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The Digital Strategy–Capability Alignment Framework for Managing Business Transformation in Competitive and Uncertain Markets

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Abstract

Digital transformation has become a central strategic challenge for firms operating in competitive and uncertain markets. Yet the ability to transform successfully depends not only on adopting digital technologies but also on aligning digital strategic intent with the organizational capabilities required to enact it. This article develops a conceptual framework for understanding this alignment problem. Existing digital transformation research has generated important insights into digital strategy, innovation, business models, and dynamic capabilities. However, these streams often remain fragmented, treating strategic direction and organizational capability as related but insufficiently integrated domains. As a result, firms may articulate ambitious digital strategies without possessing the capabilities needed to implement, adapt, and sustain them. The objective of this article is to propose the Digital Strategy–Capability Alignment Framework. The framework explains how firms can manage business transformation by aligning strategic digital choices with capability configurations under conditions of uncertainty, competitive pressure, and technological change. It positions alignment as a dynamic managerial process rather than a static planning exercise. The article is based on a conceptual synthesis of peer-reviewed journal articles published. These studies are integrated across strategic management, digital innovation, digital transformation, dynamic capabilities, business model innovation, and competitive strategy. The synthesis identifies the core dimensions of digital strategy, the organizational capabilities required to support them, and the market contingencies that shape the value of alignment. The framework contributes to theory by specifying how profile fit, contingency fit, and temporal fit connect digital strategy to transformation outcomes. It contributes to practice by offering managers a diagnostic lens for identifying strategic misalignment, capability gaps, and transformation risks. The article argues that sustained transformation success depends on continuously recalibrating the relationship between what the firm seeks to become digitally and what it is organizationally capable of doing.

Keywords Strategic alignment, Conceptual framework, Market uncertainty, Digital strategy, Organizational capability, Business transformation

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Introduction

Digital transformation has shifted from a technology investment issue to a strategic management challenge because digital technologies increasingly alter how firms

create value, compete, coordinate activities, and engage ecosystems. Digital innovation research shows that digital technologies change the nature of innovation by increasing recombining ability, generativity, and connectivity, thereby requiring new managerial approaches to strategy and

organizing [1]. At the same time, digital transformation differs from earlier IT-enabled change because it reshapes organizational identity, processes, business models, and competitive boundaries rather than merely automating existing operations [2]. This makes digital transformation a broad business transformation problem rather than a narrow information systems implementation problem.

Despite this strategic significance, many firms continue to approach digital transformation through fragmented initiatives that are weakly connected to organizational capability development. Studies of incumbent digital transformation show that firms often face competing concerns between existing operational logics and emerging digital opportunities, which creates tension between strategic aspiration and organizational readiness [3]. Digital strategy-making in pre-digital organizations further demonstrates that transformation requires deliberate coordination between strategic intent, organizational learning, and capability renewal [4]. The central problem is therefore not whether firms adopt digital technologies, but whether their digital strategies are matched by capabilities that can convert technological possibility into sustained business transformation.

The alignment challenge is intensified because digital competition unfolds in markets characterized by platform dynamics, ecosystem interdependence, accelerated innovation cycles, and shifting customer expectations. Strategy research on ecosystems highlights that value creation increasingly depends on interdependent actors whose roles, complementarities, and coordination structures shape competitive advantage [5]. Platform-based competition also changes the basis of rivalry by privileging network effects, orchestration, and boundary-spanning strategies over purely internal resource control [6]. Under such conditions, a digital strategy that is not supported by appropriate capabilities can expose firms to strategic drift, execution delays, and competitive erosion.

This article addresses this problem by proposing the Digital Strategy–Capability Alignment Framework. The framework integrates digital strategy logic with organizational capability logic and explicitly incorporates market uncertainty and competitive pressure as conditions that shape alignment requirements. It builds on research showing that digital transformation requires strategic renewal, dynamic capability development, and organizational reconfiguration rather than isolated project management [7]. The objective is to provide a conceptual

model that explains how firms can diagnose, develop, and sustain fit between digital strategic choices and the capabilities needed to execute them.

Conceptual Gap

The first conceptual gap concerns the separation between digital strategy research and organizational capability research. Digital strategy studies often emphasise how firms formulate digital objectives, redesign business models, and position themselves in digital markets, whereas capability studies focus on how firms sense opportunities, seize them, and transform their resource base [8, 9]. Business model innovation research has similarly advanced understanding of value creation and value capture, but it often does not specify how internal capability configurations must change to support different digital strategic choices [10]. This leaves an important theoretical gap between what firms intend digitally and what they are organizationally able to accomplish.

The second gap concerns the limits of inherited alignment thinking. Traditional strategic alignment models were developed primarily for IT-business alignment, where the main concern was the fit between information systems investments and business objectives. However, digital transformation involves deeper organizational changes, including new process logics, ecosystem roles, innovation architectures, and forms of value creation that exceed conventional IT alignment assumptions [11]. The distinction between IT-enabled transformation and digital transformation is therefore crucial because the latter demands a framework that captures strategic, structural, cultural, and capability-level reconfiguration.

The third gap is the limited treatment of uncertainty and competitive pressure in strategy–capability alignment models. Digital transformation frameworks often identify drivers, processes, and outcomes, but they do not always explain how environmental dynamism changes the type of alignment firms require [12]. Competitive and technological turbulence can make yesterday's fit obsolete, requiring firms to continually update capabilities as markets, platforms, customer expectations, and institutional demands evolve [13]. Without a dedicated framework, managers lack a systematic way to diagnose whether transformation problems stem from weak strategy, insufficient capability, poor fit, or changing external conditions.

Digital Strategy Logic

Digital strategy differs from traditional IT strategy because it concerns the redefinition of business scope, value creation mechanisms, competitive positioning, and organizational transformation through digital technologies. Digital innovation scholarship shows that digital technologies are not merely tools but generative resources that can produce new products, services, processes, and business models [1]. This means digital strategy must specify how the firm will use data, platforms, analytics, ecosystems, and digitally enabled customer relationships to compete. The strategic logic is therefore broader than technology adoption and must be understood as a transformation logic that connects digital possibilities to market positioning.

A first dimension of digital strategy is value logic, which concerns whether digital initiatives are designed primarily to reduce costs, differentiate offerings, create new revenue models, or reconfigure ecosystems. Research on business models and dynamic capabilities demonstrates that successful digital competition often requires firms to rethink how value is created and captured, rather than simply digitising existing operations [9]. Digital transformation research also shows that firms may pursue operational efficiency, customer experience enhancement, innovation renewal, or platform-based expansion, each of which imposes different strategic demands [14]. These strategic choices matter because different digital logics require different capability foundations.

A second dimension is competitive logic, which concerns how the firm positions itself in relation to rivals, customers, complementors, and ecosystem partners. Platform-based competition illustrates that firms increasingly compete through ecosystem orchestration, network effects, and complementary innovation rather than through isolated product-market positioning [6]. Research on digital transformation and innovation further suggests that firms must decide whether to defend existing advantages, extend current business models, or pursue more radical strategic renewal [15]. Thus, digital strategy must clarify not only what digital technologies will be used, but also how they will alter the firm's competitive role.

A third dimension is transformation logic, which concerns how digital strategy is translated into organizational change. Evidence from digital strategy implementation shows that firms must move from strategic aspiration to coordinated transformation projects that require learning,

governance, leadership, and capability-building [16]. Table 1 outlines the core dimensions and typologies of digital strategy. Together, these dimensions form the strategic pillar of the proposed framework because they define the capability requirements that the organization must satisfy.

Table 1. Digital Strategy Logic: Core Dimensions, Typologies, and Strategic Imperatives for Business Transformation

Digital strategy dimension	Core meaning	Main typologies	Strategic imperatives
Value logic	Defines how digital initiatives create and capture value	Cost efficiency, differentiation, new revenue model, ecosystem value creation	Clarify transformation aim, efficiency, experience, innovation, platform expansion
Competitive logic	Defines how the firm positions itself in digital markets	Defender, extender, disruptor, ecosystem orchestrator	Identify the firm's competitive advantage, extend market reach, record competitive performance
Customer logic	Defines how digital strategy reshapes customer relationships	Transactional digitisation, experience enhancement, personalization, co-creation	Move digital strategy towards customer relationship base creation
Technology logic	Defines the role of digital technologies in strategic renewal	Supportive infrastructure, process enabler, innovation engine,	Determine which technologies support existing operations

		platform foundation	become to st differ
Ecosystem logic	Defines the firm's relationship with complementors and partners	Closed firm-centric model, selective partnership, platform ecosystem, open innovation network	Deci much cre depe interde with e ac
Transformation logic	Defines how strategy becomes organizational change	Project-based change, staged renewal, continuous transformation, ambidextrous transformation	Transla inte operati change routi perfo mea

change [19]. These foundational capabilities create the minimum organizational conditions required for digital strategy execution.

A strategic layer of capability concerns analytics, learning, innovation, cultural agility, ecosystem coordination, and leadership-driven transformation. Digital innovation research emphasises that firms need capabilities to integrate technological possibilities with organizational learning and value creation [20]. Studies of digital transformation leadership and organization design also show that roles such as chief digital officers can coordinate strategic initiatives, reshape decision rights, and mobilise transformation activities across organizational boundaries [21]. **Table 2** categorises the organizational capabilities essential for digital transformation.

Table 2. Organizational Capability Logic for Digital Transformation: Capability Types, Definitions, and Interdependencies

Capability type	Definition	Foundational or strategic layer	Key interdependencies
Digital infrastructure capability	Ability to provide scalable, secure, interoperable digital systems	Foundational	Depends on technology architecture, cybersecurity systems in
Data analytics capability	Ability to collect, integrate, analyse, and apply data for decisions	Foundational and strategic	Depends on governance, analytics, and decision processes
Process integration capability	Ability to redesign and coordinate workflows across functions	Foundational	Depends on operational knowledge, cross-functional collaboration
Sensing capability	Ability to identify technological,	Strategic	Depends on intelligence, absorptive

Organizational Capability Logic

Organizational capability logic explains why digital strategy cannot be implemented through technological investment alone. Dynamic capability research argues that firms must sense opportunities, seize them through strategic commitment, and transform their resource base as conditions change [17]. In digital transformation, these capabilities become especially important because digital initiatives often disrupt existing routines, governance structures, customer interfaces, and business models. The capability question is therefore not whether a firm owns digital tools, but whether it can continuously reconfigure organizational resources around digital strategic priorities.

A foundational layer of digital transformation capability includes digital infrastructure, data architecture, process integration, and operational flexibility. IT-enabled dynamic capabilities have been shown to influence competitive performance indirectly by enabling firms to adapt resources and processes to changing opportunities [18]. Digital transformation in small and medium-sized firms further demonstrates that entrepreneurial ambition must be supported by capabilities related to knowledge integration, resource orchestration, and digitally enabled process

	customer, and competitive changes		and ex scan
Seizing capability	Ability to commit resources to digital opportunities	Strategic	Deper leade govern fundin decision
Transforming capability	Ability to reconfigure structures, routines, and resources	Strategic	Deper cha manag learning and c readi
Ecosystem orchestration capability	Ability to coordinate partners, platforms, and complementors	Strategic	Deper governan and bo spanning
Cultural agility and talent capability	Ability to develop digital skills, experimentation norms, and adaptive mindsets	Strategic	Deper leade commur trainin psychc readi

The distinction between foundational and strategic capabilities is important because different digital strategies require different capability configurations. A cost-efficiency digital strategy may depend primarily on process integration and infrastructure scalability, whereas an ecosystem-orchestration strategy requires partner coordination and platform governance capabilities [22]. Research on digital strategy alignment in smaller firms also shows that alignment emerges through ongoing learning, adaptation, and dynamic capability development rather than one-time strategic planning [23]. Thus, capability logic provides the second pillar of the framework by specifying what the organization must be able to do in order to make digital strategy actionable.

Market Uncertainty and Competitive Pressure

Market uncertainty shapes the value of strategy–capability alignment because turbulent environments make static strategic plans less reliable. Digital transformation research highlights that firms face shifting technologies, changing customer expectations, evolving ecosystems, and unpredictable competitive moves [14]. Under these conditions, alignment cannot be treated as a stable match between strategy and resources. It must be understood as a continuous adjustment process through which firms recalibrate strategic priorities and capability investments as uncertainty unfolds.

Competitive pressure also affects alignment because firms may be forced to accelerate transformation before their capabilities are fully developed. Digital markets intensify rivalry through platform competition, rapid imitation, data-driven service innovation, and ecosystem-based entry [6]. Studies of digital transformation and customer value creation in SMEs show that firms often need dynamic capabilities to respond to competitive pressure while simultaneously building new digital value propositions [24]. **Table 3** characterises the market conditions that moderate strategy–capability alignment.

Table 3. Market Uncertainty and Competitive Pressure Dimensions: Environmental Contingencies Affecting Digital Strategy–Capability Fit

Market condition	Core meaning	Alignment challenge	Likelihood of misalignment
Technological turbulence	Rapid change in digital technologies, platforms, and standards	Capabilities may become obsolete before strategy is fully implemented	Overinvestment in outdated systems delays adoption of emerging technologies
Customer volatility	Changing customer expectations, channels, and experience demands	Strategy may target value propositions that capabilities cannot deliver	Poor customer experience weakens personal or income streams
Competitive intensity	High rivalry, imitation,	Firms may pursue	Transformation over

	platform entry, or ecosystem competition	speed without adequate capability readiness	fragm projec exec fai
Ecosystem interdependence	Dependence on partners, complementors, and platform actors	Internal capabilities may be insufficient for externally coordinated value creation	Weak coordin los ecos pos
Regulatory and institutional change	Shifts in rules, standards, compliance expectations, or legitimacy pressures	Digital strategy may face constraints beyond technological feasibility	Comp failu legitim or de transfo
Market ambiguity	Unclear demand, uncertain monetisation, or unstable business model assumptions	Firms may not know which capabilities to build first	Strateg experim wit learn prem sca

The moderating role of uncertainty means that the same strategy–capability configuration may be effective in one context and inadequate in another. Broad reviews of digital transformation show that transformation success depends on strategy, organizational change, and contextual conditions rather than on a universal sequence of digital actions [12]. Recent reviews also indicate that digital transformation research still needs stronger attention to environmental contingencies, capability heterogeneity, and performance implications [25]. For this reason, the proposed framework treats uncertainty and competitive pressure not as background conditions but as forces that alter the required form and intensity of alignment.

Proposed Digital Strategy–Capability Alignment Framework

The Digital Strategy–Capability Alignment Framework is built on the premise that business transformation succeeds when digital strategic intent and organizational capability configuration reinforce each other under specific market conditions. Digital strategy defines the intended direction of transformation, while organizational capabilities determine whether the firm can enact that direction reliably, adaptively, and competitively. Prior research on digital transformation strategy-making shows that firms must translate digital ambition into coordinated organizational action through governance, learning, and resource reconfiguration [4]. The framework therefore places alignment at the centre of digital transformation theory.

The framework consists of three forms of fit: profile fit, contingency fit, and temporal fit. Profile fit refers to the internal match between a firm’s digital strategy type and the capabilities required to implement it, such as matching platform strategy with ecosystem orchestration capability. Contingency fit refers to the match between the strategy–capability configuration and external conditions such as market turbulence, technological uncertainty, and competitive intensity [13]. Temporal fit refers to the firm’s ability to maintain alignment over time as digital strategy and organizational capabilities co-evolve.

The first proposition is that stronger profile fit between digital strategy and organizational capability will improve transformation coherence. When a firm’s strategy emphasises digital differentiation, for example, it must possess capabilities in analytics, customer insight, experimentation, and service innovation. When strategy emphasises operational efficiency, it must develop process integration, infrastructure scalability, and performance measurement capability [26]. Misalignment occurs when firms pursue strategic claims that their capability base cannot support, creating symbolic transformation rather than substantive change.

The second proposition is that market uncertainty and competitive pressure moderate the relationship between alignment and transformation outcomes. Under stable conditions, moderate alignment may be sufficient because capability requirements change gradually. Under turbulent conditions, however, weak alignment becomes more costly because firms must respond quickly to technological change, platform shifts, and competitive threats [27]. Table 4 presents the proposed alignment framework with its components and propositions.

Table 4. Digital Strategy–Capability Alignment Framework: Constructs, Fit Dimensions, Propositions, and Transformation Outcomes

Framework component	Definition	Main constructs	Co propositions
Digital strategy logic	The firm's strategic intent for using digital technologies to create, capture, and defend value	Value logic, competitive logic, customer logic, ecosystem logic, transformation logic	Digital strategy specific type of transformation the firm before capabilities require can diagnosis
Organizational capability logic	The firm's ability to mobilise, integrate, and reconfigure resources for digital transformation	Infrastructure, data analytics, process integration, sensing, seizing, transforming, cultural agility	Capabilities configuration must correspond the strategic demand the selected digital strategy
Profile fit	Internal match between digital strategy type and capability configuration	Strategy type, capability depth, capability complementarity	Higher fit increases transformation coherence and reduces execution misalignment
Contingency fit	Match between strategy–capability alignment and external market conditions	Technological turbulence, customer volatility, competition, regulation, ecosystem dependence	The value alignment increases under uncertainty and competitive pressure
Temporal fit	Continued recalibration of strategy and	Learning loops, performance feedback, capability	Firms monitor renewal alignment over

	capabilities over time	renewal, strategic review	sustainable transformation benefits effectiveness
Misalignment diagnosis	Identification of gaps between strategic claims and capability realities	Capability gaps, strategy drift, execution bottlenecks, market mismatch	Diagnosis misfit evidence targeted intervention before transformation failure become embedded
Transformation outcomes	Strategic and organizational results produced by alignment	Agility, innovation, customer value, efficiency, ecosystem position, performance	Alignment improves outcomes connects strategic direct organizational enactment

The third proposition is that temporal fit strengthens the durability of digital transformation by enabling continuous renewal. Digital transformation is not a single episode but an ongoing process in which firms must repeatedly revise routines, structures, skills, and strategic assumptions [7]. Dynamic capabilities for transitioning across platform ecosystems show that firms may need to reconfigure capabilities as their ecosystem roles evolve from product-centred to innovation-centred logics [28]. The framework therefore conceptualises alignment as a dynamic cycle of strategic sensing, capability diagnosis, capability development, implementation, feedback, and recalibration.

Figure 1 illustrates how digital strategy logic and organizational capability logic are aligned through profile fit, contingency fit, and temporal fit to support business transformation under uncertainty and competitive pressure.

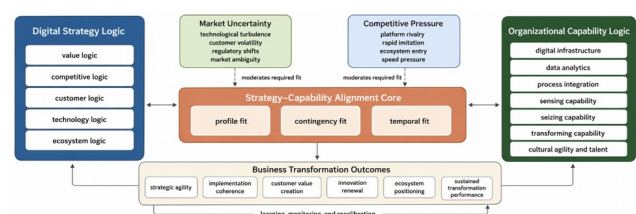


Figure 1. The Digital Strategy–Capability Alignment Framework for Managing Business Transformation in Competitive and Uncertain Markets

Managerial Application and Implementation Pathway

The framework can be used as a managerial diagnostic tool for assessing whether a firm's digital strategy is supported by the capabilities required for implementation. Managers should begin by clarifying the dominant digital strategy logic, including whether the transformation is primarily efficiency-driven, differentiation-oriented, platform-based, ecosystem-dependent, or ambidextrous. Research on digital strategy implementation indicates that transformation projects often fail when firms move directly into execution without first clarifying strategic intent and organizational implications [16]. A structured alignment diagnosis can therefore prevent firms from confusing activity volume with strategic progress.

The second stage is a capability audit that identifies whether the organization possesses the infrastructure, analytics, process, learning, leadership, and ecosystem capabilities needed for its selected digital strategy. This audit should not simply list existing resources but should evaluate whether capabilities are deep enough, connected enough, and adaptive enough to support transformation. Evidence from digital transformation capability studies indicates that firms must build dynamic capabilities through iterative learning, resource reconfiguration, and managerial coordination [19]. The audit should therefore distinguish between capabilities that already exist, capabilities that require upgrading, and capabilities that must be newly developed.

The third stage is continuous alignment monitoring through feedback loops, performance measures, and periodic strategic review. Studies on digital transformation and new business process logics show that organizations must adapt processes and governance mechanisms as transformation changes how work is coordinated [26]. Leadership is central to this process because senior managers must align investment, structure, culture, and accountability with the firm's digital strategic direction [21]. The implementation pathway therefore moves from strategic clarification to capability diagnosis, targeted capability-building, transformation execution, and ongoing recalibration.

Limitations

The first limitation is that the Digital Strategy–Capability Alignment Framework is conceptual and has not yet been empirically tested. Although it synthesises peer-reviewed literature across digital strategy, dynamic capabilities, digital innovation, and transformation, its propositions require validation through qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method research designs. Reviews of digital transformation research show that the field still contains conceptual fragmentation and inconsistent operationalisation of transformation constructs [2, 12]. Future studies should therefore test whether the proposed dimensions of profile fit, contingency fit, and temporal fit can be measured reliably across organizational contexts.

The second limitation is that the framework simplifies the complexity of capability development. Capabilities do not emerge automatically from managerial intention; they are shaped by history, path dependency, organizational politics, resource constraints, and learning processes. Dynamic capability research warns that the development and deployment of capabilities vary across firms and may not always produce predictable performance effects [17]. Therefore, the framework should be viewed as a conceptual guide for analysis rather than a deterministic formula for transformation success.

The third limitation concerns contextual variation across industries, firm sizes, and institutional environments. The framework may operate differently in platform-intensive industries, regulated sectors, manufacturing firms, service organizations, and small firms with limited resources. Research on digital transformation in SMEs shows that resource constraints and customer value creation pathways differ from those of large incumbents [24]. Future research should therefore examine how institutional pressure, industry velocity, firm size, and ecosystem position shape the applicability and boundary conditions of the framework.

Conclusion

This article proposed the Digital Strategy–Capability Alignment Framework as a conceptual lens for understanding and managing business transformation in competitive and uncertain markets. The central argument is that digital transformation succeeds when firms align their digital strategic intent with the organizational capabilities needed to enact, adapt, and sustain that intent. The framework identifies digital strategy logic, organizational capability logic, market uncertainty, competitive pressure,

and dynamic forms of fit as core elements of transformation success.

The article contributes to theory by moving beyond fragmented treatments of digital strategy and capabilities. It conceptualises alignment as profile fit, contingency fit, and temporal fit, thereby showing that strategy–capability alignment is not a one-time planning outcome but an ongoing managerial and organizational process. This perspective helps explain why firms with similar digital technologies may experience very different transformation outcomes.

For practitioners, the framework encourages an alignment mindset. Managers should not ask only whether their firms have digital strategies or digital technologies, but whether their capabilities are configured to support the specific transformation path they have chosen. Future research should empirically test, refine, and extend the framework across industries, firm sizes, and institutional settings.

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