



Live&Learn Wing Lam

WE are entering a digital era.

The world's most valuable companies are no longer banks or energy companies, but technology companies.

Accenture chief executive officer (CEO) Pierre Nanterme noted that "digital is the main reason just over half of the companies in the Fortune 500 have disappeared since the year 2000".

With so much emphasis on digital, it's clear that today's graduates not only need the hard and soft skills that universities have tried to develop, but a newer and much-needed repertoire of digital skills.

Indeed, the adoption of online learning by many universities also represents a timely opportunity for students to build their digital skillset.

There are five key digital skills that today's graduates need in order to be digitally proficient:

> Distributed teams and collaboration

With Covid-19, many of us experienced, for the first time, working from home over a sustained period.

However, the reality is that many digital-ready organisations already expect their employees to be productive and work collaboratively as part of a virtual and even global team, regardless of their physical location.

This trend will only continue. Collaboration technology has advanced to the stage where face-to-face interaction is nice, but not essential.

Today's graduates must be able to work effectively as part of a team, whether that team operates physically, virtually or both.

Digitally skilled

The workforce of tomorrow needs talents who are knowledgeable in all things technology

They will need to manage their time, work independently, remain disciplined and know how to get the best out of meetings.

> Data science

The most successful companies are increasingly data driven.

Netflix systematically analyses data on the viewing habits of its 130 million subscribers, everything from what they search for and the shows they watch, in order to provide a highly personalised experience that is ultimately designed to engage and retain customers.

It also uses data to drive multi-million-dollar investment decisions in new shows based on the likelihood of success.

Today's graduates need not become full-fledged data scientists, but they do need to understand how to use data in problem-solving and decision-making.

> Digital entrepreneurship

All the exciting and emerging opportunities will be in the digital space.

So, traditional companies need to build

an entrepreneurial talent base to compete with the nimbler, digitally native players and start-ups.

We are already seeing a wave of independent digital entrepreneurs – everything from multi-millionaire YouTube content creators to freelancing Grab drivers.

Graduates that can acquire the right set of digital entrepreneurship skills will have the widest range of career options, including venturing into their own business.

> Design thinking

Design thinking is a collaborative approach to problem-solving that puts customers (or users) at the centre of the process and is core to developing a 'delightful' digital experience.

In major cities across China, paying for things digitally using WePay or Alipay, is the norm.

The entire digital payment experience is so quick, convenient, reliable and secure, that it has now displaced all other forms of payment.

Companies cannot hope to compete in the digital economy unless they understand design thinking and are able to cre-

ate compelling digital experiences.

Graduates that are able to apply a design thinking approach will be highly sought after by organisations undergoing digital transformation.

> Developing code

"Coding is the second most important language you can learn," said Apple CEO Tim Cook, who advocated that every child should learn how to code.

There is no shortage of digital ideas, but there is a real lack of coders, or software engineers, who can translate those ideas into real-world digital solutions that can be taken to market.

The shortage of tech talent is global. Companies pay lucrative salaries to attract and retain the very best talent.

While today's graduates do not need to be full-fledged software engineers, in the digital era, coding is analogous to mathematics – it is something that everyone should have at least a basic grasp of.

The future is exceptionally bright for graduates who can master all five of the aforementioned digital skills.

Prof Wing Lam is Provost and CEO at University of Reading Malaysia, an international branch campus of the University of Reading, UK. He has held a variety of academic positions in Malaysia, Singapore and the UK. Prof Wing completed his PhD in Computer Science from Kings College London in 1994. He has published over 80 peer-reviewed articles and journals. His current areas of research interest include technology and innovation. The views expressed here are the writer's own.