

## BUSINESS LESSON

# MERCER'S VIEW ON CROWDSOURCING AND THE GIG ECONOMY

## TEACHER'S NOTES

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Mercer's View on Crowdsourcing and the Gig Economy

<https://www.esldebates.com/business-mercers-view-on-crowd-sourcing-and-the-gig-economy/>

### Vocab matching answers

1. b
2. c
3. a
4. e
5. d
6. g
7. f
8. i
9. h
10. j

### Video Answers.

1. There are predictions that hundreds of millions of jobs will be lost in the next few decades due to automation.
2. Antonio Christidis is a partner at Mercer, one of the world's largest human resources consulting firms. He also co-leads a partnership with management consultants.
3. No, he does not.
4. It will depend on the characteristics of the business.
5. There are more companies experimenting with the new work model and it has a direct impact on how they are structured and what skills they need.
6. Customers' expectation comes first. Technologies are basically made in the process.
7. The pace of change is so much faster these days so understanding the customer first is really the key to the future of work.

## Warmer questions

- How many hours per week do you work?
- Would you want more flexible hours?
- Have you ever considered working part-time or to change the times you work?
- Would you ever work remotely?
- From home or from a mountain top retreat?
- What does it mean to have a 'career' these days? Is the same as what it meant 50 years ago?
- Have you heard of the 'gig economy'?

## Reading section

### Singing for your supper

Rising labour costs and the pursuit for productivity are driving businesses to automation. Higher output and increased productivity have been two of the biggest reasons in justifying the use of automation. So the world continues to achieve unprecedented levels of advancement in automation, AI and robotics, and the emergence of the gig economy.

The technology was once viewed as an instrument that drove human progress forward. Today, technology is, though, threatening the employment and job security of millions. Three of the world's 10 largest employers are now replacing their workers with robots. A report released in February 2016 –by Citibank in partnership with the University of Oxford– forecasted that 47 per cent of US jobs are at risk of automation. In the UK, 35 per cent is at stake. In China, it is a huge 77 per cent –while across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, it is an average of 57 per cent.

Researchers say that in the year 2030, countries with advanced economies will have a greater proportion of workers that would need to learn new skills rather than in developing economies. In the United States and Germany, a third of workers would need to learn new skills. For Japan, the figures reach almost 50 per cent of the workforce, while in China it reaches 12 per cent.

High-profile personalities such as Stephen Hawking, as well as economists, have begun to discuss the displacement of human jobs by increasingly sophisticated means of automation. "The internet and the platforms that it makes possible allow very small groups of individuals to make enormous profits while employing very few people. This is inevitable, it is progress, but it is also socially destructive."



## The 'gig economy'

Technology has allowed platforms to be created where people work any time they want and to be paid by the second. Work that is usually considered low-skill (few barriers to entry) and requires some monotony are being opened to anyone with basic checks. Taxi drivers, writers, painters, secretaries, and more used to be contract work or sometimes shift work. Having a global economy and access to cheap communications tech now means a magazine, for instance, doesn't need to employ 30 full-time writers. They can employ one editor to hire 500 writers from around the world, pay them on a per-word basis, and then finalise the content for monthly printing.

In one way, it allows companies to make use of underutilised labour around the world in an instant. On the other hand, it now means those with long-standing contracts are feeling their wages stagnate as there is not a seemingly unlimited supply of people. Welcome to the gig economy, where people sing for the supper, but now, it's for every single meal.

### Questions to consider:

- According to the Grant Thornton International Business Report (IBR), a survey of more than 2,500 executives across 36 economies states that 56 per cent of firms are either automating processes or plan to do so in the immediate future. Should there be laws controlling the automation of jobs?
- When installed equipment is wrongly handled it often causes assembly line failure or reduces productivity. If machines have automated people out of their job, how much could that failure cost to the business in contrast with keeping manual labour?
- Without a middle-class on the workforce, it is hard to sustain a healthy democracy. So, can democracy, as we know it, survive the future of automation?



# Vocabulary matching

Using the words on the left match them to their real definitions.

Vocab Meaning	Meaning
1. Prediction	a. to assign (troops, employees, or resources) to a new place or task.
2. Automation	b. a thing predicted; a forecast.
3. Redeploy	c. the use of largely automatic equipment in a system of manufacturing or other production processes.
4. Partnership	d. the last day of the world's existence.
5. Doomsday	e. an association of two or more people as partners.
6. Freelancers	f. an environment in which temporary positions are common and organizations contract with independent workers for short-term engagements.
7. Gig economy	g. a person who works freelance: working for different companies at different times rather than being permanently employed by one company.
8. Bots	h. a person who provides expert advice professionally.
9. Consultant	i. (chiefly in science fiction) a robot. An autonomous program on a network (especially the Internet) that can interact with computer systems or users, especially one designed to respond or behave like a player in an adventure game.
10. Crowdsourcing	j. the practice of obtaining information or input into a task or project by enlisting the services of a large number of people, either paid or unpaid, typically via the Internet.



## Video: What does it mean to have a career with the gig economy?

Mercer, which is the world's largest human resources consultancy, talks about how automation will lead to changes in how people work and how they define a career.

<https://www.esldebates.com/business-how-smart-is-todays-artificial-intelligence/>



Watch the video and then answer the questions below

1. What do predictions say about automation?
2. Who is Antonio Christidis?
3. Does Antonio think robots are going to take over?
4. How does he know the combination that he needs of internal software, freelancers, automation and bots or people working in the gig economy?
5. What does Antonio think about the way that firms are using crowdsourcing?
6. Are all these changes being driven by the technology by what is possible or by what customers expect?
7. Why are customers important to the companies?

## Why automation is great

- Increased workers' safety. Automated systems frequently remove workers from the workplace –safeguarding them against the hazards of the factory environment– when transferring the workforce from active to supervisory roles.
- Reduced work hours. Another benefit of automation is the reduction in the number of hours worked on average per week by factory workers.
- Improved product quality, accuracy, repeatability, and less human error. Automation eliminates the monotonous, manual, clerical tasks that are routine and boring. When a machine is programmed to perform a repeated task, the precision and repeatability of the work are much larger than the work of human hands. The potential for human error is significantly reduced.
- A higher volume of production. Automated equipment is capable of producing much larger production volumes than a largely human workforce.
- Lower employee costs. With a smaller human workforce, employers will be able to skirt numerous costs like payroll, health care, benefits, sick days, etc.

## The disadvantages of automation

- Displacement of middle-class jobs. Automation and new technology could mean substantial displacement of workers.
- Less versatility. An employee can perform a flexible variety of tasks, whereas a machine is limited to what it has been programmed to do. Even flexible automation is less flexible than humans, the most versatile machines of all.
- More pollution. The standard automated machine will run on a motor, producing more pollution than a human worker.
- Great capital investment. Utilizing automated machinery in a manufacturing factory requires a large, significant operational cost. Making the transition from manual to automate can cost between thousands and millions of dollars, depending on the type of manufacturing plant.
- Unpredictable or unknown costs. Automation in manufacturing has not become widely implemented until very recently, so there are unpredictable or unknown costs that come with new technology. Maintenance, repair, supervision, training, etc.

## Potential debating topics on workplace automation

- Automation and AI programmers and engineers will hold supremacy over the rest of labour force by reason of upper leverage or power.
- Humans will not need to work in factories in the near future.
- There are potential risks that automation technology will ultimately subjugate rather than serve humankind.
- We are living in an information dystopia: The privacy of humans will be invaded by massive computer data networks.
- Democracies will be at stake: Populist ideas will become more attractive to those who feel left behind.
- Society will become entirely dependent on automation for its economic well-being.
- The human error in the management of technology will somehow endanger civilization.



# DEBATING PLANS

## PREMIUM 30-PAGE DEBATING LESSONS ON DOZENS OF TOPICS

These lessons are extensive and includes a magazine-like introduction, a 2-page article, vocabulary section, grammar exercises, and images for discussion. To help students organize their debate, worksheets are included for appropriate language and pros and cons to get them started. In total these lesson plans offer 30 pages of activities and tasks for students.

### Environmental Crimes

Debate Lesson Plan

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Should natural features be given legal rights to protect them from pollution? This debate will target issues relating to how to legally protect the environment and criminalise pollution.

### Food Tax

Debate Lesson Plan

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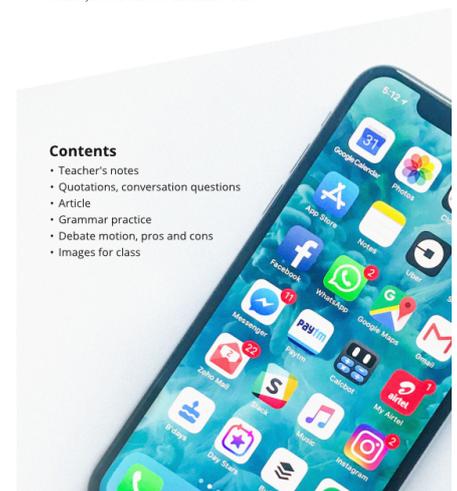


What are the best ways to tackle obesity? Some people advocate better food education, while others want to tax people to change their spending habits. Which is the most effective?

### Social Media

Debate Lesson Plan

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People are becoming increasingly concerned about social media. Discuss the main issues and find out what your students think and why.