UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF UPSKILLING AND RESKILLING IN MANAGING ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

Rapid technological revolutions have caused constant disruptions to the corporate landscape, making human capital reconfiguration a critical survival technique. For a better understanding of the crucial roles that upskilling and reskilling play in managing organisational change, this research synthesises three fundamental theoretical frameworks: Organisational Learning Theory (OLT), Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT). Based to the study, the psychological well-being of the workforce significantly influences the effectiveness of transitions, even though upskilling is the tactical expression of a company's dynamic capacities. Employee attitudes can transform from resistance to change to autonomous commitment when organisations address the SDT demands of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Additionally, individual learning needs to be institutionalised through double-loop and deutero-learning processes to produce systemic agility. In ensuring long-term sustainability in the era of digital paradigm shifts, this conceptual assessment suggests that businesses develop a "reliable" learning culture. It does this by offering a strong framework that connects systemic resilience with human motivation.

Keywords: Dynamic capabilities, organisational change, organisational learning theory, productivity, reskilling, self-determination theory, upskilling

INTRODUCTION

Effective upskilling and reskilling initiatives are more crucial than ever as organisations strive to remain competitive in today's changing business climate. Despite the urgency, many organisations face significant obstacles in equipping their personnel with the necessary skills. Globalisation, technological advancements, and shifting economic conditions all contribute to the fast evolution of the modern corporate environment (World Economic Forum (WEF), 2020). To be competitive, firms must cultivate employees who are adaptable and agile (Bersin & Associates, 2021). As the cliché goes, organisations are only as good as their employees. It implies that a company's success is directly related to the calibre of its workforce. Additionally, having personnel who are both flexible and adaptive is crucial because the business environment is constantly changing, with many companies riding the waves of expansion and contraction.

An era of continuous skill development is emerging as the period of lifelong single expertise skill draws to an end (Hasan et al., 2019). Upskilling and reskilling are essential strategies for accomplishing this objective, as they enable the workforce to develop new skills or improve current ones to meet the changing demands of their professions (Hasan et al., 2019; Istenič et al., 2021). While reskilling equips workers for new positions within the organisation, upskilling enhances their abilities to increase job performance (Sivalingam & Mansori, 2021; Adepoju, 2022).

Accordingly, researchers believe that when firms invest in upskilling and reskilling programmes, the firm experiences increases in employee adaptability, productivity, and creativity (Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019). Notable companies that have successfully implemented upskilling and reskilling initiatives include IBM and Siemens. These initiatives have effectively addressed skill gaps and produced a workforce that is more flexible and adaptive (Fachrunnisa & Hussain, 2020; Siemens, 2020).

Sawant et al. (2022), Mahdia (2024), and Tasheva (2024) studies emphasise how employees' upskilling and reskilling contributed to their employability, promotion, and entry into the workforce. Nai and Abraham (2024) study stated that an organisation's reskilling and upskilling initiatives are for talent retention and employee development. Despite these success stories, organisations continue to experience competency gaps due to major difficulties such as identifying relevant skills, encouraging employees to learn, and analysing the impact of training projects. Therefore, a critical understanding of employee upskilling and reskilling through the integration of OLT, SDT, and dynamic capabilities interventions is essential for managing organisational change, enhanced productivity, and efficiency in navigating the complexities of the modern business landscape.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organisational Change

Regardless of size or industry, change is seen as a universal idea that applies to all organisations; hence, organisations are forced to either adapt quickly or fail (Kotter, 2012; Lichtenthaler, 2016; Palmer et al., 2017). Change is defined as a system of ongoing transformation that occurs in one or more organisational domains (Kiran et al. 2015), including organisational technology, structure, and human resources. Palmer et al. (2017) view organisational change as an activity or a sequence of actions that result in a change in purpose or a process that impacts an organisation's ability to function. Based on George and Jones

(2012) study, organisational change occurs when an organisation adopts novel concepts or behaviours in reaction to both internal and external influences. Hence, change is a normal and unavoidable part of organisational life.

Technological advancements, shifting competitors in the market, changes in consumers' preferences, and pressure from other stakeholders, such as the government, could lead to external pressure for organisational change. On the other hand, employees, management, and shareholders may exert internal pressure for reform (Kotter, 2012; Palmer et al., 2017). Gareth (2017) study on socialisation and new commers adjustment to organisation highlights dealing with the unanticipated, managing diversity, establishing a competitive edge, and promoting efficiency, speed, and innovation are the four (4) reasons for organisational transformation. In today's business world, an organisation cannot thrive if it does not adapt, but, without knowing the employees' skill gaps, it will be challenging for the organisation's management to precisely determine how to develop improvement strategies.

Upskilling and Reskilling

Upskilling and reskilling are two crucial strategic ways to meet the unique needs of the workforce while overseeing organisational transition. The workplace of the twenty-first century is heavily digitalised, capital-intensive, and technology-driven. The process of teaching employees to acquire new skills or enhance current ones so they may take on novel or higher-level roles is known as upskilling. In a highly competitive global economy, upskilling helps employees stay relevant (WEF, 2020). Thus, a firm's organisational structures must incorporate measures that support inclusive staff upskilling; this will lead to transparency, accountability, motivation, and performance.

The process of acquiring new abilities to perform a different profession or the practice of retraining employees who may have lost their jobs due to creative changes to the economy or new challenges to development brought about by technological improvement is known as reskilling. Reskilling enables the workforce to be ready for new positions in the organisation (Sivalingam & Mansori, 2021; Adepoju, 2022). This flexibility has become essential in today's workplaces due to the rapid rate of technological development

Programmes for upskilling and reskilling effectively address skill shortages and equip workers to tackle future challenges, promoting long-term competitiveness and sustainability (Li, 2022). A company's culture and leadership play a critical role in carrying out these initiatives (Herremans, 2021), because training programmes are more effective when they align with business objectives and market expectations (Rushmeier et al., 2019).

The Need for Reskilling and Upskilling

The Disruptions of the 4th Industrial Revolution

The changes brought forth by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) are still changing the kinds of skills needed in the digital labour markets. According to some academics, a traditional reaction to such disruptions is for industries to create skills initiatives (Bajpai & Bierman, 2019; Adepoju, 2021), given that employees must be prepared to thrive during technology disruptions (Eccles & Serafin, 2017; Gibe, 2019; Sreedhar & Seema, 2025). For organisational sustainability and continuity throughout the 4IR, upskilling and reskilling are essential efforts.

This will ensure the skillset stays current, competitive, and in demand (Gupta & Wright, 2021; Butler, 2024).

Rapid Technological Advancement

Rapid technology advancements are significantly affecting businesses (Stephany & Lorenz, 2021; Garcia de Macedo et al., 2022). In addition to technological advancements, other megatrends have also had an impact on the demand for skills such as: urbanisation (attraction of high-value, knowledge-intensive sectors and more varied employment), globalisation (increased integration of global markets), environmental sustainability (emergence of new "green jobs"), geopolitical uncertainties in some areas, rising wealth and income inequality, and demographic changes (aging and population decline) (Hogarth, 2019).

Based on the Future of Jobs Report 2020 (WEF, 2020), cloud computing, automation, artificial intelligence (AI), broad use of big data analytics, and ubiquitous high-speed mobile internet will be the main forces behind company expansion. In Chakma and Chaijinda (2020), training current employees is more economical than hiring new ones during the present Industry 4.0 wave. Reskilling improves overall performance, increases employee retention, and helps organisations stay in line with changing market standards. They cite a McKinsey analysis that estimates that by 2030, digitisation and artificial intelligence may force over 375 million jobs worldwide to retrain.

More details about how AI is changing the abilities that employers need is provided by Morandini et al. (2022). Operational models are changing as a result of tools like PathAI in diagnoses and NLP in customer service, necessitating reskilling in both knowledge and blue-collar employment. Critical thinking and problem-solving are examples of transversal abilities that are becoming more and more important, yet demand for some mid-level positions is decreasing. The paper also emphasises how generative AI, such as ChatGPT, may both foster creativity and raise concerns about global disparities in upskilling resources and job security. Both time and money are still major obstacles, especially for those with lower skill levels. Therefore, fostering a culture of learning and growth through supportive internal networks and policies can allow employees to continuously upskill and reskill to avoid falling behind (Chakma & Chaijinda, 2020; Vroman & Denko, 2022).

For Strategic Development

Upskilling and reskilling processes enable the preparation of the next generation of workers for jobs that require not only technical skills but also innovative thinking, flexibility, interpersonal skills, and a willingness to learn more (Weber, 2019); help employees develop their knowledge, values, and competencies so they can better adapt to change in unpredictable future (Chamorro-Premuzic & Frankiewicz, 2020), and solve potential problems during crises (Kotsiou et al., 2022). It is acknowledged that lifelong learning is a prerequisite for employees to be able to adjust to the ever-changing demands of their jobs.

In addition to employee initiative, it is the duty of firms to provide learning opportunities and instill a lifelong learning mindset across the organisation (Bennett & Layzell, 2021). When it comes to operating margin, return on equity, and sales growth, companies that offer training to all of their staff are more likely to remain competitive than firms that do not (Udemy Business, 2022).

Improving Employee Productivity and Efficiency

According to a study by Dutta (2021) on learning and upgrading in the global value chain, an employee's existing skill set will increase, making them more capable, effective, and productive. Therefore, one way to ensure these goals is to raise staff skill levels. Learning from mistakes or from colleagues are two examples of how it usually manifests in the workplace.

Nayak (2018) emphasises how changing learning environments have enabled employees to gain new skills wherever they are. The development of entirely digital training methods, such as interactive social media groups and live video sessions, which try to mimic the efficacy of in-person instruction, was further accelerated by the COVID-19 epidemic. This digital revolution improves efficiency and production by increasing customisation and scalability in learning.

According to Samuel and Gilsha (2023), the IT industry is dynamic, and skill gaps among personnel are caused by frequent technical developments. Employees are increasingly looking for companies that are dedicated to their professional development as a result. The study looks at research that shows how training initiatives boost worker productivity and skill sets. Variations in experience and ability levels highlight the need for specialised training and development, as Samuel and Gilsha disclose. These initiatives not only increase output but also promote employee engagement and career advancement.

Increasing Job Satisfaction and Motivation

Job satisfaction is a person's level of contentment with their work, which can lead to higher motivation. Díaz-García et al. (2020) conducted a mixed-methods study to assess the impact of reskilling and upskilling on employee promotions. The discoveries demonstrate that employees who actively pursue developmental programmes increase their value to the organisation and enhance their chances of promotion. This commitment to personal growth reflects positively on their career trajectory and contributes to corporate advancement.

Participating in reskilling or upskilling allows an individual to stay up-to-date with changes in their workplace, which keeps employees motivated. Increased dedication and devotion to the company are frequently the outcome of higher morale and better job satisfaction. Correspondingly, Nwali (2021) explores how training and development impact employee promotions and reveals organisations that invest in upskilling not only enhance employee performance and satisfaction but also benefit from improved retention rates and reduced recruitment costs. Such investments create a more engaged, motivated, and high-performing workforce that drives organisational success.

Upskilling and Reskilling Strategies as a Response to Competency Gaps

The workforce has seen structural disruption as a result of the exponential technological change, which is characterised by the increasing degree of automation, artificial intelligence, and the digitalisation of work processes. The competency gap between the personnel's current capabilities and future skill demands has grown more noticeable as a result of this phenomenon. If this gap is not addressed methodically, it not only reduces organisational productivity but also raises the possibility of structural unemployment (Silalahi et al., 2025). As a deliberate reaction to this problem, upskilling and reskilling strategies are therefore unavoidable. In this

regard, companies must develop cognitive and affective skills relevant to the collaborative and humanistic phenomenon of Industry 5.0, in addition to raising their personnel's technical proficiency.

Theoretical Foundation

Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) served as the foundation for Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT), which emphasises a company's capacity to "integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external capabilities to address changing contexts dynamically" (Teece, 2014, as referenced in Biswakarma & Bohora, 2025). Dynamic capabilities, as defined, are the "meta-capabilities" that enable organisations to withstand technological disruption. Upskilling and reskilling are the main reconfiguration tools. According to recent research, dynamic talents increase organisational resilience rather than performance directly (Biswakarma & Bohora, 2025). Without completely restructuring, organisations can move their staff from dwindling functions to new tech-driven positions by seeing human skills as changeable assets.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

The three fundamental psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) as well as the different forms of motivation (intrinsic versus extrinsic) are the main focus of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000). According to this study, "competence" is the crucial connection between SDT and organisational transformation. Initiatives to reskill people meet the demand for competence, which encourages self-motivation. Instead of opposing new skills as "forced" requirements, employees are more likely to internalise the need for them when leaders manage change using SDT-informed techniques (Forner et al., 2025). In times of instability, this results in increased engagement and longer-lasting occupational adaptation.

Organisational Learning Theory

Organisational Learning Theory (OLT), pioneered by Argyris and Schön (1978) and further developed by Senge (1990), conceptualises organisations as dynamic systems capable of processing information, retaining institutional memory, and modifying collective behaviour. In the context of the modern workforce, OLT acts as the "operating system" that facilitates and sustains the upskilling process. This theory informs the present study through three critical dimensions: the institutionalisation of knowledge, the dismantling of defensive routines, and the creation of a strategic buffer against environmental volatility.

First, OLT bridges the gap between individual growth and collective intelligence. While upskilling begins as a personal endeavour, its true value to the firm is realised only when that knowledge is institutionalised (Biswakarma & Bohora, 2025). Through the lens of OLT, an employee's newly acquired talents are integrated into departmental standard operating procedures, transforming isolated reskilling efforts into a cohesive competitive advantage rather than a series of disconnected workshops.

Furthermore, the theory provides a mechanism for breaking through "organisational defensive routines" that typically hinder change. Employing double-loop learning, organisations move beyond surface-level skill acquisition to fundamental cognitive shifts. For example, reskilling

for a digital future requires more than teaching technical skills like coding; it necessitates an ontological shift from "human-led" workflows to "human-AI collaboration" (Global HR Trends, 2026).

Finally, Senge's concept of the "learning organisation" serves as a vital buffer against the disruptions of change. When an organisation possesses a strong "learning orientation", reskilling is no longer perceived as a traumatic interruption but as a natural, ongoing evolution. This strategic mindset yields tangible results; recent data indicates that companies with robust learning orientations experience 30% higher success rates in digital transformation initiatives compared to their less adaptive counterparts (Ginting, 2026).

METHODOLOGY

The paper uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. This methodical strategy was chosen to guarantee that the synthesis of reskilling and upskilling frameworks is exhaustive, repeatable, and devoid of researcher bias. The SLR approach assesses data from a variety of diverse fields, such as human resource development, occupational psychology, and strategic management. To obtain current academic and practitioner viewpoints, a thorough search of high-impact electronic databases was conducted as part of the data collection process.

Discussion of Reviewed Literatures

The empirical literature reviewed provides compelling evidence that upskilling and reskilling are critical mechanisms for enhancing organisational adaptability, employee performance, and long-term competitiveness, although their effectiveness is influenced by contextual and organisational factors. Several studies establish a strong positive relationship between skill development initiatives and workforce outcomes. For instance, Sawant et al. (2022), Mahdia (2024), and Tasheva (2024) demonstrate that participation in upskilling and reskilling programmes significantly improves employees' employability, career progression, and labour market integration. Similarly, Nai and Abraham (2024) empirically show that such initiatives are instrumental in talent retention and employee development, reinforcing the strategic value of continuous learning in modern organisations. Dutta (2021) finds that skill enhancement within global value chains increases employee efficiency and capability, thereby contributing to improved productivity outcomes. In a related vein, Samuel and Gilsha (2023) reveal that structured training programmes in the IT sector not only bridge skill gaps but also enhance employee engagement and output, particularly when training is tailored to varying experience levels. Nayak (2018) also demonstrates that the adoption of digital learning platforms, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has improved the scalability and effectiveness of training, leading to greater operational efficiency.

Empirical studies also underscore the motivational and psychological benefits associated with upskilling and reskilling. Díaz-García et al. (2020), through a mixed-methods approach, show that employees who engage in continuous learning initiatives are more likely to achieve promotions and exhibit higher organisational commitment. This is corroborated by Nwali (2021), who finds that training and development investments significantly enhance job satisfaction, employee performance, and retention while reducing recruitment costs. These findings collectively suggest that skill development initiatives contribute not only to technical competence but also to positive attitudinal and behavioural outcomes within organisations.

In addition, the literature identifies technological disruption as a key driver necessitating upskilling and reskilling. Chakma and Chaijinda (2020) and Morandini et al. (2023) demonstrates that advancements in artificial intelligence are reshaping skill requirements across both white-collar and blue-collar roles, increasing demand for higher-order cognitive skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving. However, these studies also highlight persistent barriers, including financial constraints, time limitations, and unequal access to training opportunities, particularly among lower-skilled workers. Chakma and Chaijinda (2020) and Vroman and Denko (2022) indicate that organisations that foster continuous learning environments and supportive internal networks are better positioned to sustain workforce adaptability. Complementary evidence from Ginting (2026) suggests that firms with strong learning orientations achieve significantly higher success rates in digital transformation initiatives, thereby reinforcing the role of institutionalised learning in organisational resilience.

CONCLUSION AND ECOMMENDATIONS

The literature establishes that in an era of rapid technological disruption, human capital reconfiguration through upskilling and reskilling is not merely an operational choice but a critical survival technique. The synthesis of OLT, SDT, and DCT reveals that the effectiveness of organisational change is deeply rooted in the psychological well-being and autonomous commitment of the workforce. While digital transformation offers immense potential for business excellence, its success depends on institutionalising individual learning through double-loop and deutero-learning processes to achieve systemic agility (Sreedhar & Seema, 2025). Ultimately, organisations that fail to address the core human needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness risk internal resistance that can undermine even the most sophisticated technological investments.

Recommendations

It is recommended that organisations transition from ad hoc training sessions to a structured, continuous learning culture that views upskilling as a tactical expression of their dynamic capabilities. HR departments should take a proactive role in facilitating this development, particularly in high-pressure sectors such as oil, gas, and IT, where automation risks are most acute (Tasheva, 2024; Tong, Wu, & Evans, 2021). Leadership must move beyond a focus on technical proficiency alone, embracing "cross-skilling" to enhance workforce flexibility and ensure that reskilling efforts pay off in diverse operational contexts. Furthermore, to foster long-term sustainability, firms should align their change management strategies with SDT principles, ensuring employees feel empowered and connected to the organisation's evolving digital vision.

Suggestions for Further Study

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies that track the direct impact of specific upskilling interventions on long-term business excellence and employee retention across different industry verticals. There is also a significant need for empirical inquiry into the "complementary benefits" of cross-skilling, specifically how learning seemingly unrelated skills can enhance an employee's primary job performance.

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