

# Executive summary: The rise of workforce activism

The paradox of the robotic age is that automation will only make human skills more valuable. The World Economic Forum estimates that 75 million jobs will be lost to automation by 2022 but 133 million new jobs will be created – jobs requiring uniquely human qualities such as emotional intelligence and fine judgment. But unlike robots, humans have opinions – and that presents its own challenges for employers.

Our survey warns of an unprecedented rise in workplace activism ahead, across all sectors and geographies. As employers explore different working models and advanced technologies, those working for them are becoming more vocal in articulating their views – about the workplace, their employer and about wider social issues – enabled and amplified by social media. The voice of the workforce will insist on being heard as never before. If traditional, internal communication channels fail to meet their needs, external means of raising concerns will fill the gap. Employers need to be prepared for what's ahead.

Respondents say workforce activism could cost them up to 25% of global revenue per year (between £121 million and £177 million)

**25%**   
of global revenue per year

**81%**   
of companies anticipate a rise in employee activism in the future

**59%**   
of those in Asia expect this increase to be significant

**AI and automation (identified by 57%) and surveillance or monitoring of employees (50%) are key triggers of activism**

Values are becoming a significant trigger for activism, including **CSR/environmental issues/climate change (46%)** and **lack of diversity (45%)**

**84%**   
of those in banking and **86%** in pharmaceuticals/healthcare expect a rise in employee activism

**86%**   
of companies with annual revenue of £1 billion or more predict an increase in internal complaints and grievances and **74%** see **more digital petitions ahead**

**But large companies see pay and benefits (57%) and the status of casual workers (54%) as significant triggers of activism**

**77%**   
expect to see **more crowdfunded legal challenges**

**83%**   
foresee an increase in activism among casual workers in the future

**95%**   
envisage a rise in employees making their voices heard via social media over the next 5 years

**59%**   
of mining companies expect a **significant rise** among casual workers



**55%** of respondents name workforce actions as **a potential risk to reputation**, only exceeded by cyber threats and economic recession

**49%** see activism as a **positive force for change** 



**48%** choose to engage with employees **only through external channels**, rather than use an internal forum