

Why hospitality skills can help all businesses adapt to the AI revolution

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The future of work is being rewritten by artificial intelligence (AI) – but technology competence alone will not be enough to empower the workforce of the future. While AI has massive potential to improve efficiency, accuracy and productivity in the workplace, it's less clear how it will evolve to foster the person-centred concerns that all businesses face.

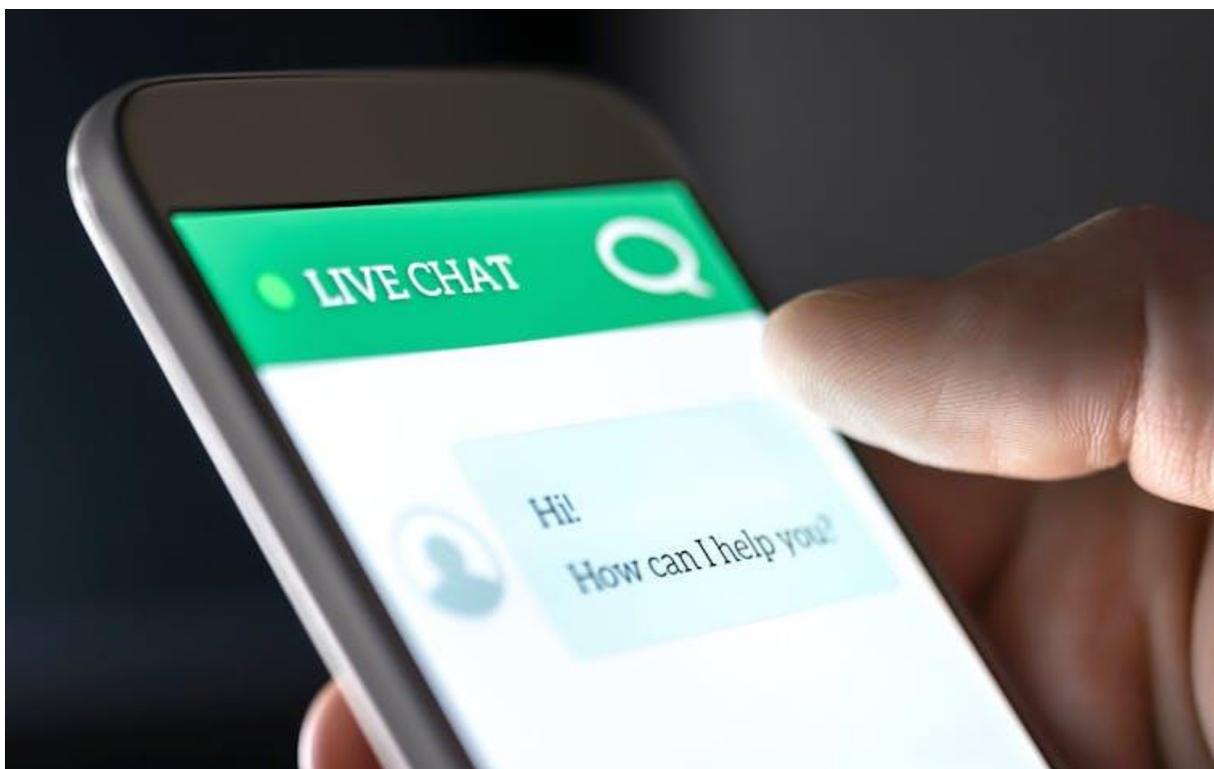
The human-centred skills found in the [hospitality sector](#) (empathy, creativity, adaptability, kindness, resilience and cultural intelligence) have been shown to be [strategic assets](#) in AI deployment in the workplace – things like chatbots or virtual assistants. They also remain the hardest skills to replicate in and by AI.

These qualities are not just soft skills – they should be at the heart of all customer service businesses. They enable employees to turn routine interactions into memorable experiences through emotional connection and the anticipation of customers' needs. For now at least, AI is ill-equipped to manage this.

These hospitality skills matter for all businesses – not just those in the sector. In a world of evolving AI, they can help organisations ensure that the human touch is not lost. And investing in these skills can also drive profitability.

The UK hospitality sector leads the [Social Productivity Index](#), a metric that measures the broader social value of industries beyond just how much revenue they make. Hospitality is the third-largest employer in the UK and the top employer of under-25s, part-time workers and minority groups. It also contributes [£93 billion](#) to the UK economy annually, accounting for 3% of GDP.

As such, investing in hospitality skills is critical to driving economic growth and building more resilient, people-centred workplaces. These skills are essential for things like creating a welcoming environment or navigating complex and changing business demands. There is a need for all businesses to prioritise these skills alongside their use of AI.



Efficient... but impersonal. [Tero Vesalainen/Shutterstock](#)

By 2030, industries such as [banking](#), healthcare and retail are expected to rely heavily on agentic AI (those systems that can solve complex problems in real time) to interact with customers. These industries lean heavily on efficiency, compliance and product knowledge – which are important – but they leave little room for genuine [emotional engagement](#).

Many businesses are using chatbots and virtual concierges to resolve customers' problems. Hospitality skills can help to determine which customer concerns can be dealt with by AI and which need to have the human touch. Similarly, AI can manage staff and rotas, but it cannot judge uncertainty or consider the impact of decisions on staff.

Hospitality comes into its own in terms of personalisation and [cultural sensitivity](#). These skills are not just add-ons; rather they are the glue that holds great customer experiences together. Multilingual greetings, tailoring menus to cultural norms, spotting unspoken needs and other small touches all [build loyalty](#).

Good hospitality professionals do not just serve, they anticipate, adapt and make people feel seen. [Emotional intelligence](#) and emotional labour are [embedded into hospitality roles](#), with staff trained to manage emotions and respond with empathy.

The ‘what’ and the ‘why’ of business

In an era where technology handles the “what”, hospitality skills can deliver the “why” – that is, the meaning behind the interaction. And when transferred to sectors that also rely heavily on these strengths, [such as healthcare](#), hospitality skills can provide great opportunities for career change or progression.

We suggest three ways organisations can embrace hospitality skills alongside AI to future-proof their talent pool.

First, staff training should be designed to combine both AI knowledge and the deep connectivity of hospitality skills. This training should encompass how businesses expect staff to engage with AI, as well as how hospitality skills can be fused to support and enhance their customers’ experience.

While AI can process data and do transactions, it cannot truly care, comfort or create trust. These are crucial measures in ensuring that the human element does not fade into the background.

Second, by investing in hospitality skills, businesses can concentrate more effectively on the customer journey and improve the efficiency of their service. For example, while AI can provide prompts on what to say, it cannot offer genuine comfort to a dissatisfied customer. Hospitality skills are essential to deliver those messages effectively and with care.

These skills help businesses to understand customer management, flow and touchpoints (points of interaction). This in turn strengthens the connection between AI and the customer experience as they interact to deliver a warm welcome.

Third, in developing AI for business use, hospitality skills will become core to the training process in order to improve the customer experience. This kind of hospitality training can transform business services from being standardised and short-termist to those that focus on building a lasting relationship with the customer.

For example, using banking apps, customers receive automatic suggestions on loans, mortgage updates or new accounts. But it is the staff’s hospitality skills that ensure these recommendations are presented with warmth and a genuine understanding of

customers' needs. This delivers experiences using AI but also conveys personalised customer service.

Businesses that engage with hospitality skills will not only navigate the AI revolution, but lead it. By combining AI-driven efficiency with the kind of skills that encourage genuine human connection, they can deliver streamlined services while making customers feel valued. In other words, technology can enhance, not replace, the human touch.

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