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Business Model Reinvention after Digital Transformation: A Perspective on Revenue Logic, Customer Data, and Ecosystem Positioning

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Abstract

Firms have invested heavily in digital transformation through cloud infrastructure, process digitisation, data platforms, automation, and digitally enabled customer interfaces. Yet many organisations discover that becoming more digital does not automatically produce durable competitive advantage, stronger margins, or defensible market positions. The central problem is that digital transformation is often treated as a strategic endpoint rather than as a foundation for deeper business model change. Firms may modernise systems, accelerate operations, and improve data visibility while leaving their revenue logic, value proposition, customer relationship, and ecosystem role largely unchanged. This perspective argues that digital transformation becomes strategically meaningful only when it triggers business model reinvention. The article focuses on three critical dimensions of post-transformation business models: revenue logic, customer data as a strategic resource, and ecosystem positioning. The article develops an evidence-based perspective using peer-reviewed research on business model innovation, digital transformation, platform strategy, data-driven innovation, and ecosystem competition. It does not present new empirical data; instead, it offers a critical synthesis and strategic argument for managers and scholars. The perspective concludes that the central managerial challenge is no longer simply how to become digital, but how to reinvent the business after digital foundations are in place. Firms that fail to make this transition risk becoming digitally efficient but strategically stagnant.

Keywords Digital transformation, Ecosystem positioning, Perspective, Business model reinvention, Revenue logic, Customer data

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Introduction

Digital transformation has become one of the dominant strategic projects of contemporary firms, promising faster processes, richer data, automated operations, and closer customer connectivity. However, the relationship between digital transformation and sustained advantage remains far from automatic, because digital technologies often spread quickly across industries and become imitable infrastructural conditions rather than exclusive strategic assets [1]. The important question is therefore not whether firms can digitise, but whether they can convert digital capability into a redesigned logic of value creation, delivery, and capture [2]. This perspective begins from the premise that digital transformation is a necessary but incomplete stage in strategic renewal.

The disappointment surrounding many digital transformation programmes reflects a conceptual confusion between operational change and business model change. Digital transformation can modernise the organisational engine, but business model innovation determines how that engine generates value, captures revenue, and establishes defensible market positions [3]. Earlier business model research shows that the core issue is not technology adoption alone, but the configuration of value proposition, value architecture, and value capture mechanisms [4]. When firms digitise existing processes without rethinking these elements, they risk doing familiar business more efficiently while leaving the underlying strategic logic intact.

The central question of this article is what comes after digital transformation. The answer proposed here is business model reinvention: a deliberate shift from digital capability as an internal improvement agenda to digital capability as the basis for new revenue logic, data-driven value propositions, and ecosystem positioning. Business model research has increasingly emphasised that innovation is not merely a matter of introducing new offerings, but of redesigning the architecture through which firms create and appropriate value [5]. In post-digital settings, this architecture is shaped by the monetisation of recurring relationships, the strategic use of customer data, and the firm's role within platform-based ecosystems.

This perspective is organised around three interdependent dimensions of business model reinvention. First, revenue logic must move beyond transaction-based models toward subscription, outcome, usage, platform, and data-based mechanisms enabled by digital infrastructure [6]. Second, customer data must be treated not as an operational residue but as a strategic resource that shapes personalisation, prediction, and new value propositions [7]. Third, firms must decide whether they seek to orchestrate ecosystems, complement dominant platforms, or occupy specialised positions within digital value networks [8].

Central Perspective

The central perspective advanced in this article is that digital transformation optimises the engine room, whereas business model reinvention redesigns the business logic. Cloud migration, automation, analytics, enterprise platforms, and digital interfaces may improve speed and coordination, but they do not determine how the firm will earn, scale, defend, or renew its value proposition [9]. Dynamic capabilities are therefore essential because firms must sense digital opportunities, seize them through new business model choices, and transform organisational arrangements accordingly [10]. Without this strategic conversion, digital transformation remains a capability upgrade rather than a source of business model renewal.

Many firms stop short because digitisation produces visible progress before strategic reinvention becomes unavoidable. A company can introduce digital sales channels, automate service workflows, and integrate data dashboards while continuing to rely on legacy pricing, product-centric value propositions, and linear supplier-customer relationships. This creates a managerial illusion: the firm appears transformed because its processes are digital, yet its value capture logic remains anchored in the pre-digital business model [11]. The distinction matters because IT-enabled organisational transformation and digital transformation are not identical to business model reinvention; each involves different mechanisms of change and different strategic consequences [11].

Digital capabilities do not automatically translate into value because value must be channelled through a coherent business model. Data infrastructure, analytics, and platform connectivity become strategically powerful only when they support new customer benefits, new monetisation paths, and new competitive positions [12]. This is why digital business model innovation requires construct clarity: the presence of digital technology is not enough; the firm must redesign the logic through which technology alters value creation and capture [13]. The perspective developed here therefore challenges the assumption that digital maturity itself is a competitive advantage.

Why Digital Transformation Requires Business Model Reinvention

Digital transformation creates the opportunity for business model reinvention because it dissolves several constraints that historically shaped value creation. Digital technologies reduce search costs, expand customer reach, enable modular interfaces, and support real-time coordination across organisational boundaries [1]. These changes allow firms to move from selling discrete products toward providing continuous services, from standardised offers toward personalised experiences, and from isolated transactions toward ongoing relationships [2]. Yet these opportunities remain latent unless the business model is redesigned to exploit them.

Digital transformation also creates the necessity for business model reinvention because competitors can use similar technologies to attack established revenue pools. When digital tools lower entry barriers or enable platform-based intermediation, incumbent firms may lose control over customer relationships, data flows, or complementary assets [14]. Strategic advantage increasingly depends on how firms configure networks, platforms, and partnerships rather than on ownership of a standalone product or process [15]. In this environment, business model reinvention becomes a defensive as well as offensive response to digital transformation.

The risk is that firms may digitalise analogue processes without changing monetisation. For example, a firm may move customer service online but still treat service as a cost centre rather than as a source of subscription value, predictive insight, or relationship-based retention. It may digitise sales channels while preserving a unit-sales revenue model that fails to capture the value of continuous engagement. Research on digitalisation and business model innovation shows that the strategic effect of digitalisation depends on whether firms change their value proposition, customer interface, value network, and financial model, not merely whether they adopt digital tools [16].

A deeper problem is that business models become cognitively sticky even after technological foundations change. Managers may continue to interpret digital transformation through existing industry assumptions about customers, pricing, ownership, and competitive boundaries [17]. In creative industries and other digitally disrupted sectors, transformation has repeatedly shown that the most consequential shifts occur when firms redesign the whole business model rather than simply digitising distribution or production [18]. The post-transformation challenge is therefore to ask not only how digital tools improve the existing business, but what new business the digital foundation now makes possible.

Figure 1 presents the post-transformation reinvention logic showing how digital foundations must be converted into redesigned revenue, data, and ecosystem business model choices.

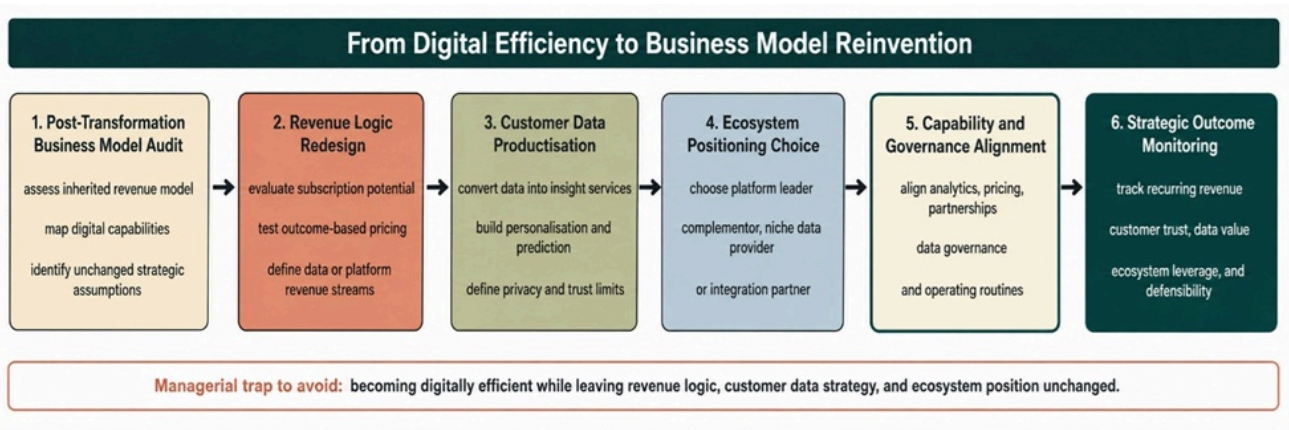


Figure 1. Post-Transformation Business Model Reinvention Logic: Converting Digital Foundations into Revenue, Data, and Ecosystem Strategy

Revenue Logic after Digital Transformation

Revenue logic is where the strategic promise of digital transformation either becomes measurable value or remains an unrealised operational improvement. Traditional business models often depend on episodic transactions, unit sales, and product ownership, whereas digital infrastructures enable recurring access, usage-based charging, performance-linked contracts, and platform-mediated revenue streams [6]. The shift is not simply financial; it changes the firm’s assumptions about customer relationships, risk sharing, customer lifetime value, and the timing of value capture. Digital transformation therefore forces managers to ask whether the firm is still monetising an analogue relationship inside a digital operating system.

Subscription and recurring revenue models are among the most visible expressions of post-digital business model reinvention. They convert value capture from a single exchange into an ongoing relationship in which retention, engagement, service quality, and continuous improvement become central economic variables [2]. However, subscription logic is not automatically superior to transaction logic; it requires the firm to sustain perceived value over time, reduce churn, and justify repeated payment through evolving benefits. In this sense, subscription models are less about billing frequency than about redesigning the customer relationship around continuity.

Outcome-based and data-enabled revenue models push reinvention further by linking payment to customer results, system performance, or actionable insight. Digital servitisation research shows that firms increasingly combine products, services, data, and ecosystem partners to create value propositions that are difficult to capture through simple unit pricing [19]. Outcome-based models can strengthen alignment between provider and customer, but they also transfer risk to the provider and require advanced measurement, predictive analytics, and operational accountability [6]. **Table 1** contrasts traditional and post-digital revenue logics across key dimensions.

Table 1. Traditional Versus Post-Digital Revenue Logic: Transaction, Subscription, Outcome, and Data-Based Models

Revenue logic dimension	Traditional transaction logic	Subscription or access logic	Outcome-based logic	Data-based or platform logic
Core revenue assumption	Value is captured when a product or service is sold.	Value is captured through recurring access and ongoing customer use.	Value is captured when measurable customer outcomes are delivered.	Value is captured through data insights, network participation, intermediation, or ecosystem transactions.
Customer relationship	Episodic and exchange-centred.	Continuous and retention-centred.	Partnership-oriented and performance-centred.	Multi-sided, data-intensive, and interaction-centred.
Strategic requirement	Efficient production, distribution, and sales conversion.	Continuous engagement, service renewal, and churn reduction.	Outcome measurement, risk management, and operational accountability.	Data governance, platform governance, network effects, and partner coordination.
Main value-capture mechanism	Unit margin, volume, and repeat purchases.	Recurring fees, tiered access, and lifetime customer value.	Shared savings, performance fees, or value-based contracts.	Data monetisation, transaction fees, advertising, analytics services, or complementor participation.

Managerial risk	Revenue depends on repeated new transactions.	Customers may cancel if ongoing value is weak.	Provider carries responsibility for uncertain outcomes.	Privacy, platform dependence, ecosystem conflict, and regulatory scrutiny may undermine trust.
Reinvention implication	Digital tools mainly improve efficiency if the model remains unchanged.	Digital tools enable relationship-based monetisation.	Digital tools enable measurable value promises.	Digital tools enable new markets built around data, interfaces, and network participation.

Data monetisation and platform-based revenue streams represent the most radical departure from traditional revenue logic because they convert information, interaction, and ecosystem coordination into monetisable assets. Data-driven business model innovation shows that firms can create revenue from prediction, personalisation, benchmarking, and insight services, rather than only from the original product or service [7]. Yet managers must avoid treating data monetisation as a mechanical extraction exercise, because customer trust, regulatory boundaries, and perceived fairness shape whether data-based revenue is sustainable [20]. The post-digital revenue question is therefore not only “how can we charge differently?” but “what new value logic makes alternative charging legitimate?”

Customer Data as a Business Model Resource

In post-digital business models, customer data is not a by-product of digital activity; it is a strategic resource that shapes value propositions, revenue options, and competitive positioning. Digital transformation creates the technical capacity to collect, integrate, analyse, and act on customer data across touchpoints, but business model reinvention determines whether that data becomes meaningful value [21]. Firms that treat customer data only as operational input may improve targeting or efficiency, but firms that treat it as a business model resource can create predictive services, personalised experiences, and new insight-based offerings. This shift changes data from a support asset into a central element of value creation.

Customer data enables value propositions that were difficult or impossible under traditional product-centred models. It can support personalisation, anticipatory service, adaptive pricing, behavioural segmentation, and continuous improvement of digital offerings [22]. These capabilities make the customer relationship more dynamic because the firm learns from use and then feeds that learning back into the value proposition. The strategic importance of data therefore lies not in possession alone, but in the firm’s ability to convert data into better decisions, better experiences, and differentiated customer outcomes.

The conversion of data into business model value also changes the boundaries of monetisation. Firms can move from selling products to selling insights, from providing services to providing intelligence, and from managing transactions to managing customer knowledge systems [7]. Big data analytics capabilities are especially important when they support entrepreneurial orientation and business model innovation, because they help firms identify new opportunities and redesign how value is created and captured [21]. However, these opportunities require organisational routines that connect analytics to strategy, rather than isolating data science inside technical functions.

The strategic use of customer data is constrained by privacy, trust, and legitimacy. Research on data privacy shows that customer perceptions of data practices can affect both customer outcomes and firm performance, meaning that data-based business models must be designed around trust rather than extraction alone [20]. Privacy-sensitive innovation also requires firms to balance personalisation and surveillance, convenience and consent, and insight generation and customer autonomy [22]. A post-digital business model that monetises customer data without protecting the customer relationship may generate short-term value while damaging the trust foundation on which future data access depends.

Ecosystem Positioning and Competitive Advantage

Digital transformation also forces firms to reconsider where they sit in value networks. In analogue settings, many firms could define their business models around relatively stable industry boundaries, supply chains, and customer segments, but digital ecosystems blur these boundaries through platforms, APIs, complementors, data sharing, and network effects [8]. Ecosystem strategy therefore becomes part of business model reinvention because the firm’s role in the ecosystem determines what value it can access, what dependencies it accepts, and what forms of advantage it can build. The question is no longer only what the firm sells, but where it positions itself within a wider system of value creation.

One option is to become a platform leader or ecosystem orchestrator. This position can create powerful advantages through network effects, governance authority, data accumulation, and control over interfaces, but it also requires the firm to attract complementors and manage tensions between openness and control [23]. Platform-based competition differs from traditional product competition because value is co-created by participants whose incentives must be aligned through rules, standards, and revenue-sharing mechanisms [14]. For this reason, becoming a platform leader is a business model choice, not merely a technology architecture decision.

A second option is to become a complementor within another firm’s platform or ecosystem. Complementors may gain access to customers, infrastructure, credibility, and innovation opportunities, but they may also face dependence, margin pressure, data limitations, and exposure to platform rule changes [15]. A third option is to occupy a specialised niche, such as a data provider, analytics layer, integration partner, or domain-specific service provider, where advantage comes from focus rather than ecosystem control. Table 2 outlines ecosystem positioning strategies and their implications for business model reinvention.

Table 2. Ecosystem Positioning Strategies: Platform Leader, Complementor, and Niche Player Business Model Options

Ecosystem position	Core strategic role	Business model opportunity	Main advantage mechanism	Primary managerial risk
Platform leader	Orchestrates interactions among customers, complementors, developers, suppliers, or service partners.	Builds multi-sided revenue streams through transaction fees, access fees, data services, advertising, or ecosystem services.	Network effects, governance control, interface ownership, and data accumulation.	High governance burden, complementor conflict, regulatory scrutiny, and trust erosion.
Complementor	Provides products, services, applications, data, or capabilities within another firm’s platform.	Monetises access to platform users while reducing the cost of market entry and scaling.	Speed, reach, interoperability, and ecosystem association.	Platform dependence, reduced bargaining power, limited data access, and vulnerability to rule changes.
Niche data provider	Supplies specialised datasets, analytics, insights, or domain intelligence to ecosystem participants.	Creates insight-based revenue streams through benchmarking, prediction, decision support, or data-as-a-service.	Specialised knowledge, proprietary data quality, and analytical credibility.	Privacy exposure, imitation, narrow market scope, and dependence on data-sharing agreements.
Integration or API partner	Connects systems, workflows, data sources, or services	Captures value by reducing complexity and enabling ecosystem interoperability.	Switching costs, embedded infrastructure, and	Commoditisation, technical standard shifts, and pressure from larger platform owners.

	across ecosystem actors.		cross-system coordination.	
Strategic implication	The firm must decide whether it seeks control, participation, specialisation, or connectivity.	Revenue logic must match the chosen role in the ecosystem.	Competitive advantage comes from position-specific capabilities rather than generic digital maturity.	A misaligned ecosystem position can turn digital transformation into dependence rather than advantage.

Ecosystem positioning decisions are strategic business model choices because they define how the firm creates value with others and captures value from shared activity. Research on digital markets shows that platform-based competition requires firms to understand governance, participation, complementarity, and competitive interdependence [23]. Studies of ecosystems further show that advantage depends on the structure of interdependencies among actors, not only on the resources owned by the focal firm [8]. Post-transformation reinvention therefore requires managers to decide whether digital capability should support orchestration, participation, specialisation, or selective independence.

Managerial Recommendations

Managers should begin the post-transformation stage with a business model audit rather than another technology roadmap. This audit should ask whether the firm's revenue model, data strategy, customer relationship, and ecosystem role have changed meaningfully since digital transformation began [24]. A science-map view of digitalisation and business models suggests that the field has moved beyond isolated technology adoption toward the strategic redesign of how firms operate and compete [24]. Managers should therefore diagnose whether digital investments are improving the old model or enabling a new one.

The second recommendation is to redesign revenue logic explicitly rather than allowing it to evolve accidentally. Firms should assess whether subscriptions, usage fees, outcome-based contracts, freemium entry models, data-based services, or platform revenue streams fit the value they now create [6]. This requires a careful match between pricing mechanism, customer benefit, data capability, and operational risk. A firm should not adopt recurring or outcome-based revenue because it appears fashionable; it should do so only when digital capabilities allow the firm to deliver continuous or measurable value better than the traditional model.

The third recommendation is to treat customer data and ecosystem position as board-level strategic choices. Data should be governed as a value-creating asset with clear rules for consent, privacy, productisation, analytics, and trust protection [20]. Ecosystem positioning should be selected deliberately, because the choice between platform leadership, complementor participation, niche specialisation, or integration partnership will shape future revenue options and competitive dependence [25]. The managerial checklist is therefore straightforward: audit the inherited model, redesign revenue logic, productise data responsibly, select an ecosystem role, align capabilities with that role, and avoid mistaking digital efficiency for strategic reinvention.

Figure 2 translates the perspective into a managerial pathway for auditing, redesigning, and governing post-digital business model reinvention.

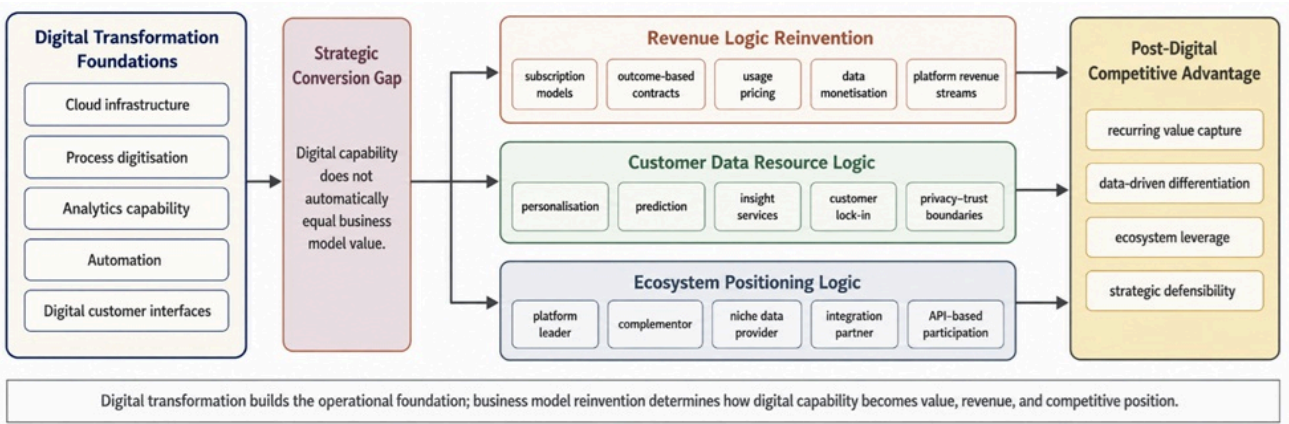


Figure 2. Managerial Pathway for Business Model Reinvention after Digital Transformation

Conclusion

Digital transformation opens the door, but business model reinvention walks through it. Firms that stop at process digitisation, cloud adoption, automation, and analytics may become faster and more efficient, but they may not become more strategically distinctive. The decisive challenge is to convert digital foundations into a new logic of value creation, delivery, and capture.

This perspective has argued that post-transformation reinvention depends on three imperatives. Firms must rethink revenue logic so that digital value is captured through models appropriate to continuous, data-rich, and ecosystem-connected relationships. They must also treat customer data as a strategic business model resource and reposition themselves deliberately within digital ecosystems.

The future agenda for managers and scholars should move beyond asking whether firms are digitally transformed. The more important question is whether they have reinvented the business model that digital transformation makes possible. Competitive advantage will increasingly belong not to firms that simply become digital, but to firms that know what kind of business they can become after becoming digital.

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