



# EQ in the Robotic Age

Artificial intelligence is playing an increasingly important part in business, but where will that leave humans? **Mary-Anne Baldwin** discovers that our emotional intelligence will become our unique selling point

**W**e're in the midst of a technological revolution that's making leaders reassess their business models and strategies, but what they really need to focus on is their feelings. Automation and artificial intelligence (AI) will have such a huge impact on tomorrow's workforce that emotional intelligence (EQ) may become a person's selling point.

Robots and software systems are taking on more sophisticated roles in businesses. Already algorithms are being used in journalism to produce grammatically correct and well-styled articles, while IBM's cognitive system, Watson, is employed in numerous traditionally human tasks, from analysing the risk in financial investments to helping oncologists with cancer diagnoses.

PA Consulting Group's recent report, [The Robots are Coming](#), noted that because machines increasingly carry out logical tasks within businesses, a person's EQ may become their key differentiator; perhaps even the reason they're hired.

**Jennifer Cable**, Managing Consultant at PA Consulting Group says: "There is a real change in the type of work that needs to be done by a person and as machines are getting better at carrying out complex tasks, the question is whether IQ will still be the reason you get a job."

It's a phenomenon that's not gone unnoticed by **Mark Spelman**, Executive Committee Member at The World Economic Forum and Co-Head of its Future of the Internet Initiative.

"A survey by the World Economic Forum found that we could lose five million jobs over the next five years due to technology," says **Mark**. "Office and admin workers will lose out due to automation and it won't just be those at the low end. Roles like accounting and legal will also be affected."

While new technology is bringing monumental change to businesses, we're not entering some dystopian world in which humans and their attributes are discarded, in fact it will be quite the opposite.

"Don't fall for the lie that it's all about technology - it's about technology and human skills coming together," **Mark** explains. >



“The creative skills set becomes more important in this world. You’ll also need emotional intelligence combined with the social skills of persuasion and teaching.”

## The Human Touch

Despite the impressive advancement in AI and automation, there are human qualities that machines simply cannot replicate. **Julian Birkinshaw**, Criticaleye Thought Leader and Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship at the London Business School, explains what EQ is and why it’s a vital attribute in leaders.

“It’s the ability to connect with people at an emotional level, which includes being able to empathise, build rapport and develop relationships. It also means being able to act on intuition as well as on scientific fact,” he explains.

“The more senior a leader gets, the more important EQ will become. Good leadership is about understanding who you are and how people perceive you.”

**Sandy Stash**, Group Vice President of Safety, Sustainability and External Affairs at Tullow Oil, highlights how EQ plays out in practice. “I took a job where I had to go in, shut down mines and mills, and deal with legacy employment and pollution issues from the decades in which the mining works operated.”

“I was able to use my EQ skills to engage with the mayor and the community,” explains **Sandy**. “I saved the company a lot of money and 20 years later I’m still welcomed back in a lot of those communities.”

The power of EQ demonstrated by **Sandy’s** story has been long understood

by many businesses, but few recognise just how important it’s yet to become.

**Jennifer**, who previously headed Global Talent and Leadership Development at Shell, explains that until the 1980s Shell’s approach to identifying high performing people (used in a system called Currently Estimated Potential, or CEP) attributed twice as much worth to IQ as it did to emotional or social intelligence. This has long since changed, but still leaves a legacy in the culture of the organisation.

She also notes that while both genders show EQ, numerous studies have shown that women typically express a greater capability than men. “It stands to reason then, that businesses would benefit from having more women at the senior level,” says **Jennifer**.

It’s an area that was explored at Criticaleye’s recent [Women in Leadership Event](#), at which **Jennifer** and **Sandy** spoke.

**Phillippa Crookes**, Relationship Manager at Criticaleye, who chaired the event, comments: “When it comes to good leadership, command and control rarely works long term. Both employees and customers crave leaders who are relatable and approachable, someone who shows emotion and is self-aware. It’s the human element in an interaction that we remember.

“With the call for EQ in leaders getting louder, this could be the time for more women to step up into leadership roles.”

Indeed for **Sandy**, who spent her career in the male-dominated sectors of mining and energy, EQ was what set her apart as a leader.

She says that ‘masculine’ industries typically need to invest in EQ more than others: “STEM industries are critical to industry and trade. Those sectors historically have tended to be not as good at EQ, but we’re at an interesting time in which we need people who are technically trained yet have those people-to-people skills.”

The good news is that while some individuals may have naturally higher EQ than others, with time and effort it can be learnt. **Julian** from the London Business School explains: “If you want to become more emotionally intelligent, you have to actually unlearn a lot of bad habits and put in place good habits that may come unnaturally to you.” ■

Many of these thoughts were shared during Criticaleye’s recent [Women in Leadership Event](#). Find out more about joining the next event.

Featuring Commentary From:



**Julian Birkinshaw**  
Criticaleye Thought Leader  
Professor  
London Business School



**Jennifer Cable**  
Managing Consultant  
PA Consulting Group



**Phillippa Crookes**  
Relationship Manager  
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**Mark Spelman**  
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