



Rise of the machines

A computer program has joined the board of a venture capital firm, reports Brunswick's ROBERT MORAN

WE HAVE LEARNED TO LIVE with labor jobs being taken over by robots. But are we ready to work alongside “bots” in the executive suite?

Deep Knowledge Ventures, a Hong Kong-based venture capital fund, put an algorithm on its board in 2014. The program, Validating Investment Tool for Advancing Life Sciences, or Vital, is a Big Data screener to help take emotion out of investment decisions. Publicity stunt? Possibly. But, as a voting member, Vital is an early sign of a bot-filled future.

In 1950, computing pioneer Alan Turing suggested artificial intelligence would one day make it impossible to tell whether we were interacting with a human or a machine. Some say we have already passed that milestone. But it turns out such supreme sophistication may not be necessary for computers to act as colleagues or even superiors. IBM's Watson was a machine and that was enough to win on *Jeopardy*—no humanity was required.

Oxford University has estimated that 47 percent of the US workforce is at risk of being replaced by a robot or algorithm. In the document review phase of legal discovery, battalions of young lawyers have already been relieved by e-discovery software. In journalism, companies such as Narrative Science

have automated sports coverage and the *Associated Press* said in 2014 it was automating quarterly earnings reports. The bots are here to stay.

Will the boss ever be a bot? In the Hong Kong transit system it already is. Every week, 10,000 employees complete 2,600 repair and maintenance projects. Virtually all of this is tasked by a program created by Hong Kong's City University. Technologists foresee the creation of so-called “distributed autonomous corporations,” organizations run by AI programming.

For now, executives and managers are learning to work *with* AI and use it to improve their decision making. As a model, consider “freestyle” chess tournaments in which human teams can consult computer software, or *The New York Times*' 4th Down Bot, where an algorithm offers a live analysis of a football team's choice to punt or go for the first down. Bots won't replace football coaches anytime soon, but on-field decisions could be improved by AI, unaffected by testosterone and emotional baggage.

The bots are coming. But thankfully, for many of us they'll be a tool and not a competitor.

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