



The skills needed to prosper in an automating world

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As we highlighted in our previous report (If it can be automated, it should be), automation is in the process of changing the market research and insights world. Things are moving faster than ever before, there is more data than ever before, and more research is being conducted than ever before.

In this fast-changing world, many jobs and roles will disappear and many new ones will be created – which means there will be winners and losers. A recent PWC report suggested that 38% of jobs in the USA and 30% in the UK could be replaced by robots over the next 15 years. In this report we look at the skills needed to prosper in an automating world.

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Consultants, specialists & polymaths.

These are the **three skill groups** that Simon Chadwick and Reg Baker identified after surveying the state of market research and patterns in hiring (2014). Chadwick and Baker said that the keen need is for: Consultants, Specialists, and Polymaths. These three skills were in demand in 2014 and are even more **in need in an automated environment**.

Consultants. One of the key strengths of consultants is that they can work with businesses to help determine the key business issues, to frame a research route that will help deliver results. Automation provides the consultants with more options and improved control. Once the research is complete, the consultant has the vital job of ensuring the insights are translated into actions and provide clear ROI (return on investment).



Specialists. As the world grows more complex, as the range of options expands, and as the flow of data becomes ever faster and larger, the need for specialists grows. However, the growth in the number of specialists (data scientists, ethnographers, semioticians, etc.) is not keeping pace with demand. If companies are to be successful they will need these specialists to leverage automation and new tools (such as Artificial Intelligence) to be more productive.



Polymaths. The term polymath (from the Greek, having learned much) refers to a good generalist, someone who is strong in several areas. This form of generalist has a good understanding of the basics of market research, has several key areas of expertise, and they can work with the specialists to tackle complex problems. The polymaths we need will leverage the new tools of analysis and automation with confidence.



If there are waves, surf.

Automation is going to create changes and some of those changes will create waves. In some cases automation will allow people to **handle more tasks**, in other cases it will **eradicate those tasks altogether**. If you are working in a situation where waves are becoming a common experience, there is a risk that you will be washed backwards and forwards, like a piece of driftwood.

When there are waves, the alternative to being a piece of driftwood is to be a surfer, somebody who rides the waves to show their talent and to go where they want to go. In the context of automation, surfer strategies include:

- Be the person **evaluating new options**, looking at the changes created by automation and actively suggesting them to your colleagues and employer.
- **Piloting new techniques**, being the first in your organisation to try new options when they are available.
- **Training other people** in how to use innovations. New techniques need new skills, which means there are opportunities to train and help colleagues get up to speed with innovations.
- Joining (or even better, leading) **cross-disciplinary teams**. Market research is coming out of its silo, many tools (such as big data and social media) cross traditional demarcations. Organisations are responding by turning to multidisciplinary teams – this creates opportunities for market researchers to use their skills in a much wider context.
- **Helping deliver new opportunities and uses**. When using new tools and approaches, do not just use them to replicate what went before, actively look for, and champion, new uses. When research becomes faster and cheaper, the range of situations in which it can be used increases.



In order to surf and not drown, there are some key things you need to do, including:

- Reading about **new approaches**.
- Being the first to **be trained** in new approaches, processes, methodologies etc.
- **Thinking outside the box** to see how new approaches can do more than simply replace existing ways of doing business. But, the key attribute is to make sure your organisation knows you are keen to be involved in anything new and innovative – even if it means putting in extra time and effort.



Skills are becoming more portable.



One positive change that will help people to deal with an automating world, is that **modern skills are less tied to a specific job**, meaning that a skill can be applied to a wider range of careers than in the past. A recent study by the Foundation for Young Australians, which looked at over 2.7 million job adverts, found that when somebody has the skill for one job, they typically have the skills required for 13 jobs.

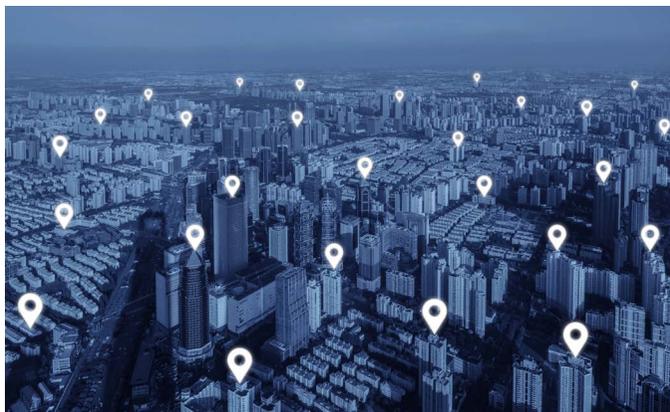
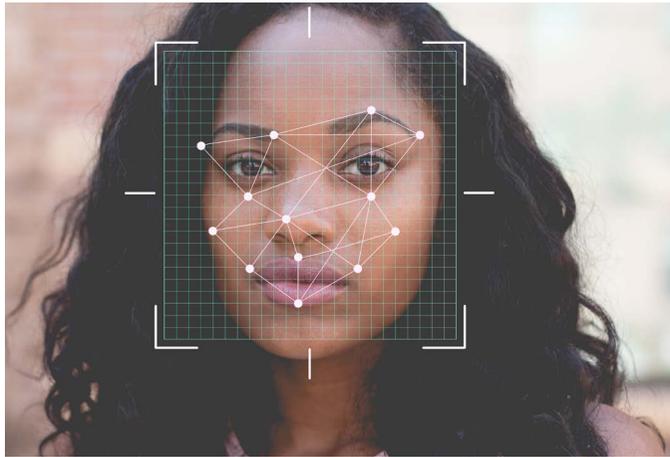
This portability of skills will aid both employees and employers, widening the range of choices for both. However, it does mean that **organisations should favour platforms and systems that conform to standards, rather than developing their own bespoke solutions.**

Want to be an entrepreneur? Choose things that can be automated.

Some people want to be entrepreneurs (or intrpreneurs – people inside an organisation with an entrepreneurial outlook). In an automating world the key is look at things that others are doing manually that you think can be automated. In the medium term you may want to produce something that is better than what is currently on offer, you may want to expand the market, but in the short term, look for chances to be faster and cheaper.

Using standardised products instead of bespoke products is one way to be faster and cheaper, but there are other options too.

Options that are ripe for automation are those where demand is being held back because of cost and speed considerations, these include:



- Coding **open-ended comments** – these tend to be underutilised at the moment.
- Use of **images and video** – the speed and cost considerations have held these back, but the demand is there for innovative solutions.
- **Non-conscious measurement** – in this post-Kahneman era, organisations know they need to move beyond direct questions, but the current options for Behavioural Economics and neuroscience tend to be too slow and too expensive.
- **More use of mobile** – for example, in the moment diaries, location-based research, and passive data collection. All of these are in demand, if somebody can offer a cheaper and faster option.

Want to be an artisan? Choose things that can't be automated.



Not everybody wants to work in a company where the aim is to scale the operation up so that an ever-larger number of clients can be offered a service. Some people want to work closely with a small number of clients, but they still want to be well-paid (and well-respected) for their work. These people are like the craft brewers and the artisanal bakers.

If you want to be an artisan you need to choose skills and options that are unlikely to be automated in the foreseeable future. Some of these skills will use automated tools, but the essence of what they do can't be automated. For example, somebody who creates manga versions of market research reports will use a variety of computer-aided design tools – but the essence of what they do is creative, and won't be automated in the near (or maybe even distant) future.



Roles that fall into this artisanal zone include:

- **Ethnographers** – people who can hang out with consumers and get them to reveal things about their lived experiences.
- **Qualitative moderators** – there may come a time when robots moderate face-to-face focus groups and depth interviews, but that time is still a long way off. Savvy moderators are using the latest tools to make themselves more productive, but their core offering of interacting with people is not being threatened.



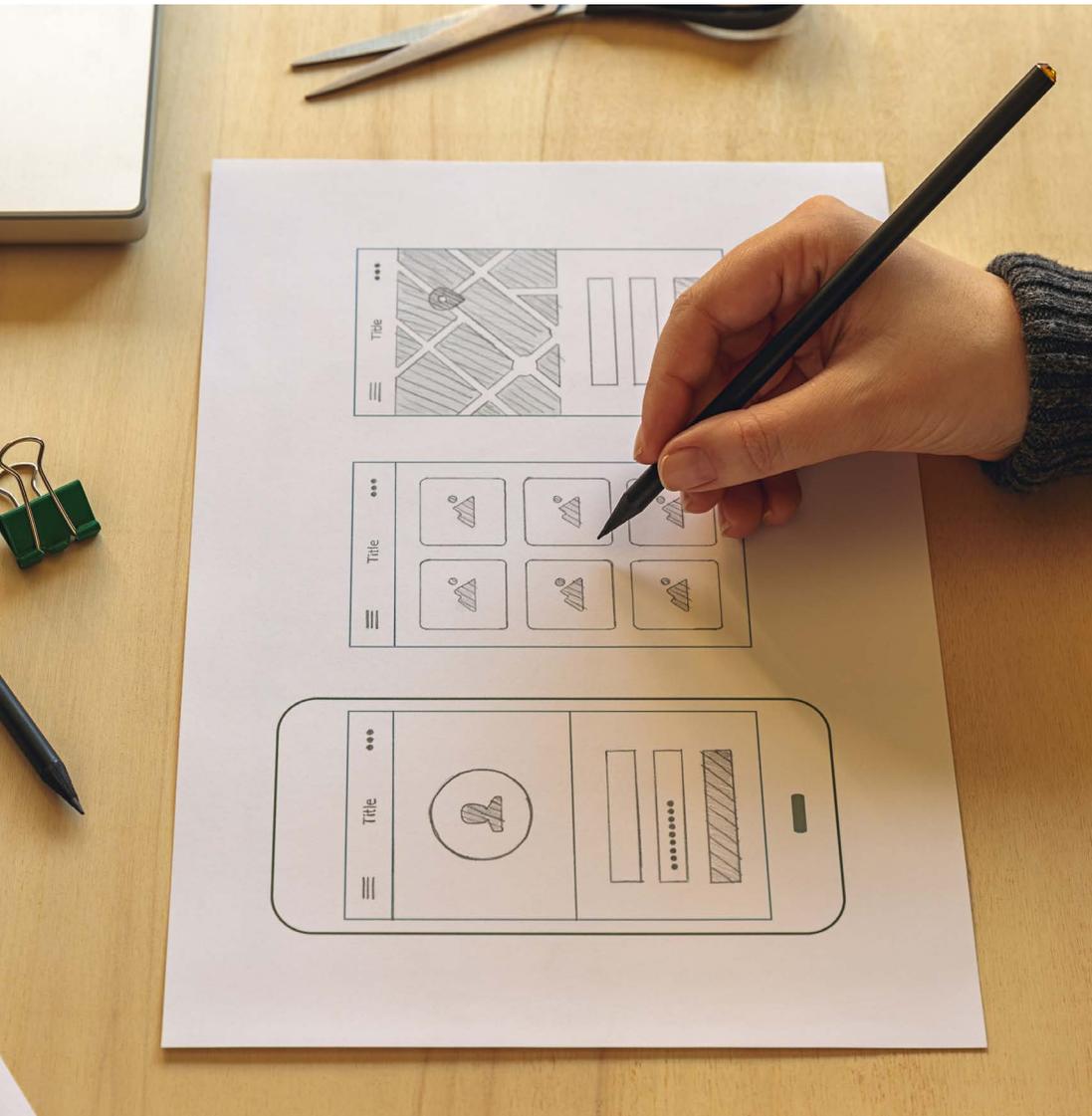
- **Artists** – for example people who edit video or create great visualisations. The modern artist uses lots of tools, some of them leveraging automation – but the artist isn't being automated.
- **Data and marketing scientists** – although these people are increasingly using automated products, they are in ever-greater demand. The two key areas where they are in demand are **a) bespoke projects** and **b) making sense of the new deluge of data.**

In the past, data and marketing scientists tended to be employed by large companies, but there are a growing number who find they work as freelancers, leveraging their specialist (artisanal) skills.



- **Problem fixers** – things go wrong, and there is often a budget to pay for people who know how to fix things that have gone wrong.

- **Business Process Re-engineers** – when companies need to reduce their spending, and increase their throughput, they need to re-engineer their processes. Consultants who specialise in this process can point to a very clear ROI for their work.
- **Suppliers of bespoke solutions** – for example people creating research games, innovative mobile solutions, and conjoint designs.



- **Educators, coaches, and trainers** – there is a growing realisation that entrants to the research and insights profession do not have the skills they need, organisations do not have the resources to train them, so the demand for training has never been greater.
- **International and cross-cultural experts** – along with automation we are seeing more projects being run from the centre, rather than being run by local teams. This process is creating a number of challenges that create opportunities for people with cross-border and cross-cultural expertise to step in to prevent problems (or help address problems that have already happened).



The rise of the customer success manager.



One role that has been growing over the last few years has been that of the customer success manager. Along with automation, the world is shifting from a product focus to a services focus.

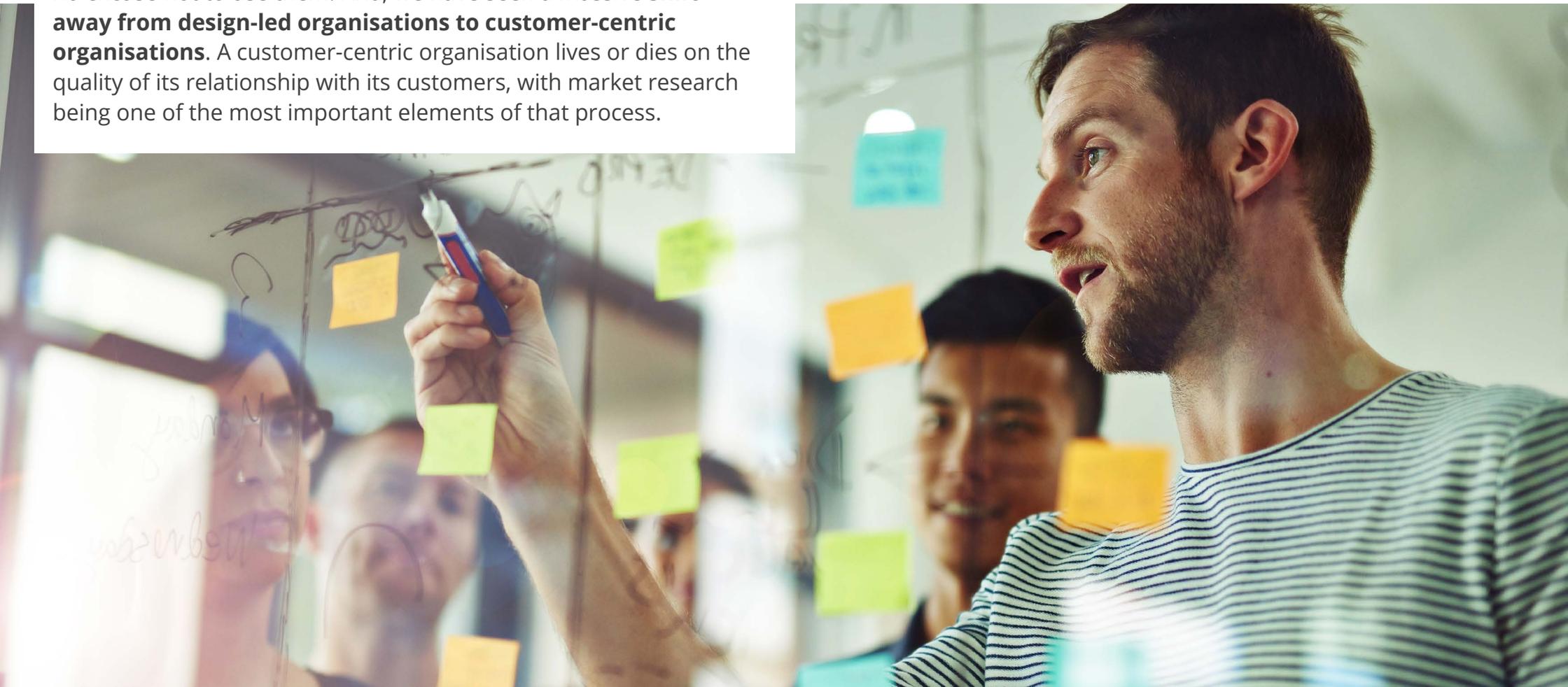
The key responsibility of a service company (including a market research or insights provider) is to make the client successful. The key tool a market research company uses to make its clients successful is, of course, good, timely and relevant market research. But the market research is a means; it is not an end in itself. The true end is client success. The client success manager is a role for humans, not robots, it is all about understanding the client and ensuring that success is achieved.

If you are unsure about customer success, we suggest reading a great book on the topic 'Customer Success: How Innovative Companies Are Reducing Churn and Growing Recurring Revenue', by Nick Mehta, Dan Steinman, and Lincoln Murphy.

Agile is the new normal.

The key to thriving in a world awash with automation is **to be flexible**. As the speed of research gets faster, and as the cost of research falls, the opportunity is to use **market research in more situations than ever before**. In the past, the majority of business decisions have been made on the basis of 'gut instinct'. This was largely due to two things a) evidence took too long to gather (and was usually too expensive), b) many companies were design led (they thought they knew better than the customer).

Today, we have options that are so fast and cheap that there is no excuse not to use them. And, we have seen a massive **shift away from design-led organisations to customer-centric organisations**. A customer-centric organisation lives or dies on the quality of its relationship with its customers, with market research being one of the most important elements of that process.



Advice to new researchers.

Whenever there is a review of skills and the future of market research, one of the most frequently asked questions is “What advice would you give a young person just starting out on their career in market research?” From the research we have done in preparing this report the key things we would say are:

- 1. Understand the basics of what market research is.** Know about qual and quant and understand their different strengths. Understand the flow from business question, to research questions, to research, to results, to insights, through to business results.
- 2. Develop a skill, something that will cause others to ask for your help.** That skill can be technology, statistics, ethnography, online moderation or any of a hundred things. Just ensure there is some interest in your topic in your organisation and become skilled in it.
- 3. Try to be involved in innovative projects** that might change the way your company conducts its business. Volunteer to work on trials and pilots of new software, investigate new options (even in your own time).
- 4. Create a brand for yourself,** within and beyond your own organisation. For example, by creating a social media presence (LinkedIn or Twitter), by blogging, or by speaking at events/ conferences.

Advice to veteran researchers.

Veterans have **several advantages** when it comes to thriving on change, compared with those who have fewer years in the industry. These include:



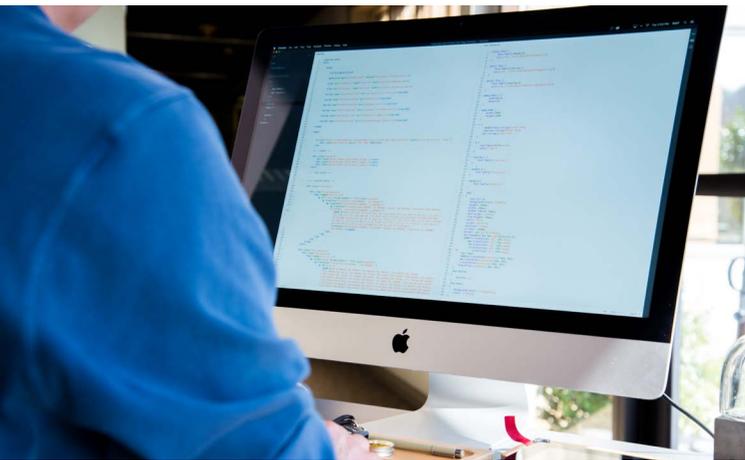
- Consultants and polymaths are more likely to be people who have been in the industry for a while, who have had a chance to acquire the **perspective needed to be a consultant, or the time required to acquire multiple skills**. The main thing the veteran needs to keep in mind is that they are moving from a world that valued methodologists to one that values business outcomes. If they are lacking in business skills, that is something they should address rapidly.
- People who have seen change often find it easier to **understand that the world as it is today is temporary**. Younger researchers often understand that the world has changed, but may underestimate how much change is still to happen.
- Veterans know **where the logjams, pain points, and pinch points are**. These are the key areas that need automation or which will provide consulting opportunities.

A new skill every year.

Perhaps our top tip for everybody, newbie and veteran alike, is to learn a new skill every year. The world is changing, and it is going to keep changing. As several people have said, the rate of change in 2017 is likely to be the slowest rate of change you will experience in the rest of your working life.

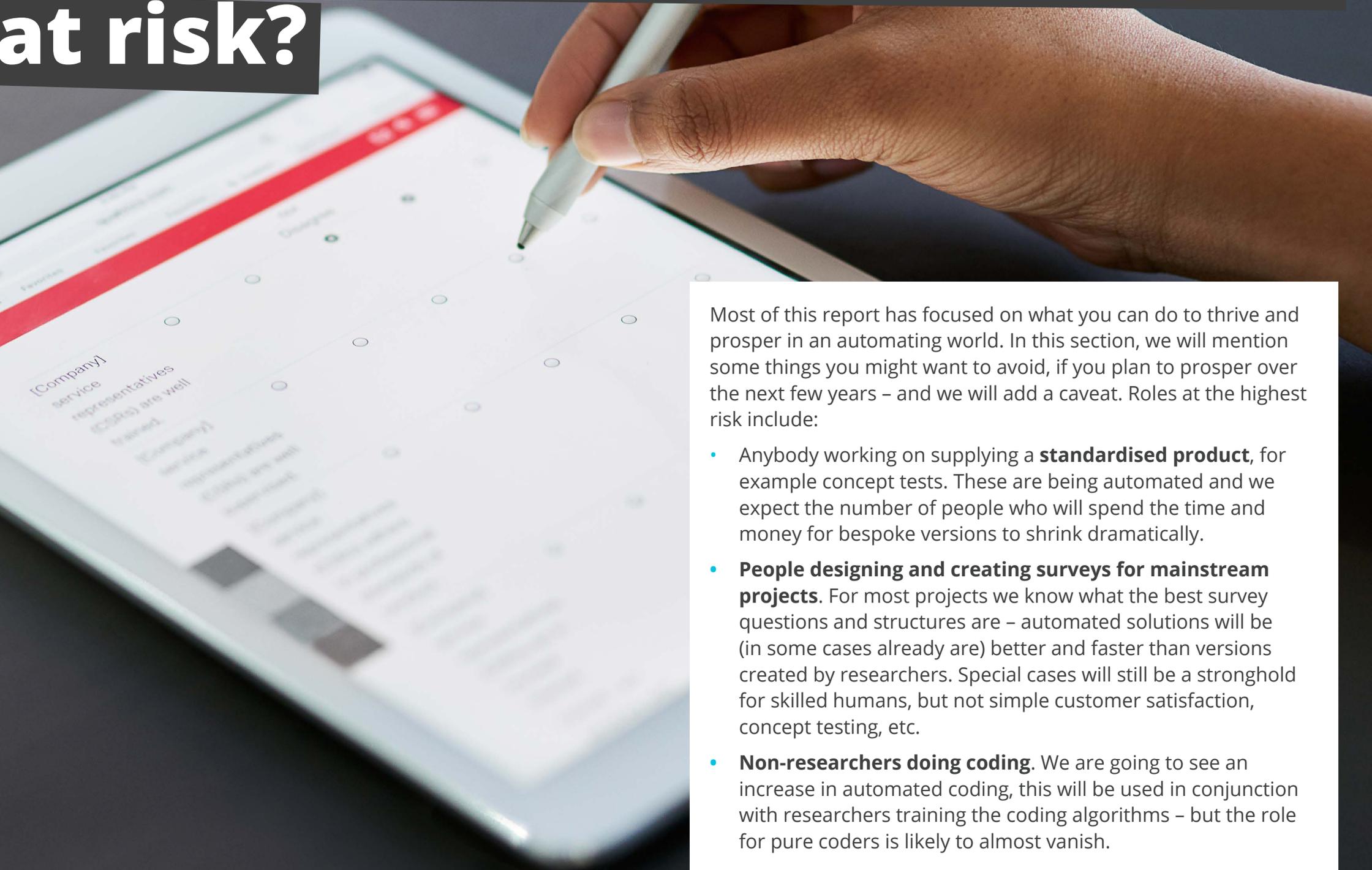
Learning a new skill each year keep you flexible, it can improve you worth to your company, and it will help you see and utilise new options. Examples of things you might want to do are varied, and some of our recommendations include:

- A coaching course (for example coaching a junior sports team).
- Learning R (a statistical language that is great for data visualisation too).
- Learning to code.
- Learning a language or learning to play an instrument.
- Learning a research skill from another discipline. For example, if you are a quant researcher, learn about ethnography and if you are a qual researcher, you could learn about using a product like Tableau to present data better.
- Presenting skills.
- Writing skills.
- Acting or 'improv' courses (this can help with presenting and confidence).
- Social media research, for example learning how to scrape and interpret posts.
- Marketing and/or sales courses. Most fields are moving from products to services, and in a services world, everybody is in marketing/sales.



What roles/tasks are most at risk?

at risk?



Most of this report has focused on what you can do to thrive and prosper in an automating world. In this section, we will mention some things you might want to avoid, if you plan to prosper over the next few years – and we will add a caveat. Roles at the highest risk include:

- Anybody working on supplying a **standardised product**, for example concept tests. These are being automated and we expect the number of people who will spend the time and money for bespoke versions to shrink dramatically.
- **People designing and creating surveys for mainstream projects.** For most projects we know what the best survey questions and structures are – automated solutions will be (in some cases already are) better and faster than versions created by researchers. Special cases will still be a stronghold for skilled humans, but not simple customer satisfaction, concept testing, etc.
- **Non-researchers doing coding.** We are going to see an increase in automated coding, this will be used in conjunction with researchers training the coding algorithms – but the role for pure coders is likely to almost vanish.

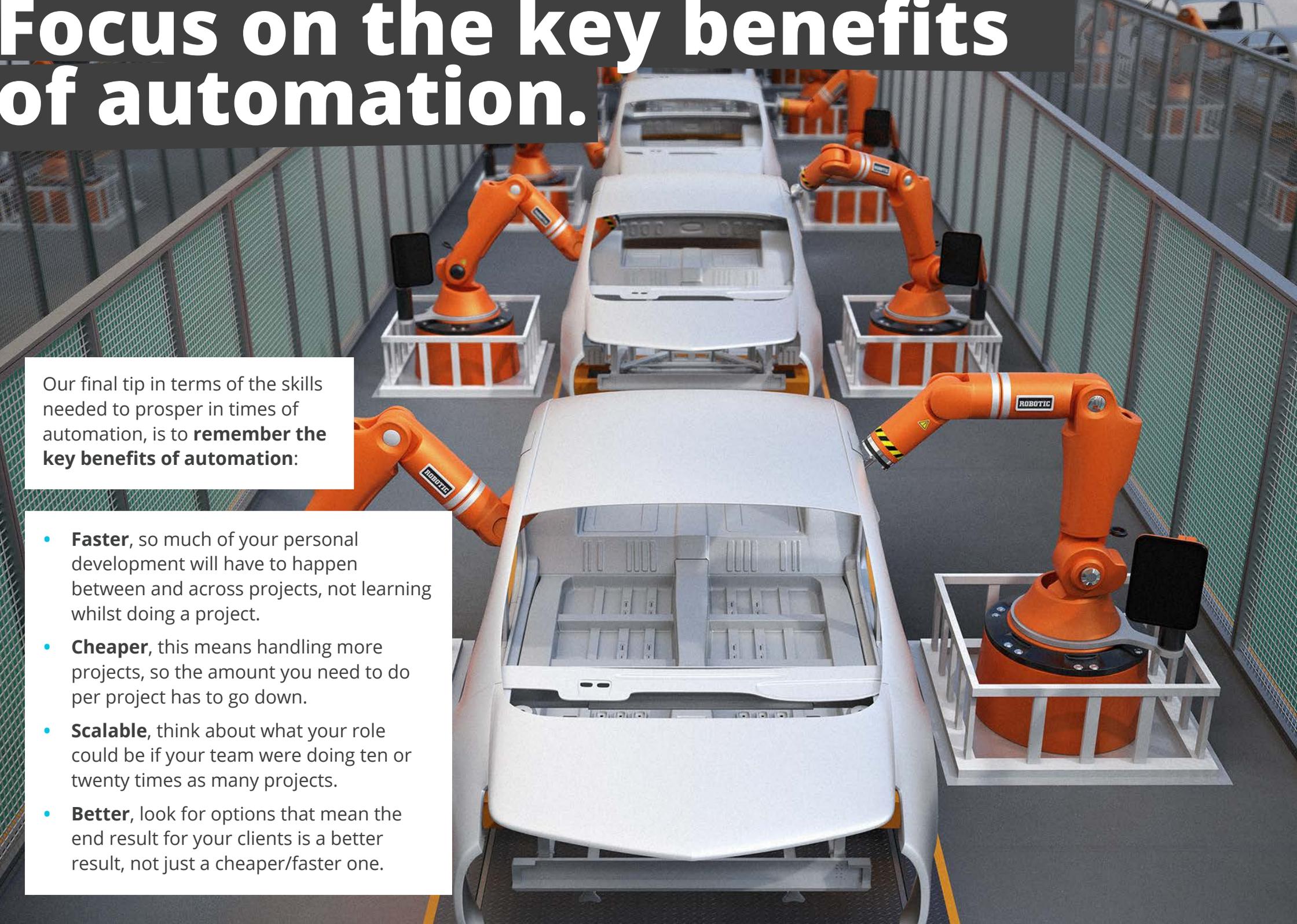


- **Project management.** As the number of pre-packaged research solutions (like those offered by ZappiStore) grows, the number of people needed to manage projects reduces. Automation will have an effect on bespoke research too, making it easier to manage. So, although the total amount of research conducted may increase, the number of people project managing will decline.
- **In-house developers,** although we suspect these people should be able to find employment elsewhere. I think we will see fewer and fewer companies building their own solutions, and more people using SaaS platforms (software as a service).

The caveat. In many cases there is a business in being the last person still able to do something. Dealing with what are called legacy issues. Some data will still be in old formats, some people will still want backward compatibility with previous work. If you time things right, and if you have the right contacts, you can make a living out

of things that nearly everybody else has stopped doing. For example, you might run one of the last call centres in your country, or you might print data tables for people who don't like looking at them interactively on a screen, or you might code open-ended comments by hand.

Focus on the key benefits of automation.



Our final tip in terms of the skills needed to prosper in times of automation, is to **remember the key benefits of automation:**

- **Faster**, so much of your personal development will have to happen between and across projects, not learning whilst doing a project.
- **Cheaper**, this means handling more projects, so the amount you need to do per project has to go down.
- **Scalable**, think about what your role could be if your team were doing ten or twenty times as many projects.
- **Better**, look for options that mean the end result for your clients is a better result, not just a cheaper/faster one.

References.

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- **Consumer spending prospects and the impact of automation on jobs**, PWC, March 2017, <http://www.pwc.co.uk/services/economics-policy/insights/uk-economic-outlook.html>
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Sign up for our webinar series on Automation

This report is part of a multi-part series, co-authored by Ray Poynter (NewMR) and Stephen Phillips (ZappiStore), under the theme **'Succeeding in an Automated MR World'**.

We will also be broadcasting four more webinars as a part of this theme, which you can register for on NewMR.org.

- 24 May, ***The skills needed to prosper in an automating world.***
- 6 July, ***A client's perspective of automation.***
- 7 September, ***Automation: a strategy of tactical efficiencies.***
- 9 November, ***Using agile approaches and automation to go from research grind to actionable results.***

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