

How women's hard-hitting soft skills can protect them from automation

By [Tricia Jones](#)

27 Aug 2019

Skills that women bring to the table, once called soft skills, are now recognised as both profitable and essential. It is critical, then, to consider the impact of the fourth industrial revolution on women in the workplace. How will the accelerating pace of technological change affect what roles women can play in the economy, politics, and society?



By the year 2030, approximately 400 – 800 million individuals could be retrenched because of automation. This scary statistic is according to a [2017 McKinsey Global Institute report](#). Although only 11% of millennial women rank automation as the biggest threat to their career, it is clearly a technical development that can pose challenges in the future.

Leading the way

Fortunately for the female workforce, their often-overlooked soft skills may be their most potent professional armour that will protect them against unemployment. A study showed that “women more effectively employ the emotional and social competencies correlated with effective leadership and management than men...” (Source: [Workforce.com](#)).

Similarly, in an article by [Forbes](#), diversity consultant Jennifer Brown aptly describes the skill sets acquired by women as they progress through their careers: “Women learn to do more with less; they are resourceful and develop a unique political awareness. These factors equip women to navigate through rocky waters, build the right alliances and relationships, and seize strategic opportunities.” Brown’s description familiarly evoked what many innovation practitioners refer to as ‘human-centred design’.

Businesses benefit from equality

A vital characteristic of design thinking is the ability to observe and listen, gather ideas from several viewpoints, and then synthesise ideas into offerings – all of which are traditionally attributed to female work styles. Not only that, but a collaborative work style is another (generally) female trait that is often undervalued, but of key importance in the workplace. While these traits are conducive to teamwork and a holistic view of problems and opportunities, they are also particularly integral to the innovation process.

[A study from Harvard Kennedy School](#) found that teams with lower percentages of women also have lower sales and profits compared to teams with a balanced gender mix. In conjunction with this, having more women in the workplace is associated with positive organisational outcomes for both men and women.

This study found that having more women in the workplace actually makes an organisation a better place to work. Having a higher percentage of female talent in an organisation predicted:

- More job satisfaction;
- More organisational dedication;
- More meaningful work; and
- Less burnout.

Gender diversity provides immense value for businesses. Whether it's helping to advance knowledge, increase profits, grow the economy, or enhance a company's reputation. By becoming more inclusive, companies can take advantage of the 'human-centred' skillset and design thinking that make women a powerhouse during the fourth industrial revolution.

If you find this topic interesting, join me at the HR and L&D Innovation and Tech Fest 2019, taking place from the 26th – 27th August. During my sessions, I'll share even more insights about this topic. I will also be sharing tools and processes with a focus on the employee experience aimed to help achieve strategic business goals through enabling high performance.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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