According to Gartner, by 2025 at least two of the top 10 global retailers will establish robot resource organisations to manage nonhuman workers, as new digital technologies and ever-changing customer expectations force the introduction of technologies such as AI, automation and robotics.

The analyst says 77% of retailers plan to deploy AI by 2021, with the top use case being the deployment of robotics for warehouse picking. Warehouse picking involves smart robots working independently or alongside humans. In the future, retailers will establish units within the organisation to procure, maintain, train, tax, decommission and dispose of robot resources, as well as create the governance required to ensure people and robots collaborate effectively.

Many retail workers want to use AI as an on-demand or predictive assistance, meaning robots will need to work alongside-- or "mesh"-- with the human team. In other words, both humans and robots will need to learn how to "collaborate" in order to operate effectively together. For example, an autonomous robotic kitchen worker must learn the specific recipes of the operator, and prepare them accordingly. In turn, the operators are adapting to changing consumer tastes.

Of course, choosing the right candidate-- be they human or machine-- for the job is critical. Gartner says HR, IT and line-of-business hiring managers must identify the right skills required to ensure the pair works together well. Retail CIOs must provide ongoing maintenance and monitor performance. After all, if not effective the team will prove counterproductive and lead to

a bad customer experience.

The introduction of AI and robotics is, however, likely to bring fear and anxiety among the workforce, especially among part-time workers. Retail CIOs must work with HR and business leaders to address and manage employee skills and concerns, and change their mindset around the development of robot resource units.

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