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WITHYOUWITHME

Being
human

in an AI world

Why diversity in the workforce is a strategic imperative for the future of work

Written by

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From the Author

My name is Sally Walker.

I used to be an intelligence officer. My job, at its core, involved the processing of vast amounts of data in pursuit of national security, the safety of our citizens and allies, and delivery of economic wellbeing.

I spent 25 years in a job that I loved. I was the diversity champion in one of the intelligence agencies for more than a decade. I finished as the Director of the UK's cyber operations.

I left government service with the opportunity for reflection compounded by a covid lockdown. And I got asked a lot what I was doing. To which the answer was 'less than I used to'. But I did consume data, learn, think a lot, and pivot towards the commercial world to reframe their challenges around information and decision making and human potential.

Which brings me here...

As is tradition, I could offer you a longer summation of my CV. I could go with the counter cultural 'mum of 3 boys, or wife of engineer' that features more in my world than I previously had the opportunity to enjoy.

It would be, as CV's are, a condensed curation of interesting things I have done. It would, lets be honest, tell you precisely nothing about who I am, how I think, what I value, or what potential I have for the future.

Whether you are new in your career, or mid-career and thinking about change, or end career thinking about your legacy and what's next, I hope this paper talks to you.

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Keen to learn more about Sally?

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The immense value of the human brain, and our human resource.

Why, precisely, do we place so much weight and value on a couple of pages of A4 in eliminating talent from the pipeline, removing capable brains from the recruitment process? Why are we still talking about individuals when we know we need teams?

Why are we talking about previous achievements when we know we need to focus on the future? About job descriptions when we need to deal with immense and complex problems that change day by day? And when we talk about diversity, why is tech seen as a replacement to human endeavour in the name of efficiency and 'more doing', instead of a partner to human endeavour in the name of value creation and 'better thinking'?

Why aren't we having a conversation about the opportunity from a blended approach to human and technical intelligence, to deliver a better, safer, more sustainable world?

I am struck by the consistency of the messaging around the world.

- We have a skills shortage. We are short of trained valuable humans. And as a result businesses around the world are failing to deliver their full potential, failing to manage risk effectively, failing to grow.

- Tech offers us huge opportunity, but is exacerbating the crisis.

- We are changing the world of work but our employees are not keeping up. We're retooling and reshaping roles with alarming regularity, but our educational processes and learning remains remarkably familiar to those of us who went through school in the last century.

- And then from the individual, a sense of fear and trepidation, sometimes around global stability, but more often around individual sense of value, contribution and purpose.

Which is a long way of saying **'is AI is going to take my job?'**

Lets start with how we **define** the job...

This paper explores my thinking on the topic of future-proofing workforces in the age of AI. It's an area that I – and the entire team at *WithYouWithMe* – are deeply passionate about.

Have a read but most important, have a think about how this will apply to your own workforce, your own role.

– Sally Walker

Get the work done
Humans as Resources

CEOs, from all lines of business, are lamenting the skills shortage in the tech sector. World Economic Forum data was cited at an AI conference in London last year; a global digital skills gap of 85 million personnel by the year 2030.

Most nations report skills shortages despite the investment in the tech sector. An analysis of the Australian census and labor force data published this summer found:

- There are a remarkably precisely 11,387 cyber security workers in the entire country

- There is just one cyber security professional for every 240 Australian businesses.

Of course the skills gap, or skills lag, isn't just a tech sector problem, and the skills shortage is not confined to one region or industry. It's a global phenomenon, affecting everything from information technology and healthcare to education and manufacturing.

Cyber literacy, managing data effectively and protecting digital assets, is becoming a must-have skill for every worker in the digital age, regardless of occupation.
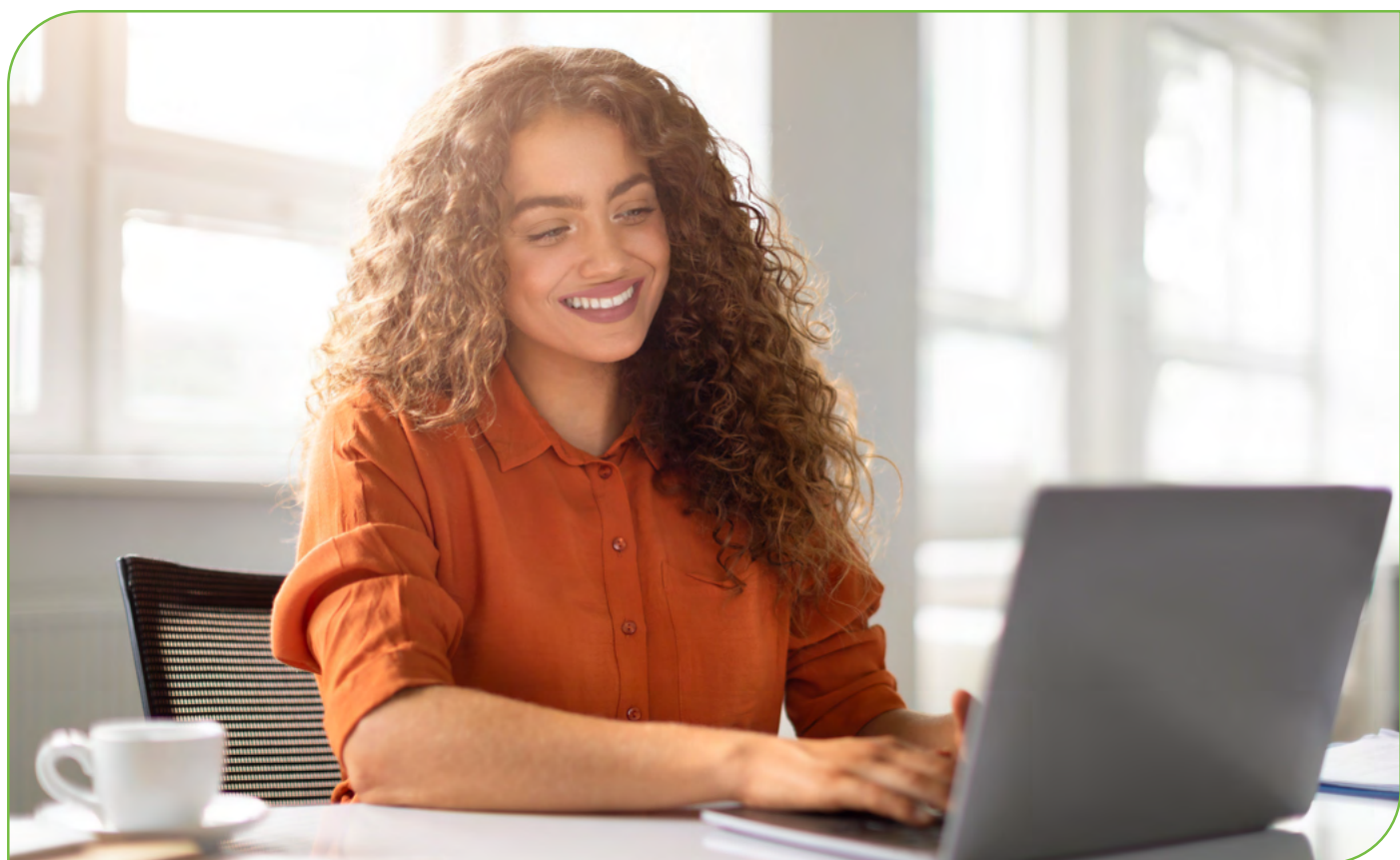
The driving *forces*

What has caused this imbalance between supply and demand?

First, technological advancements are reshaping industries faster than ever before. Automation, artificial intelligence, and data analytics are transforming the way we work. While these innovations create new opportunities, they also displace existing jobs, leaving many workers struggling to adapt. The demand for tech-savvy professionals is surging, while the supply of individuals with these specialized skills remains low.

Second, we are facing demographic shifts. Many advanced economies are grappling with aging populations. At the same time, in many developing countries, populations are growing, but young people are entering the workforce without access to the quality education and training needed for modern jobs.

Additionally, education systems around the world have been slow to adapt to the changing demands of the workforce. Too many curricula are still geared toward skills of the past rather than preparing students for the jobs of tomorrow. This mismatch leaves millions without the skills that employers need and value.

And finally, we still don't have the flexibility we need to match the requirements of all individuals to all roles, instead parcelling up task lists and geographical expectations and blocks of time into a fixed job definition.

We then look puzzled when the stay at home parent, or the neurodiverse learner, or the front line emergency worker, the school leaver, the PhD without practical experience and the refugee haven't applied. The parcelling of tasks in time and skills doesn't match to the shape of the people who might be well placed to help.

It's a square peg round hole problem, and it has existed since work began

My provocation to you is that this huge gap is something we are choosing to reinforce by outdated and inadequate management practices, in the interests of speed, efficiency and simplicity. We view humans as resources, not as resourceful.

GCHQ in Bletchley, England

There is a *better way*

■ **The framing of 'the job' can be done differently.**

When we built the National Cyber Force in the UK, the supposed cyber 'talent' had been stripped out to man the National Cyber Security Centre that stood up at the same time, with a significantly more prominent public profile. The well was, technically, dry – no more PhD's in cyberness.

We could have stopped there. Instead, we asked for help. And we found significant numbers of personnel with uniquely curious and capable brains from all walks of life, who were more than up to the job. Some did it differently, some did it in ways that had not previously been contemplated. They didn't have the qualifications, but they did have the qualities that were needed.

■ **The framing of 'the problem' can be done to inspire with possibility, not to close with challenge.**

A colleague once described their summer intern programme – where they gave the kids a really difficult problem to fix by the end of the summer. What the organisers

neglected to mention was that the challenge had previously been ruled 'too difficult' by the great minds that had gone before them.

Missing that vital framing, each and every year a group of "technically" unqualified personnel solved the problem. Why did they succeed where others had failed? – because they thought that is what they were there to do...

To move from humans as resources to resourceful humans, we need to stop the limiting practices in hiring (CVs, takeaway menus of barely credible combinations of experience, reductive processes to 'find the best'). It is incumbent on organisations to find the best possible pool of diverse talent to solve their most taxing problems of tomorrow, rather than the best possible person to do the job of today.

Bring the tech to decision making
Human as consumers

As we contemplate an AI dominant world, and think about the further impact of technology on the workforce of the future, it's worth pausing to reflect on how much, and how little, we know about our own brilliant black boxes – the most powerful supercomputer on earth – the human brain.

How the brain processes information and reaches conclusions—remains largely mysterious. Despite significant advances in neuroscience and psychology, our understanding of the brain's inner workings is still limited in many respects. We made around 35,000 remotely conscious decisions each day. The technology, time and talent that goes into researching how to influence our retail decisions is extraordinary.

Do me a favour and close your eyes. Imagine your local supermarket.
As we walk around our supermarkets and fulfil our online browsing or shopping habits, an extraordinary amount of time

tech and talent is watching us, processing our decision making, and learning from us. For a population who are conscious of our privacy and security, we accept an extraordinary level of intrusion into our lives in the name of commerce and convenience. One for another day.

A CEO of a retail company recently described their day to day existence in a world of online consumer data. The options to determine every aspect of their customers' lives; socio economic status, relationships, interests, which part of a web site holds their attention, when and why they lose focus or get distracted. Even what times of day and what colour schemes are most likely to encourage customers to open their wallets and make a purchase.

We know, from Harvard Business School research, that emotional factors heavily

influence consumer behavior, especially in purchasing contexts. And we mobilise tech to influence that context and those decisions

That same CEO also described a world where the job had become about "gaming the algorithms" to expand their markets; of determining when and where search and reward mechanisms run by massive global corporates were helping a reasonably sized but local outfit to deliver on business objectives – and, lets be clear, where the same AI returned data that simply wasn't a true reflection of the real world. Whether that was black boxes that claimed ficticious levels of sales through referral engines, or identification of 'people' that didn't exist. Gaming the algorithm. That's the job. Isn't that depressing?

This is the world of humans as consumers in an AI dominant world; where data loses much meaning beyond the numbers, where we freely gift ourselves, our data, our identity, into the ether without question, where success is the prize of 'efficiency', namely a more quick and convenient process of meeting needs and wants. Where a business is driven primarily by cost, less by value.

We are so much more than consumers – organisations need to start valuing their human asset base (and investing in it) as much as their financial asset register. Then tech becomes part of the solution, rather than contributing to the challenge.

Humans as creators
Working in partnership with tech helping us

Imagine if that technology, became part of the solution to value creation, not resource consumption? Where it drove learning and decision making to improve us, not to sell to us?

Imagine a world where:

■ Tech was being used to help us identify where and when our brains are most useful.

■ Moving to 'what do you know' and away from the tests of what you have forgotten, or not yet assimilated.

■ All that power of tech to ensure we optimise teaching, training, skills retention.

■ All that tracking to ensure we have career pathways, and can navigate our own futures with the support and influence currently used to ensure we navigate the corridors of the supermarket...

Close your eyes again, and visualise your career journey for me. Anyone got clarity? Was anyone supporting you as you made those life changing decisions and choices? Anyone have tech on their team as they navigated their way forward?

It can be done.

But to achieve this goal. Employers need to invest in their workforce, not only

through on-the-job training but by forging partnerships with educational institutions to ensure that the skills being taught are relevant. Forward-thinking companies are already doing this—by offering internships, mentorship programs, and lifelong learning initiatives, and by developing a framework of skills to manage their current and future workforces —but we need to see these efforts scale across industries and geographies.

Furthermore, education systems need an overhaul. We need to rethink how we teach and what we teach. Critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence must take centre stage alongside technical and digital skills.

It's no longer enough to simply learn facts—we need to teach our children how to learn, how to adapt, and how to innovate. We need our children to understand their brain as well as the tech; to develop their insight into motivation, attention, aptitude and potential. Never mind using the neuroscience to build META marketing revenues, lets use it to educate ourselves, and to understand the role of emotion in skills development decisions as well as we do in purchasing decisions;

Lastly, individuals themselves must take responsibility for their own lifelong learning. In today's world, education doesn't stop at graduation. We must foster a culture of

continuous improvement, where people are empowered to retool their skills as industries and technologies evolve – and critically, where the tech itself is being built to support people in their career journey.

Lets move the dial on the number of decisions we make each day around our own training and career development, and help people understand how to help themselves? Then the tech will genuinely be part of the partnership moving the human race forward – not just to consume more or differently, but to create more.

If we can design supermarkets to influence our shopping choices, and use the power of the digitally connected world to understand the hover time on a pixel on a screen, surely we can ensure we move from a transactional approach to humans as a resource, apply the research and tech beyond humans as consumers, and treat humans as the powerful value creator that we all have the capacity to be.

That would be a world where we value future *Potential* over past experience.

We would move from 'We have a skills shortage' to **'Our talent pool will usually be good enough, if not more than fit for the task in hand'.**

From 'Tech is exacerbating the crisis', to **'Tech being a partner on the team that offers unique insight and personalised support to life long learning and realisation of human potential.'**

And the individual, with a sense of opportunity and value, can celebrate what they can do, and where they can add value, and **truly be their best for as long as possible, in whatever walk of life most interests them.**

So much potential.

I am no longer an intelligence officer. But I still believe, passionately, in human intelligence, and in building technical

capability that helps us to be our very best on behalf of the next generations, on behalf of those less privileged than us, to improve the opportunity for those huge and extraordinary and diverse untapped pools of human potential.

Lets demand more, get curious, celebrate learning and thinking, take time to develop our skills, maximise our ability, and use the tech to make the world a better place.

The future belongs to the curious.

Supporting
the workforce
with agile talent

To build a strong, future-ready team, we must look beyond just technical skills. Employment should focus on individuals who can bring diverse perspectives and new ideas to solve complex problems.

Looking to the wider employment ecosystem, how do we:

- Recruit to the team

- Move from training, to learning

- Bring in new ideas to solve the hardest problems,

- Stress test our thinking to the point of being truly match fit.

Mobilising diverse perspectives and new ideas

WithYouWithMe is a global tech company that helps organisations fully utilise their workforces, by perpetually evolving the skills they have into the skills they need. We are driven by a simple belief: **that when an individual's career aspirations are aligned with organisational goals, both will thrive.**

Drawing on this philosophy, our proprietary employee activation software and talent creation services help organisations around the world to cultivate skilled workforces that are always prepared, fit for purpose and inclusive.

Our software platform maps and manages an organisation's workforce skills, capturing the current capabilities and future potential of employees against the needs of the organisation.

It's skills-based employment but with a twist.

We take someone's skills profile and enrich it with innovative psychometric and cognitive insights to create a holistic view of where they are now – and where they could go next.

Our tech makes these insights actionable across the end-to-end talent life-cycle – motivating people to continuously grow in the direction a company needs.

We call it 'employee activation'. It's how you get the most out of your people, and people get the best opportunity to succeed.

Find out more   **withyouwithme.com**