



The Human Advantage

Four human skills for thriving in the age of AI.

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There's No Such Thing as Soft Skills Anymore

For years, “**soft skills**” have lived in an awkward space in L&D strategy. Frequently cited in **capability frameworks**, consistently **rated as critical in engagement surveys**, and regularly discussed in **leadership development plans**. And yet, when investment decisions are made, they are often the first capabilities to be quietly pushed down the priority list.

The name alone makes them sound optional. Like the corporate equivalent of office plants or the fruit bowl in reception: nice to have, but hardly the first thing you'd protect when budgets get tight.

Then along came AI.



Almost overnight, organisations found themselves **automating tasks that once consumed hours** of the working day. Meetings can be summarised, emails drafted, reports structured and ideas generated in seconds. Far from making people less valuable, this shift has done something rather unexpected. **It's made the skills that machines struggle to replicate even more valuable.**

We're talking about:

- ▶ The ability to **build trust**
- ▶ Navigate **difficult conversations**
- ▶ Understand **emotions**
- ▶ Communicate ideas in ways that **genuinely connect with people**

These aren't soft skills. **They're human skills.** And in an AI-powered workplace, they're quickly becoming some of the hardest-working skills in the organisation.

Let's be clear: this isn't an argument against AI. At [Video Arts](#), we use it ourselves because it's brilliant at speeding up tasks, supporting creativity and making learning more accessible. But **AI's greatest strength** is also what makes human capability more visible.

The more technology takes care of routine work, the more organisations rely on people to provide judgement, empathy, creativity and connection. In this **eBook**, we'll explore **four human skills** that are becoming increasingly important in the age of AI, why they matter more than ever, and how learning can help organisations develop them with confidence.

Why Trust Us?

At Video Arts, we've spent more than five decades proving that nobody ever changed their behaviour because they survived another 90-slide presentation.

People change when learning feels relevant, realistic and memorable. Better still if it gets a few laughs along the way.

That's why every video and course we create is developed alongside subject matter experts and built around real behaviours. Our job is to take credible research and translate it into learning people can use in real workplace challenges.

Our approach combines:

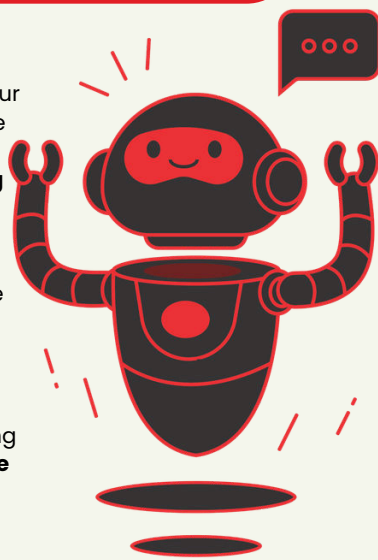
- ✓ Evidence-based insight grounded in behavioural science
- ✓ Humour and storytelling that make learning memorable
- ✓ Practical workplace scenarios people recognise
- ✓ Easily digestible learning designed for busy professionals

Meet our AI Coach

AI is also part of the way we deliver learning. Across our learning pathways, **our AI Coach** gives learners a safe space to rehearse workplace conversations, from **giving feedback** and **handling conflict** to **supporting colleagues** and **managing difficult customer interactions**.

It isn't there to have the conversation for you. It's there to help you prepare for it. Learners can **test different approaches, build confidence and reflect before stepping into the real situation**.

For us, that's where AI adds real value. Not by replacing human interaction, but by helping people **develop the human skills that matter most**.



Human Skill 1: Building Trust

If AI is changing how work gets done, trust is becoming the glue that holds it all together.

Trust has never been a nice workplace extra. It underpins collaboration, engagement and performance, and becomes even more valuable during periods of change. Psychological safety, a key outcome of trust, has been identified as the strongest predictor of high-performing teams ([Emondson, 1999](#)), while higher levels of trust are consistently linked to increased employee engagement, productivity and retention ([Gallup, 2023](#)).

As organisations introduce AI into everyday workflows, **trust takes on another dimension**. People need confidence not only in the technology itself, but in the judgement of the people using it. They need to be able to:

- ▶ Trust that leaders are making thoughtful decisions about AI
- ▶ Trust that colleagues are using it responsibly
- ▶ Trust that important decisions still have meaningful human oversight

Recent research suggests that's exactly what employees want. While **63%** of people would trust AI to inform important workplace decisions, **only 1%** would trust it to make those decisions without human involvement ([CIPD, 2025](#)). Employees may be embracing AI as a tool, but they still expect people to remain accountable.

The **good news** is that trust isn't built through grand gestures. It's built through hundreds of small moments:

- ▶ Keeping promises
- ▶ Listening properly
- ▶ Following through
- ▶ Being honest when you don't have all the answers
- ▶ Taking responsibility when things go wrong

These everyday behaviours create the trust that **helps teams collaborate, innovate and adapt with confidence**.

AI can help you communicate more efficiently, but it can't communicate with integrity on your behalf.

For L&D teams, that makes trust a capability worth developing deliberately. Learning that develops **active listening, trust-building communication, expectation setting, psychological safety** and **leading through uncertainty** can help organisations build stronger relationships alongside smarter technology.



Human Skill 2: Emotional Intelligence

As AI becomes better at processing information, **emotional intelligence** becomes even more valuable. After all, recognising patterns in data isn't the same as recognising when a colleague is overwhelmed, frustrated or quietly disengaging.

Work has always been emotional.

Whether it's **navigating organisational change**, **delivering difficult feedback** or supporting someone through a **challenging period**, people don't leave their emotions at the office door. **Emotional intelligence** is what helps us recognise those emotions, understand their impact and respond in a way that strengthens relationships rather than undermining them.

Research has consistently linked emotional intelligence with **stronger leadership effectiveness**, employee wellbeing and job performance ([Miao, Humphrey & Qian, 2017](#)). It also plays an important role in managing change. Self-awareness and self-regulation, two core components of emotional intelligence, help people respond thoughtfully under pressure rather than reacting emotionally ([Goleman, 1998](#)).

That matters more than ever as organisations adapt to new technologies and ways of working. AI may help identify patterns in language, summarise sentiment, or suggest responses, but it can't genuinely empathise. It can't notice the hesitation before someone says they're "fine", sense tension in a meeting, or instinctively know when someone needs reassurance instead of another solution.

For managers, emotional intelligence often shows up in the small moments:

- Asking the follow-up question.
- Listening without rushing to solve the problem.
- Recognising when someone is struggling before they tell you.

These behaviours build trust, strengthen engagement and create healthier, more resilient teams.

Emotional intelligence isn't something people either have or they don't. It's a skill that can be developed through practice. Learning that encourages active listening, empathy, self-awareness, emotional regulation and responding rather than reacting helps people build the confidence to navigate workplace relationships when they matter most.



Human Skill 3: Humour & Storytelling

As AI becomes better at generating content, the challenge is no longer simply producing information. It's creating messages that people notice, understand and remember.

This is where humour and storytelling have a neurological advantage.

Stories work because the human brain is naturally wired to make sense of information through narrative. Rather than storing isolated facts, most of us **remember experiences, characters and cause-and-effect relationships** (Zak, 2014). A well-told story gives information context, helping people understand not just what is happening, but why it matters.

Humour works in a similar way by capturing attention. When something makes us laugh, **our brains become more engaged** as they try to resolve the unexpected nature. This moment of curiosity activates areas involved in **attention and problem-solving**. When the punchline lands, the brain's reward system is activated, releasing dopamine, which plays an important role in **motivation and memory formation** (Bains et al., 2014).



The benefits of humour extend well beyond learning. Stanford psychologist **Dr Jennifer Aaker** and comedian **Naomi Bagdonas** found that appropriate humour helps people build stronger relationships, feel more confident and helps people **stay resilient** during periods of **uncertainty and change** (Aaker and Bagdonas, 2021). In other words, humour isn't only a way of making people laugh. It's a social skill that helps people connect.

As work is increasingly supported by AI, engagement matters more than ever. The risk isn't that communication disappears. **It's that it becomes efficient but forgettable.** After all, we've all sat through a meeting that somehow managed to use 300 words without saying anything at all. AI can make producing content faster, but it can't always **judge the subtle humour, lived experience or emotional nuance** that helps a message truly connect with its audience.

Learning is far more likely to be remembered when it uses relatable stories, recognisable workplace scenarios and carefully placed humour to bring skills into real life. **These techniques don't distract from learning.** They help the brain decide what's worth remembering.

It's a philosophy we've believed in for **more than 50 years**. Humour isn't fluff. It's an attention tool, a memory device and one of the most effective ways to make behaviour change stick.

Human Skill 4: Difficult Conversations & Conflict Resolution



Difficult conversations sit at the intersection of judgement, empathy, and courage.

Whether it's addressing poor performance, resolving conflict, or navigating change, these moments rarely follow a script. They require people to listen, adapt and respond thoughtfully in real time.

Yet managers can often have an aversion to addressing workplace conflict, and that hesitation can carry a significant business expense. It's estimated that workplace conflict **costs UK organisations £28.5 billion** every year through *lost productivity, absence, staff turnover and formal workplace disputes* ([Acas, 2021](#)).

Managing conflict well is rarely an instinctive skill. It requires:

- Practice
- Self-awareness
- The confidence to handle uncomfortable conversations constructively

Developing skills **through practice** can help managers:

- Address issues earlier
- Communicate more effectively
- Protect the relationships that keep teams working well.

The challenge

With **conflict resolution**, no two conversations are the same. Unlike a process or technical skill, there is rarely a single correct response. Every situation involves different personalities, emotions, and circumstances, which means learning needs to go beyond simply knowing what to say. This is also why **difficult conversations cannot simply be handed over to AI**. Conflict resolution relies on *human judgement, empathy*, and the ability to respond to another person in the moment. What AI can do is help people prepare for those moments.

This is exactly where **our AI Coach** adds value. Rather than replacing difficult conversations, our AI tool can give learners **a safe space to rehearse them, explore different approaches** and reflect on how their language might be received **before the stakes are real**. It helps build confidence and good judgement through practice, while keeping the human relationship firmly at the centre.

How L&D Can Build Human Skills in an AI World

AI is changing the way work gets done, but the long-term success of organisations will still depend on how well people *communicate, collaborate, and navigate* complexity together.

Trust, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution are not fixed personality traits that people either have or don't have. They are capabilities that **can be strengthened** through thoughtful **learning design**, deliberate practice, and ongoing reinforcement. Developing these human skills also requires a human approach to learning; humour and storytelling, for instance, help make concepts more memorable and easier to apply in real workplace situations.

So how do organisations turn these capabilities into everyday practice?

1. Stop calling them soft skills

Language shapes priority.

When skills like communication, empathy and relationship-building are labelled as "soft", they can unintentionally sound optional.

But these skills influence how people lead, collaborate, manage change, and make decisions. Reframing them as human skills reflects their true value: they are not decorative behaviours; they are strategic capabilities.

2. Teach behaviours, not buzzwords

People need to understand what these skills look like in practice. Show them:

- How to **build trust** through everyday actions
- How to **listen actively**,
- How to **handle disagreement**
- How to **communicate clearly** when situations become challenging.

The most effective learning **connects concepts** to realistic moments where people can visualise good and bad practices.

3. Build practice, not just awareness

Human skills develop through experience. Knowing that active listening matters is different from using it during a difficult conversation.

Scenario-based learning, role-play, reflection, and **feedback** give people the opportunity to practise, make mistakes and build confidence before the stakes are high. That's something our **AI coach** tool helps with 😊.

4. Use AI to support learning, not outsource humanity

AI can be a powerful learning companion when used in the right way. It can help people:

- Simulate workplace scenarios
- Practise conversations before having them for real
- Structure their thoughts and prepare for challenges
- Reflect on their approach and consider different perspectives

The value of AI is not replacing human judgement. **It is creating more opportunities for people to develop it.**

The organisations that thrive in an AI-enabled workplace won't be those that simply adopt the newest technology. They'll be the ones that use technology to strengthen the human capabilities that make great work possible.

AI may be changing how work gets done. It's also highlighting the skills that make people uniquely valuable.

The organisations that thrive won't just teach people how to use new tools. They'll invest in the human capabilities that help people build trust, communicate clearly, navigate challenges, and lead effectively when work gets complicated.

Because the future of work isn't about choosing between humans and AI. It's about using technology to give people more opportunities to do what they do best.



Human-Centric
Leadership



AI Anxiety



Cross-Cultural
Communication:
Listening and
Building Trust



Leadership Sins:
Avoiding Conflict



Emotional
Intelligence



Difficult
Conversations

**Get in touch to explore how Video Arts can help
your organisation build the human skills that
matter most.**

