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HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

DIGITAL SKILLS READINESS FOR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ADOPTION IN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AMONG MANAGERS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES IN TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: This study explored the readiness for digital skills in Artificial Intelligence (AI) adoption in Human Resource Management among managers in Local Government Authorities in Tanzania.

Statement of the Problem: Despite increasing adoption of digital technologies in the public sector, limited empirical evidence exists on managers' readiness to integrate AI into Human Resource functions, particularly in developing country contexts.

Methodology: The study adopted a qualitative case study design guided by an interpretivist approach. Managers were purposively selected from functional areas including human resource management, administration, finance, planning, and information and communication technology. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, with sample size determined by data saturation.

Findings: Most managers possess basic digital literacy and experience with electronic HR systems. However, gaps exist in advanced competencies such as data analytics, AI-supported decision-making, and the ethical management of digital systems. Organizational factors such as training, leadership support, and digital infrastructure significantly influenced readiness.

Conclusion: The study concludes that although foundational digital skills exist, significant gaps remain in advanced competencies required for effective AI adoption.

Recommendation: The study recommends targeted capacity building, the integration of AI competencies into managerial development frameworks, the strengthening of organizational support systems, and the establishment of clear ethical and governance guidelines to support sustainable AI adoption in public-sector HRM.

Keywords: *Digital skills, Artificial Intelligence, Human Resource Management managers, Local Government Authorities, Tanzania*

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Artificial Intelligence has increasingly been integrated into Human Resource Management to enhance efficiency, objectivity, and strategic decision making through applications such as automated recruitment, performance analytics, workforce forecasting, and learning personalization (Bondarouk & Brewster, 2022; Malik *et al*., 2023; Zhou *et al*., 2024). In public-sector organizations, these applications are promoted as mechanisms to improve accountability, transparency, and service-delivery outcomes, particularly in resource-constrained environments (Mergel *et al*., 2022; Wirtz *et al*., 2023). However, empirical evidence suggests that the success of Artificial Intelligence in Human Resource Management is not determined primarily by technological availability, but by the digital skills readiness of managers who are responsible for system governance, interpretation of outputs, and organizational change leadership (Kane *et al*., 2022; Jöhnk *et al*., 2023).

Digital skills readiness among managers is inherently uneven, reflecting differences in professional background, exposure to digital systems, access to training, and organisational learning cultures (van Laar *et al*., 2022; Ragnedda *et al*., 2023). While basic digital literacy is increasingly common in public organizations, advanced competencies such as data analytics, algorithmic reasoning, ethical judgment, and Artificial Intelligence-supported decision-making remain limited and unevenly distributed (Di Vaio *et al*., 2023; Vrontis *et al*., 2022). This variation creates asymmetries in decision quality and system utilization, whereby some managers act as digital enablers while others become bottlenecks to Artificial Intelligence adoption. Studies from both developed and developing contexts demonstrate that such disparities often result in partial adoption, symbolic compliance, or reliance on traditional Human Resource practices despite the presence of digital systems (Jöhnk *et al*., 2023; Abu-Shanab and Al Dalou', 2023).

In the public sectors of developing countries, the problem of varying digital skills is further exacerbated by structural and institutional constraints. Limited training budgets, weak digital infrastructure, hierarchical decision making, and risk-averse organizational cultures restrict opportunities for managers to develop and apply advanced digital competencies (Twizeyimana & Andersson, 2022; World Bank, 2024). In Tanzania, national initiatives such as the Digital Tanzania Programme and the National ICT Policy seek to promote digital transformation across government institutions (URT, 2023). However, evidence from Local Government Authorities indicates uneven implementation capacity, with significant differences in

managers' digital competence influencing the effectiveness of technology-based reforms (Mashauri *et al*., 2022; Lwoga & Sangeda, 2023). As a result, Artificial Intelligence-related innovations in Human Resource Management remain fragmented and underutilized.

Existing studies on digital transformation in Tanzanian public institutions have largely focused on e-government systems, infrastructure readiness, and user acceptance, often treating digital skills as a uniform or secondary factor (Mtega *et al*., 2022; Komba & Ngulube, 2024). This approach obscures the critical role of managerial digital skill variation in shaping outcomes of Artificial Intelligence adoption. Given that managers act as intermediaries between technology and organizational practice, failure to address disparities in their digital skills risks reinforcing inequality in system use and undermining the strategic value of Artificial Intelligence in Human Resource Management. This study, therefore, responds to a critical empirical gap by analytically examining how varying levels of digital skills readiness among managers influence the adoption of Artificial Intelligence in Human Resource Management within Local Government Authorities in Tanzania.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews theoretical and empirical literature relevant to the study on digital skills readiness for Artificial Intelligence adoption in Human Resource Management among managers in Local Government Authorities in Tanzania. The purpose of the literature review is to establish the conceptual and empirical foundations of the study, identify key theoretical perspectives, analyze existing empirical evidence, and highlight gaps that justify the current research.

Theoretical Literature Review

The Technology Acceptance Model remains one of the most influential theoretical frameworks for explaining technology adoption in organizational settings. The model posits that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use shape an individual's intention to use a technology, which in turn influences actual usage (Davis, 1989). While this framework has been successfully applied to information systems and electronic Human Resource Management, recent theoretical work argues that it is insufficient to explain the adoption of Artificial Intelligence in Human Resource Management, particularly in public sector contexts. Artificial Intelligence systems differ from conventional information systems because they introduce algorithmic

decision making, automation of judgment, and ethical accountability concerns that extend beyond usability considerations (Venkatesh *et al*., 2022; Wirtz *et al*., 2023). As a result, scholars argue that managerial digital skills and ethical competence must be incorporated into adoption models to adequately explain Artificial Intelligence readiness.

Contemporary theory on Artificial Intelligence in Human Resource Management emphasizes that the value of technology is socially constructed through human interaction with systems rather than embedded in the technology itself. From this perspective, Artificial Intelligence serves as a decision support mechanism whose effectiveness depends on managers' ability to understand data inputs, evaluate algorithmic outputs, and exercise informed judgment (Bondarouk & Brewster, 2022; Malik *et al*., 2023). Managers with limited digital skills may accept Artificial Intelligence systems symbolically while avoiding their substantive use in decision-making. This theoretical position supports the argument that varying digital skills among managers produce different patterns of adoption, ranging from meaningful integration to superficial compliance.

Readiness-based frameworks in public administration further strengthen this argument by conceptualizing technology adoption as a function of institutional capacity rather than individual attitude alone. These frameworks identify the availability of digital skills, leadership commitment, organizational learning, infrastructure, data governance, and regulatory alignment as interconnected dimensions of readiness (Twizeyimana & Andersson, 2022; Mergel *et al*., 2022). Importantly, readiness is often uneven within public organizations, particularly in decentralized governance systems such as Local Government Authorities. Managers across different functional units are exposed to varying training opportunities, resources, and expectations, leading to internal variation in digital readiness. This theoretical insight provides a strong justification for examining the adoption of Artificial Intelligence through a work-group-based analytical lens.

Empirical Literature Review

Empirical studies consistently show that foundational digital literacy among managers is a necessary but insufficient condition for the adoption of Artificial Intelligence in Human Resource Management. Evidence from public sector organizations indicates that while many managers are competent in basic ICT use and electronic Human Resource information systems, these skills largely support administrative efficiency rather than strategic Artificial

Intelligence-enabled decision making. Studies conducted at European and African public institutions reveal that managers often use digital systems for record-keeping and reporting, but rarely exploit Artificial Intelligence functionalities due to limited confidence beyond routine operations. This pattern demonstrates that foundational digital skills create a baseline for participation in digital systems, yet do not automatically translate into readiness for the adoption of Artificial Intelligence, thereby producing uneven utilization across managerial roles and departments.

A second stream of empirical literature highlights limited advanced competencies in data analytics and Artificial Intelligence-supported decision-making as a major barrier to effective adoption. Research across both developed and developing contexts shows that managers frequently lack the ability to interpret algorithmic outputs, assess data quality, or integrate Artificial Intelligence insights into Human Resource decisions. Empirical findings indicate that these gaps lead to cautious or symbolic adoption, in which Artificial Intelligence tools are present but decisions continue to rely on managerial intuition. This evidence analytically suggests that variation in advanced digital skills directly shapes the depth of Artificial Intelligence integration, reinforcing disparities in Human Resource Management practices within the same organizational system.

Organizational support and infrastructure emerge as a third critical theme shaping digital skills readiness and Artificial Intelligence adoption. Empirical studies demonstrate that access to training, leadership commitment, and availability of reliable digital infrastructure significantly influence managers' capability development. Where institutional support is uneven, digital skills development becomes fragmented, producing pockets of readiness alongside areas of resistance or stagnation. Evidence from local government and public administration contexts shows that managers operating in better-resourced departments exhibit higher readiness for Artificial Intelligence adoption, while others remain constrained by limited learning opportunities and weak system support. This underscores that individual skills variation is closely linked to organizational capacity and governance arrangements.

Finally, empirical research identifies perceived risks and resistance as important factors that interact with variation in digital skills. Studies show that managers with lower digital competence are more likely to express concerns about data security, ethical accountability, and job displacement associated with the adoption of Artificial Intelligence. These concerns often translate into avoidance behaviour or delayed implementation, further widening the readiness

gap across managerial groups. Conversely, managers with stronger digital and analytical skills tend to view Artificial Intelligence-related risks as manageable, enabling more proactive engagement. This evidence suggests that risk perception does not operate independently, but is mediated by digital skills levels, reinforcing uneven adoption patterns in Human Resource Management.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach guided by an interpretivist paradigm to examine digital skills readiness for the adoption of Artificial Intelligence in Human Resource Management among managers in Local Government Authorities in Tanzania. The interpretivist orientation was appropriate because the study sought to understand managers lived experiences, meanings, and interpretations of digital skills and Artificial Intelligence within their organizational settings rather than to quantify predefined variables (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). A qualitative case study design was adopted to enable an in-depth examination of Artificial Intelligence readiness in real-world local government contexts, where organizational practices, managerial roles, and institutional conditions are closely intertwined (Yin, 2018).

The study was conducted in selected Local Government Authorities in Tanzania, which serve as key implementing units for national digital transformation and public sector reform initiatives. Managers were targeted as the study population because they are responsible for strategic decision-making, system oversight, and the operational integration of digital and Artificial Intelligence-enabled Human Resource systems (Bondarouk & Brewster, 2022). Participants were drawn from Human Resource Management, administration, finance, planning, and information and communication technology departments to capture variation in digital skills readiness across functional work groups. This work group-based approach enabled analytical comparison of managerial experiences and explained how digital readiness differs within the same institutional environment (Guest *et al*., 2012).

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who had direct involvement in Human Resource Management processes and in the use of digital systems. This technique was suitable because qualitative inquiry prioritizes information-rich cases that can provide detailed insight into complex organizational phenomena (Patton, 2015). The sample size was not fixed in advance but was determined by the principle of data saturation. Data collection continued until

additional interviews no longer produced new themes or insights, indicating that sufficient depth and coverage had been achieved across the work groups (Guest *et al*., 2006; Saunders *et al*., 2018).

Primary data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. This method was chosen because it allows participants to articulate their perspectives in their own words while enabling the researcher to probe emerging issues related to digital skills and the adoption of Artificial Intelligence (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). An interview guide was developed based on the study objectives and existing literature, focusing on managers' digital competencies, experiences with digital and Artificial Intelligence-related systems, organizational support mechanisms, and perceived risks. Interviews were conducted with participants' consent, audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy.

The qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, which provides a systematic and flexible approach to identifying patterns of meaning within qualitative datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021). Analysis involved repeated reading of transcripts, coding of relevant segments, and iterative development of themes that captured similarities and variations in digital skills readiness across managerial work groups. This analytical process supported the interpretation of how varying digital skills influence the adoption of Artificial Intelligence in Human Resource Management, rather than merely describing responses.

Trustworthiness was ensured through strategies addressing credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced by comparing findings across different managerial work groups and by ensuring consistency between data and interpretations. Dependability was supported through detailed documentation of data collection and analysis procedures, while confirmability was achieved by grounding interpretations in participants' narratives and maintaining reflexive awareness of potential researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, and participants provided informed consent after being informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Participant anonymity was maintained, and data were securely stored in accordance with ethical guidelines for qualitative research (Israel & Hay, 2006).

FINDINGS

Analysis of the in-depth interview data revealed four interrelated themes that explain how varying levels of digital skills readiness shape the adoption of Artificial Intelligence in Human Resource Management among managers in Local Government Authorities in Tanzania.

Theme 1: Foundational Digital Literacy and Routine System Use

It was noted that most managers demonstrated foundational digital literacy and were comfortable using computers, email, and electronic Human Resource and management information systems for routine administrative tasks. These skills supported activities such as employee record management, payroll processing, and report generation. However, it was also noted that this level of competence remained largely operational rather than strategic. One Human Resource Manager explained that *"I can use the HR system for employee records and reports, but when it comes to more advanced functions, I rely on ICT staff"* (Manager, May, 2025). Similarly, a Finance Manager observed that *"digital systems help us work faster, but we mainly use them as instructed, not to analyse or predict anything"* (Manager, June, 2025).

This theme indicates that foundational digital skills serve as an entry point for system use but are insufficient to enable Artificial Intelligence-driven Human Resource Management. The reliance on ICT staff for advanced functions limits managerial autonomy and constrains strategic engagement with Artificial Intelligence.

Theme 2: Limited Advanced Digital and Artificial Intelligence Competencies

It was further noted that managers exhibited limited advanced digital and artificial intelligence-related competencies. Interview responses revealed uncertainty in data analytics, interpretation of algorithm-generated outputs, and Artificial Intelligence-supported decision-making. Many managers expressed hesitation in trusting system-generated recommendations. An Administration Manager stated that *"we hear about Artificial Intelligence, but honestly, I do not understand how it makes decisions or how I should trust the results"* (Manager, April, 2025).

This finding suggests that Artificial Intelligence adoption is constrained by gaps in analytical capabilities rather than by the absence of technology. Without advanced digital skills, managers

are unlikely to fully integrate Artificial Intelligence into human resource decision-making processes.

Theme 3: Organisational Support and Infrastructure Inequalities

It was also noted that organisational support and infrastructure significantly influenced digital skills readiness. Managers reported uneven access to training opportunities, differences in leadership commitment, and disparities in digital infrastructure across departments. It was noted that managers from ICT and planning units generally had greater exposure to digital tools, whereas those from traditional administrative units had limited capacity-building. One Planning Manager noted that *"training is not equal; some departments attend digital workshops while others are left behind"* (Manager, March, 2025).

This theme demonstrates that variations in digital skills are institutionally reinforced. Unequal access to training and infrastructure results in fragmented readiness, limiting consistent Artificial Intelligence adoption across Local Government Authorities.

Theme 4: Perceived Risks and Resistance to Artificial Intelligence Adoption

Finally, it was noted that perceived risks and resistance shaped managers' attitudes toward the adoption of Artificial Intelligence. Concerns related to data security, ethical accountability, and potential job displacement were frequently expressed, particularly among managers with lower digital confidence. One manager observed that *"if something goes wrong, it is not clear whether the system or the manager will be responsible"* (Manager, June, 2025).

This theme highlights that resistance to the adoption of Artificial Intelligence is closely linked to digital competence. Limited understanding increases perceived risk, while improved digital skills may reduce fear and support trust in Artificial Intelligence systems.

Overall, the findings indicate that variations in managers' digital skills readiness are central to understanding uneven Artificial Intelligence adoption in Human Resource Management within Local Government Authorities. These variations are shaped by individual competencies, organisational support structures, and perceived risks, collectively influencing how Artificial Intelligence is understood, trusted, and applied in practice.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The finding that managers possess foundational digital literacy but use digital systems mainly for routine administrative purposes aligns with empirical studies, which argue that public-sector digitalization often results in surface-level adoption rather than strategic transformation in Human Resource Management (Bondarouk & Brewster, 2022; Di Vaio *et al*., 2023). However, this study diverges from some private sector-focused research, which suggests that basic digital skills can quickly evolve into analytical use once systems are introduced. In the Local Government Authority context, reliance on ICT staff for advanced functions persists, indicating that organisational structures and role demarcations may inhibit managerial skill progression. This suggests that foundational digital skills alone are insufficient to drive the adoption of Artificial Intelligence without deliberate managerial empowerment and role redefinition.

The limited advanced digital and Artificial Intelligence-related competencies identified in this study are consistent with empirical evidence showing that managers' inability to interpret algorithm-generated outputs undermines trust in Artificial Intelligence-supported decision-making (Jöhnk *et al*., 2023; Malik *et al*., 2023). However, unlike some studies that attribute this limitation primarily to individual resistance or attitudinal barriers, the present findings suggest that the problem is more closely related to capacity gaps rather than unwillingness. Managers did not reject Artificial Intelligence outright but expressed uncertainty due to limited understanding, suggesting that resistance may stem from skill deficits rather than being a root cause. This reframes resistance as a capability issue rather than a behavioural one.

With regard to organizational support and infrastructure, the findings align strongly with studies that emphasize institutional conditions as determinants of digital skills development and the adoption of Artificial Intelligence in the public sector (Twizeyimana & Andersson, 2022; Lwoga & Sangeda, 2023). However, this study extends the literature by demonstrating how uneven support within the same Local Government Authority produces internal variation in readiness across work groups. While existing studies often compare different organizations, this intra-organizational variation underscores that policy implementation can yield unequal outcomes even within a shared institutional framework, suggesting a need for coordinated rather than decentralized capacity-building strategies.

The finding that perceived risks and resistance are linked to digital competence both supports and challenges existing empirical literature. Consistent with prior studies, managers with lower digital confidence were more likely to express concerns related to data security, ethics, and job

displacement (Wirtz *et al*., 2023; Ragnedda *et al*., 2023). However, this study challenges the assumption that risk perception is primarily attitudinal. Instead, it shows that risk concerns are mediated by knowledge and skills. Managers with higher digital understanding perceived risks as manageable, whereas those with limited skills viewed Artificial Intelligence as opaque and threatening. This suggests that addressing digital skills gaps may be more effective in reducing resistance than awareness campaigns alone.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Artificial Intelligence adoption in Human Resource Management within Local Government Authorities in Tanzania is uneven and largely shaped by variations in managers' digital skills rather than the absence of digital systems or policy initiatives. While most managers demonstrate foundational digital literacy sufficient for routine administrative tasks, significant gaps remain in advanced competencies related to data analytics, Artificial Intelligence-supported decision-making, and ethical governance. These skill disparities are further reinforced by unequal organisational support, including differences in access to training, leadership commitment, and digital infrastructure across departments. In addition, concerns related to data security, accountability, and potential job displacement were closely linked to managers' levels of digital competence, indicating that resistance to Artificial Intelligence adoption often stems from limited understanding rather than negative attitudes. Based on these findings, the study recommends targeted and role specific capacity building programmes that emphasise advanced digital and Artificial Intelligence competencies, integration of Artificial Intelligence related skills into managerial development frameworks, coordinated institutional support to ensure equitable training and infrastructure provision, and the establishment of clear ethical and governance guidelines to build trust and support sustainable Artificial Intelligence adoption in Human Resource Management within Local Government Authorities.

RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends that Local Government Authorities in Tanzania adopt a comprehensive and systems-oriented approach to strengthening managerial capacity in the digital era. This should include targeted, role-specific capacity building programs that extend beyond basic ICT training to encompass advanced competencies such as data analytics, Artificial Intelligence (AI)-supported decision-making, and the ethical management of digital systems. Consistent

with broader system-strengthening approaches, these capacity-building initiatives should be institutionalized within existing training frameworks to ensure sustainability and continuous learning.

Furthermore, AI and digital competency frameworks should be formally integrated into managerial development structures, including performance appraisal and promotion systems, to reinforce accountability and long-term skills development. Local Government Authorities should also enhance organizational support mechanisms by ensuring equitable access to digital infrastructure, fostering coordination of training efforts across departments, and strengthening leadership commitment to digital transformation.

In line with best practices on governance and responsible innovation, clear ethical, legal, and regulatory guidelines for the use of AI in Human Resource Management should be established. These should address critical concerns such as data security, transparency, accountability, and workforce implications, thereby promoting trust, safeguarding employees, and supporting the sustainable adoption of digital technologies within public sector institutions.

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