

Why digital must unlock diversity for the energy transition

Geeta Thakorlal, President, Energy Transition & Digital at Worley discusses how digital transformation and the energy transition can elevate underrepresented groups in our industry





It's no secret that there's a lot of change happening in the energy industry. Whether it's the energy transition or digital transformation, we're constantly being reminded that we need to adjust, adapt and adopt. Because if we don't, we'll be left behind.

This is no small task. Especially when it seems almost impossible to keep track of what's happening, why it's happening, or whether you'll be able to attract and retain the right talent for your business in five or 10-years' time.

But as technology changes the way we work, and the energy transition redefines our old metrics for success, one thing is certain; a diverse and capable workforce is the only way to buy a ticket to a successful future.

As important as technology is to organizations today, it all comes back to people – their creativity and knowledge are what will drive our industry and the energy transition forward. That's why it's so important to understand the needs of the future workforce and identify the critical gaps and how to manage them. If we don't, the industry will face bigger problems than which assets to digitize.

Automation could threaten any progress we've made in closing the gender gap

A recent study by the UK's Office for National Statistics found that more than 70 percent of jobs under threat from automation are held by women. The study explains that in both advanced and emerging economies, women are more prone to the effects of automation for a variety of reasons.

While we can't be sure of the types of jobs that will be created in the future, we need to start thinking about how we can plan for this disruption, leverage the talents of women, and bring their perspectives into the industry.

But it's not just the gender gap that's cause for concern

It's the widening generational gap, too.

Millennials and Gen Z are the fastest growing portions of the global workforce. But attracting people from this connected and environmentally conscious generation is proving more difficult than anyone expected.

Surveys show that younger people are moving away from industries like oil and gas. Coupled with an aging workforce, one of the biggest risks is a chronic shortage of talent to fill these roles for the long-term.

But while the industry is still digitally transforming – and will be for a while – younger generations see technology and innovation as a given. In fact, according to a study by EY, the opportunity to use the latest technology didn't even make it into the top three drivers for millennials. Salary, work-life balance and on-the-job happiness did.

Millennials want to engage in more meaningful work.

Fresh eyes for humanity's biggest problem

The energy transition is urgent, but it also excites a diverse range of people. That's why Worley believes it can bring young people back into the fold. The fulfilment from solving the world's most complex problems goes hand-in-hand with on the job satisfaction. Every organization in the energy industry will play a role in the energy transition. If we talk more about those types of contributions in a truthful and compelling way, it will help retain the talent the industry has while attracting job-seekers in demographics that have gravitated away from the industry.

It won't solve the imbalances overnight, but it's going to set the course for the industry going forward and create a clear connection to the betterment of the world.

For all this to fall into place, we need to get serious about diversity. Solving the world's energy challenges will require the brightest minds and different perspectives.

However, it's more than just articulating your company's contributions to society. Progress can easily come undone if you don't walk the talk. This is where digital transformation can help.

Digital transformation can add more momentum in the pursuit of a more diverse workforce

As an industry struggling with diversity, we have a responsibility to make use of digital tools and give underrepresented groups the flexibility they need to join, and then progress, within the industry.

Emerging technologies enable better access to a broader range of talent, through digital collaboration and flexible working tools, which make it easier for people to work remotely to suit their family circumstances and priorities in life.

And we shouldn't be afraid of automation. While it may take away some jobs, it'll create other jobs that we haven't even thought of yet.

Digital transformation can also help to address systemic and cultural issues. There is an urgent need to enable women to move into more senior, more creative and more value-add roles across the industry. Training, both inside and outside

of the digital space, is part of the progression to strategic problem-solving roles. And not just formal training. It's also about exposure to new working environments, new ways of working in digital, different projects, mentorship, sponsorship and so on.

And what of the role of digital in attracting younger people? Although the industry sometimes persists with outdated processes, there are also things that we take for granted that are actually at the forefront of new technology and are at the cutting edge of what 'digital' can offer anywhere.

We also know that younger generations see technology as transformative. And they need to be backed up by a culture that encourages fabulous ideas and gets them funded and put into practice. A workplace that lets you unleash ideas is a powerful magnet for new talent looking for opportunities. That demands a culture that celebrates experimentation.

That's what digital transformation is all about, and that's exactly the environment that newcomers to the workplace need.

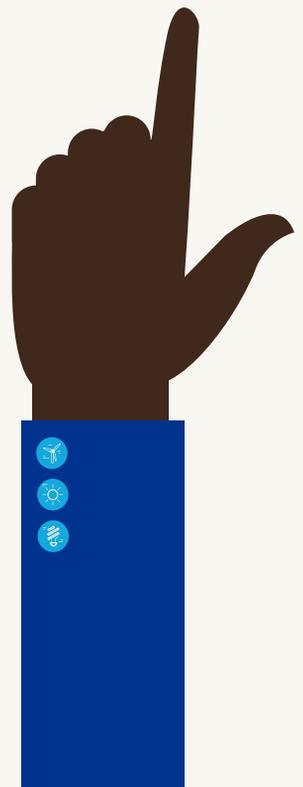
The burning platform

A final piece of advice for companies sailing into uncertainty: Be bold and proactive, rise to the challenge, rather than waiting to board a burning platform. You'll only fall victim to the

rate of change if you don't pay attention to what's going on and you aren't scanning for opportunities to reskill or upskill your workforce.

Humans are problem solvers. It's what we do best. Equipping people from diverse backgrounds with the right skills will be critical to the energy transition.

*With thanks to my colleagues
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