



Required Skills and Guidance for Job Seekers and Universities' Graduates: Reskilling and Up skilling in The Era of Disruptions

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Abstract

With today's New Normal and technological disruptions, working style and skills needed have drastically changed our workforce landscape at an unprecedented scale. That being said, it is essential for employers and employees, students, graduates and working adults to adapt and learn new skills in order to be competitive and sustainable in the long term. In today's work environment, not only people have to compete with each other for a job but they also have to up their skills to get ahead of machines automation, Artificial Intelligence (AI) such as Chatbots, and perhaps, robotics just to name a few. A research by the US firm Gartner indicates that the number of skills needed for a single job, say...in marketing or sales, has increased by 10% per year for the last four years. At the same time 30% of the skills required for a job four years ago are no longer relevant or required. As the world is changing fast, with new jobs and new positions every year, inevitably old skills will likely be replaced. According to 2020 Deloitte Global Human Capital, the essential skills that are vital to workforce are Growth Mindset, Critical Digital and Cognitive capabilities, Strategic/Systematic, EQ (emotional quotient), and Business/Win-Win Thinking and result-driven approach and mindset complemented by Experiential Learning through hands-on are boldly pointed out. Further, disruptors to the nature of work have been delivered by technology innovation, a growing demand for new competencies, shifting labor demographics, aging population, unskilled and low/outdated-skilled workers/staff new workforce models, and the ever-evolving business environment, and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic, all these have made employability much more complicated, demanding and challenging. To serve as a key guidance and an informative source for stakeholders stated above, the article helps define fields of work which need reskilling, up skilling in line with workforce requirements. To sum up, the content can be served as a guiding pathway for job seekers, employers and universities' graduates to prepare and adapt in order to sustainably stay relevant and competitive in the New Normal and disruptive era.

Keywords: Reskilling, Up skilling, Soft and Hard Skills, Workforce Competitiveness



1. Introduction

Many developments have emerged in our modern world that has heavily disrupted lives and businesses. At this moment, the effective use of technology has never been more critical, and in order to stay competitive and thrive in today's work environment, multitude jobs require a complete revamp of the way we work. This is where reskilling and upskilling become an integral foundation for working people, graduates, undergraduates, job seekers, students, teachers and the list goes on. Given the unpredictable New/Next Normal scenarios reskilling/upskilling have never been more urgent, and are considered a Must not a Need. Workers and individuals across industries must figure out how they can adapt to rapidly changing conditions, and companies have to learn how to match those workers to new roles and activities. To describe the term reskill, it is to learn new things, completely different from our usual expertise, while to upskill is to update our current knowledge and skills to strengthen them. This also refers to the expansion of people's capabilities and employability so they can fully participate in a rapidly changing economy. Factoring in the pandemic, this has made reskill/upskill fronts essential. Hence, workers across industries must figure out how they can adapt to rapidly changing conditions.

According to Hansen M. (2018), he cited that... sounded education is the key tool to manage and deal with the challenges. The economy of the future will be driven by innovative, knowledge/expertise, technology-oriented, market-demanded and customer-focused/oriented driven in order to support innovative trends and contend with disruptive technology, therefore those without or lack of such skills would find themselves difficult to compete in the job markets, and would likely be at a risk of getting left behind.

Speaking of working in the Next Normal era, it is a work that requires humans to work together with technology. Simply put, repetitive, monotonous tasks that do not use intelligence and cognitive abilities that were originally used by people to do such tasks will be replaced by automation or Artificial Intelligence (AI). That said though, people are still at the center or forefront (People Centricity) in work. Facts are AI and Machine Learning will help humans to reduce their workload, reduce time for easy work that does not require much intelligence thus giving people more time to focus on tasks that require analytical thinking, imagination, innovation, add value, and create a competitive advantage that will affect the success of the individual and organization as a whole. And overtime people's qualifications for employment will change, educational background, age, gender will gradually lose importance and meaning for employment will be reduced. The intrinsic values that play an important role in hiring decisions are competence and skills. In brief, the decision-making criteria for hiring or not hiring depends on job candidates/graduates' abilities, hard and soft skills, potentials, and things the person can do for that position not where he/she graduated from, thus having strong and needed skills which fit the requirements is what matters the most.



According to Chandavimol V. (2021) his article offered perspective and advice to college students in order to be career-readied, which they must go beyond mastery in their own subjects. They must be able to think critically, able to solve problems, able to communicate and collaborate, be self-directed/motivated, and adapt to new technology effectively. As jobs become more inter/multidisciplinary, information-intensive and innovation-oriented in order to succeed workers will need a combination of core skills and specialized technical skills together with strong soft/human skills to help them move across occupations and from the informal to the formal economy smoothly.

2. Research Methodology & Findings

2.1 Decided on the topic (useful to current workforce, skills needs, and employment situations) related to the conference theme (Social Development).

2.2 Searched for key content/information from various and credible/reliable sources of information (listed under References)

2.3 Outlined a scope of framework and content sequences based on academic article standards and principles.

2.4 Analyzed and synchronized the searched sources and looked for key and relevant paragraphs then logically and orderly put them together in written context.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

Chantaphong S. (2021). Data from the WEF (Future of Jobs Report 2020) and the Global Competitiveness Index 4.0 (CGI) show that human capital is the most important element in driving a country out of the middle-income trap. The human capital index of Thailand is in the middle to low level. The proportion of high-skilled workers is only 14% and the proportion of adults with secondary education is only 45 % (not to mention lacks of vocational and technical skills) which is a basic education that can be used to enhance learning and develop skills for future careers. The aforementioned 14% and 45% figures indicate that reskilling/upskilling, continuous learning and life-long learning are imperative for Thailand and its workforce to compete in both regional and global stages. On the other hand, the proportion of the population with comparative digital skills was at a satisfactory level of 55% which is close to Japan (51%), the UK (61%). Interestingly, World Economic Forum (2020) report states that...by 2025, 85 million jobs are expected to be replaced by machines/automation. At the same time, there will be positions that require new skills needed to work with approximately 97 million machines, robots and algorithms. Its report also states that the top five trending technology disruptions are cloud computing (98% of respondents), Internet of Things (95%), encryption & cyber security (90%), E-commerce and digital trade (87%) and big data analytics (85%) highlighted the skills employers need today and in the future. Objectively, the findings focus on possessing core digitally technical skills such as writing and programs designing/development. Moreover, mastering the use of various technologies and skills essential to complement today's work are critical thinking, innovation, constant active learning/doing, and complex problem solving as well as analytical skill. All these traits are of significance for employability going forward.

According to Prachachart Turakij Online/Business (2021), it reveals from the latest assessment of new graduates in the 2019-2020 academic year which included all educational levels, approximately there were total of 282,000 students graduated with bachelors' degrees with the highest number of graduates were Business Administration and Law 87,000, Engineering and Construction 37,000, Healthcare 23,000, Technology and Communications (ICT) 14,000, Science, Mathematics 14,000, Education-related fields and Education 31,000, Fine Arts, Humanities 32,000, Communication Arts / Social Sciences 20,000 people in which the two underlined fields would likely have difficulties finding work unless they get upskilled and reskilled in trades/technical/mechanical nature, numerical/digital literacy and just as important...English, Chinese, Japanese, Korean languages, and/or neighboring languages namely Burmese or Cambodian or Malay to increase their capabilities and competitiveness, and in line with the job requirements and geographical relevance.

According to <https://www.jobkk.com/home>, a popular jobs website, its recent classifieds has approximately listed the Hot Career jobs nationwide as follows...Sales 129,000 required positions, IT 34,500, Engineering 27,000, Logistics/Transportation/Warehouse 25,100 positions, PR/Marketing 41,000 jobs. When analyzed the figures, hard skills related to IT and engineering aspects are in strong demands as well as those with sales/communication/negotiation/strategic thinking, and foreign languages skills would be able to fill the needed voids.

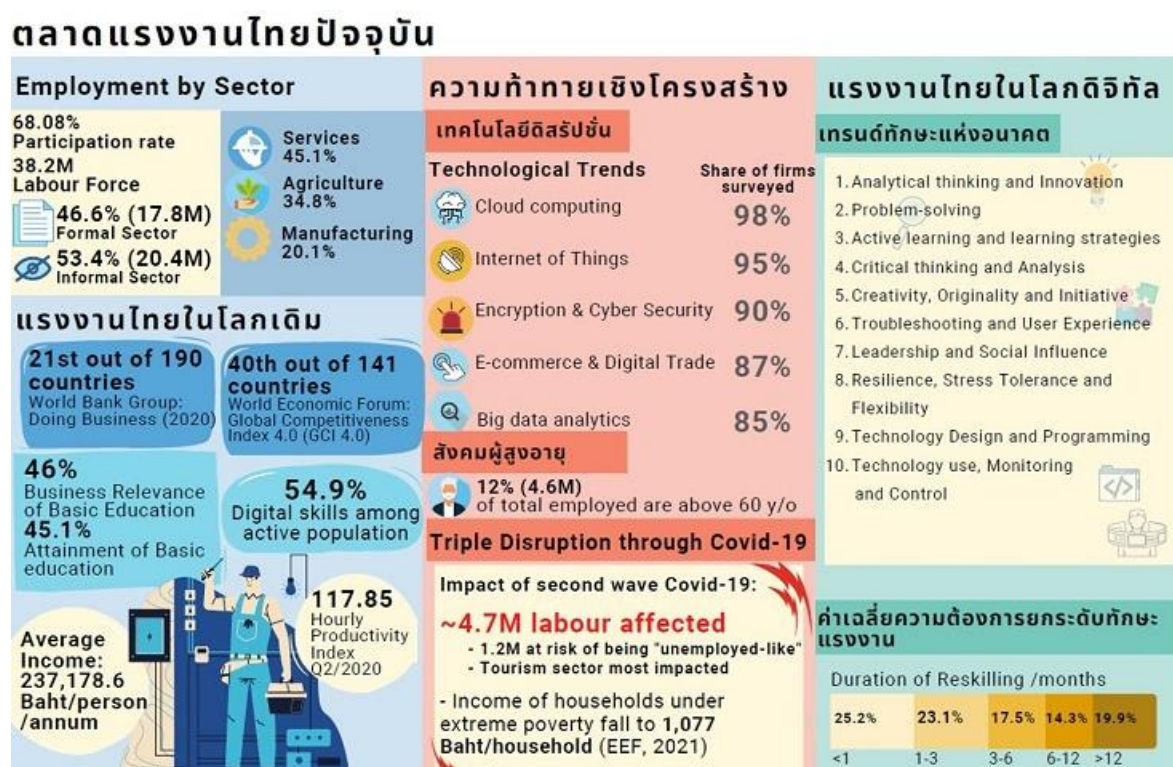


Figure 1: Future of Jobs 2020

Source: WEF



As for the figure 1 above, what it tells us is that most of the present and future businesses are related to and would involve digital technologies cited Sivakriskul N. (2021), therefore would result in a surge in demand for software and cyber security specialists as well as jobs in digital marketing and E-commerce due to spikes in online selling/buying, health care related (aging population) positions, social-media managers, engineering/machine learning jobs, and cloud kitchen staff offer strong jobs potential.

A related article written by Suchit L. (2021) states that...in Thailand information theft is on the rise, as a result private and public organizations need to pay attention to their cyber security measures, as experts warned cybercrimes could become more commonplace in the years to come. Thus, jobs that are connected/related to cyber security will be in need, and organizations are urged to provide digital skills training for staff to avoid possible disruptions, deploy security technology that can defend against threats, and respond effectively when incidents occur.

3.1 Hard skills and soft skills: What these mean.

Hard skills:

- Being able to analyze data in order to ask questions, find answers, and make good decision-making choices (Big Data Literacy); because data is the new power that can create change for businesses/companies/organizations. Hard skills typically fall into two broad categories: CER (Coding, Electronics & Robotics) & STEM (Science, Technology, and Engineering & Math). The digital age will be characterized by communication with humans in English and communication with computers and Artificial Intelligence machines through the language of computer code. Coding and the computational thinking required to be a successful coder, and are certainly key hard skills for the digital age. Another key hard skill is the understanding of robotics and other computers designed to undertake ever more advanced tasks currently being done by humans. Such hard skills include computational thinking, creativity, and judgment.

Soft skills:

- Good language skills to use as a key to gaining new knowledge; also able to communicate effectively and logically so that people understand exactly what the person wants to convey. Just as important, ones must be able to think critically, systematically, and creative/out-of-the-box thinking, self-motivated/initiated are required in order to be competent.
- Having the skills to learn/unlearn/relearn, and use flexible thinking (Cognitive Flexibility). Additionally, humans must develop skills to work with humans or team-work/collaborative and emphatic skills. Hence, accepting and honoring each other etc.; to work together to create innovations, and equally necessary...be resilient; adaptability to situations, stress tolerance and flexibility are essential.

Page M. (2021) states that global multi-national companies have strong preferences for candidates who possess strong communication skills in both English and Thai, specifically top candidates which refer to those who can constructively challenge the status quo and decisions made by their superiors (in a constructive and with respect/polite manner). Keep in mind, there is a fine line between constructive criticism and plain out rude comments. As recent government initiative,



Thailand 4.0 is aiming to move Thailand toward a tech-centric ‘value-based economy’. This potentially results in more demand for talented Thai candidates. With this, soft skills are considered crucial within any business setting, especially when dealing with regional or global stakeholders.

3. 2 Essential skills needed for 21st century; tips for job interview

1. Digital Skills

The skills organizations look for in job seeking candidates and employees are digital skills. This skill is a must-have skill for IT and digital employees. Nowadays if you are an HR staff or graduated in such field or similar, the person must be able to use digital tools for online recruiting and interviewing together with basic understanding of working with data analytics technology. For job seekers and graduates, while waiting for a job why not take time to develop one’s digital skills such as taking online courses and taking additional digital certificate exams through, for example Thai Mooc website and/or find opportunities to offer oneself to work on more digital projects to enhance your experience, and list those skills and experiences with certificate obtained on your resume.

2. Resilience & Adaptability

Relevant soft skills which will be in high demand are flexibility and adaptability. Without a doubt, no organization needs employees who keep complaining, stuck in trouble, and stick to the same things; with Today’s new challenges and hurdles, it is highly advisable that working people/employees look for hidden opportunities to turn the crisis into an opportunity by retrain/reskill/upskill oneself in the field (s) which serves job market demand..

***In a job interview, the candidate may need to demonstrate an open attitude at work. Do not create too many working conditions and are ready to be flexible for the organization.

3. Creativity

When people are faced with New Normal, as a result new problems come along, and sometimes the old ways of working or solving problems may no longer viable. Thus, creativity is a necessary skill needed to come up with new ideas and solutions. New Normal workers should possess the courage to ask new questions, dare to think outside the box, and able to put creative idea into substantive action.

***Before going for interview, consider a project that you are proud of. How do you come up with the ideas and how to bring your ideas to succeed and make it counts?

4. Learning agility & complex problem solving

Workers/staffers need to strive for more knowledge; never stop learning; apply the knowledge learned to actual use in a meaningful way good decision making; evaluating potential impacts or repercussions before decision is made.



3.3 21st century skills: Colleges and university students' outlook.

Traditionally, education has focused on improving literacy, which is the ability to read and write. That said, everyone who attends school should eventually become literate. Furthermore, 21st century skills are a way to consider additional forms of literacy that are needed to navigate the modern world, and are becoming significant for university/college students pertaining to their future job prospects. Such skills and descriptions are:

- The ability to find accurate information from trustworthy online sources.
- Logical/reasoning skills: being able to consider/absorb different opinions, analyze problems, able to reflect, and come up with clear and practical solution.
- Public speaking skills: be able to present and share supporting opinions both face-to-face and online.
- Global awareness and multicultural literacy: able to understand other cultures and able to function and operate in international business environment.

For educators and teachers, this is a challenge and is worth noting that preparing students for workplace of the future by making certain that they gain the critical skills needed for future career success.

Bamrungsin (2017) pointed out seven essential skills which were considered weak points of Thai graduates as reported by stakeholders/employers: (1) English skills (2) digital literacy (3) innovative thinking (4) adaptability/flexibility and collaboration (5) critical thinking and problem solving (6) creative thinking, and (7) media literacy.

In conclusion, COVID-19 has heightened the challenge of reskilling people to meet the demands of new, expanding occupations. The long-term effects of the virus may reduce the number of low-wage jobs, which previously served as a safety net for displaced workers. Well-paid jobs such as those in healthcare and STEM professions are likely to continue to expand and provide opportunities for STEM and related majors/fields. For those (university/college graduates) with non-related STEM fields, it is strongly recommended that reskilling/upskilling both hard and soft skills as well as second and/or third foreign languages skills are of significance, and are considered a Must for employability and self-competent/improvement. As for the Thai government's initiatives and policy of creating a next-generation "growth area" to realize "Thailand 4.0" strategy to promote sustainable economic growth based on "New S-Curve" industries with research, innovation, and the digital economy together with Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), reskilling and upskilling have never become more important and necessary. Bear in mind though, regardless of how efficient or productive AI/Robots are or can be, humans can beat and get ahead of them by applying and utilizing our human/soft skills to the fullest. To deal with future challenges, Thailand's workforce needs digital upskilling in anticipation of possible changes in their roles and responsibilities. This will serve as lay a new foundation and help adapting to new circumstances, while businesses will benefit from greater operational flexibility. Fact is disruptions can be uncontrollable. However, it is advisable that organizations and individuals adapt quickly through reskilling and upskilling preparing for the ever-challenging and difficult-to-predict scenarios in the Next Normal time.



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