

Big firms embrace artificial intelligence

Australian Associated Press | 7:30pm January 17, 2017

By Trevor Chappell

Australia's big businesses are embracing artificial intelligence (AI), with two-thirds planning to replace jobs, or already replacing them, with computer technology.

AI is an area of computer science involving intelligent machines that work and react like humans, and can be used for tasks such as speech recognition, planning and problem solving.

Research from technology consultant Infosys shows large Australian companies are investing on average of more than \$8 million a year in AI, behind only the United States.

Many believe the use of AI is crucial for future growth, and Infosys expects investment to grow rapidly. It surveyed 1,600 business leaders in companies with more than 1,000 staff and annual revenue over \$US500 million, across Australia, the US, UK, France, Germany, China and India.

"Two-thirds of those companies in Australia have already deployed artificial intelligence and are continuing to invest in it," Infosys regional head of Australia and New Zealand Andrew Groth said.

AI is being used in Australia for the automatic ordering of pharmaceuticals in a hospital, driverless tractors on farms, and the delivery of parcels. A bank is also using algorithms to forecast investor reaction to market shocks, and a mining company is using predictive analytics to schedule maintenance and reduce machine breakdowns.

About two in five companies using AI have already made cost savings and boosted productivity, Infosys said. But companies are also grappling with concerns about job security and a shortage of technical skills needed to implement new technology.

The biggest issue for most Australian companies looking to use AI is an ethical one. For example, where and when to deploy it, and whether or not it impacts humanity. "There are many jobs out there that will be replaced or changed as a result of AI," Mr Groth said.

"It's taking away many of what could be argued are menial, mundane, frankly boring types of roles." Mr Groth said many more Australian companies are focusing on the ethical issues related AI than those in the US.

The challenge for companies and governments is to re-skill employees so they can participate in the changed workplace, he said.

Also, standing in the way of wider deployment of AI is Australia's relative lack of access to people with the skills required for the implementation.

AAP tc/dc