



By Dr Jaclyn Lee, PhD

5 Key Skills Needed in the Digital Economy

Following from my previous article on staying ahead and keeping abreast, I would like to continue this series by zooming in on five key skills that are needed for us to stay ahead in the digital economy. Fast forward to 2020, we can see that the key trends will include a rapidly aging population, the rise of smart machines and systems, new media, social tools, global connectivity as well as increased use of sensors and processing for analytics.

As I have shared in the recent NTUC U Leaders Forum, PMETs will now need to prepare themselves for this onslaught of technology and digitization. Whether we like it or not, it is going to happen, and the sooner we prepare ourselves, the better equipped we are: The 5 key skills (researched from different sources) that we need to start harnessing will include the following:

- 1. Innovative and adaptive thinking** - This means having the ability to think and come up with solutions beyond that which is routine. Some examples would be using technology and design thinking to integrate new ideas into existing processes, systems and products. As the world shifts towards automation of routine work and off-shoring, people with an ability to adapt and respond to unique expected circumstances of the moment will thrive in the workplace.
- 2 Virtual Collaboration and social intelligence** – Ability to work virtually across boundaries as the internet becomes more pervasive in all parts of the world, is another important skill to possess. This includes the ability to assemble a virtual team together to work on projects and harnessing the power of technology to develop deep collaborations. Examples including using collaborative tools, and tapping into talent networks across the globe through the use of virtual platforms like UPWORK. As we work with people from all cultures, race, and religion, social intelligence will set us apart from machines. Social Intelligence includes having the skills to develop deep and meaningful relationships with others, to collaborate, and to sense and adapt our thinking styles, and mannerisms to align with others.
- 3 Ability to work across disciplines** – The world now needs systems, services and products, which means that the ability to work across disciplines become important. More and more workplaces will require multi-disciplinary teams to develop such an ecosystem. Elon Musk, the extremely successful billionaire who built four multi-billion companies by his mid-40s, is an “Expert-Generalist”. His expertise ranges from Rocket Science, Engineering, Physics, Artificial Intelligence to Solar Power and Energy. His ability to integrate concepts from different fields help him to be able to spot trends and patterns that others were not able to. Thus, understanding several disciplines helps us to be able to transfer and integrate knowledge in a way a single discipline is not able to do.
- 4 Literacy in different types of media** – The ability to understand various media platforms, and how best to communicate effectively with them are valuable skills. As the world is now gradually being driven by social media, the ability to develop content using new media forms and leverage these for persuasive communication becomes key.
- 5 Computational Thinking and Analytics** - Digitization and technological advancement will drive the need for tech-related skills. In particular, computational thinking will be a highly demanded skill as big data and analytics become a reality in our everyday lives. Data scientists will be required to ply through mountains of data to make sense of everything, spot trends and patterns for use in consumer marketing, human resources, banking and other sectors. Being trained as a Psychologist, and working as a Human Resource Practitioner, I was not able to really understand and use data in my job until 4 years back when I decided to take up a Doctorate in Information Technology. The training equipped me with the skills to use software, new media tools, as well as analytics to become much more effective in my job.

As we move into the new age of advancing technology, we will need to transform ourselves day by day. You are in the sweet spot now to take that quantum leap for the digital economy. I wish you every success in your journey.