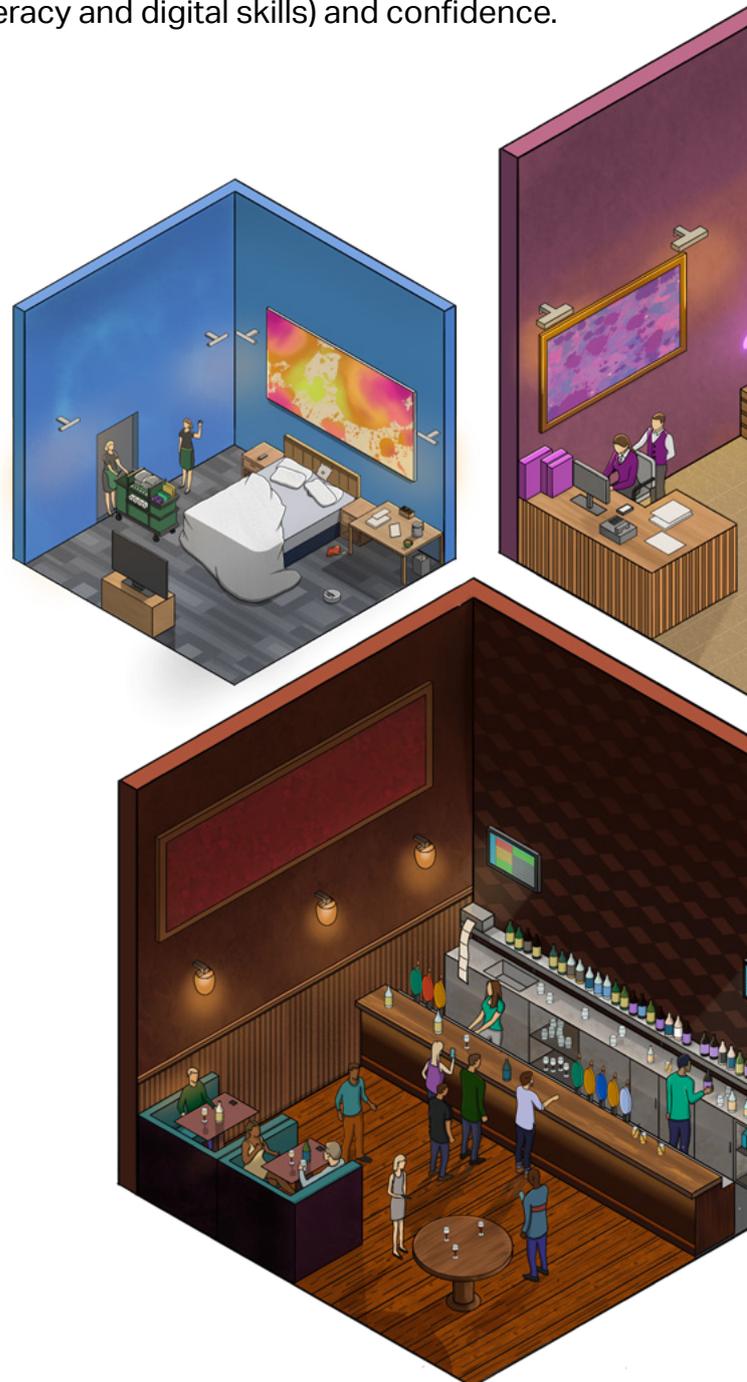
To fully acknowledge and account for the impacts of new technologies on working conditions, worker wellbeing and quality of hospitality jobs, more research needs to be commissioned into examining these. Funding more research that explores the full range of implications of technological transformation on workers can help mitigate negative impacts

and avoid exacerbating workplace inequalities in the longer-term, in particular in the service economy and in the context of more precarious workers. Growing the evidence base in this critical area can help expand knowledge and understanding of workforce and societal implications.

10. Education, skills and the future of work need to be more closely connected, with education not seen as only having a skills provider role.

Closer collaboration between policymakers, employers, young people and educational institutions is needed to prepare future workers for navigating the constantly evolving (and increasingly AI-infused) working realities and adapting to change with confidence. Critical analysis, problem solving, critical thinking and communication skills remain as important as data literacy and digital/AI skills in equipping future workers to deal with the messy realities of work (see the Institute for the Future of Work (2025) report for review on skills). Emotional intelligence, empathy and communication skills continue being important in the service sector economy but are at risk of being increasingly mediated, reduced or replaced with technology. Yet, these are key (e.g. for enhancing customer experience, keeping hospitality values within the hospitality sector) to making hospitality jobs more attractive and meaningful.

To prepare young people better for navigating technological change, future workers need to be equipped with critical analysis and thinking skills to be able to unpack technology-related issues and find meaningful ways to mitigate challenges. With generational change, and stereotyped assumptions being made about GenZ, there is a need to challenge the assumption that young people desire more technology and 'naturally' have good digital skills. It is also important to introduce training and educational schemes to prepare workers of all ages to adapt better to technological change and support them with developing a range of skills (including communication, adaptability, problem solving, as well as data literacy and digital skills) and confidence.



6. Overview of project outputs



Key Findings

What do hospitality workers report.

Technological change with workers in mind: A toolkit for employers



Workers Toolkit

Technological Change With Workers in Mind - A Checklist for Workers.

Technological change with workers in mind: Checklist for hospitality workers experiencing technological change in their workplaces



Unions Toolkit

Toolkit for Workers, Unions and Organisations Supporting Workers.

Technological change with workers in mind: A toolkit for workers, trade unions and organisations supporting hospitality workers



Employers Toolkit

Technological change with workers in mind - A Toolkit for Employers.

Hospitality workers' experiences of technological change: Key findings



10 Questions

To consider when implementing technological transformation.

10 questions to consider when implementing technological transformation



When implementing a new technology:

How to better support workers with technological change.

When implementing a new technology: How to better support workers with technological change

Explore the experiences of workers through listening to eight short audio-narratives

These stories are an amalgamation of hospitality workers' experiences collected through 65 interviews. The audio-narratives picture the realities experienced by many people working in increasingly digitalised and automated bars, cafes, restaurants, pubs, fast food outlets and hotels.



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About the study

Funded by the British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship, this first-of-its-kind large-scale qualitative study involved conducting 65 in-depth interviews with UK hospitality workers in a wide range of roles (e.g. receptionists, bar tenders, chefs, housekeepers, baristas, waiting staff), as well as employers, managers, technologists, trade union representatives and industry professional body representatives. The study explores perspectives and experiences of technological change and the implications technology-driven transformations can have on workplace interactions, worker wellbeing, the nature and future of hospitality work, and wider society.

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Dr Rydzik offers tailored training on making technological change in workplaces more inclusive. Do get in touch.

More information and future publications

To download outputs and learn more about this research and forthcoming publications, please visit the project website:

www.hospitalityfutures.co.uk/reboot

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