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PORTFOLIO OF PROFESSIONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT & SHORT REPORT ON DIGITAL SKILLS WITHIN THE WORKPLACE

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Introduction

Digital developments in recent years have become an evident trend to be undertaken essentially by businesses to improve their market competitiveness. Digitisation of firms provides effective growth opportunities to businesses by automation of operations and elimination of human error risks. The companies in recent years have been impacted drastically by increasing market competition and complexities of globalisation. This study focuses on identifying recent digital developments taking place in business market environment along with continuing industrial advancements. Additionally, significant digital skills in demand have also been highlighted in this study. A reflective perspective using a suitable model has been highlighted to identify key leadership and management soft, as well as, digital skills to be possessed or developed by technical workforce.

Part 1

Recent Digital Development and Continuing Industrial Advancement

Digital developments due to globalisation and increasing market competition have become an ongoing trend. According to Reier-Forradellas and Garay (2021), AI and robotics have been the most common digital developments adopted by organisations to improve its operational efficiency and market performance. Outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic led to growth of a significant digital transformation of remote-working, influencing operational performance of retail companies. In this context, reported that digital transformation strategies of Amazon are comprehensive, implementing online marketing to reach global customers through digital marketing campaigns (simplilearn.com, 2023). The firm uses social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to interact with its customers, improving customer engagement. Social media is extensively used nowadays, accumulating 4.80 billion users in 2023 which is equivalent to 59.9% of total global population (datareportal.com, 2023). Therefore, Amazon advertises its merchandise through social media to take advantage of users and convert potential customers into loyal ones.

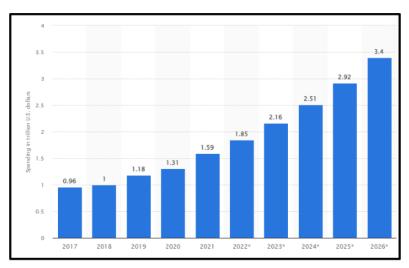


Figure 1: Global digital transformation expenditure

(Source: Statista, 2022)

Digital transformation is being extensively adopted by retail companies worldwide to attain competitive edge using innovative and improved operational capabilities. In 2022, digital transformation spending was \$1.6 trillion with a projection to reach \$3.4 trillion by 2026 (Statista, 2022). Digitisation helps businesses to identify appropriate market demand and connect merchandise design with market product expectation. Additionally, digital expenditure in 2023 has been recorded to be \$3.22 trillion with an expected growth of 13.07% CAGR amounting \$5.27 trillion by 2027 (Statista, 2022). Thus, indicating that digital developments in recent years have been adopted by several businesses like Amazon to improve performance effectiveness.

Remote-first working transitions

Recent digital transformation across sectors in recent years comprises agreements for remotefirst working for several customer service automation in retail, e-portals in healthcare for hospitals, and businesses. As mentioned by Choudhury *et al.* (2021), COVID-19 pandemic and its lockdown restrictions led to work-from-anywhere flexibility improving productivity effects and geographical flexibility in recruitments. Remote-first working transitions opened doors for improved cross-cultural hiring along with providing employee satisfaction due to workplace flexibility. As argued by Aloisi and De Stefano (2022), digital surveillance and remote working imposed a critical issue of disrupted communication and connectedness between departments. Remote working has also led to increased mental stress and problems due to disconnectedness from social life. Amazon permitted remote working to its employees in 2020 to improve its employee health safety and wellbeing concerns (Amazon.com, 2023). The company operating in delivery services had to increase its warehouse and delivery service providing staff.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial intelligence is being extensively adopted by retail businesses in present era to automate their store formats and supply chain operations. AI-based convenient stores are a recent trend facilitating operational effectiveness and improved financial performance. As mentioned by Oosthuizen *et al.* (2021), retail businesses globally have adopted AI-enabled value chains to improve their market performance and competitiveness. AI in retail enables e-commerce websites to suggest products uniquely relevant with shoppers and permits them to search products using convenient images or language (Mahmoud *et al.* 2020). AI facilitates business productivity and improves customer engagement due to which AI has become a recent trend in retail business market.

Machine Learning (ML)

Machine learning in retail sector relies on self-improving algorithms that are computerised, generated to spot patterns of recurring, process data, and variable animalising, and learning departmental interconnectedness. Machine learning is mostly used for determining phenomena, business scenarios, and trends of industry. As quoted by Rahman *et al.* (2019), machine learning software like Google cloud AI platform are extensively adopted by retail companies to improve their customer and confidential data storage digitally. Machine learning implementation has been boosted by increasing cyber-attacks from which confidential business data needs to be protected. As opined by Anica-Popa *et al.* (2021), machine learning imposes a restriction of lack of efficient workforce leading to disrupted operational performances. Machine learning in current years has attained more popularity due to remote working practices as it provides automated training and learning opportunities to employees.

Industrial advancements have attained a significant growth in recent years by application of robotics, AI and 5G technologies. Amazon utilises various emerging technologies like big data, robotics, and artificial intelligence among others to facilitate its service and operational capabilities (globaldata.com, 2022). The retail brand has been using AI for enabling a possibilities range for companies. For example, drone delivery, Alexa voice assistance powered by machine learning and AI algorithms, and Amazon Go convenience stores. Moreover, as stated by Rysavy and Michalak (2020), innovation and R&D practicesses in recent years are evidently influenced by digital transformations leading to industrial

advancements. Industrial advancements have been driven by digital transformations and developments in recent years.

Significant Digital Skills Sections in Demand

Software Development/ Engineering

Industrial advancements influenced by digital technology adoptions demands for software development or engineering skills to an extensive level. According to Joynes *et al.* (2019), digital skills are essential to be developed by employees in recent years to improve their performance in digitally driven business operations. Software development skills permit employees to improve their career opportunities along with benefiting retail companies to improve digitised operational performances. Critical tasks within organisations can be conducted in an improved manner with effectiveness by development of engineering skills. Similarly, as mentioned by Bejaković and Mrnjavac (2020), effective leaders with software development skills offer clarity, guidance, and motivation to organisations for realising its objectives and mission. Software development skills are extensively demanded by Amazon due to its constant focus on automating its operations.

Socio-emotional skills

Recent retail market has been impacted by COVID-19 impact and most of the businesses are still coping to attain improved profitability. Socio-economic skills due to increment of economic disruption in society have become essential to create a bridge between social processes and economic activities. The most suitable example of socio-economic skills is deployment of transformational leadership to promote employee retention (Gekara *et al.* 2019). However, socio-economic skills are not much demanded in stable economies or economic conditions but the development of economic crisis has led to demand for socio-economic skills in recent years. Socio-economic skills are also demanded because it helps companies to identify income and employment patterns in competitive markets that can be used to attain an effective competitive edge.

Communication skills

Retail enterprises extensively demand for effective communication skills because interacting with customers is a critical aspect in retail operations that can be achieved by effective communication. Communication skills are used for building appropriate customer-company relationships along with sustainable departmental connectedness (Hashim *et al.* 2019). This skill permits individuals to interact effectively with other employees in workplace resulting in appropriate information transmission and high-quality task completion. Furthermore,

communication skills also help companies to build a peaceful, ethical and healthy workplace environment. This is because appropriate communications skills help reduce conflicts and miscommunication issues within firms. Communication skills is necessary for the retail sector as it assures that teams have most recent, correct, and relevant information in order to meet or exceed customer expectations (Prada *et al.* 2019). This, in turn improves customer engagement and satisfaction along with improved trust and loyalty due to information transparency offered by effective communication procedures.

Critical thinking skills

Business environment and operations of retail sector are highly complex and demand critical thinking skills for making appropriate decisions and quick problem-solving. Critical thinking in retail workplace guarantees efficient and objective problem-solving, leading to reduction of costs involved in human error (Vrontis *et al.* 2022). Effective critical thinking skills help ensures that resources of an organisation are used wisely due to appropriate decision-making. Leaders in retail employing critical thinking skills are capable of connecting ideas, eliminating inconsistencies, and spotting errors. The most significant role played by leaders possessing critical thinking skills are identifying curiosity, biases, inference, judging relevance, and undertaking research. Moreover, critical thinking skills also allow identification of conflicts or miscommunication issues in advance by leaders or organisational managers (Bejaković and Mrnjavac, 2020). Open mindedness and putting up thoughtful questions are two most evident qualities in employees with critical thinking skills. Henceforth, critical thinking skills are highly demanded by retail businesses to improve their operational and human resource performance.

Part 2

Reflection of Own Management and Leadership Soft Skills Using Kolb's Reflective Cycle

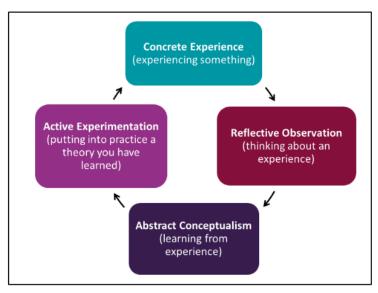


Figure 1: Kolb's Reflective Cycle

(Source: University of Hull, 2023)

Reflection on management and leadership soft skills has been done using Kolb's reflective cycle (University of Hull, 2023).

Concrete Experience

Soft skills play a crucial role in improving efficiency of management and leadership duties within an organisation. I have acquired digital soft skills including data analytics and content research along with non-digital soft skills that include communication skills, problem-solving, and decision-making. These skills can aid me in performing my specific duties within a technologically advanced organisation efficiently. Communication skills are important for maintaining effective communication with other employees and team members (Moldoveanu and Narayandas, 2019). Problem-solving and decision-making skills can aid in developing solutions to issues faced during work and guide team members. On the other hand, I think digital soft skills are essential for keeping up with global trends of digitisation. Data analytics would enable an analysis of marketing strategies employed by competitors (Tanjunget al. 2021). Content research techniques are essential for analysing information about customers and selecting the most suitable content for marketing.

Reflective Observation

I have acquired digital and non-digital soft skills by acquiring knowledge about them and applying them in various real-life instances. Communication skills have aided me in sharing knowledge and skills with my peers during my academics. Apart from this, communication skills also aided in establishing communication with team members while managing a team activity. Problem solving-skills have aided in analysing different issues and identification of the root causes behind those issues (Yukl *et al.* 2019). Decision-making skills led to the development of solutions for aiding team members facing issues during group activities. Digital soft skills aided in a better understanding of digital technologies used in organisational activities. Apart from this, I have implemented data analytics and content research skills for analysing market trends and developing marketing content.

Abstract Conceptualism

I have stated about benefits and procedures associated with my soft skills including both digital and non-digital soft skills. However, there were difficulties in acquiring these skills due to their specific characteristics. A proper understanding of these skills had to be developed and practical applications were essential for understanding the procedures of their real-life applications. For instance, data analytics skills are essential for analysing collected information however, without proper application the results of analysis might be improper (Fischer *et al.* 2020). Apart from this, I think my soft skills can be improved by making further applications in diversified instances.

Active Experimentation

Soft skills acquired by me will aid me in performing my managerial and leadership duties effectively. I will be able to communicate effectively with employees using communication skills. Problem-solving and decision-making skills will lead to development of better decisions for organisational functions. Apart from this, my soft skills will aid me in guiding team members in utilising advanced technologies to their advantage. These activities will lead to enhanced performance of an organisation I would work in and improve its sustainability within changing circumstances.

Personal Development Plan

Skills	A	Actions	for skill	S	uccess criteria	Relevance	Timescale	
	development							
Communication	•	Hold	effective	•	Improved	Developing	6-8 months	

skill	meetings regularly Actively listen to peer concerns and issues Seeking feedback for each task completed	interpersonal relationships with peers	communication skills is necessary for understanding information more accurately and quickly	
Problem-solving skills	Collaboratively undertake	solutions are		8-12 months
	efforts to visualise the key problem within any situation Brainstorming creative solutions with help from peers Research existing systems and practices used to resolve	quickly developed for every identified issue Critical tasks are conducted more effectively Risk monitoring and mitigation across tasks	exploit various opportunities within a particular	
Decision-making skills	an identified problemTaking advice from experts and managers		Developing decision-making skills is the key	8-12 months

	during decision-	possible	to choosing the	
	making	option during	best course of	
	processes	core decision-	action for an	
	• Setting	making	organisation by	
	priorities within	processes	assessing all	
	a goal mindset	Selection of	facts	
	and establishing	options		
	specific task	providing		
	deadlines	maximum		
	 Undertaking 	benefits and		
	extensive	minimum risks		
	research from			
	reliable sources			
	to gather key			
	background			
	information			
Data Analytics	• Joining an •	Enhanced	Data analytics	10 months
	online data	ability to make	skills are	
	community	informed	essential for	
	• Taking online	decisions	helping an	
	courses and	Creation of a	organisation to	
	workshops	more effective	meet key goals	
	• Practising with	marketing	and make	
	real data	strategy	improvements in	
	projects	Improving	key business	
		customer	operations	
		experience		
Content Research	• Exploring •	Improved	Developing a	6 months
	expert help	ability of	proper content	
	guides related to	locate relevant	research skill	
	a research	information	helps in gaining	
	• Consulting with •	Improvement	new	
	senior library	in information	opportunities for	

	learning advisor	quality	learning	and
•	Tracing	evaluation	growth	
	citations to			
	discover the			
	scholarly			
	conversations			
	related to a			
	research topic			

Table 1: Personal development plan

(Source: Self-created)

Contribution towards Increased Level of Effective Management and Leadership

A personal development plan is effective for people as this helps to grow individuals and their leadership skills. As per the view of Bakker and de Vries (2021), in the time of preparing a personal development plan it is important to focus on the needs and demands of a person along with activities which can support the person to develop their leadership skills. Personal development plan helps to improve management and leadership qualities among people as this provides an opportunity for self evaluation. Leadership is an essential management function that supports directing resources of an organisation for enhancing efficiency and achieving goals. I have identified that I need to develop my problem-solving and communication skills to improve professional development and digital skills. Improved communication skills will help me to improve coordination with team members leading to effective information transformation. Moreover, problem-solving skills will provide effective solutions for quick development and identification of every minute organisational issue.

A personal development plan helps to focus on personal goals and objectives which enhance ability to improve skills and knowledge of individuals. Moreover, a personal development plan helps in the development of a positive attitude towards people and this helps in leadership development and effective management. As per the view of Pattnaik and Jena (2020), a good personal development plan helps people to be active leaders as this helps in improvement of engagement level and morale among them. Moreover, a good personal development plan helps in development of work ethics and strong team skills. This helps in effective communication and collaboration among team members and this contributes to proper management. About 71% of companies across the world have improved their management system by focusing on personal development plans for their employees

(Statista.com, 2022). Personal development plan helps to improve skills which have importance for self analysis and manage oneself in an effective manner. This also contributes in leadership development and appropriate management as this provides an opportunity for enhancement of self awareness.

A personal development plan also helps in creation of a roadmap of goals, strategies and aims. This helps people in determining the appropriate path and also provides the right direction to them. This can contribute to enhancement of leadership quality among people and also helps in effective management of an organisation. As per the view of Schippers and Ziegler (2019), a personal development plan has to be updated in a regular manner according to demand and needs of individuals to meet objectives of life and organisation. Moreover, this plan helps to track progression level and also helps to focus on goals and this helps in development of necessary skills. The evaluation of progress and development of skills helps in development of leadership quality and thus helps in effective management of an organisation. Along with that, this plan is effective for understanding the responsibility of an individual which helps to make better decisions. About 55% of companies in all over the world have experienced improvement in the performance level of employees due to adoption of a better decision (Statista.com, 2022). A better decision helps in development of leadership among people and this contributes to proper management of an organisation.

A well personal development plan provides an opportunity to be self disciplined which can manage the temptation of individuals. This helps in development of learning ability and skills which contribute in improvement of leadership quality and this helps in proper management of an organisation.

Conclusion

It has been concluded that retail businesses in recent years are emphasising operational digitisation leading to improved digital development and industrial advancements. Amazon uses AI-based software to interact with customers in an improved manner. Additionally, it has been evaluated that machine-learning, AI, and remote-first working transitions are the most significant digital developments adopted by retail businesses. AI-based operations result in attainment of improved operational effectiveness and customer retention due to automated customer engagement. This study also concludes that software development, cloud computing, and digital marketing specialisation skills are highly demanded by retail companies nowadays to attain improved market competitiveness. In this context, it has been evaluated that communication, leadership, and critical thinking skills need to be developed

for appropriately nowadays.	performing	in	retail	organisations	driven	by	digital	advancements

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