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Boosting human skills to succeed in an AI world

As humans, we need to power up key capabilities and connections – now more than ever.

Introduction

Technology, including AI automation and augmentation, is already reshaping how organisations get work done. Business leaders need to prepare their workforce for major changes and disruptions in the nature of work – what it is, how it's done, the skills and capabilities needed.

In the post-pandemic and hybrid-working world, authenticity, purpose, compassion, and connection have emerged as critical factors in employee engagement, well-being, innovation, agility and organisational success.

Boosting human skills and capabilities is more important, not less –social-creative and interpersonal abilities are crucial for thriving in an AI world, and for tackling increasingly complex problems.



Technology is transforming how businesses succeed – but AI is only part of a bigger story

AI is already impacting how L&D teams work in a variety of ways and often not strategically

Driving more content is counterproductive if you really want to shift behaviour

The smart move is to leverage technology to power human skills to the next level

To thrive, humans need to be even more human, with ourselves and with each other

When we are connected to each other, a wider purpose, and ourselves we are better able to navigate the inherently uncertain world we occupy.

To thrive, we need to be even more human.

What are the key human skills and capabilities and how can we power them to the next level?

Read on to discover...

- What ‘human skills and capabilities’ are
- The top 12 human capabilities – according to the latest insight and evidence
- Seven factors to optimise ‘human learning’ – our RESPECT model⁴. Examples of how top organisations are responding to the challenge

“Connection is the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard and valued; when they give and receive without judgement; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.”



Brene Brown


What are ‘human skills & capabilities’

Human capabilities are what makes us unique - how we are, how we think, how we relate to each other.

Human skills and capabilities are extraordinary. They help us be at our best in many different contexts and are not specific to any job or organisation. They can be valuable outside of work too! We consider ‘soft skills’ to be a subset of human skills.

In comparison, technical skills are job-specific knowledge and capabilities. They tend to focus on knowledge and expertise, enabling employees to perform core tasks and meet the performance requirements associated with a particular role and/organisation. Examples might be programming, engineering, accounting.

Whilst human skills and technical skills are both important in the workplace, they serve a different purpose and are often developed in different ways.



“People with strong human skills can form deeper connections with colleagues and customers. This ultimately serves as a strong foundation for positive workplace performance... and are crucial for a more adaptive, inclusive and digital future.”

Harvard Business School

The term **'capability'** is literally a combination of **'capacity'** and **'ability'**.

Add confidence into the equation and you're away!

**Capability =
capacity
+ ability (skills)
+ confidence**

What's the difference between skills & capabilities?

Skills are the building blocks, which combine into higher order capabilities. For example, rapport building, active listening, and summarising are three of the skills which combine to help develop a coaching capability.

To build and sustain capability you need enough of all three. Learning to drive is a capability and requires plenty of capacity (time and thinking space) especially at the start to build your many skills and confidence safely.

Capabilities only come to life when you use them, practice and refine them. Reading an article about presenting doesn't mean you are a skilled presenter. It takes time and space as well as the opportunity to learn from practice, experience, and progress.

The 12 top human capabilities

As humans, we have the unique ability to think like humans, connect like humans, and meet our human needs – but what are the specific skills and capabilities we really need?

The Hemsley Insights Group (a team of external L&D practitioners, clients, and internal learning experts) reviewed the latest evidence from research and L&D best practice and identified our top 12 human capabilities with 3-4 key skills associated with each.

Our framework deliberately covers four perspectives which together form the human experience in organisations – represented here.

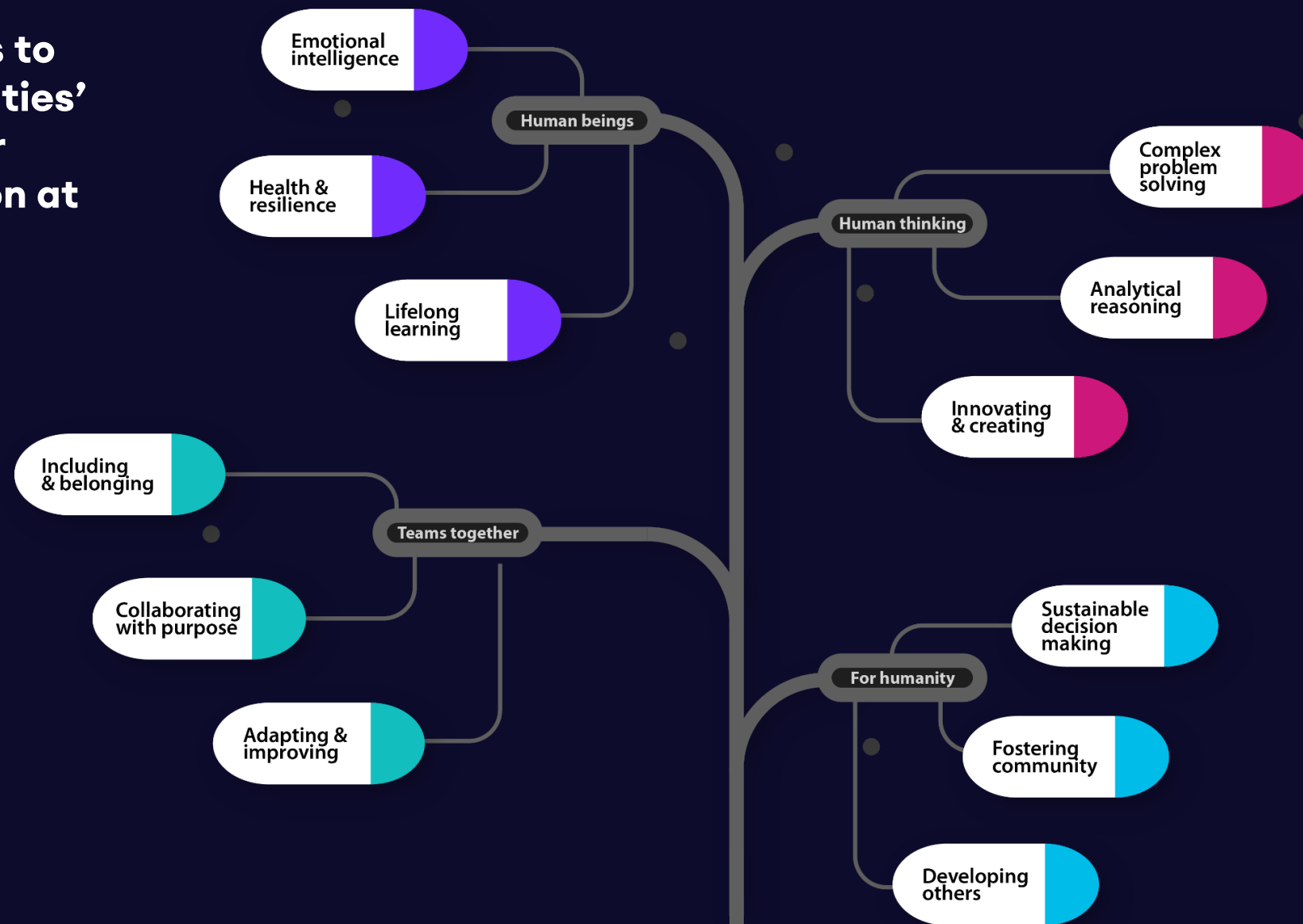
Moving from top to bottom, the scope of capabilities expands – from being primarily individually focused to a much bigger and broader agenda.



We believe everyone needs to boost their ‘human capabilities’ but there may be particular priorities for an organisation at any point in time.

Like any capabilities, you can build capability at individual, team and organisational levels. Leaders and L&D teams can make learning and development solutions available for individuals, for teams to learn together, for certain populations (e.g. senior leaders) or for everyone (through a learning campaign).

Please see the appendix (page 11) to discover the top skills under each of the twelve capabilities.



Seven factors to optimise ‘human learning’

To boost human skills and capabilities it is vital we attend to how we design and provide the best learning – we need to respect how humans learn best. In our experience, humans learn best when these seven factors are in place.

Our **RESPECT model** provides a helpful checklist to boost human learning

Rhythm

“As adults, we learn best when it is relevant, integrated in the rhythm of work, and valued by the organisation. Ensure learning is well-timed – it can be tempting to train new managers months ahead but they acquire skills best when they have real experiences to address. Ensure it fits well in the organisational rhythm, easing the path for all involved.”

Emotions

Learning is an emotional business, but is usually ignored in the design of learning solutions. Humans retain knowledge best when it’s also connected to a mildly positive emotion / memory of one. Additionally, strong emotions are contagious (such as courage or anxiety). Human learning design needs to attend to the emotional experience too.

Social Connection

Humans are neurologically wired for connection, and hormonally rewarded for successful connections. Being together physically does not guarantee connectedness any more than virtual, in fact it can sometimes get in the way. If events help build meaningful connections, learning and wellbeing can be boosted too.

Psychological Safety

Learning can involve risk – we need to stretch beyond our comfort zones, be able to get involved, and be ready to speak up. Take time to establish a safe environment and a sense of belonging and inclusion – it’s OK and right for me to be here, now, with these people.

Engaging Design

Learning needs to be engaging by design. Excite learners so they feel open, present, intrigued – not distracted, overwhelmed, judged. Engage them with methods that blend together providing for accessibility, different preferences, and greater impact. Embed learning through on-the-job reinforcement, practice, peer support. Evolve solutions as the contexts and learners do.

Continuing

Human learning is rarely one and done. The half-life of skills is now estimated to be 5 years or less. Also ‘mastery’ is part of the human condition, good for our mental and cognitive health. Our brains can retain plasticity through our whole lives – we need to keep using them, having new experiences, and building fresh connections.

Time

The #1 challenge for L&D uptake is ‘not enough time’. Learning events can be a welcome oasis in the busyness of work, but humans really do need time and space to learn, retain and practice new capabilities, especially at the start. Sleep also helps so try and avoid cramming everything into one day.

How organisations are responding to the challenge

Here are a few examples of learning solutions we have partnered with client organisations to develop – for inspiration.

They typically focus on a critical human skill / capability and are designed in ways that reflect our RESPECT model.

Boosting human skills and capabilities is becoming more important, not less. When we are connected to each other, a wider purpose, and ourselves we are better able to navigate the inherently uncertain world we occupy.

Bitesize team activities

Engaging activities for teams to learn together in a team meeting.

- Fits into existing team meeting rhythm
- Engaging and participative design
- Builds shared experiences, skills and language
- Flexible location (site / online)
- Conversation based, antidote to digital
- Pick of topics – to ensure relevance
- Clear instructions for any facilitator

Campaign of hot topics

A calendar of events through the year with a focus topic per month.

- Likely to be 10 topics / themes over the year (avoiding August and December)
- For whole / part of your organisation
- Multiple activities each month (e.g. for individual contributors / leaders) targeting a topic
- Stays fresh as the topic shifts, but not too quickly. Uses a mix of formats.

On-demand programmes

Off the shelf or bespoke programme to boost skill – single or multiple sessions.

- For an existing team or a mixed group
- Extensive range of topics to choose from, aligned to our human skills
- Blended design with face to face or virtual facilitation options available
- Typically 90 minutes or 3 hours
- Carefully designed to be relevant, connecting, safe, engaging, and timely

Trigger skill injections

Using technology or existing processes to trigger relevant and timely learning.

- Target priority populations (e.g. new managers on appointment)
- Could inspire people interested in a topic (e.g. analytical reasoning)
- Fully / partially automated – using LMS / HR process / email system / MS Teams / other
- Human curated or AI driven

Building human skills across your organisation

Whether you need a **targeted learning experience to address an immediate challenge** or want to build **performance-led learning programmes**, use our core human skills topics as the foundation.

Leadership & Management

- Agile Leadership
- Authentic Leadership
- Leading Remote Teams
- Managing Change
- Coaching Skills
- Building Effective Teams
- Leading Without Authority

Communication & Collaboration

- Giving & Receiving Feedback
- Conducting Challenging Conversations
- Communicating Effectively
- Communication Styles
- Collaboration
- Influencing

Personal Brand & Impact

- Emotional Intelligence
- Growth Mindset
- Personal Resilience
- Time Management
- Habit Building
- Psychological Safety
- Constructive Conflict
- Presentation Skills

Critical Thinking & Decision Making

- Creative Thinking
- Problem Solving
- Decision Making
- Strategic Decision Making
- Analytical Thinking & Reasoning

Our core library includes **100+ topics spanning leadership, personal effectiveness, and project management.**

Appendix (1 of 2)

HUMAN BEING

Emotional intelligence

Being emotionally aware and Agile is foundational to thriving In a technology driven world – Becoming our best selves with Skill, individually and together.

Optimising strengths

Emotional agility

Impact on others

Authenticity

Health & resilience

Learning how to tolerate uncertainty, nurture well being, Sustain resilience and boost Vitality are crucial to personal Sustainability.

Wellbeing attentive

Proactively Dealing with stress

Mental resilience

Sustaining Boundaries & energy

Lifelong learning

Being a dynamic learner is Critical to success – embracing New opportunities for growth, Progressing in unforeseen ways, And mastering new ways of Knowing and working.

Fostering A growth mindset

Career designing

Learning agility

Confidence

Self-aware • Curious • Growthful

HUMAN THINKING

Complex Problem solving

Dynamic thinking is fundamental to addressing complex problems – Making sense of new situations; Navigating multiple interwoven factors; and re-shaping the plan regularly.

Making sense of complex systems

Multi-modal evidence

Experimentation

Making dynamic decisions

Analytical reasoning

Analytical reasoning is crucial to leveraging, focusing, and translating abundant data – using AI/technology to make sense of things, critique information, and prioritise actions.

Storytelling With data

Reviewing critically

Using AI & prompt engineering

Critically prioritising

Innovating & creating

Initiate ideas by combining Exploration, imagination, collaboration and solution focus - Challenging assumptions, Networking ideas, and refining options regularly.

Using design thinking

Fostering disruptive thinking

Idea networking

Using Creative tools

Mentally elastic • Question well • Evidence-led

Appendix (2 of 2)

TEAMS TOGETHER

Including & belonging

Becoming a trusted and valued team member, creating an environment where we all feel appreciated, supported and boosted – for who we are, what we know, what we value, and what we offer.

Empathy & relating to others

Psychological safety

Diversity In teams

Building trust in teams

Collaborating with purpose

Coming together to magnify our combined potential, value and fulfilment – all working towards something bigger, bolder, important.

Shared goal setting

Proactively Dealing with stress

Fostering accountability

Effective teams

Adapting & improving

Standing still is not an option – we need to be willing to challenge the status quo, critically review ways of working, devise experiments, and change in healthy, sustainable ways

Change readiness

Agile working

Continuous Improvement

Conflict resolution

Actively listens • Humanity & compassion • Trustworthiness

FOR HUMANITY

Sustainable decision making

Practicing mindful decision Making which considers both the present and long-term impacts of choices – personally, For the organization, the environment, and for society.

ESG / CSR

Evidence-led Decision making

Experimentation

Business acumen

Fostering community

Nurturing a positive, collaborative and supportive environment based on strong relationships, open communication, celebrating commonalities, appreciating uniqueness and valuing every voice.

Engaging communication

Connecting & networking

Leading without authority

Bringing People together

Developing others

Giving and receiving meaningful support to grow, thrive and succeed – individually and together. Investing time and resources to build future proofed skills and capabilities.

Coaching

Mentoring

Building a Bench of talent

Empowering

Mentally elastic • Question well • Evidence-led

Further insights & POV papers

Reimagining in-person learning

In a world where communication is constant, but connection is fading, the power of in-person human connection has never been more vital.

[Click here](#)

Becoming a great 'manager of managers'

How to successfully navigate the squeezed middle. Using the latest evidence and best practice to equip middle managers to be the best they can be, ready for tomorrow.

[Click here](#)

Rethinking learning impact & performance

Learning impact is too often assessed at the end of a programme—when it's already too late to influence outcomes. Rethinking Learning Impact sets out a different approach: designing learning for performance from the outset.

[Click here](#)

Are your learners time poor?

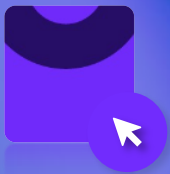
We keep hearing how a 'lack of time' is impacting employee's engagement with learning – but is that really the whole story and what are the best organisations doing to tackle this important and growing issue.

[Click here](#)

www.hemsleyfraser.com

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www.hemsleyfraser.com/human-capabilities

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