
Guest editorial: A retrospective and prospective of how to develop managers, framed by post-pandemic experiences of digital transformation

Guest editorial

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Restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the world of work (Hodder, 2020; Kaushik and Guleria, 2020; Kramer and Kramer, 2020; Monitor, 2020) accelerating digital transformation for all. Digital transformation became an essential component as businesses adapted to the shift to remote and online working with the importance of this topic across all sectors due to the impact of COVID-19 (Ardolino *et al.*, 2022, Klöckner *et al.*, 2022). Although the transformation impacted entire organisations, the main stakeholders driving the change have been the managers who stood at the forefront of decision-making and embedding digital transformation being responsible for workforce management and training through to implementing digital and hybrid working, managing the well-being needs of the employees and own training needs, often with little or no support due to a rapid nature of the transformation (Denicolai and Previtali, 2023; Khor and Tan, 2022; Oleksa-Marewska and Tokar, 2022).

This special issue focuses on what can be learnt from the pandemic experiences of digital transformation and the digitised workplace. The purpose of the special issue is to explore and identify best practices regarding how to develop managers in an age of uncertainty, with specific reference to responsible management development (Abdelgaffar, 2021; Hind *et al.*, 2009; Karakas, 2009). The intention is to span boundaries beyond the conventional ideas of “developing managers” for the corporate world and instead explore new approaches that can be considered more inclusive, sustainable and that have social impact (Bleich and Bowles, 2021). To this end, papers have been welcomed from different contexts, with an emphasis given to scholars who examine the impact of pandemic-driven digital disruption on responsible management development, with a view to introducing new approaches to developing management skills. The focus is on how to prepare individuals for future (unforeseeable) management challenges, exploring ways to build resilience and above all, distilling the lessons that can be learnt from the pandemic experiences of digital transformation.

The articles carefully selected for this special issue build on the leadership theory and extend it by introducing a conceptual model of managerial performance, proposing key components for virtual leadership, exploring the use of metaverse in business management, proposing new approaches to gamification and finally exploring the process model for digital transformation. All five articles complement each other and offer the reader unique insights into the latest developments in digital transformation affecting the work of the manager retrospectively and prospectively. The intention has been to create a portfolio of ready to use recommendations and practical examples for the managers working within the ever-evolving world of digitisation to be supported with lessons learnt and suggestions for practical techniques. We hope you enjoy reading and trying out some of the ideas.



Journal of Management
Development
Vol. 42 No. 5, 2023
pp. 337-339
© Emerald Publishing Limited
0262-1711
DOI 10.1108/JMD-06-2023-511

Contributing articles

The first article, “A juggler’s manifesto: elevating creativity to stay productive amid uncertainty” by Rickard Enstroem, discusses strategies for enhancing a manager’s creativity and resiliency and proposes recommendations for improving professional development training and post-secondary business education. The author introduces a conceptual model that focuses on managerial performance, derived from a synthesis of the literature on creativity in business and psychology. This model provides tools for managers to deal with adverse and rapidly changing conditions flexibly, promoting employee productivity and satisfaction.

The second manuscript, “Discovering the antecedents of virtual leadership in universities and higher education institutions of Iran during COVID-19 pandemic: a qualitative study” by Soudabeh Vahdati, Naghavi Seyyed, Ali Mir, Reza Vaezi and Fattah Sharifzadeh, explores the components of virtual leadership in universities and higher education institutions during COVID-19 pandemic. The authors advance leadership development theory by highlighting the main components of virtual leadership in the educational sector as a comprehensive perspective and complement the other aspects of virtual leadership such as consequences and challenges investigated by other studies. The authors identified five main components influencing virtual leadership during COVID-19, including the leader’s personality traits, followers’ characteristics and technological, environmental and organisational components.

The third article, “Metaverse changing realm of the business world: a bibliometric snapshot” by Mita Metha, addresses the use of metaverse in business management as one of the fastest-growing digital transformations impacting business across the globe. The author undertook a comprehensive review of the literature pertaining to themes, opportunities and contemporary challenges of the metaverse in business management to gain insights into the challenges posed to managers through such transformation. This article provides rich insight into how the world of virtual workspaces is making a paradigm shift in management development.

The fourth article, “Learning through playing: appreciating the role of gamification in business management education during and after the Covid-19 pandemic” by Konstantina Skritsovali, considers the role of gamification during and post the COVID-19 pandemic on the impact of business management student experiences in the UK. The author contributes to a series of design suggestions for fellow tutors and practitioners seeking to advance their pedagogical approach to developing agile and resilient future managers and leaders. The author suggests that gamification can enhance the practical experience, provide opportunities for peer engagement and active participation and improve the development of soft and hard skills.

The fifth manuscript, “Which key components belong to a digital transformation process with a meaningful change?” authored by Viktoria Behrens, draws on statistical analysis to gain insights into the components and processes of digital transformation with the aim to determine if the process model for digital transformation already exists. The author proposes that the main and most important components of a digital transformation are mindset, communication, strategy, technology and people.

Discussion and future research directions

The special issue on post-pandemic management development through digital transformation identifies key strategies for educators, organisational learning and development departments on novel and innovative methods to address digital transformation in the training and development of current and future managers. The ever evolving digitisation offers many opportunities for efficiency and higher quality. We hope this special issue captures the richness of the experiences of digitisation and offers a much

needed insight into the theory and practice supporting the managers and organisations in making the most of the digital transformation. Guest editorial

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