

white paper

women and automation.

confronting tomorrow's diversity
challenges today

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a new era

in diversity.

A diverse workforce drives innovation through different perspectives, thoughts and ideas. Organizations strive to create a balance between the antiquated “check boxes” of compliance and the strategic, more intentional efforts of inclusion. And in an age of rapid technological advances, robotics and automation add another level of complexity to diversity.

Automation has been slowly introduced into society over the past few decades. The automatic teller machine (ATM), arguably the first major consumer self-service technology, launched in London in 1967 and was later adopted in the U.S. during the 1970s. Many skeptics at the time worried that it would mark the end of the human bank teller. But rather than disappearing, bank tellers’ roles evolved to become banking consultants. This adaptation was key for workforce growth and development in the banking industry.

57%
of jobs lost to
automation are
those currently
held by women

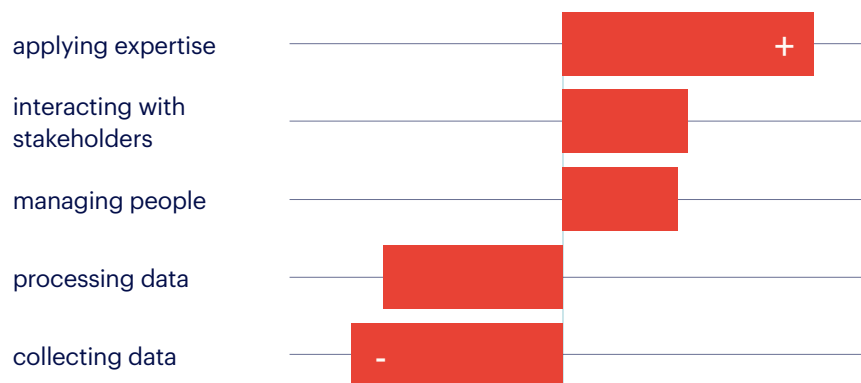
change is on the horizon

Just as the ATM was a disruptive technology for its time, robotics, artificial intelligence (AI) and self-driving vehicles are among today's disruptors. We're naturally attracted to the latest shiny new tech on the market, and as evidenced by the multi-billion dollar cell phone, tablet and computer industries, people crave what is cutting edge. Part of this insatiable hunger is derived from the programming everyone is exposed to daily, including pop-up advertisements on cell phones, electronic billboards and videos. But while many are focused on the latest gadget, we often overlook the sheer number of jobs lost or greatly altered by automation — and a recent study by the [World Economic Forum \(WEF\)](#) claims that almost 57 percent of those will be jobs currently held by women. The report claims administrative/clerical, customer service, accounting and paralegal roles are all at risk.

In addition, a report from McKinsey Global Institute shows that as many as 375 million workers will need to find alternative careers by 2030. Determining which roles women will be able to transfer into following displacement could be today's biggest diversity challenge for workers and employers alike. Without a formidable strategy in place, organizations will fail a substantial portion of their workforces.

demanding new skills

Automation will radically change the skills employers need to succeed. Anything that can be automated likely will, making "human" skills like personal interaction and management more desirable.



source: [McKinsey Global Institute](#)

73.7%
of all cashier
positions are held
by women

Business leaders need only look to retail giants that have already implemented automation to see its effects in action. With the rise of self-checkout terminals now present at many large retailers, these stores can reduce the number of workers or redeploy them to other functions. Some retailers are even beginning to explore human-less stores. Amazon, for example, recently established Amazon Go beta convenience stores, in which shoppers access the store through the Amazon app and are automatically charged moments after removing items from the shelves and placing them in their baskets.

As more and more retailers and restaurants opt for digital interfaces over human interaction, women will be the hardest hit. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 73.7 percent of all cashier positions are held by women.

But it isn't just the working class that will be hardest hit by automation. Another recent WEF study shows that it's office and administrative job growth — not blue collar job growth — that is declining fastest due to automation.

jobs lost vs jobs gained



source: [World Economic Forum](#)

preparing for displacement caused by automation

Now — not five or ten years in the future — is the time to prepare for a future workforce impacted by automation. Robotics and automation is already here, and the future of our workforce hangs by a delicate thread. The following are recommendations to lessen the impact:

job mapping

Organizations should be comparing skills sets of the positions that are likely to be displaced and the roles they'll need in the future. For example, accounting, billing and payroll staff often have repetitive duties that can and are being automated. By mapping these skills, business leaders can begin to identify other positions in the organization that displaced employees could fill with additional training.

reskilling

Some skill sets will simply become completely obsolete. Therefore, reskilling is critical. Assess workers' abilities and interests to see what training programs would be beneficial for the future. Offer company-subsidized tuition reimbursement in return for a two-year commitment to stay with the organization upon completion.

redeployment

Just as the banking industry up-skilled tellers to become financial banking advisors, other industries will need to redeploy resources through cross-training and job rotations.

returnships

Returnships allow women with education and work experience in high-demand fields like STEM who are currently out of the workforce to transition back to full-time employment. Through on-the-job training and partnerships with universities, organizations can bring women in part-time or on a per-project basis while they regain the education and/or critical certifications needed to move into more permanent positions.

find balance

It's critical to strike a balance between technology and humanity in the diversity dialogue. Despite our appetites for technology, convenience and personalized experiences, connecting with others is still a critical part of the human experience. After all, empathy and emotion are part of what separates humans from robots.

It's also important to consider the diversity pipeline when reskilling the workforce. While there is no indication of when or if our society will achieve gender parity, it is critical to ensure that women and minorities are included in the reskilling efforts.

Taking proactive steps today will enable companies to prepare for the coming workforce changes of tomorrow. While robotics and automation will usher in a new industrial revolution, cultural competence is still top of mind for many. Inclusive workplaces ensure that all employees have a chance to achieve success and contribute to the growth and stability of the global economy.



A portrait of Audra Jenkins, a Black woman with short, dark, wavy hair, smiling and looking slightly to the right. She is wearing a dark blazer over a red top and a necklace with a cross pendant. The background is a blurred indoor setting with a window and a red wall.

Audra Jenkins

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about the author

As chief diversity and inclusion officer, Audra is responsible for working with Randstad's U.S. lines of business to further diversity strategies both internally and externally. With more than 20 years of human resources, diversity and compliance experience, Audra provides guidance for effective strategies in diversity, inclusion, veterans affairs and compliance. Audra is the executive sponsor and helps manage Randstad's Hire Hope program to provide career readiness training and job placement services to underserved and at-risk women, including survivors of exploitation and trafficking. Audra holds a Master of Business Administration degree with a human resources concentration and Bachelor of Arts degree in Finance from the University of North Carolina. A member of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), she is also a Certified Diversity Professional (CDP), a certified Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR), a SHRM Senior Certified Professional (SHRM-SCP) and a Six Sigma Green Belt. Audra is known for her speaking engagements at diversity conferences and has published white papers in her area of expertise.

human

forward.



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