Why coding isn't necessary for a career in tech

We saw proof that tech facilitates many livelihoods during the Covid pandemic. The People and Skills Report 2022 from Tech Nation says, 'During the uncertain times faced by most people over... the Covid pandemic, technology has been an enabler for individuals, companies and communities. It has facilitated new ways of working and kept the economy buoyant.'

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Thanks to technology, we now experience better ways of operating professionally with the flexibility of remote working. This has helped many of us meet other priorities in our daily lives, such as being parents, caring for a loved one or simply fitting wellbeing in with better fitness routines. There are plenty of people who could never have imagined being able to work like this pre-pandemic, and as we all know, it was only possible with good tech and support.

The People and Skills Report 2022 goes on to share ,'More than two million tech vacancies were advertised over the last year, more than any other area of the UK labour market'. According to the report, tech vacancies overtook trade and construction, teaching and healthcare roles.

With such a shortage of skills in the tech industry, what is stopping people, especially women and girls, entering this exciting sector? There is a widely held belief that one must study and excel at programming or become a coder or programmer to have a successful career in tech. This is not true, so do not be put off.

Understanding programming or knowing how to code in languages like Java are good skills to have as they enhance your understanding of logical computer-like thinking, for example, how computers break down problems and solve them. This can aid in developing your problem-solving abilities and knowledge of how applications work. It can also enhance your understanding of how coders translate and approach problems.

If you are interested, I encourage you to get a taste of programming or coding via a mini course, bootcamp, hackathon or online class with self-study. Many communities and organisations hold day-long introduction sessions for coding. These days, there are so many ways to find yourself a free taster – just for your own satisfaction.

Please note, though, that this does not mean programming or coding is your only way into working in tech. Coding or programming can be like Marmite – you either love it or hate it! It is not for everyone. However, it is beneficial to go through some learning to know what it involves and to get a flavour of it.

Just like a recipe when you are cooking, the tech sector has many ingredients. It is so variable with its roles and areas, so be aware, as when you are making a pie or a cake, that some ingredients should be a part of your journey and some just won't be to your taste. It's all about personal preference.

I did not enjoy creating code and learning programming during my MSc degree, but I quickly realised through studying Java and Structured Query Language (SQL), which is used for databases, that I am drawn to the business or analytical side of the tech sector. This involves softer and less hands-on technical skills, for instance, communication, presenting, meetings, problem solving, analysis and dealing with people in general.

That said, I did learn SQL, Java and hypertext mark-up language (HTML)

skills used for building websites. Some, like HTML, are quite simple to learn, while Java reminded me of knitting in that it was more intense, and if you get one stitch wrong, it messes up the whole

garment. For example, a scarf ends up with a small hole showing, and then you have to go back to correct a whole row of stitches. I tried knitting for a short time as a girl, when my late mother created a beautiful crocheted garment for me, which encouraged me to want to try basic knitting, but my enthusiasm did not last for long. It was the same in coding. It tested my patience as I had to go back if the program was not working and read every single line of code meticulously, each letter in the script to find out where the mistake was before I could move on.

My programming course was a good one covering practical areas, and the first primary assignment I completed was to create a telephone directory. The main observation I had, as I had never coded or written computer programs before, was that I couldn't believe

the number of lines of coding required to ask the computer to perform a simple task, like finding the telephone area code for London, Leeds or Bedford. All to receive a three- to five-digit number! It was a great learning experience for me and I passed my end-of-year exam with a good grade, but it was a journey which I didn't enjoy.

However, this was balanced out with other subjects I did enjoy, such as business information systems and systems analysis, which brought out the artistic side in me. I also loved the creativity in internet and web design.

Why have I shared my example of learning coding if you don't need it to enter the tech industry? It's because I recommend that you at least try it. This general information could be something you need to know about and help you understand how things work in the background. If, for example,

you go to work in a company with end-to-end development of applications, like banking software or fintech, it is helpful to know a little about how code works, and once you learn one program, you'll find they all have similar principles.

If you enjoy programming or coding, that is OK – do keep it up! If you do not, this is also OK. You will find that soft and non-technical skills can secure you a good job within tech. I am not an expert in every area; I'm simply sharing insights so you can be more aware of what is available to you, and then you can seek expert help in any decisions you make or to allow you to learn.

This is an adapted book extract from _She Chose Tech_ by Sonal Shah.

Sonal Shah is a speaker, coach, tech advocate and author of _She Chose Tech_.

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Article by Sonal Shah