

**IMPROVING EMPLOYEE DIGITAL CAPABILITIES IN NIGERIAN ORGANIZATIONS:
CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS**

Elekwachi, Happiness Nwanyi & Dr. Mekuri-Ndimele, Joy Adanma
Department of Office and Information Management, Faculty of Business Studies
Ajuru University of education, P.M.B. 5057, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt,
Rivers State, Nigeria

Corresponding email: elekwachihappiness94@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper focused on discussing the digital capabilities: Challenges and Prospects in Nigerian organizations. The digital capabilities by the researcher were advanced data processing skills, online communication skills, cloud computing skills, the challenges were low digital awareness, low access to power supply, and local culture and resistance to change, the prospect are self development by employees, hands-on training and retraining of employees on information technology, and development of policies and practices that force workers to work virtually. The paper concluded that organizations that build on the capacity of their employees by improving on their digital capabilities through setting up hands-on training and retraining on information technology for their employees as well develop policies and practices that force them to work virtually, will not fail to benefit from this uncommon human capacity building, as this will manifest in the significant improvement on their advance data processing skills, online communication skills, and cloud computing skills, all things being equal. The paper recommended, amongst other things, that public and private organizations across Nigeria should as a matter of urgency employ mechanisms such as hands-on training and retraining of their employees on information and communications technology and development of policies and practices that force workers to operate virtually in order to improve the digital capabilities of their employees and the growth of the organizations.

Keywords: Digital Capabilities, Challenges, Prospects, Organizational Policies, and Organizational Practices.

INTRODUCTION

Digital capabilities refer to the ability to utilize, manage, integrate, communicate, evaluate and create information safely and appropriately through digital technologies and network devices for participation in economic and social life (Sam, 2019). Digital capabilities are not options but requirements for any individual to be considered competitive and best prepared for today's world of advanced technology and the future work. According to Jaluch (2019), digital capabilities are the knowledge, skills and behaviours used when online examples connected through the web to the world. Digital capabilities are essential when using digital devices such as desktops, laptops, tablets and smart phones etc. Digital capabilities can also relate to the software we use in our daily tasks in the workplace, including Microsoft Office, Sage, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software and Photoshop. Employee digital capabilities refer to an employee's abilities to navigate standard digital technologies that enhance his/her job activities – from operational to non-operational workplace activities (Dave, 2019). An example is a retail executive using a mobile Point of Sale (PoS) or a nurse using Electronic Health Record Systems (EHRS). Other examples can be an employee's ability to digitally process data productively, utilize social media and cloud-based applications, etc. Some organizations in Nigeria are still lagging behind in terms of the digital capabilities of their employees.

This study therefore set out various challenges, as well as prospects of improving employee capabilities in Nigerian organizations. They are: advanced data processing skills, online communication skills and cloud computing skills. The challenges as perceived in this study are low digital awareness, low access to power supply, local culture and resistance to change. Self development by employees, hands-on training and retraining of employees on information technology, and development of policies and practices in organizations that forces workers to work virtually, are the digital capabilities prospects as identify in this study.

Objectives.

The specific objective of the study are :

- i. To examine how digital capabilities improves employee capabilities.
- ii. To examine how Advanced data processing skills enhance employee digital capabilities
- iii. To online communication enhances employee's capabilities.
- Iv. To identified the challenges and prospects of digital capabilities

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work is anchored on two theories – Diffusion of Innovation Theory and the Theory of Constraints.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

E. M. Rogers' (1962): The Innovation Theory is the theoretical framework in which this work as anchored on (Odu, 2017). This theory postulates that individuals and social systems will adopt new technologies and innovative ideas at different points and that the point an innovation is accepted into a system determines subsequent outcomes of the system. The assumptions of the theory are as follows:

- i) In a social system, there will always be a disparity in the level and time at which individuals within a given social system adopt new ideas, techniques, and technology.
- ii) Individuals and arms of institutions that adopt innovations early will naturally outperform late adopters and the laggards (Odu, 2017).

The implication of this theory is that as organizations across Nigeria make significant effort to improve the digital capabilities of their employees, there will be inconsistency on how and when employees of these diverse organizations accept to get themselves improved in the area of advanced data processing skills, online communication skills, and cloud computing skills. Some, especially those that are dealing strongly with local culture, will believe that what they already know about digital capabilities is enough to live with, while others will believe otherwise. Borrowing from the second assumption, the theory predicts that employees who accept early enough and get on with the improvement strategies, such as self development by employees, hands-on training and retraining of employees on information technology, and development of policies and practices that force workers to work virtually, will outperform those who will accept later.

The Theory of Constraints

The Theory of Constraints (TOC) is an overall management philosophy introduced by Eliyahu M. Goldratt in his 1984 book titled "The Goal," that is geared to help organizations continually achieve their goals (Cox & Goldratt, 1986). Goldratt adapted the concept to project management with his book Critical Chain, published in 1997. The theory of constraints (TOC) is a management paradigm that views any manageable system as being limited in achieving more of its goals by a very small number of constraints. There is always at least one constraint, and TOC uses a focusing process to identify the constraint and restructure the rest of the organization around it. Theory of Constraints(TOC) adopts the common idiom "a chain is no stronger than its weakest link". This means that processes, organizations, etc., are vulnerable because the weakest person

or part can always damage or break them or at least adversely affect the outcome. The assumptions of the theory are:

1. The underlying premise of the theory of constraints is that organizations can be measured and controlled by variations on three measures: throughput, operational expense, and inventory. Inventory is all the money that the system has invested in purchasing things which it intends to sell. Operational expense is all the money the system spends in order to turn inventory into throughput. Throughput is the rate at which the system generates money through sales (Goldratt, 1988).
2. Before the goal itself can be reached, necessary conditions must first be met. These typically include safety, quality, legal obligations, etc. For most businesses, the goal itself is to make profit. However, for many organizations and non-profit businesses, making money is a necessary condition for pursuing the goal. Whether it is the goal or a necessary condition, understanding how to make sound financial decisions based on throughput, inventory, and operating expense is a critical requirement (Goldratt, 1988).

The implication of this theory is that organizations across Nigeria are at one point or the other faced with challenges by one constraint or the other, which constitute limitations. In this case, the constraints are low digital capabilities. When these get fixed, the organizations are strengthened to do more on service delivery, production rates, market shares, and general organizational growth by improving the digital capabilities of their employees through advanced data processing skills, online communication skills, and cloud computing skills. The first and second assumptions of the theory implies that the throughput (manifestations of digital capabilities such as advanced data processing skills, online communication skills, and cloud computing skills) must be greater than the inventory and operational expenses (i.e the money spent on purchasing and setting up all digital devices and technologies as well as the training and retraining fees) put together. The organizations must see significant result as they invest on their employees and digitalization, as these efforts transform into better employee performance. It therefore becomes pertinent for organizations to sagaciously make financial decisions based on throughput, inventory and operational expenses, as this will ensure safety, quality and legal obligations, amongst others.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

DIGITAL CAPABILITIES IN NIGERIAN ORGANIZATIONS

Digital capabilities is defined by Buckingham (2017) as a set of skills that enable individuals to operate effectively in information retrieval task in technology-oriented environment. He further stated that an employee that is digitally capable is one who can evaluate and use information critically from relevant and authoritative source online. Certain capabilities have been identified by the researcher as needed for an employee in order to competently compete in a digital age. They are advanced data processing skills, online communication skills, and cloud computing skills.

Advanced Data Processing Skills: Data processing is basically synchronizing all the data that entered the software in order to filter out the most useful information out of it (Kane, 2017). This is a very important task for any company as it helps them in extracting most relevant content for later use. It is also the conversion of data into usable and desired form. This conversion or processing is carried out using a predefined sequence of operations either manually or automatically. With the increase in demand and the requirement for such services, a competitive market for data services has emerged. Most of the processing is done by using computers and thus done automatically. The output or processed data can be obtained in various forms such as image, graph, table, vector file, audio, video, charts or any other desired format. The form obtained depends on the software or method of data processing used, but when done itself, it is referred to as automatic data processing. Data processing is performed in order to store the most refined information in their systems for later use. With the proper

processing of data, more and more information can be sorted. This helps in getting a clearer view of matter and also leads to better productivity and more profits for the organizations involved. On the basic level, data can be skillfully processed by: (i) proper data collection (ii) data preparation (iii) data input (iv) processing (v) data output/interpretation, and (vi) data storage.

Something is said to be advanced when it is at a higher and more difficult level; when it has gone above the basic standard. Advanced processing will therefore be the use of finely tuned, sophisticated processing methods, such as data mining, transaction processing, data cleansing, survey processing, etc. to sort through an organization's data to provide comprehensive final results that are fit for immediate or future use. Other instances of advanced processing are data de-population, image processing, cheque processing, market research forms processing, order processing, and electric bill processing. This connotes that advanced data processing skills would be the most modern and trending data processing skills, which are really not part of basic data processing skills. Advanced data processing skills are the various trending proficiencies that are utilized for dealing with modern day data processing activities in an organizational setting (researcher's idea). Some of these include the use of trending and customized organizational data processing software packages, skillful use of Google Sheets, Google Drive, Google Docs, Google Slide and Google Forms; graphics designing, database management skills, etc. are other examples. Most organizations require data for providing a good quality of service. These bulk of data, most of the time, need to be refined in order for them to serve the anticipated purpose(s). Today, some organizations that have gone cloud as well as virtual are advancing their course in digitalization, which is impacting positively in their data processing activities. These have taking their data processing from the traditional to the advanced level, where sophisticated devices, software and applications are utilized and data processed from any location in the globe. Employees get introduced and groomed on all digital devices and suites necessary for their jobs, and are also encouraged to virtualize and use cloud technologies. This truly improves employee digital capabilities, even as the organization waxes stronger in their level of productivity and service delivery. And if data is processed by observing all laid down organizational guidelines, usable information fit for organizational productivity is bound to be birthed (Oluwaseye & Abraham, 2016). It therefore becomes a necessity for organizations in Nigeria and other parts of the world to specially train their employees on advanced data processing skills so they will competently handle data processing in order to achieve the desired results.

Online Communication Skills: Online communication refers to the number of different ways people can communicate over the World Wide Web (Howard, Rainie & Jones, 2017). It includes chat rooms, email, instant messaging, forum, social networking sites and Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) programme. The World Wide Web, or the Internet, is series of connected networks that connect computers across the world together. This network allows different kinds of communication methods. Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) refers to programs like Skype, WhatsApp video call, Zoom, Facebook Messenger video call, etc. that allow people to communicate using audio and video over the Internet. Social media site like Facebook is another example of internet communication. These sites allow people to post messages and then respond to the messages over others in a long network from one computer to another. Internet forums also facilitate communication by letting someone create a thread, which others then respond to in a long chain. Some advantages of online communication are growing community, good documentation, versatility, and leveling. An employee can be at the comfort of their own house drinking coffee and having a conference call with clients or bosses which saves transportation, meal, and even laundry costs. Experientially, it is far less expensive to make voice calls with WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger than the normal use of airtime to do so.

Online communication skills refer to the combination of observable and measurable knowledge, skills, abilities and personal attributes in the sharing of information, ideas, or simply words over the World Wide Web, or the Internet (Howard, Rainie & Jones, 2017). Everyone seems to have gone digital via the use of online communication without caring at all or much about the skills in its usage. The global growth in online communication truly requires skills for ease of communication, security, effectiveness in the area of socialization, corporate dealings, etc. Skills in online communication bring about versatility in communication, a growing community of individuals, good documentation, and a leveled communication among others. Also, online communication skills are the abilities to effectively and efficiently communicate via a network of networks that run across the globe (European Commission, 2017). Communication over the Internet is far more complex than the face-to-face (traditional) form of communication, in spite of its advantages. The complexities range from learning how the devices and communication platforms work to learning the rules of the communication pattern. New features are added to online communication devices every now and then; same with the platforms. Online communication, which can be via texts, audio, video, memoes, ideograms, etc., is very technical in nature. There is need, therefore, for employees across organizations in Nigeria to get along with the trend in order to be competent in online communication.

Cloud Computing Skills: Cloud computing is a model for enabling convenient, on demand network access to a shared pool of configurable computing resources (e.g., networks, servers, storage, applications, and services) that can be rapidly provisioned and released with minimal management effort or service provider interaction (Bunekemeifa, 2019). Cloud computing has emerged as a popular solution to provide cheap and easy access to externalized IT (Information Technology) resources. An increasing number of organizations (e.g., research centres, enterprises) benefit from cloud computing to host their applications. Cloud technology or computing offers a number of benefits which include but not limited to time and cost saving, flexibility, reduction in loss of information, technological innovation, provision of a real competitive advantage and improved business performance (Fatuma, Nahum & Pepular, 2014). Cloud computing skills according to Meskerem and Abrehet (2014), as the ability to effectively and efficiently use software applications, infrastructures and storage services over the internet. An employee must be acquainted with the ability to effectively and efficiently utilize cloud computing mechanisms in performing his or her job. By so doing, such employee will be inundated with the cloud benefits compared to other organizations through the delivering services associated with their data, software and other computing needs on their behalf, without the need to own or run the usual physical hardware (such as servers) and software (such as email) themselves. Thus, the skills herein cloud computing requires the ability and capability of the employee to use everything — from computing power to computing infrastructure, applications and business processes as service wherever and whenever he or she needs them. Cloud computing skills to this end, are those special abilities and capabilities that enable one to manipulate cloud computing technological devices, software and infrastructures to enhance ubiquitous, convenient, on-demand network access to a shared pool of configurable computing resources (e.g. networks, servers, storage, applications, and services) that can be rapidly provided with minimal management input or service provider interface.

CHALLENGES OF IMPROVING EMPLOYEE DIGITAL CAPABILITIES IN NIGERIAN ORGANIZATIONS

The various challenges the researcher has pictured to militate against employee digital capabilities in Nigerian organizations are resistance to change, low digital awareness, poor access to power supply .

Resistance to make changes: (Tim, 2017). Reflects people's feelings of suitability, comfort, and correctness; attributes that define personal preferences and changing tastes. A local culture encompasses nearly all the sorts of feelings and behavioral tendencies that an individual can have in their personal preferences. Since local cultures are really just a summation of individual values, a local culture is changed by influencing many individuals over time. They believe that having online communication skills that enables an individual to successfully and professionally use all possible internet communication platforms to communicate across distances do not matter much; they believe that their small android devices are just ok for them. They never for one day think that cloud computing skills on their part will be needed – their basic knowledge on cloud computing is just ok for them. These set of individuals will rather hire able hands to handle jobs for them that are digitally-related than for them to learn these things and be grounded in them. These actions show how strongly their local cultures have eaten deep into their minds and are not ready to change.

Their powerful feel affection for for digital existence would have to be cared for like that of a infant to reform their former idea which is against the improvement of digital capabilities. It suffices to say that the issue of restricted civilization and resistance to change is a big challenge to improvement of employee digital capabilities in Nigerian organizations.

Poor Digital Knowledge and Ability: Digital knowledge is much more than just knowing how to use a computer (Reimer, 2017). Digital knowledge means that one is able to understand and make use of technology in an increasingly interconnected world. Employees need to realize how their digital interactions can have a lasting impact on their personal and professional lives. Technical skills obtained in one's major area of study are necessary, but developing soft skills like digital awareness are just as important. Employees with poor digital awareness skills only know little when kept in a digitally difficult environment either for work. This means that successful handling of Gmail app, some cloud technologies, social media apps, etc. with good knowledge of their user interfaces and underlying set ups, especially for security purposes, are very difficult tasks for such person.

Digital knowledge includes developing an understanding of one's online identity, including making efforts to protect online privacy, to increase one's computer security, use social media and networking wisely and to protect one's digital footprint and reputation (Mawick, 2018). Technology has made the world much smaller and much more competitive. Employees of this age need to showcase and share their talents via digital media if they hope to be successful throughout their careers. An employee's digital awareness can be expressed in the way he or she loves surfing the internet (with a positive mindset), use social media, email, Skype, Zoom, etc. apps with knowledge of considerable amount of their technicalities, and being aware of trending digital technologies and apps that are for personal and official consumption. It then becomes very difficult for an employee with low digital awareness to function productively in an organization that is trying to improve on employee digital capabilities. This is a serious challenge and therefore calls for immediate attention if organizations across the Nigerian nation are bent on advang the digital capabilities of their employee

Abridged Power Supply: Access to power supply is said to be low when a consumer cannot reach power most of the time, which could be because of power cut, irregular power seizure, or bad power generating station (e.g. generating set, power plant, inverter, solar, etc.). When this is experienced in an organization, employees suffer it a lot, as most part of their job activities can be brought to a halt, since some of the digital devices (e.g desktop computer, printer, scanner, CCTV camera, etc.) will be shut down and the chargeable ones will follow suit when their battery power completely drains off. Low access to Power supply is the process of generating electrical energy from the point of creation (e.g. generating set, power plant, inverter, solar, etc.) to the point of consumption, such as home or office. It can be public power supply,

solar power supply, use of inverter, and generating set. Electricity comes to homes and workplaces through a huge network of power stations and cables. Failure of any kind in supply to individual consumers and organizations raises panic and as well as slow operations in the work place. Reason being that its usefulness to individuals and organizations cannot be overemphasized. Some of these employees probably suffer the same issue when they get to their various homes, such that their phones, laptops, desktops, CCTV cameras, TVs, etc. do not have power in them most of the time due to significant lack of power supply. Where this becomes the order of the day, it therefore poses a great challenge to improvement on the digital capabilities of employees. This will definitely hinder their frequent use of digital facilities, advanced data processing skills, online communication skills, and cloud computing skills. It behooves on the organizations and employees to fix their power supply by using good power generating sets, solar and inverter power supply sources, utilize more of chargeable devices as well as solar and inverter power supply sources.

DIGITAL CAPABILITIES PROSPECTS FOR NIGERIAN ORGANIZATIONS

Digital capabilities prospects are laid down steps that have been pictured to be effective in warding off agents that stand as bottlenecks to the improvement of digital capabilities in employees and other individuals. The various employee digital capabilities improvement strategies for Nigerian organizations as conceptualized by the researcher are: self development by employees, hands-on training and retraining of employees on information technology, and development of policies and practices in organizations that forces workers to work virtually.

Personal Development by Employees: Is the wish of an individual to find their own freedom, to connect with their own intellect of worth, and integrity, and happiness. Personal development consist of activities that develop a persons capabilities and potential, buid human capital (kalu, 2016). The process of personal development is a enduring learning process, because every time when it is necessary to become acquainted with a new to improve skills, this process runs again and again until the set goals are reached. This should be the mindset of employees across organizations in Nigeria – that they will continue to work on themselves so long as they want to remain very relevant in their job positions. Employees should personally develop themselves in the area of improving their digital capabilities, encompassing advanced data processing skills, online communication skills, and cloud computer skills.

Hand on-hand Training and Retraining of Employees on Information Technology:

According to Ajileye in Information technology is a combination of computer and telecommunications technologies, which has made possible to help the people at work, in education and at home (Gopal, 2017). Thus, it is all about the application of varieties of electronics to the information organization. Information technology can also be seen as the application of various technologies for the acquisition, processing, storage and dissemination of information. Various technologies here include microelectronic-based computers, telecommunication, reprography, printing etc.

Employees across Nigerian organizations should as a matter of urgency be taken on hands-on training and retraining on information technology, where they will be practically taught how to acquire, process, store and disseminate information successfully. They will be intensively trained and retrained on how to neatly type and print documents; copy or cut and paste documents; use external and internal storage devices; save and retrieve information from the computer system; compose, send, forward, and reply emails; use different electronic gadgets necessary for their job definitions; use the scanning machine. They will also be taught cloud and virtual technologies, apps for mobile and immobile devices necessary for their job. These trainings and retrainings that will hold indoor and outdoor, will be done in such a way that employees will have ample opportunities to play around the things they have been trained and retrained on. This is an

improvement strategy for digital capabilities as it helps to increase the digital awareness of employees, drastically deal with the issue of local culture and resistance to change and thereby causing them to improve on advanced data processing skills, online communication skills and cloud computing skills. This improvement strategy should therefore be utilized by employers in organizations across Nigeria in order to constantly boost the capacity of their employees for better job performance.

Development of Policies and Practices in Organizations that Force Workers to Work Virtually:

An organization devoid of rules and policies for employees to abide to is certainly a recipe for disaster. Policies serve a vital purpose in strengthening, supporting, and protecting an organization and its people. A policy is a set of general guidelines that outline the organization's plan for tackling an issue (Snook, 2019). Policies communicate the connection between the organization's vision and values and its day-to-day operations. Policies and procedures go hand-in-hand in any organization. A procedure as given by explains a specific action plan for carrying out a policy. Procedures tells employees how to deal with a situation and when. Organizations need to develop policies and procedures that reflect their vision, values and culture as well as the needs of their employees. Once they are in place, enforcing these guidelines is even more important. However, accomplishing these goals can be tougher than it sounds.

Organisational practices are the behaviors & actions in an organization. The organisational practices convert the values and ideals in an organisation's culture into practical actions and movements that keep the organization running actively, and more importantly on an upward trajectory in terms of business and profit margins. It is important that an organization follows good practices, that are good enough to sort things in place and to ensure the processes move in the right direction and to ensure timely identification of problems for improvements. Organizational practices are either Internal – affecting those within your organization – or External – with others outside the organization (Margolis, 2019). Internal Practices are the inner workings of the organization that affect employee relationships, interactions and accomplishments. To clarify, these Practices typically affect employees. External practices define how employees of an organization interact with outsiders. More clearly, this is interaction with others who are not employees of that organization. For example, these external practices include the customers and markets; the products and services the organization offers; and the suppliers, vendors and business partners.

Organizations should therefore set up policies and practices that will force employees to use digital devices and technologies that support virtual interaction. Such policies that will restrict employees from frequent face-to-face communication, rather apps such as Skype, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Gmail, etc. should be used for texts, video and voice calls in order to pass messages across fellow employees management. Policies that will also force them to work from home and other locations they might find themselves should as well be put in place by organizations, thereby making the employees to go virtual and improve their digital capabilities. In the same vein, between employees and between employers and outsiders (customers, markets, products and services, vendors, and business partners), practices should exist that will cause both the employees and outsiders to utilize more of digitize means in communication and business interaction. They should use more of mails, cloud technologies, online communication apps and software to interact and do business. This will consciously and unconsciously force them to work virtually. An employee does not need to move from his or her department/office to another in order to ask for a document to be printed for them when a message or call could just be placed via an online communication tool and the content will be sent on email or WhatsApp. Employees, especially marketers should be encouraged to interface with customers and suppliers using more of online communication tools, instead of face-to-face mode. By so doing, employees across organizations in Nigeria will find themselves aligning with virtual business and non-

business relations, making their digital capabilities to get highly improved. This will significantly better their job performances.

The diagram below represents the elements of discuss in this work:

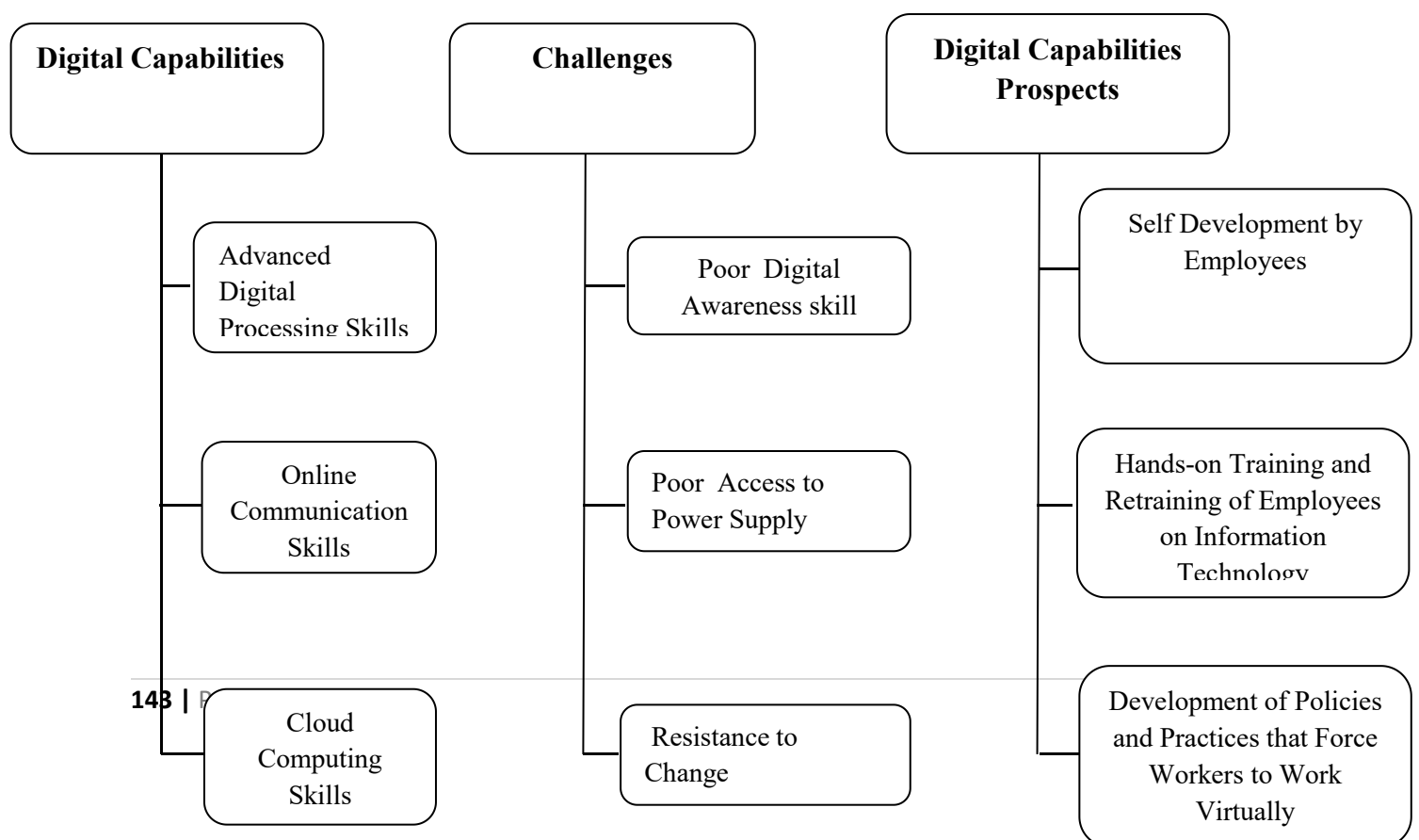


Figure 1: Improving Employee Digital Capabilities in Nigerian Organizations: Digital Capabilities, Challenges, and Prospects.

Source: World Wide Web (Howard, Rainie & Jones, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Judging from our discussions above, we therefore conclude that organizations that build on the capacity of their employees by improving on their digital capabilities through setting up hands-on training and retraining on information technology for their employees and as well develop policies and practices that force them to work virtually, will not fail to benefit from this uncommon human capacity building, as this will manifest in the significant improvement on their advanced data processing skills, online communication skills, and cloud computing skills, all things being equal. As skills advancement in digital capabilities become an urgency due to the nature of the present digital world, employees who refuse to align themselves with this growing world will find it very difficult to fit in properly in a digital work environment. This calls for organizations and employees across towns and cities of Nigeria to wake up to this timely call of positioning themselves through self development, hands-on training and retraining on information technology and development of policies and practices that force employees to operate virtually, to help them to be digitally relevant and also develop their employees and the growth of their organizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our conclusion, the following recommendations were made:

1. Public and private organizations across Nigeria should as a matter of urgency employ mechanisms such as hands-on training and retraining of their employees on information and communications technology and development of policies and practices that force workers to operate virtually in order to improve the digital capabilities of their employees and the growth of the organizations.
2. Employees in various ministries and parastatals across the shores of Nigeria should make great effort to develop themselves by getting on self-sponsored training and coaching, personal development (learning from YouTube and other sister sites), warding off local culture and submitting to change in order to advance their digital capabilities as well.
3. The Federal Government of Nigeria should work to fix the power sector in the nation so as to enable employees and other individuals have sufficient access to power supply in order to aid their self development practices and training and retaining sessions for improvement of their digital capabilities, the organizations and the entire Nigerian society.
4. Organizational leaders should be aware of the importance of training and developments' impact on the performance and evaluation of employee. Employee training and development assists the organization and employee in attaining diverse goals, such as improving moral, sense of security. Employee engagement, and overall competencies necessary to perform a particular job.

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