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DIGITISATION AND INCLUSIVITY: TAKING EVERYONE ALONG

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The inclusivity paradox of the digital age

the more it is involved, the greater the inclusiveness of technological spread-effects. This we know from the onset of public education: it did not coincide with the industrial revolutions for no reason, since these revolutions created and consolidated the firmest of gaps between the "haves" and "have-nots". Public universities may not be at the cutting-edge of knowledge-creation all the time, but their job of stopping the knowledge-gap from widening is a full-time and very crucial job: no other agency can do it; and without the government, we will be under the complete command of knowledge creators, for either good, that is, harmony and progress, or for evil, that is, anarchy and the survival-of-the-fittest instinct.

Some authors emphasise the 5 Cs as the founding pillars of digitalisation (Sumeet Bhutani and Yashi Paliwal, among others): consciousness, connectedness, compliance, collaboration, and contentment.
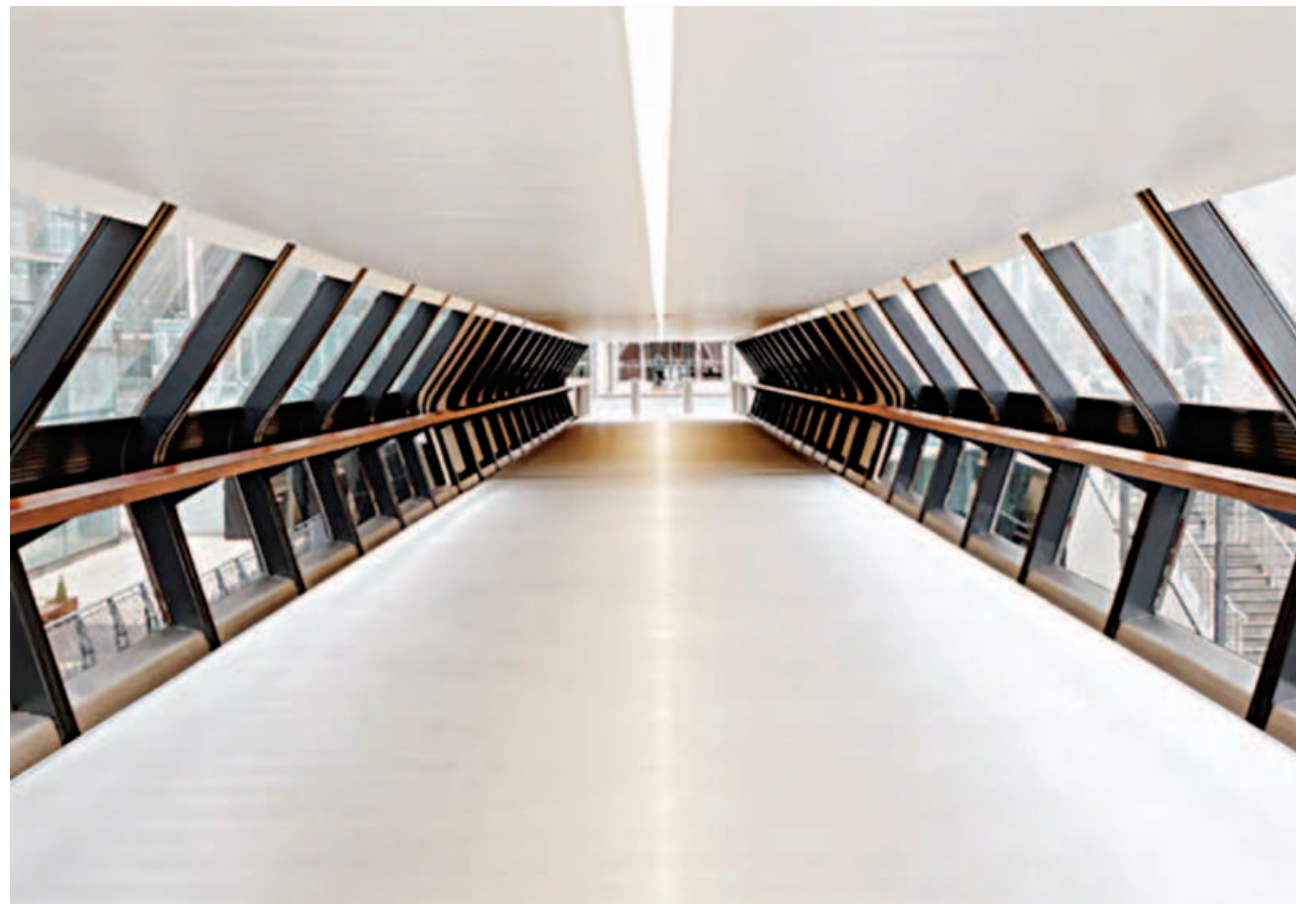
Our collaborative capacity had three components, each of which digitalisation also advocates: collaboration only happens because there is "trust", upon which "purpose" is cultivated, in turn producing the "energy" propelling collaboration.

These qualities did not spring from digitalisation, but without the government helping the "have-nots" to sharpen them, and thereby the country, they would have no chance in a "networked society" itself, an over-drive digitalisation outcome.

Other authors, more concerned about knowledge controls (such as Xiudian Dai), reaffirm the crucial need for governmental presence, and thereby social inclusivity. They distinguish between "market regulation" (where the fittest survive) and "state-regulation" (where the less-fit get a chance to breathe), arguing both play a balancing role upon each other: the weaker one side gets, the stronger the other side gets, as if automatically, which must be stopped.

Nobody disputes the key features of digitalisation: how ubiquitous or universal it is, that it is so affordable anyone can jump in (perhaps to be bitten later). It is reliable ("numbers do not lie"), brisk (computers outpace even the brightest mind faster), and usable (application in "all" walks of life). Yet, it is in shepherding each of those five discussed cornerstones that the maximum gains can be extracted at minimal costs (what von Neumann and his equally genius mathematical partner, Oskar Morgenstern, dub *maximin*).

A careful dissection of "maximin" shows how it cannot be a one-person game, raising a digitalisation paradox: although digital information emanates from individual-level intellect (brutally exposing the "have-have not" divide), no digital revolution can be successful without disseminating that know-how, making "collaboration" an essential factor. Inclusivity needs collaboration, for example, bridging across economic, educational, political, societal, and all other divides for the outcome, as we Bangladeshis managed in 1971

to win the war. Our collaborative capacity had three components, each of which digitalisation also advocates: collaboration only happens because there is "trust", upon which "purpose" is cultivated, in turn producing the "energy" propelling collaboration. Rob Gross, Amy Edmondson, and Wendy Murphy emphasise precisely these features in articulating "the nuts and bolts of digital transformation" (*MIT Sloan Management Review*, Winter 2020, 37-43).

When the "enemy" shifts from another human being or a corporation to robots in this enveloping AI (artificial intelligence) age, just to

stay ahead demands comprehensive changes, as much on "tangibles", such as the tools we use (to get the data first, then play with the numbers, ultimately to build the architecture connecting "inputs" with desired "outputs", and fixing the playground), as the intangibles, like attitudes (cultural, economic, educational, political, social). Across a combative, competitively-inclined world today, our "outcomes" have to be a maximin-defying second-best. While this is natural against the typically competitive business environment, governmental intervention may save the day (Iansiti and Lakhani discuss these in

"Competing in the age of AI," *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 2020, 61-7).

In the final analysis, it is governmental intervention that breaks our biases and stereotypes to prepare the level digital playing-field demand today. Have we lived up to that challenge? Time will certainly tell, but having prior knowledge displays our capacity to stay ahead of robotic power.

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