

What are the ethical implications of technological advancement in business? Answer the question with reference to a specific technological improvement of your choice in a company of your choice.

Since late 2021, the United Kingdom has been faced with a cost-of-living crisis. Prices have been skyrocketing for all daily essentials, and the population is struggling to get by on their once admirable earnings. Unfortunately, this is not the only dilemma that the people of the United Kingdom are facing. A variety of jobs in a range of industries are gradually being replaced by ever-advancing automation, which consequently cuts people's livelihoods short as they are plunged into financial uncertainty. With ethics being the moral principles of an organisation, how can organisations be allowed to end ephemeral careers without a societal moral outrage?

Ethics is a subjective, humanly constructed concept. It depends on what society deems to be morally justifiable. With regards to the market, there has been a recent increase in demand for businesses to be more ethical in their trade. Amazon is an example of a business that has been perpetually mentioned when the debate revolves around unethical businesses. There are several complaints from burned out, exhausted Amazon workers about the indigent working conditions, and the neglect of their needs. Haplessly, their lack of moral principles is allowed because of the convenience of next-day delivery, particularly through the 'Fulfilled by Amazon' programme that not many people seem to notice or understand.

Quite simply, 'Fulfilled by Amazon' is when products are saved inside one of Amazon's warehouses. These warehouses are called Fulfilment Centres. Amazon's fulfilment centres are where fleets of robots run. Surprisingly, within a twenty-five-mile radius of Manchester alone, there are three fulfilment centres. Most processes inside the fulfilment centres are run by these robots, and the human workforce is kept to a minimum. The workers are merely meant to pick up each item and place them into the correct packaging. The robotics are delegated to the internal coordination of Amazon's fulfilment centres. If one chooses to focus solely on the industrial perspective, the robotics are certainly the pinnacle of technological advancement.

Ethically, it can be argued that the only way for human society to continue forward is through technological advancement. In a post-modern society where businesses are repeatedly forced to value the consumer need for convenience, a business must be allowed to capitalise on its resources. Business, trade, commerce has always been rooted into human societies, with evidence originating from prehistoric times that even early Homo sapiens used to trade. Current business is the epitome of human progress, and if society now begins to question its values, then every strategy and sense of competition between societal predecessors will be lost. Surely it cannot be considered more ethical to lose humanities joint effort to amend its quality of life.

Amazon do not benefit alone from their advancements. British society has also been benefitting from Amazon's work. According to Amazon themselves, 'Keystone, an independent economic consultancy, estimates Amazon's investments contributed £36bn to the UK's GDP since 2010.' This strengthens the United Kingdom's economy, meaning that standards of living are increased. This also improves strength of the pound, hence increasing customer purchasing power.

The benefits of Amazon's operations in the United Kingdom are endless, and whilst they do operate robotics in their fulfilment centres, Amazon have other types of warehouses, such as delivery stations, of which there are four in a twenty-five-mile radius of Manchester. There are also sortation centres, and each city has at least one, Manchester's being the MAN8 building in Haydock. Choosing to argue that Amazon's modus operandi in the United Kingdom is completely unethical would be narrow-minded as they have also instated a permanent workforce of 75000 and have supported upwards of 160000 jobs through the businesses selling on their platform, with these statistics coming from Amazon themselves.

Nevertheless, there are still some ethical issues within Amazon's daily operations, that has caused them to be frequently mentioned as an unkind employer. With the workers only needing to pick up certain products to put in parcels, it is inevitable for the workday to become mundane in the fulfilment centres. This constant routine, lack of differentiation and seeming lack of promotional opportunities could force some out of this employment, and in a cost-of-living crisis, that appears to be the last thing that fragile households need. The boredom and apathy that would come from such a consistent task could cause some workers to make mistakes in the orders unintentionally. If this would continue, the only logical action would be to remove the employee from the workplace.

Alternatively, as the robotics are still quite recent in their development, then it can be concluded that many redundancies have been made. This would likely damage the financial stability of the affected people as it takes around five months to find an occupation. Regrettably, not every such instance in which this will have occurred would receive statutory redundancy pay, meaning that such hapless individuals are left without a source of income whilst they struggle through interview after interview, hoping for a perfect fit.

Ethically, Amazon should offer some semblance of job rotation. This would break up the repetition, meaning that more workers would be excited to work, rather than dread each day, or decide that they should hand in their resignation. Furthermore, this might increase the employee motivation, which could likely increase their efficiency. In which case, job roles in Amazon's fulfilment centres would likely become a more well-liked form of employment. Overall, it appears that Amazon themselves stand to gain more from improving the employment procedures.

Alas, such a concept is more complicated than it would initially seem.

If technological advancement is ruled unethical by the masses, then the vast and extensive range of medical treatments that could come about from the field of robotics would likely remain undiscovered. Imagine an increased efficiency in surgeries, as a machine equips its scalpel and removes the damaged tissue with a quick and stable motion. Naturally, the only course for society's development is through technology. Amazon's robotics are certainly a commendable achievement, but, if such research and development continues, perhaps humanity could use robotics to save lives later down the line.

Since the genesis of humanity, society has always sought out its own convenience first, with the Antikythera mechanism being upwards of two thousand years old. It was made to chart the passing of days and years, alongside being able to record important events, akin to a mobile calendar. Another example would be the wheel. Transporting goods for commerce is more convenient with wheels that can withstand certain weights. Even in a society advancing into the digital age, an invention from the fourth millennium BCE is still in use.

Amazon's robotics may only be the tip of the technological iceberg, and if society collectively chooses to turn away from technological advancement because of the few who suffer as a result, then such a course of action would be synonymous with remaining ignorant to the large-scale benefits that technology can bring.

Thusly, it can be argued that society has two options to choose from: willingly give up research into technological advancements, hence forcing corporations like Amazon to throw millions of pounds worth of research and development away and employ hundreds in the place of their technology, or simply live and let live. There are of course ethical implications to both choices, with allowing the research to continue meaning that many working-class occupations would be completely removed from society, hence continuing merciless capitalism.

In closing, the ethical implications of technological advancements are vast and extensive. If we as a societal body choose to continue developing robotics we risk ending livelihoods whilst trying to better our own. However, if we choose to forbid such development, then all curiosity within such a field will never be quelled. Pertaining to Amazon and its use of robotics in fulfilment centres, with thorough research it can be concluded that whilst Amazon is satisfied with its profit margins, British society should be satisfied with Amazon's trade in the United Kingdom. Allegedly, Amazon has contributed £36bn to the UK's economy, since 2010, meaning there are financial benefits to their operations. The use of robotics is only relevant to their fulfilment centres, meaning that operations in the sortation and delivery centres are completely ran by humans, thusly ensuring that livelihoods today are still protected from technology and its flawless programming.