

Elevating Human Skills in the Age of AI

How to Close Critical Skill Gaps to Future-Proof Your Teams

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The Human Edge in an Automated World

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming industries, automating tasks, and reshaping the way we work. **McKinsey** forecasts that by 2030, activities accounting for up to 30% of hours currently worked across the U.S. economy could be automated—a trend accelerated by the rise of generative AI.

But even as AI redefines efficiency, it cannot replace the qualities that make us human, like communication, collaboration, connection, creativity, ethical judgment, and leadership. In fact, organizations are beginning to recognize that the skills most essential for success in an AI-driven world are not technical, but human.

Consider this: **89% of new hires fail** because of attitude, while only 11% fail due to a lack of technical skills, according to Leadership IQ. Leaders who want to engage their teams and close crucial gaps in the wake of AI will need to lean into developing the skills that set us apart from machines and that enable us to more effectively leverage technological capabilities together.

In a workplace where technology handles the routine, your team will thrive because they bring creativity, discernment, and clear communication to every interaction. These are the skills no algorithm can replace. While AI is undoubtedly powerful, distinctly human strengths like inspiration, trust, and creative collaboration must come into play as technology shifts the way we work. And it's up to today's leaders to empower their direct reports to further develop the mindsets and skillsets to close the gaps that AI won't fill.



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The Changing Landscape of Work

What AI Can (and Cannot) Do

According to **FranklinCovey Institute data**, 70% of employees say AI and technology are evolving faster than their cultures can adapt. Artificial intelligence excels at automating repetitive, rules-based tasks, analyzing vast amounts of data, and fulfilling even complex goals and deliverables. AI is undoubtedly powerful: **Gartner** predicts that by 2029, AI agents will autonomously manage up to 80% of customer service requests. And according to **McKinsey data**, 78% of organizations now say they're using AI for at least one business function.

Yet, AI has clear limitations. AI cannot build relationships, exercise ethical judgment, ideate something completely new, or demonstrate true understanding of others' experiences. It cannot inspire a team, navigate interpersonal dynamics, or lead with integrity. These are human capabilities that are uniquely valuable in a world where technology can do so much but understand so little.

Takeaway: AI can streamline workflows and analyze data, but it can't replace human connection and innovation.



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The Rise of Human-Centric Competencies

Organizations that succeed in an AI-driven world will not simply be those with the most cutting-edge technology. They will be those with the most adaptable and collaborative teams. This means cultivating skills that cannot be coded, like trust-building, conflict resolution, and strategic thinking.

The World Economic Forum's **Future of Jobs Report** identifies critical skills for the future, which include analytical thinking, communication, and leadership. These so-called "soft skills" are actually essential, with **Deloitte** reporting that 92% of companies rank human capabilities as being as important as, or more important than, technical skills in the current business world.

What's more, leveraging necessary technical skills will require an emphasis on human skill development. Research from **IBM** shows that more than 120 million workers worldwide will need retraining in the next three years due to AI and automation, but mastering the technical side is only part of the puzzle. The work of where and how to apply AI and other emerging technologies will be a uniquely human endeavor.

Takeaway: Organizations now have access to the same technology and even the same strategies. It's their people who determine whether outcomes are successful.



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Personal Productivity and Effectiveness



Own Your Time and Energy

In a world flooded with information, managing your time and energy, and ensuring your team does the same, is more important than ever. As AI takes on more routine tasks, leaders and teams must focus on what truly drives impact.

The solution is surprisingly simple: To be more effective, prioritize your most high-impact activities.

However, this isn't something you can simply automate. In that sense, this solution isn't as simple to put into action. AI can automate rote tasks, but it can't reason or discern why one task should take priority over another at any given moment. While leaders can leverage automation tools to streamline their daily workflow, they also need to show up with a clear sense of where their efforts will make the most impact. This means defining a vision and prioritizing what truly matters to ensure teams are aligned around that vision and have the tools they need to effectively prioritize their work.

Takeaway: AI can manage tasks, but only you can manage focus and energy.

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Embrace a Purpose-Driven Focus

Time and energy are best managed when aligned with purpose, not just with a list of duties. In the age of AI, purpose is more important than ever. According to research by **Gallup**, employees who use their strengths daily are six times more likely to be engaged at work. By connecting your team's behaviors and contributions to the organization's mission, values, and key initiatives, you can fuel their sense of purpose at a time when disconnection and over-reliance on technology are running rampant.

As automation handles more repetitive tasks, human effort flourishes in an environment where there is a mission and there's a shared sense that the mission matters. When you focus on the wildly important—those few critical tasks that require intense effort to accomplish outside the daily whirlwind of operations—leaders and teams create the focus necessary for human ingenuity to flourish.

But to determine what's most important, you need a plan for success. Beginning with an end point in mind allows us to visualize where we are currently and where we want to go. When you know where you're headed, it becomes easier to make purposeful decisions and execute on the purpose-driven priorities that support that ultimate vision.

Although this vision may shift as circumstances evolve, this purpose-driven focus will act as your North Star; even as conditions around you evolve, you'll still have a clear vision of where you want to end up.

Takeaway: While AI can automate your workflow, your purpose helps define why it all matters.



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Cultivate Agility by Building Self-Trust

Trust is foundational to success in an unpredictable world. But to build trust in our interpersonal relationships and acquire the agility to respond to disruption, we must first foster self-trust. Self-trust is different from self-confidence: It's about knowing you can rely on yourself—not just to achieve your objectives but to maintain your principles and mission, and to operate with character.

You can earn self-trust by achieving "private victories" like taking ownership of your choices, rather than merely reacting to circumstances, and ensuring your actions align with your values and goals. As you build focus and prioritize what matters most, you'll also build self-trust by proactively establishing a vision and engaging in the most impactful behaviors that support that mission, showcasing your ability to effectively see things through and lead with your values.

These habits create self-trust because they build a track record of reliable action. When you trust yourself, you can make quick decisions, adapt to change, and seize opportunities even when conditions are uncertain. And the more you trust yourself and demonstrate high-trust behaviors, the more effectively you'll be able to build trust and promote agility in your team.

According to the **LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report**, 91% of executives say soft skills like adaptability and self-awareness are more important today than ever before. In this way, self-trust becomes an invaluable tool with which to confront and embrace AI.

Takeaway: Adaptability, trust, and self-awareness can't be replicated by a machine; these skills can help you take full advantage of what technology can do.



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Strategic Execution and Focus

Align Teams With Strategy Amid Automated Workflows

In a world where AI can perform complex, rules-based tasks with speed and precision, the human role in strategy execution becomes even more critical. To achieve breakthrough results, organizations must focus on behaviors that drive results, rather than just reacting to outcomes.

That requires leaders to look to the right performance metrics to influence results. Lead measures are the high-impact actions within your control that directly influence your most important goals. Whereas lag measures (like revenue or market share) show results after the fact, lead measures are proactive and predict success. For example, within a sales team, revenue is a lag measure, while the number of quality customer follow-ups each week might be an important lead measure.

Takeaway: Automated workflows can free up time, but the behavior change required to achieve lead measures is distinctly human—and it's crucial for breakthrough results.



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Harness Execution-Focused Communication

Effective communication is not just about exchanging information; it's about achieving clarity and alignment. When team members seek to understand others in their interactions, they learn to decode the nuance and intention that AI cannot replicate.

And for leaders, 1-on-1 and team meetings are essential in fostering alignment and trust. These structured conversations can enable leaders and team members to align on priorities, provide feedback, and strengthen relationships to improve cohesion and results.

Takeaway: Without emotional buy-in, AI-produced outputs are merely data points.

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Innovate Through Human Synergy

Creativity and innovation are distinctively human capabilities. After all, AI can't actually conceive original ideas, but your employees can. When teams synergize, they leverage their different perspectives and ways of working for improved creativity, collaboration, and innovation.

Strategy execution depends on people who are clear about their goals, aligned in their efforts, and committed to making an impact. Plans transform into action when teams focus on lead measures, maintain accountability, and foster innovation through human synergy.

Takeaway: AI can simplify processes, but it cannot create, communicate, or adapt based on real-life experiences.



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Trust and Transparency

Trust as the Currency of Transformation

In a rapidly changing world, trust is among our most valuable commodities. Trust is the foundation of successful change, underpinned by integrity, intent, capabilities, and results.

But trust is also hard to come by in our uncertain reality. The **2025 Edelman Trust Barometer**, an annual global report that measures public trust in a variety of institutions, reveals that our collective trust in government agencies, the media, and our employers has hit new lows across the board. **FranklinCovey Institute data** also reflects the widespread trust problem: Two-thirds of employees have low trust in today's leaders overall, with 42% of employees viewing their own leaders as trusted.

Emerging technologies have a trust problem, too. From disinformation to deepfakes, it's no wonder that **75% of Americans surveyed** in one recent study said they can trust AI-generated information only "some of the time" or "hardly ever."

When disengagement and skepticism reign, it's crucial for leaders to lean into trust-building practices with their teams. Trust accelerates execution and reduces costs, which is reflected in a concept we refer to as "Trust Dividends." Companies with high-trust cultures consistently outperform their peers, achieving 286% higher stock price growth, according to **Forbes and Harvard Business Review**. Additionally, **FranklinCovey Institute data** finds that high-trust organizations experience 260% higher motivation, 50% lower turnover, and 8.5 times more revenue per employee compared to low-trust organizations.

Integrity is essential for the ethical use of AI. Without clear principles, AI can introduce risks, such as legal liability, privacy breaches, and compliance issues. Organizations that prioritize ethical AI use and openly communicate their intentions maintain credibility with employees and customers.

But it's also necessary for leaders to actively demonstrate high-trust behaviors with their direct reports and enable team members to build trust in interactions with each other. Teams that trust one another will communicate openly, resolve conflicts quickly, and efficiently adapt to new challenges. In contrast, low-trust cultures are marked by fear, confusion, and wasted time.

As AI becomes more inescapable and collective trust continues to dwindle, organizations that can leverage technology without losing sight of what makes them human will prevail.

Takeaway: Trust accelerates everything, and trust-building is a distinctly human practice.

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People-Centered Change Leadership

Leading change is not just about data or technology; it's about people. Effective change leadership requires compassion, clear narratives, and an active presence. People need to understand not just what's changing, but why.

McKinsey research shows that **70% of organizational transformations** fail. But that failure isn't because of the strategy or the technology. It's because they've forgotten about their people. Successful leaders can avoid these outcomes by ensuring their approach is people-centered—by creating a sense of shared purpose, providing ongoing support, and ensuring their teams have the tools they need to successfully navigate change.

Win-win thinking is a critical mindset for change leadership. This mindset of abundance ensures that change benefits people, rather than just the bottom line. Leaders who help teams see how they will grow and benefit from change will build resilience and engagement.

Takeaway: It's not your processes but your people who truly facilitate change.

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Humanity Is the Ultimate Competitive Advantage

As technological acceleration reshapes the workplace, one truth stands out: The future of work will belong to those who understand people.

While AI transforms how we work, it cannot replace trust, connection, creativity, and principled self-leadership. These are not auxiliary traits; they are the very foundation of thriving organizations. As AI advances, people skills are the most strategic capabilities we can cultivate.

To lead in this new era, we must be intentional about aligning our time and energy with purpose, values, and high-impact goals. As automation liberates us from mundane tasks, we must elevate our expectations, both for what we do and for who we become. When leaders create clarity, prioritize what matters most, and emphasize the importance of personal effectiveness and interpersonal skill development, their teams can contribute at their highest level.

Organizations that embrace this shift by investing in the human skills that foster trust, inspire action, and fuel innovation will be the ones that turn disruption into growth, reimagining work in ways that center on human excellence.

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