

Module 2. Skills of the future: digital capabilities for modern sports organizations

Introduction: why skills are Strategic

Introduction

Digital transformation doesn't happen through tools alone—it happens through people. Even the most advanced technology stack will fail to deliver its full potential if the organization behind it lacks the right skills, fluency, and adaptability to activate its potential. In the world of sports, where tradition and innovation often coexist uneasily, the ability to build and scale future-ready capabilities is emerging as a decisive competitive advantage (Accenture, 2021).

Historically, skills development in sports organizations has centered around performance departments, operations, or marketing. But in today's digital-first environment, capabilities like data analytics, CRM management, fan journey design, content automation, and agile product delivery are no longer niche—they are central to strategic execution (McKinsey and Company, 2021). These are the skills that bridge the gap between **digital ambition** and **real-world impact**.

Yet many sports organizations still face a persistent mismatch between their transformation goals and the internal talent available to deliver them. In some cases, clubs and federations hire external digital experts only to find they struggle to integrate with legacy teams. In others, existing staff are expected to adopt digital practices without sufficient support or development pathways (Harvard Business Review, 2020).

This is why digital transformation increasingly demands a parallel focus on **capability building**—identifying what skills are needed, where they sit today, and how to develop or acquire them over time. The shift from traditional roles to digital-era profiles is not just a hiring question—it's a leadership and learning challenge (McKinsey and Company, 2021).

This reading explores the digital capabilities reshaping sports organizations: what they are, why they matter, and how to build them systematically. We will examine emerging role types, upskilling strategies, talent models, and how organizations can measure their progress—all within the unique context of the sports industry.



Just as the previous reading highlighted the cultural and mindset foundations of transformation, this piece zooms in on **people as enablers**—focusing not on **who** you hire, but on **what** your people are equipped to do.

Defining digital capabilities in the sports context

Introduction

Digital capabilities are not simply about using technology—they are about applying it to create value in ways that align with an organization’s goals, fans, and culture. In the context of sports, this means enabling faster, smarter, and more personalized experiences for fans, athletes, partners, and internal teams. Whether it’s personalizing ticket offers, automating content creation, or analyzing real-time performance data, digital capabilities are the hands and feet of transformation—the operational muscle that turns strategic ambition into day-to-day delivery.

Three levels of capability: literacy, fluency, specialization

A useful way to frame digital capability building is through three progressive levels: **digital literacy**, **digital fluency**, and **digital specialization**.

- At the foundational level, **digital literacy** refers to baseline understanding—the ability to use data, interact with platforms, and collaborate in digital environments. This includes knowing how to navigate dashboards, manage online assets, or participate in digital workflows. Clubs such as Aston Villa have introduced digital onboarding sessions for all staff to build common vocabulary and tool usage across departments (Aston Villa, 2022).
- The next level, **digital fluency**, involves applying these tools seamlessly within one’s role—making decisions based on CRM data, automating key touchpoints in fan communications, or integrating feedback into agile team processes (Accenture, 2021). For instance, Manchester United uses Salesforce’s Marketing Cloud to dynamically personalize fan communications based on engagement history, demonstrating fluent use of CRM tools in content strategy (Manchester United, 2021).
- Finally, **digital specialization** refers to deeper domain expertise. These are roles with advanced capabilities in areas like UX



design, data engineering, machine learning, or content automation. Bayern Munich, for example, has hired dedicated data scientists to optimize everything from ticket pricing algorithms to fan behavior prediction models (Bayern Munich, 2023).

Capability domains in modern sports organizations

When looking at capability areas across modern sports organizations, several key domains have emerged.

Data and analytics: the ability to gather, clean, interpret, and act on data has become essential—not just for performance departments, but across fan engagement, marketing, and commercial teams. FC Copenhagen has invested heavily in fan data segmentation and analysis to improve matchday targeting and loyalty program retention (FC Copenhagen, 2022).

Technology enablement: the connective tissue that links systems together. Staff need working knowledge of platforms, APIs, and how technologies integrate. The NBA has created internal tech platforms that merge real-time performance, content production, and fan insights into unified dashboards (NBA, 2020).

Customer experience and CRM: crafting fan journeys across touchpoints, personalizing interactions, and managing segmented engagement strategies. AS Roma uses AI-powered segmentation to tailor push notifications during matchdays based on behavioral patterns (AS Roma, 2022).

Content and digital marketing: beyond content production, teams must now automate distribution, optimize performance, test formats in real time, and align content with audience behavior. Formula 1's global digital team exemplifies this approach with multilingual, short-form, and regionally targeted strategies (Formula 1, 2021).

Product and innovation: designing and delivering new digital experiences using agile methods and user-centered design. LaLiga Tech has built in-house platforms for OTT delivery, fan data analytics, and innovation pilots across the league (LaLiga Tech, 2022).

Cybersecurity and governance: with increasing compliance and trust demands, data protection and governance are now critical roles. UEFA's data governance frameworks are an example of federations responding to the digital maturity of the fan ecosystem (UEFA, 2021).

Why collaboration is just as important as competence

Crucially, these capabilities do not live in isolation. A data analyst must collaborate with



marketers. A product owner needs input from both tech and commercial leads. A CRM strategist must work with content teams. In this sense, digital capability is as much about collaboration across functions as it is about technical depth—and that’s where many organizations still struggle.

Not every club or federation needs all of these roles in-house. Smaller organizations may focus more on digital marketing and CRM, while global brands may invest in platform engineering, AI-driven personalization, or performance tech. What matters is clarity: understanding which capabilities are critical to strategic goals—and making deliberate decisions about how to source, develop, or partner to gain them (Salesforce, 2023).

Visual: digital capability spectrum

Table 1. Digital capability spectrum

Level	Description	Example in sports organization
Literacy	Basic understanding and use of tools	Creating dashboards in Google Analytics
Fluency	Integrating digital tools into decision-making	Running targeted email campaigns from CRM
Specialization	Expert-level knowledge and system-level impact	Building AI-based fan segmentation engine

Source: own elaboration.

The key takeaway

The key takeaway is this: **digital capabilities are the human layer of digital transformation.** They are not simply checkboxes on a hiring spec—they are dynamic, evolving, and deeply tied to the strategic maturity of the organization. As such, they must be cultivated with the same intentionality as the tech stack or the brand itself.

The digital skill map: core roles emerging in sports



Introduction

As digital transformation deepens across the sports industry, the composition of teams within clubs, leagues, and federations is changing rapidly. Where once the internal workforce leaned heavily on departments such as match operations, communications, or ticketing, today's digital-first organizations are building a new layer of talent—one rooted in data, design, content, and product development.

These digital-first roles are not simply additions to existing departments. They represent a fundamental shift in how work is structured, how value is created, and how fans are engaged. They require new skillsets, new ways of collaborating, and new leadership approaches. In many ways, they are the “connective tissue” between vision and execution—the practical enablers of innovation.

The shift toward these roles is not limited to the biggest clubs. While organizations like the NBA, FC Barcelona, and LaLiga have built out mature digital units with highly specialized staff, smaller clubs and federations are also investing in hybrid or multi-functional talent to fill critical capability gaps. Whether the structure is lean or large, the need is the same: modern sports organizations must identify, build, and empower the roles that drive their digital ambitions forward.

Key capability areas and emerging roles

The digital skill map in sports organizations can be divided into several core capability areas—each with its own set of emerging roles. While titles may vary across regions and organizations, the functions are becoming increasingly standardized across the industry.

In the area of **data and analytics**, roles like data analysts, data engineers, and business intelligence managers are central. Data analysts interpret fan behavior, campaign performance, or matchday metrics, turning insights into strategic recommendations. Data engineers support these functions by building and maintaining the technical infrastructure—data lakes, APIs, dashboards—that make analytics possible. BI managers often operate at the intersection of departments, aligning data usage with commercial and marketing KPIs. Clubs like Bayern Munich have shown how powerful these roles can be when applied to both fan and performance data. Their dynamic pricing models, driven by fan behavior and seat demand, are a result of strong internal data capability (Bayern Munich, 2023).

In **CRM and fan experience**, the most important roles include CRM managers and fan journey designers. The CRM manager typically oversees automation tools, segmentation strategies, and campaign personalization—helping to move fans from anonymous browsers to loyal supporters. The fan journey designer (sometimes part of a customer experience team) looks holistically at how fans interact across all touchpoints, ensuring



seamless and relevant experiences. Manchester United's CRM unit, for example, applies behavior-based segmentation through Salesforce Marketing Cloud to deliver customized email flows that reflect the preferences and loyalty history of each fan (Manchester United, 2021).

Product and UX capabilities are also becoming indispensable. These roles are especially critical in organizations that develop their own platforms or digital services—such as ticketing portals, mobile apps, or OTT content players. Product owners or managers coordinate cross-functional teams to define features, prioritize roadmaps, and deliver experiences aligned with fan needs. UX and UI designers focus on usability, accessibility, and design consistency. LaLiga Tech, for instance, has led the way in building white-labeled OTT platforms for clubs, with product teams overseeing everything from onboarding flows to user analytics (LaLiga Tech, 2022).

Content and marketing roles have evolved significantly. No longer limited to creative output, these roles are now rooted in automation, data, and optimization. Content strategists and automation leads map out content flows across platforms, using audience data to personalize formats and channels. Multichannel marketing specialists focus on delivering coherent experiences across email, app, web, and social—often using journey builders and performance dashboards. Formula 1 has built multilingual, market-specific workflows that distribute race-day content automatically across more than ten regions, while tracking engagement and adapting based on real-time feedback (Formula 1, 2021).

Finally, in the area of **technology and innovation**, roles such as digital transformation leads, platform architects, and integration specialists are gaining ground. These are the professionals who connect systems together, pilot new tools, and ensure the tech ecosystem supports organizational goals. The NBA's internal operations unit connects performance data, fan engagement, and media distribution into a unified digital infrastructure—enabling real-time collaboration between media, analytics, and commercial teams (NBA, 2020).

These roles are not solely technical. What sets them apart is their cross-functional nature. A CRM manager must collaborate with data engineers and content strategists. A product owner works across departments, from commercial leads to tech teams. A UX designer depends on input from fans and internal stakeholders. In this way, digital roles are as much about **orchestration** as they are about execution.

What makes digital roles different in sports?

What distinguishes these digital roles in sports from more traditional positions is not just the technology they use—it's the mindset and collaboration they demand. These professionals are expected to work across silos, interpret data, adapt rapidly, and prioritize fan needs in every decision. They are more agile, more integrated, and more



iterative than legacy roles, which often worked in vertical teams with defined outputs.

Another difference is pace. Digital roles require constant adaptation. Tools evolve quickly. Fan expectations shift season to season. Regulations like GDPR impact how data can be used. As a result, digital staff must continually learn, test, and iterate.

Some organizations have already started to adapt structurally. FC Barcelona, for example, reorganized part of their digital team into cross-functional squads—bringing together CRM, content, data, and product specialists to work toward specific fan engagement goals. This squad model enabled them to launch a redesigned fan platform in less than half the time of previous initiatives, while also improving internal collaboration and accountability (FC Barcelona, 2022).

Summary: the digital capability blueprint

Across organizations, a pattern is emerging. Regardless of scale or sport, the following capability areas are becoming central to digital strategy.

- **Data and analytics:** making sense of fan behavior and business performance.
- **CRM and fan experience:** managing personalized journeys across channels.
- **Product and UX:** designing fan-centric digital platforms.
- **Content and marketing automation:** delivering optimized content at scale.
- **Technology and integration:** connecting platforms and enabling innovation

Each area contains roles that didn't exist in most sports organizations ten years ago. Today, they are not only present—they are essential.

Hybrid skillsets and T-shaped talent

Introduction

As the pace of digital transformation accelerates, the most valuable professionals in sports organizations are no longer just those with deep technical expertise or years of domain knowledge. Instead, the new competitive edge lies in **hybrid talent**—individuals who combine strong expertise in one area with the ability to collaborate across disciplines, communicate with clarity, and adapt to changing needs.

This hybrid profile is often referred to as a **T-shaped skill set**. The vertical bar of the “T” represents **deep expertise in a particular domain**, such as data analysis, CRM, UX design, or product management. The horizontal bar represents the **ability to work across functions**, drawing on a foundational understanding of other areas such as marketing, content, or development. T-shaped individuals thrive in modern, cross-functional teams because they can contribute depth while also connecting dots across silos (McKinsey and Company, 2021).

From specialist silos to collaborative talent

Traditional organizations—including many in sports—often hired for I-shaped profiles: specialists with strong vertical knowledge, but limited cross-functional collaboration. While deep specialists are still critical, today’s digital delivery requires individuals who can **translate across departments**, understand the upstream and downstream impact of their work, and integrate into agile teams focused on outcomes rather than functions.

For instance, a **CRM manager** might need to understand campaign automation in considerable depth (the vertical of the “T”), but also grasp fan data architecture, content personalization strategies, and marketing goals to be effective in an agile team (the horizontal). Likewise, a **data analyst** with strong storytelling skills can better support product teams and commercial leads when they can translate numbers into narratives that drive action.

Organizations such as **Manchester City** and **Ajax** have deliberately recruited individuals with hybrid talent profiles in their digital teams, encouraging hires who can move fluidly between content, analytics, and fan experience. These individuals often serve as natural collaborators and internal connectors—accelerating execution by reducing handovers and increasing mutual understanding between departments (Manchester City, 2022; Ajax, 2021).

The role of cross-functional squads

T-shaped talent becomes even more powerful when deployed in **cross-functional squads**—small, autonomous teams composed of different roles aligned around a shared goal, such as improving app engagement or personalizing matchday experiences. These squads allow for faster iteration, clearer ownership, and more effective problem-solving.

In sports, this structure has been adopted by clubs like **FC Barcelona**, which built agile squads combining content strategists, product managers, designers, and CRM specialists to redesign their digital membership platform. The result was not just a better fan product, but also faster time-to-market and more sustainable team performance (FC Barcelona, 2022).

T-shaped team members in these squads act as bridges. They understand their craft deeply, but also empathize with the challenges and objectives of their teammates. This leads to fewer misunderstandings, greater shared accountability, and stronger alignment with organizational objectives.

How to develop hybrid talent

Hybrid talent can be **developed intentionally**—not just hired. Several methods can support this shift.

- **Role shadowing:** allowing staff to follow colleagues in other departments for short periods to learn their challenges and tools.
- **Cross-training programs:** structured internal courses that give foundational knowledge of CRM, data, UX, or content.
- **Agile onboarding:** introducing new hires to agile ceremonies and principles to promote collaboration from day one.
- **Rotational assignments:** moving staff between teams to broaden their exposure and skillset.

Sports organizations like **Liverpool FC** have integrated these practices into their internal digital training frameworks, helping team members build hybrid competencies that align with evolving strategic priorities (Liverpool FC, 2023).

Summary: why T-shaped talent matters

In an industry that is becoming more connected, data-rich, and fan-centric, T-shaped talent brings the adaptability and collaboration required for speed and innovation. They are not just better equipped for modern workflows—they are essential to unlocking the value of digital transformation. As such, clubs and federations must not only **recruit for hybrid profiles**, but also **invest in developing them** across their existing workforce.

Upskilling and reskilling the legacy workforce

Introduction

Digital transformation does not depend solely on hiring new talent—it also requires **unlocking the potential of the people already within the organization**. Many sports clubs, leagues, and federations have decades of operational excellence embedded in their

staff, but lack the digital capabilities needed to execute on modern strategies. Bridging this gap through **upskilling and reskilling** is not just cost-effective—it's also strategic.

Legacy staff often carry invaluable institutional knowledge: deep understanding of fans, stakeholder networks, matchday operations, or regional markets. These individuals can become **critical enablers of transformation**—if they are equipped with the right tools, language, and mindsets.

As Accenture (2021) notes, the organizations that scale transformation fastest are those that treat capability building as a strategic investment, not an HR side project.

The dual challenge: upskilling and reskilling

It's useful to distinguish between **upskilling** and **reskilling**.

- **Upskilling** is about enhancing an existing role through the integration of digital tools and fluency—for example, helping a marketing manager use automation platforms or performance dashboards.
- **Reskilling** involves preparing individuals to step into **new roles entirely**—such as transitioning someone from ticketing operations into data operations or digital content planning.

Both approaches are needed. While some staff may evolve their current roles, others may need to **pivot entirely** to meet the demands of new capability areas like CRM, analytics, or content automation.

Clubs like **Liverpool FC** have embraced both. Their internal digital skills program includes role-based upskilling tracks for marketing, content, and commercial teams—as well as open access modules for staff interested in changing their career paths (Liverpool FC, 2023).

Key tactics: how sports organizations build digital skills

Several approaches are proving effective in sports contexts.

1. Digital learning academies

These are structured internal learning programs offering courses in CRM, data literacy, UX principles, and agile ways of working. They can be powered by external partners (e.g. edtech platforms) or run internally through LCD teams.

2. Internal bootcamps



Time-bound, intensive training experiences designed to give staff the confidence and core competencies to work in a new domain. Intensive training boot camps are particularly effective for high-priority transformation areas like content automation, data dashboards, or journey mapping.

3.Shadowing and pairing

Allowing legacy staff to spend time with digital specialists fosters informal learning, improves cross-functional empathy, and reduces resistance to change. Pairing a CRM lead with a ticketing veteran, for instance, can accelerate understanding on both sides.

4.Rotational assignments

Short-term rotations between departments allow employees to explore new roles, while also increasing collaboration across silos. They are especially useful in preparing future product owners or cross-functional team leads.

5.Le.arning KPIs and recognition

Tracking participation in training, certifying competencies, and celebrating milestones help embed learning as a cultural norm. For example, **MLS** uses internal “badging systems” to recognize digital capabilities and promote internal mobility (MLS, 2022).

Addressing the human side of reskilling

Capability building isn't only about tools and content—it's about mindset and confidence. Many legacy employees may feel threatened by digital change or fear being left behind.

Effective reskilling programs address these emotional dynamics by:

- framing learning as **empowerment**, not evaluation,
- creating psychologically safe spaces to ask questions and fail,
- highlighting success stories of colleagues who have made the transition.

In this regard, **storytelling** is a powerful tool. When leaders share examples of staff who've moved from traditional roles to digital ones, it creates belief that change is possible. At **Ajax**, internal newsletters often feature interviews with team members who have completed digital upskilling journeys—helping normalize the learning culture (Ajax, 2022).

A shift from training to transformation

True digital capability building is not a one-off training program—it's an organizational



transformation. It requires **budget, leadership support, alignment with strategy, and a learning infrastructure**. Sports organizations that treat it as such are better positioned to compete in a rapidly changing landscape.

As McKinsey and Company (2021) emphasizes, the future workforce will not be built by hiring alone. It will be shaped by the speed and scale of internal capability development.

Recruiting for digital fluency and potential

Introduction

Hiring in the digital era is no longer just about job titles, years of experience, or industry background. In fast-evolving environments like sports, organizations must increasingly recruit for **digital fluency, adaptability, and learning potential**—not just for what candidates know now, but how quickly they can evolve.

Traditional sports hiring has often focused on candidates from within the industry—former players, coaches, or business staff with deep institutional knowledge. While that expertise still holds value, today's challenges demand **a different lens**: one that emphasizes capabilities over credentials and **mindsets over methods** (McKinsey and Company, 2020). The most effective digital hires are often those who bring agility, curiosity, and systems thinking—even if they come from adjacent industries like media, retail, or tech.

Digital fluency as a core hiring metric

Digital fluency is the ability to **navigate digital systems, interpret data, and collaborate across tools and platforms**. It is not only technical competence; it is also comfort with digital ways of working. For example, a digitally fluent marketer might not write SQL queries, but they understand campaign performance metrics, use CRM systems confidently, and can coordinate with analysts to improve fan segmentation strategies.

Leading clubs like **Manchester City** and **Juventus** have adopted this principle by screening candidates for “digital maturity”—their comfort with tools, data, and rapid iteration—rather than only for sports experience or traditional qualifications (Manchester City, 2022; Juventus FC, 2023). This widens the talent pool and ensures that hires can thrive in agile, tech-enabled environments.

Many clubs are now integrating **realistic hiring simulations** into their processes. Instead of asking abstract questions, they present candidates with case studies or tasks—like designing a campaign using a CRM journey builder or interpreting audience data from an OTT platform. These simulations offer better insight into how candidates think, collaborate, and adapt.



Hiring for potential, not just proven skills

Digital skillsets evolve quickly. What matters today—such as AI-assisted content creation or multi-platform personalization—may shift within 18 months. As a result, hiring teams must look beyond static skills and assess **learning ability** and **growth mindset** as central factors.

Recruiters at clubs like **Arsenal** and **MLS** have shared that their most successful hires are those who show enthusiasm for experimentation, curiosity about digital trends, and an ability to adapt to change. These traits can often be spotted through side projects, learning certifications, or the ability to reflect on past failures and learnings (Arsenal FC, 2022; MLS, 2022).

Soft signals such as how a candidate explains a learning curve, their comfort with cross-functional work, or their openness to feedback can be just as important as technical ability. Some clubs are even exploring **AI-supported assessments** that evaluate cognitive flexibility and team interaction styles as part of their hiring process.

Balancing external hiring with internal growth

While external recruitment brings in a fresh perspective and expertise, sports organizations must also think strategically about **internal mobility**. Some of the strongest digital hires may already be inside the organization—in traditional roles, waiting for an opportunity to grow.

An ideal recruitment strategy balances **external sourcing of new capabilities** with **internal development pipelines** that reskill legacy staff and support lateral moves. Clubs like **Liverpool FC** and **Ajax** have created clear visibility into digital roles across the organization and actively encourage staff to apply or train for them (Liverpool FC, 2023; Ajax, 2022).

This blended approach builds loyalty, speeds up onboarding, and reinforces a learning culture.

Employer branding and the sports-tech talent market

An often overlooked factor in recruitment is **employer branding**—how an organization is perceived by digital-native talent. While working for a football club or league might seem glamorous, many professionals in tech and media evaluate opportunities based on **culture, growth, autonomy, and innovation infrastructure**.

For sports organizations to compete with tech firms, streaming platforms, or global media agencies, they must craft a compelling employer value proposition (EVP). This includes:



- communicating digital ambition clearly (on websites, LinkedIn, job boards),
- highlighting real stories of innovation, experimentation, and internal learning,
- offering flexible work environments and personal development opportunities.

Formula E, for instance, has built a reputation for digital innovation—attracting young professionals excited by its sustainability mission, tech-forward platforms, and commitment to experimentation. This brand perception gives them an edge when competing for product managers, designers, and marketers in a competitive market (Formula E, 2023).

Building the team that builds the future

Ultimately, hiring for digital fluency and potential is about building **a workforce ready for continuous change**. The right hire may not be the one who has done the job before—but the one who can grow into what the job will become. Sports organizations that adopt this mindset will be better equipped to deliver digital transformation at speed and scale.

Measuring and managing digital capability growth

Introduction

What gets measured gets managed—and digital capabilities are no exception. For all the talk of strategy, upskilling, and recruitment, transformation will stall unless sports organizations **systematically track** the development of digital talent and align it with business outcomes.

Digital capability isn't just about filling roles or ticking off training sessions. It's about ensuring that **people have the skills, confidence, and tools to deliver transformation at scale**. That requires visibility: where capabilities exist, where they're missing, and how they're evolving.

As McKinsey and Company (2021) notes, organizations that measure capability maturity alongside business performance are more likely to scale transformation effectively.

From generic training to strategic capability mapping

Many sports organizations begin with basic training metrics—such as attendance, course



completion, or certification counts. While useful, these indicators only scratch the surface.

More advanced organizations are moving toward **capability heatmaps**, which provide a more strategic view. These heatmaps assess teams across key digital areas—such as data literacy, CRM usage, UX practices, and agile fluency—and visualize where capabilities are strong, emerging, or underdeveloped. These insights help guide investment decisions, team compositions, and hiring priorities.

For example, **LaLiga** has used internal surveys and capability dashboards to identify which clubs in its ecosystem need the most support in CRM and data usage. These dashboards then inform which clubs receive targeted training programs or co-development resources (LaLiga, 2023).

KPIs that matter for digital capability growth

There is no one-size-fits-all approach, but leading organizations tend to track capability growth across four main categories.

1.Participation and engagement

- Number of staff engaged in learning activities.
- Participation by role, department, or seniority.
- Repeat engagement and voluntary enrollment.

2.Skill acquisition

- Certifications earned (e.g., CRM, analytics tools).
- Pre/post assessments or skills testing.
- Role-specific competency benchmarks.

3.Application in workflows

- Usage of new tools or methods (e.g., agile rituals, dashboards).
- Peer reviews or manager feedback on new skills in action.
- Inclusion of new capabilities in performance reviews.

4.Business impact

- Time-to-market for digital initiatives.
- Fan engagement improvements linked to capability teams.

- Cost savings or revenue uplift from more skilled execution.

Formula 1 tracks how digital training correlates with campaign performance—for example, how upskilled regional teams improve content engagement or reduce production time (Formula 1, 2021). This connects learning directly to business outcomes.

Aligning talent metrics with strategy execution

To avoid fragmentation, capability KPIs must align with broader **digital strategy goals**. If an organization's aim is to deliver more personalized fan experiences, then CRM and content automation skills must be tracked and nurtured. If the goal is faster product development, then agile fluency and cross-functional collaboration become priority capabilities.

Some clubs are adopting **OKRs (objectives and key results)** that tie team capability growth directly to project milestones. This ensures that skills are not developed in isolation but serve real business outcomes.

At **FC Barcelona**, the digital team uses internal dashboards to track individual capability development alongside roadmap delivery—ensuring that team readiness evolves in sync with the club's transformation timeline (FC Barcelona, 2022).

Building a capability-first culture

Beyond tools and dashboards, the goal is to create a culture where capability development is continuous, visible, and rewarded. Recognition systems (e.g., internal badges, promotions tied to new skills), leader modeling (executives participating in training), and integration with HR processes all help embed this mindset.

As Accenture (2021) puts it, you don't build a digital organization by hiring a few experts. You build it by making digital capability everyone's job—from strategy to stadium.

Conclusion

Talent as an accelerator of transformation

Digital transformation is not just about strategy, roadmaps, or technology. It is about people—their skills, mindsets, and ability to work together in new ways. Across this reading, we've explored how **digital capabilities form the engine** of modern sports organizations: shaping how work gets done, how fans are engaged, and how value is delivered.

Organizations may begin their digital journey with bold strategic intentions, but only through talent—recruited, developed, and organized with purpose—can these ambitions



come to life. As McKinsey and Company (2020) argues, transformation becomes real only when people begin doing their work differently.

From support functions to strategic enablers

For years, skills development and hiring were treated as HR tasks. Today, they are strategic levers. Whether building an internal data team, deploying agile squads, or embedding fan-centric content creators across departments, leading sports organizations now treat **talent as transformation infrastructure**.

Digital capabilities are no longer limited to the IT team or a digital department. They are spreading across every unit—from commercial to performance, from operations to fan engagement. In this context, capability maturity becomes a core organizational KPI.

The talent-first organization

The sports organizations that succeed in digital transformation don't just build new systems

— they build **new muscles**. They think differently about roles, reward learning, support mobility, and treat every employee as a contributor to change.

They ask:

- Do we have the skills to execute our digital strategy?
- Are we growing those skills internally, or relying too much on outside hires?
- Are we measuring capability, not just output?

Those that answer yes are already turning transformation from vision into value.

A bridge to the next reading

This reading has focused on individual capabilities—the **skills of the future**—and how they can be cultivated in the context of modern sports organizations. But digital success rarely comes from individual heroes. It comes from **teams**: cross-functional, empowered, and aligned.

The next reading will explore this exact topic—how collaboration, role diversity, and agile teamwork turn capabilities into collective performance. In other words: how **people work together** is just as important as what they know.



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