

Digital Revolution In The Mauritian Public Service : A Human Resource Development Perspective In Two Unrelated Companies

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Abstract: This research paper analyses the importance of digital revolution in the Mauritian public service and its impact on related human resource factors like human resource development, talent and performance management. Since these three dependent variables affect the human resource process in today's organisations, it is seen that the independent variable—digital transformation has a positive effect on the variables measured. The research was undertaken in two unrelated businesses namely a university benchmarked against a postal department which claims to operate as a one-stop shop. The result of this study claims that there is comparative similarity between the two settings whereby digital revolution influences human resource factors and contributes to enhancing productivity.

Keywords: digital revolution, postal, university, human resource development, talent and performance management.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is firstly important to understand the importance of digital revolution of the Mauritian public sector. To create the concept of "intelligent island", the Government of Mauritius vision aims to develop the country by diffusing digital technology in every aspect of human activity. Broadly, the use of computers in primary schools under the Sankoré¹ project, the one-stop-shop strategy practised in postal offices where all utility bills can be directly paid and the installation of high-emission Internet signals in households and business, are just mere examples of the state's interest in developing or enhancing digital technology in society. This calls for the involvement of society members so that they can be both users and benefactors of digital technology. Although the attempt was timid at the start, there have been in-roads in the use and harnessing of digital technology and a certain progress has been achieved.

Ghoshal (2015) explains that government are rapidly infusing new technologies into their citizen engagement practices and approaches to problem solving. They are exploring ways to leverage big data analytics to better address challenges and improve operational efficiencies and services.

One cannot speak of digital divide in Mauritius since the target audience that comprises students and intellectuals has well accommodated the use of digital technologies through the Internet and social networks. Gradually, segments outside the targeted category are being trained to use digital technology and this is facilitated through the use of applications available in telecommunications and easily adopted by Mauritians. The problem might address those people falling in vulnerable group segments and who are financially worse off than their other counterparts. Even up to this level, the concept of vulgarising the use of information technology exists.

¹ The resources used in the Sankoré project are much more stimulating than traditional resources as they stimulate the learner in visual, auditory and kinaesthetic ways. (Businessmega, 2011)

The Human Resource Aspect

Since digital technology impacts most areas of the industry, it is clear that it influences human resource practice. It has become all too familiar today to see employees using laptops or mobiles to communicate among themselves, formal and informal communication messages sent to limited or multiple recipients including reports handed simultaneously to different interest groups. This calls to inferring that technology influence humans at work, in particular, human relations and the work environment.

In line with the above argument comes the need to find out how contemporary human resource issues could be affected by digital transformation. Digital revolution is in itself a subjective element since it might assume that it preceding terminology 'diffusion of technology' simply meant imparting basic knowledge of information technology at work. This underlies that digital revolution goes a step ahead of diffusion in that transformation means the implementation and use of new technologies at work and how this impacts on the human resources under consideration at work.

The Y2K principle on digital revolution

It is interesting at this stage to briefly explain the digital revolution concept based on the Mauritian perspective. As most countries aiming at developing their human potential, Mauritius embarked since almost 30 years on digital revolution. The development of personal computers (PCs) in society created an initial craze among Mauritians namely the computer savvy generation that purchased the first generation of PCs with emblematic names like Commodore, Amstrad, etc. Regarding Amstrad, a huge number of programs and peripherals were developed for this machine (Oldcomputers.com, 1995). This was a time when only specialists and enthusiasts could use computers with some training in computer programming like BASIC or COBOL.

Microsoft's engagement in making computers user-ready was a breakthrough in digital revolution in the 1990s with the personal computer offered with a 'tower', a mouse and a keypad along with peripherals like the line printer. This immediately impacted on society with wider interest for offices to benefit from the use of computers. In line with this innovation, Internet was vulgarised at the social level with the first low-speed connections and the development of mail addresses.

By 2000, the elected government decided to revamp the use of information technology in Mauritius by developing information technology in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector in Mauritius has witnessed major developments and has undergone rapid and sustained growth over the past years. The vision of transforming Mauritius into a cyberisland and making the ICT sector the fifth pillar of the economy was already taking shape (National Computer Board, 2000). ICT sector. Incidentally, government favoured the development of ICT as a pillar of the economy through the creation of cyber cities in the Ebène area—a new location for the development of the IT hub. This was the major advancement in the field given that up to 20,000 directly related jobs were created in the sector and Mauritius, from then onwards, could claim itself as a 'cyber island'. Although initial developments were timid, progress could be perceived in the years that followed in Mauritius through greater accessibility of computers, laptops and tablets in the current situation. Quist-Arcton (2004) stated that the authorities in Mauritius were determined to combine their ambitious plans, to pioneer information technology on the continent, with a drive to educate all islanders in computer literacy, from toddlers to octogenarians.

In line with advancements in ICT creating the digital revolution, government has since then decided that all sectors of public and private sectors should be capable of using digital technology and see that such applications are enforceable in as many sectors as possible in the Mauritian society.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The concern here is on the statement that digital revolution is likely to impact on human resource factors. Could it be said that when information technology was purportedly addressed as a pillar of the Mauritian economy that the future would be successful without any concern? Could one state that the development of ICT that ensued digital revolution was an end in itself? The general argument stands as such:

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The shift from technological diffusion to digital revolution must have an effect on human resources. It is through the development of human resources that technology becomes better used. Thinking that technology alone is the sole provider of solutions for economic progress does not clearly explain the current picture. Digital revolution has an important role to play and must have impacts on human resources. Such effects are, in turn, bound to affect the performance and quality of human resources.

If digital transformation impacts positively on human resources, there is likely to affect visible changes in performance, output, service quality, talent development, among others.

This is where the problem lies. It is all too easy to assume that digital revolution will positively impact on human resource factors since this has not been correctly identified and tested in Mauritian companies. Hence, it becomes useful for the researcher to identify organisations that use information technology and how there is some acceptable correlation between digital transformation and human resource management.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Following the problem statement research questions can be identified. They are stated below.

- What is digital revolution in essence?
- How does digital revolution impact on human resource development?
- What is the effect of digital revolution on the talent management?
- How does digital revolution influence performance at work?

Based on these assumptions, a literature review has been carried out to see how it answers the research questions from a theoretical point of view and how it applies to secondary or already published research.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital revolution is described as the profound and accelerating transformation of business activities, processes, competencies and models to fully leverage the changes and opportunities of digital technologies and their impact across society in a strategic and prioritised way (Digital Transformation Guide, 2015). The development of new competencies revolves around the capacities to be more agile, people-oriented, innovative, connected, aligned and efficient with present and future shifts in mind.

According to Bloomberg (2014), companies revealed the surprising level of ignorance in the definition of Digital Transformation known as “the realignment of, or new investment in, technology and business models to more effectively engage digital customers at every touchpoint in the customer experience lifecycle.” Companies needed to think of Digital Transformation as a “formal effort to renovate business vision, models, and investments for a new digital economy.”

King (2013) stated that businesses go through digital revolution when they have failed to evolve. When a business evolves with its market, continually refreshing products and proposition, reaching new sets of customers and growing the value of existing ones, it needs no transformation. A similar contribution comes from Verdino (2015) who sums up digital transformation as the practice which closes the gap between what digital customers already expect and what analogue businesses actually deliver.

The SMACI concept of digital revolution

The smart, mobile connected digital world is driving companies to build and support an entirely new technology infrastructure. This “technology web” is the interplay of leading edge Social media, Mobility, Analytics, Cloud and Internet of Everything (SMACI) technologies, which are empowering enterprises across critical digital dimensions including products and services, customer experience, operations and workforce (Ghoshal, 2015). Key enablers of digital transformation are creating a new digital transformation web. The individual components of SMACI have been “thriving in silos” over the past few years. Ghoshal (2015) adds that through the convergence of SMACI, the IT landscape is now witnessing the burgeoning power of digital transformation. This entails the integrated play of SMACI to deliver content,

commerce and collaboration to customers anytime and anywhere in a comprehensible, personalised, contextual and cost effective manner.

The impact of digital revolution on human resource development

Next, the impact of digital revolution is studied on human resource related factors. Human Resource Development (HRD) can be defined as Human Resource Development (HRD) is the framework for helping employees develop their personal and organisational skills, knowledge, and abilities. Human Resource Development includes such opportunities as employee training, employee career development, performance and development, coaching, mentoring, succession, key employee identification, tuition assistance, and organisation development (About.com, 2015). Schuler (1990) supports the argument that the human resource department is being presented with an opportunity to become a significant player on the management team. This is occurring because the human resource (HR) function is being transformed into a significant management function.

The advancement of technology in the global workplace is now having a profound impact on the roles of human resource development (HRD) professionals. In the past, technology in HRD was primarily educational media used to support training (Benson et al, 2002). New digital technologies enable greater integration and flexibility—allowing employees to have a greater share of voice, and the ability to create their own work experiences. Digital is poised to radically disrupt HR, and redefine the future of the human resource function (Accenture, 2016).

HRD's strategic role in business performance

Mc Henry (2013) advocates that by concentrating on the development and sustainment of new skills among employees, HRD plays a critical role in business success. While positive, the expectations that new technologies have encouraged have also put the workplace under huge pressure to change. Many companies are challenged to retain and motivate the most talented young workers, who are accustomed to a more blended work/life balance facilitated by digital technology. The current generation of Millennials have grown with the digital world. Their expectations are shaped by their life experience as consumers, students and citizens who use social media, collaboration, search and other technologies as an organic part of their life and work (Mc Henry, 2013).

Digital revolution and Talent Management

Human Resources is unquestionably about the recruitment, development and retention of talent. Talent is a differentiator, a business builder and, given the threat from disruptors and the increasing pace of market change led by the digitalisation of business, an ever increasingly essential driver in protecting from the decline of market share or, at the most extreme, extinction (we are atmosphere.com, 2015).

Hunt (2014) states that transforming talent management requires digitisation, but it also involves leveraging social and digital technologies in ways that promote and enhance communication, collaboration, and engagement – not just between an employee and the organisation, but between and among employees themselves. HR and talent processes and the technology that enables them will no longer constitute their own domain. Rather, many aspects of HR and talent management will become fully embedded into the future of work (The Innovation enterprise, 2015).

Digital revolution and Performance Management

Oxford Economics (2012) points out that technology is also reshaping the performance of human resources (HR). HR leaders today can leverage tools that put metrics around things that once were difficult to measure or predict. Research shows that the transformation of HR into a strategic business function is well under way and will continue over the next years. The process involves deepening and broadening collaboration between HR and other business units to improve the performance and analysis of talent management, and a greater focus on driving business results through the strategic use of technology.

Wolf (2015) explains that performance management is actually being transformed by social and digital technologies. Going paperless is now a standard in many organisations, but the changes are evolving beyond that. Now managers can capture and provide feedback to employees nearly continuously, so that they always know how they're doing and where they stand (Wolf, 2015). This informal feedback can also be directly fed into the formal performance management process, which can help increase completeness and accuracy and minimise surprises.

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Making digital transformation a success within HRM

Regarding the staff management, the main debatable issue is about the arrival of a new generation, the “Z Generation”, which is hyper-connected, enterprising and no longer loyal to the firm. Camille (2015) states that there are several future stakes that the HR Department should consider right now. According to her, it is first important to have a good employer brand to be attractive for the “digital natives”. They have ways to make themselves a precise description of each organisation, and know where it is better to work and which firm has actually adopted its processes. Other challenges consist in integrating this new generation into the company and to make sure of the commitment of the HR Manager to accompany all generations forming the firm. A related problem is the risk of a generational split (Camille, 2015). The “reverse mentoring” is a recent and useful practice to face that. Accordingly, the manager role changes, as well as the managerial culture.

The Literature Gap

The arguments developed in the literature covered the three critical aspects of digital transformation within the human resource management function. This literature develops a perspective of digital transformation from an external point of view. The present research advocates that there is an absence of information and literature from the Mauritian context given that both data transformation and HR concepts are supposedly interconnected but sparsely related in Mauritian companies.

Ghoshal (2015) supports the idea that governments are rapidly infusing new technologies into their citizen engagement practices and approaches to problem solving. They are exploring ways to leverage big data analytics to better address challenges and improve operational efficiencies and services. At the same time, social media is changing how citizens communicate, interact and mobilise, making it an imperative for governments to be more responsive.

Although, there is an apparent desire to develop Mauritius as a cyber-island, little is said onto how digital transformation should influence selective HR practices and how these might, in turn, benefit both users of the digital systems and society.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was undertaken in two public organisations: The Université des Mascareignes and two public post offices located in north and the eastern part of Mauritius. The framework was a benchmarking process testing digital transformation in two unrelated public sectors. Benchmarking enhances transparency and performance after entering the public domain (Braadbaart, 2007). Punniyamoorthy and Murali (2008) support the argument that benchmarking should be a reference or measurement standard for comparison; a performance measurement that is the standard of excellence for a specific business; and a measurable, best-in-class achievement. To ensure credible results, a relative comparison was made before using a questionnaire method. Postal services use digital technologies a lot but are operated by few staff. Universities also use technology a lot but have larger staff. To ensure constancy in the results and consider outcomes to be representative of a normal distribution, 30 respondents were chosen: 20 from the university comprising 8 lecturers, 6 administrative staff and 6 students while in the postal department, 4 employees mainly clerical and administrative (postmaster level) were included.

VI. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The research hypotheses were developed as follows:

H₁: Digital revolution impacts positively on human resource development.

Null Hypothesis: Digital revolution has no impact on human resource development.

H₂: Digital revolution has an effect on the talent management.

Null Hypothesis: Digital revolution has no effect on the talent management.

H₃: Digital revolution influences performance at work.

Null Hypothesis: Digital revolution influences performance at work.

VII. RESEARCH FINDINGS

A questionnaire comprising 3 main questions supporting the hypothesis sub-divided into 4 items—making it 12—was provided to the respondents of both institutions with a Likert Scale method where 1 stood for Totally Disagree (NA), 2 Disagree, 3 Partially Agree and 4 Totally Agree. The mean standard value was 2.5 but mean scores for each group along with standard deviation were tabulated. They are described below.

Table 1: Findings From Research Undertaken

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	UNIVERSITY		POSTAL	
DIGITAL REVOLUTION ON HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Digital revolution develops my ICT knowledge at work.	3.2	0.63	3.0	0.53
Digital revolution develops my cognitive skills at work.	3.4	0.69	3.2	0.70
Digital revolution assists me in continuous professional development.	2.4	0.84	2.5	0.53
Digital revolution enhances my career advancement at work.	1.7	0.78	2.7	0.70
Cumulative	2.7	0.73	2.8	0.49
DIGITAL REVOLUTION ON TALENT MANAGEMENT	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Digital revolution makes me creative at work.	3.4	0.69	3.2	0.46
Digital revolution broadens my talent at work.	2.7	0.83	3.1	0.83
Digital revolution brings change and transformation in me compared to the past.	3.1	0.99	3.2	0.83
Digital revolution qualifies me for a higher position at work.	1.6	0.77	2.0	0.70
Cumulative	2.7	0.62	2.9	0.70
DIGITAL REVOLUTION ON PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Digital revolution improves my productivity at work.	3.2	0.66	3.2	0.46
Digital revolution enhances my customer service at work.	2.5	0.75	3.3	0.51
Digital revolution adds value to the work that I handle.	3.3	0.82	3.1	0.83
Digital revolution enhances my responsiveness and adaptation to flexible and productive work.	2.6	0.70	2.3	0.74
Cumulative	2.9	0.73	2.9	0.63

The three hypotheses were evaluated

H₁: There is a positive impact of digital revolution on human resource development.

Based from the mean value 2.5, the following observations were made. In the first case, mean values for the impact of digital revolution on human resource development were 2.7 and 2.8 for university and postal services respectively. Regarding the development of ICT and cognitive skills, scores were above 3.0 confirming the validity of the hypothesis. There were lower scores in continuous professional development and career advancement on the ground that promotion is highly structured and inflexible in public organisations. The two-tailed P value equals 0.6915. Since $p > 0.05$, this difference is considered to be not statistically significant.

H₂: There is a positive impact between digital revolution and talent management.

The cumulated mean values were 2.7 and 2.9 regarding the impact of digital revolution on talent management. This meant that digital revolution influences the management and development of talent with attractive scores in items like data transformation making work creative and helping in bringing change. There was a low score regarding the role of data transformation in promotion and upward mobility which are also components of talent management. The two-tailed P value equals 0.7335. Since $p > 0.05$, this difference is considered to be not statistically significant.

H₃: There is a positive outcome of digital revolution on performance management.

Cumulated mean values were similar between university and postal employees in this hypothesis. Digital revolution had a significant improvement on productivity for both categories of employees; university and postal. This also added value to

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the work that both category respondents undertook. Weaker responses were recorded in relation to flexible and productive working as flexibility is still a questionable item in the public service. The two-tailed P value equals 0.8149. Since $p > 0.05$, this difference is considered to be not statistically significant.

Following the confirmation of the hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA test was considered to check variance between the two respondents under the same conditions for evaluation namely the three variables human resource development, talent management and performance management. The three variables were influenced by data transformation confirming the positive hypotheses. The score for the ANOVA test is displayed below.

Table 2: One-Way Anova Test

Means	One-way Completely Randomised Table Entry	
	UNIVERSITY	POSTAL
1	2.6	2.6
2	2.7	2.8
3	3.0	2.5
n	3	3
X	2.767	2.633
s	0.208	0.153
X_{ave}	2.700	

Table 3: A One-Way Completely Randomised Entry

source	df	SS	MS	F	P-value
treatments	1	0.027	0.027	0.8000	0.7607
error	4	0.133	0.033		
total	5	0.160			

One-way ANOVA test: $[F(1, 4) = 0.8, p = 0.76]$

It is concluded that there is no statistically significant difference between the three conditions. The researcher can conclude that the differences between condition Means are likely due to chance. Respondents gave answers close to one another under both tests.

VIII. EXPERT OPINION ON RESULTS OBTAINED

Following the findings, the researcher sought expert opinion from a panel comprising a university academic staff specialised in Information Technology (EO1), an academic in business studies (EO2), a postal officer (EO1) and a senior public officer (EO4) to voice their opinions on the findings obtained. The objective of this exercise was to see how far the members agreed with the results obtained. To better address the questions, the members asked for anonymity given that they aimed at expressing their personal views on the subject areas. For the sake of anonymity, a coding system was used per member to ensure that their comments would not be subject to investigation.

On digital revolution on human resource development

The views of the panel of expert opinion on the issue were summarised as follows:

EO1: Human resource development is a key consideration in the public service. The fact that data transformation is useful at work means that it should also aid in better developing human potential.

EO2: Human resource development should accompany smart technology-oriented public systems. This is where the change helps in better addressing the needs of users of the service.

EO3: Apparently, there is a need to have more talented resources whether it is a postal company or university because it is through digital transformation that new talent is developed.

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EO4: The importance of human resource development is confirmed through the use of smart technologies and this might also impact on performance at work and service delivery.

On digital revolution and talent management

The views of the panel of expert opinion on the issue were summarised as follows:

EO1: Talent management is apparently better perceived in the postal services because there is a need for employees in this sector to offer their services directly to customers.

EO2: Talent management will be evidenced through digital change because people are obliged to have recourse to information technology and, in particular, the software that they must use.

EO3: The development of talent matters in both sectors since users of information technology have to be conversant both with what they are using as tools at work and how these will impact on customers.

EO4: Talent is created through rapid and more concrete transformation of work using information technology. This also addresses the need to provide one stop-shop service to the public.

On digital revolution and performance management

The views of the panel of expert opinion on the issue were summarised as follows:

EO1: There is overwhelming satisfaction regarding the impact of digital change on performance since information technology improves significantly the pace and quality of work in both sectors investigated.

EO2: Digital change not only improves performance of service providers but also facilitates work. In today's environment, such sophistication in service provision boots productivity and also employee satisfaction.

EO3: There is a higher sense of improvement in service provision at work and this is also highlighted by the strong scores provided by respondents in both sectors.

EO4: Digital change contributes to employee development while enhancing personal output at work. In this perspective, employee performance is enhanced compared to traditional paperwork in offices.

IX. A COMPARATIVE ROADMAP FOR DIGITAL REVOLUTION IN THE TWO SECTORS

This section, based on the researcher's personal experiences, provides insight into the development of digital revolution in both university and postal services over the past twenty years stemming from the public use of the Internet and broader acceptance of information technology applications in the public sector. In doing so, it also helps understanding the extent to which digital revolution has really taken place in the two sectors under investigation.

Table 4: Comparative Roadmap For Digital Revolution In The Two Sectors Under Review

UNIVERSITY	POSTAL SERVICE
1995-2000: Introducing information technology in universities -Little level of training of academic staff. -The introduction of information technology courses in universities. -First generation computers at work using Windows 95. -Weak Internet connection	1995-2000: Introducing information technology in postal services -Wide use of paper work. -No formalisation of the use of information technology. -Little or no training of postal staff. -Low exposure of government services to information technology.
2001-2010: The development of the ICT sector in Mauritius and its impact on university -ICT learning is formalised. -All academic staff are expected to be conversant with ICT technologies. -Computers become smarter and easier to use.	2001-2010: The development of the ICT sector in Mauritius and its impact on postal services -The government portal is developed. -Computers are used in postal services. -Mauritius Post becomes parastatal and less under total State control.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Development of internet-based learning platforms. -Widening of training opportunities in ICT. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Innovation of services is required. -The development of ICT is emphasised through training and learning.
<p>2011 Onwards: Digital revolution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Digital revolution is a must at university level. -There is a shift in harnessing ICT in all aspects of work. -New courses linked with Software Engineering and Multimedia are provided. -Wider networking takes place with students and external organisations. -Intranet is enhanced and widely used. -Systems are configured on Cloud computing. 	<p>2011 Onwards: Digital revolution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Government vulgarises the use of ICT in all sectors. -The postal services operate a one-stop shop service integrating payment of various utility bills. -Employees are expected to be fully conversant with information technology. -Greater amount of work is handled in the postal services. - The creation of a Civil Service College promises greater training opportunities in developing digital revolution.

X. CONCLUSION

The research sums up that digital revolution has a positive impact on human resource factors and is bound to play an influential role at the workplace. Human resource managers and practitioners have to understand and apply good systems to ensure the effective management of data transformation in business. It is also understood that there must be effective coordination between the implementation and use of digital technologies to harness benefits in the three suggested variables discussed in this study. There is some limitation to this study in terms of time constraint and the size of respondents yet the phenomenon is replicative at the national level where it is seen that educational institutions, the postal services including health and numerous public sector businesses are having an appreciation of the contribution of digital revolution to them. Mauritius is now already engaged in the harnessing of digital data—a major leap ahead of the diffusion of information technology that took place two decades ago. The modernisation of the Civil Service has entailed the training of Public Officers in information and communication technologies in order to have an ICT-literate workforce. In the Civil Service, ICT-related training with respect to office automation is, in general, delivered and designed for the Civil Service including a standard ICT course relevant to all Government officials and functional courses that meet the needs of specific categories of public officers such as Judicial and Legal Class, Administrative and Finance Cadres (National Computer Board, 2000). The shift from digital diffusion to its transformation must have positive effects on the human resource function which gradually becomes more pivotal in the organisation and has also a more responsible role to play while depending on digital transformation. This perspective might also align with Storey’s approach (2001) often seen as an archetype of the ‘soft’ variant, defining HRM as a distinctive approach to employee management which seeks to achieve competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce using an array of cultural, structural and personal techniques.

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