

## DIGITAL LEADERSHIP AND THE FUTURE OF WORK: A STUDY ON AI ADOPTION, DIGITAL READINESS AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS AMONG MANAGEMENT STUDENTS

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### Abstract

Technological progress has changed the ways in which people learn, communicate and work, and artificial intelligence (AI) is already being used across many occupations. Students therefore need to understand new technologies and prepare for the kind of work they may carry out in future. Along with technical knowledge, they must also possess skills such as communication, problem-solving, critical thinking and adaptability. This paper examines digital leadership, AI adoption, digital readiness and employability skills among management students. Its main objective is to understand how students use AI tools and how confident they are in a digital environment. The study also considers the skills that students regard as important for their careers and whether they need further support or training to acquire them. A descriptive research design is proposed, in which data are collected from students through a structured questionnaire and analysed using appropriate statistical methods to assess their use of AI, digital readiness and employability skills. The study is expected to show the extent to which students are prepared for a world of work in which AI and digital technologies are becoming common, and its findings will help colleges plan training programmes, workshops and other skill-development activities. Preparing students for the future requires not only teaching them to use technology but also helping them become adaptable, confident and capable of sound decision-making in a changing work environment.

### Keywords

*Digital Leadership, AI Adoption, Digital Readiness, Employability Skills, Future of Work*

## 1. Introduction

Technology has changed people's lives and has become an essential part of education and employment. One recent trend is the application of artificial intelligence (AI) to searching, preparing, analysing and communicating information and to many other academic tasks, and students can use AI to support their studies. AI is also changing the dynamics within organisations, as most firms have embraced digital technology to speed up processes and simplify decision-making (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018; Microsoft & LinkedIn, 2024). Students must therefore be technologically capable and willing to use new digital tools. However, technological skills alone are not enough; employers also expect

communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, teamwork and adaptability (World Economic Forum, 2023).

Besides technical skills, digital leadership is vital, as it involves managing people and processes to achieve organisational objectives. Since management students are future leaders, preparing them for emerging workplace trends is important. A study of AI adoption, digital readiness and employability skills can thus help prepare management students for a future workplace led by digital leadership.

## 2. Need and Scope of the Study

AI is a relatively new technology that students can easily adopt to enhance their search, research and studies, although some students are better at

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using digital technology than others. Even as the workplace transforms, employees will continue to use digital technology for managing data, operating online systems and many other AI applications (World Economic Forum, 2025). The increased use of AI has created many opportunities, but some students may not use it to their advantage, and although students are familiar with technology, it is not certain that they are confident in their AI proficiency. Students also need communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, adaptability and technical competencies to remain competitive.

It is therefore essential to study students' level of AI adoption, digital confidence and employability skills in order to understand their readiness for the corporate world. The study is limited to management students and focuses on their extent of AI adoption, digital confidence and employability skills. It is expected to benefit students, teachers and colleges by providing insight into students' confidence and the skills required to enhance workplace readiness.

### 3. Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the extent of AI adoption and the level of digital readiness and confidence among management students.
2. To identify the employability skills required by management students and their awareness of the AI-enabled future of work.
3. To examine the role of digital leadership in preparing students for the future workplace.
4. To determine the need for further training and suggest measures to strengthen students' digital confidence and employability skills.

### 4. Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive research design to assess management students' AI adoption, digital readiness and employability skills. Primary data are to be collected through a structured questionnaire with sections on personal information, AI adoption, digital readiness, employability skills, confidence level and perception of the future of work. Secondary data are drawn from books, journal articles and

reports on AI, digital leadership, employability skills and the future of work.

The responses are to be presented in tables showing the number and percentage of students in each category, together with the frequency of AI use, the applications of AI, students' confidence in using digital technology and the skills considered important for the future workplace. Further analysis can be carried out using statistical software, including Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and the final conclusions will be based on the results gathered.

## 5. Conceptual Framework

### 5.1 AI Adoption by Management Students

AI adoption refers to the extent to which students incorporate AI into their studies. Students can use AI for research, assignments, presentations, data management, essays, slides and other academic activities. For management students, AI can deepen their understanding of marketing, finance, human resource management, business analytics and entrepreneurship. However, students must verify the authenticity of information provided by AI before accepting it as factual.

### 5.2 Digital Readiness

Digital readiness refers to students' confidence in using technology together with their willingness to adopt new programmes. It enables students to apply their knowledge and skills to add value to their work and processes. To be digitally ready, students need computer skills, communication skills and the ability to search for information, access online programmes, follow online procedures and learn new programmes. Such confidence is essential because students will be exposed to different programmes and procedures when they enter the corporate world.

### 5.3 Digital Leadership

Digital leadership involves managing people and processes by leveraging digital technology. A leader need not be proficient in every digital programme but should be knowledgeable enough to choose the best tools and lead effectively. Leaders also need communication and adaptability skills to motivate employees to accept new procedures and programmes, and employees must be trained to use new systems. A leader can therefore play a pivotal

role in facilitating change that benefits both the organisation and its employees. Through digital leadership, management students learn that, in addition to digital skills, they need teamwork and human skills, since a leader works with other managers to keep processes efficient, takes responsibility for decisions and encourages employees to take ownership of their duties.

#### **5.4 Employability Skills Required in the AI Era**

Employability skills are the skills required to secure a job, excel in it and advance in one's career. They are important for all types of jobs, although requirements differ across organisations, industries and locations. AI will change the future workplace, but it does not eliminate the need for these skills (International Labour Organization, 2023). Communication skills enable students to deliver information confidently to employees and customers; problem-solving skills help them handle challenges; critical thinking allows them to interpret information objectively; and adaptability helps them adopt new ways of working as technology transforms the workplace. Teamwork enables people to work towards a common goal and maintain positive employee relations, creativity helps generate and implement new ideas, and decision-making enables people to make the best choices while considering the consequences of their actions. Management students can develop these skills through presentations, group discussions, case analyses, projects, internships and business games.

### **6. AI, Management Education and the Future of Work**

**Future of work:** The future of work will involve collaboration with AI. Although AI will handle many tasks, human skills will remain essential for decision-making, generating ideas, communicating, solving problems and thinking critically (OECD, 2023). The future workplace will not involve total automation; demand for some skills may decline while demand for others increases (World Economic Forum, 2025). Students who are confident in using digital technology and possess human skills will be more competitive, and employees will need to keep learning new programmes and procedures

as the workplace transforms.

**AI in management education:** Management education equips students with the skills and knowledge to compete in the corporate world. Rather than teaching AI only in theory, colleges can integrate it into management education to show its usefulness in marketing, finance, human resource management and operations. For instance, AI can analyse customer data to generate advertising insights, identify trends for financial analysis and forecasting, support recruitment and automate or improve operational processes. Such an approach helps students relate their studies to real-time applications.

**AI and decision-making:** Decision-making is one of the most important managerial skills. AI applications can analyse information and generate recommendations, but managers should not rely solely on AI, because many aspects must be considered before a decision is finalised (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018). Managers must also apply human judgement, especially when their choices affect employees' lives, and students must remember that they remain responsible for their choices even when AI supports decision-making.

**AI and students' learning:** Students can use AI to ask questions, obtain explanations, organise information and practise skills, which can help them understand concepts better and access information not available in course books or notes. However, students should not depend on AI to generate answers or copy its output verbatim, as this can compromise their learning (UNESCO, 2023).

**Responsible use of AI:** As technology spreads into all fields, it must be used responsibly. AI can sometimes give wrong information, so its outputs should be reviewed and confirmed before being used as a reference. Students should also avoid sharing personal information with online programmes and avoid copying AI-generated content into assignments or research work. Because individuals remain accountable for their actions and decisions, they should not rely excessively on technology.

### **7. Barriers to AI Adoption by Students**

A major barrier to AI adoption is the lack of awareness and understanding of how AI works: although most students know that AI exists, they may not understand how it can be useful in their field of study or career. Some students lack confidence in using digital technology, particularly new programmes, because of limited exposure, while others already have prior knowledge and skills. Another barrier is over-reliance on technology for tasks that require basic skills such as writing, critical thinking and problem-solving. Accuracy and confidentiality are also important concerns, as students must ensure that information obtained from AI is accurate and must not share personal information with technology programmes.

## 8. Role of Colleges and Future Prospects

Colleges play a significant role in preparing students for the future workplace by equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge. They should present technology in a way that students can easily understand and apply, for example through workshops on AI programmes, employability skills, communication, problem-solving and career planning, and through case studies and games that show how technology is used in different industries. Rather than trying to make students technology experts, colleges should build their confidence in using new programmes, encourage responsible use of technology and prepare them for a rapidly changing world.

AI and digital technology will continue to play an essential role in business and management, and students must be ready to work in a corporate world where many processes are automated. Digital leadership will become increasingly significant as managers guide employees in using technology effectively and responsibly. Employers will continue to seek individuals with strong human skills, including communication, creativity, empathy, critical thinking and ethical decision-making, to complement the limitations of AI (World Economic Forum, 2025). Students who develop the habit of continuous learning will be better placed to use new technology, and colleges can support them by offering hands-on experience rather than only theoretical knowledge.

## 9. Suggestions

1. Colleges should conduct regular, simple workshops on AI and expose students to the business world so that they understand the changes AI will bring.

2. Students should take part in activities that show how AI is applied in different fields and should learn digital skills alongside their subject knowledge.

3. Greater emphasis should be placed on communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, adaptability and leadership skills.

4. Students should always verify the accuracy of information provided by AI, and AI training should cover privacy and ethics.

5. Career-planning sessions should introduce students to emerging digital careers, and students should cultivate continuous learning to keep pace with new technology.

## 10. Limitations and Future Scope

The study is limited to management students and relies on information provided by them. Students differ in digital proficiency and access to technology, the study reflects only students' perspectives on future workplace trends, and AI technology and employer expectations continue to change. Future research may replicate the study among students of other courses or colleges, survey employers to understand the skills they seek, compare students' skills and confidence before and after workshops, digital-skill training or industry exposure, and track students as they enter the corporate world.

## 11. Conclusion

AI is becoming a significant part of people's lives, and management students must prepare for the changes it will bring to the corporate world. While digital proficiency is essential, students should also develop communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, teamwork, creativity and adaptability skills. Colleges must equip future managers with digital leadership skills, as they will be responsible for managing employees in firms that have adopted technology in most of their processes. The study

therefore highlights the importance of balanced career development, in which students gain exposure to AI, enhance their digital confidence and competence, and develop human skills to remain competitive in the future workplace.

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