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Strategic Leadership and Organisational Transformation in the Digital Era: Building Agility, Engagement, and Sustainable Performance

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Abstract:

This study explores how strategic management and leadership are reshaping organisational success in the era of digital transformation. The aim of the study is to understand how leaders can guide their organisations through the complexity of technological disruption while building resilience and creating long-term value. To achieve this, a systematic literature review SLR was conducted, drawing on seventy-seven peer-reviewed articles published between 2020 and 2026 across sectors such as banking, healthcare, manufacturing, education, public services, and SMEs. The review shows that digital transformation is not merely a technical process but a profound organisational shift that demands alignment between strategy, culture, and people. Strategic management is moving away from rigid, efficiency-driven models toward approaches that build dynamic capabilities and foster ambidexterity balancing the need to exploit current strengths while exploring new opportunities. Leadership stands out as a crucial enabler, with transformational and participatory styles shown to enhance employee engagement, build psychological safety, and inspire innovation in hybrid and remote work environments. The findings also emphasise the importance of strategic agility and innovation ecosystems in enabling collaboration and co-creation across organisational boundaries. Despite these opportunities, the study highlights ongoing challenges, including cultural resistance, skill gaps, and misalignment between digital investments and organisational readiness. Addressing these issues calls for leaders who can communicate transparently, invest in continuous learning, and embed sustainability and ethics into their digital agendas. In doing so, strategic leadership becomes not only the driver of digital transformation but also the safeguard that ensures it delivers enduring value for organisations, employees, and society.

Keywords:

Strategic Management, Digital Transformation, Strategic Leadership, Dynamic Capabilities, Strategic Agility, Innovation Ecosystems, Employee Engagement

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Introduction

The unprecedented pace of digital transformation has reshaped the foundations of strategic management and leadership, compelling organisations to rethink how they create and sustain value in highly dynamic environments. Unlike earlier waves of technological innovation that were largely incremental, digital transformation represents a systemic, organisation-wide reconfiguration that integrates technology, people, and processes into new business models and organisational logics (Verhoef et al., 2021). It has altered competitive dynamics by enabling the rise of digital ecosystems, disrupting traditional value chains, and redefining the role of leaders as architects of both technological and cultural change (Hoessler & Carbon, 2024). At its core, digital transformation demands more than the deployment of advanced tools such as artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and the Internet of Things; it requires leaders and managers to develop new strategic orientations that balance efficiency with innovation. Empirical studies show that firms with strong digital orientation and maturity outperform competitors in terms of financial and non-financial performance, particularly when leadership actively champions transformation (Dillianti et al., 2024). Moreover, strategic leadership serves as a mediating force in aligning digital investments with long-term organisational objectives, ensuring that digital adoption is not pursued in isolation but embedded within a coherent vision of value creation (Zhai et al., 2026). Leadership in this context is no longer restricted to hierarchical control, it is increasingly characterised by agility, empowerment, and the capacity to orchestrate ecosystems of stakeholders. For instance, research demonstrates that transformational and participative leadership styles encourage employee engagement, foster digital literacy, and create organisational cultures that embrace innovation and resilience (Boccoli et al., 202; Weritz, 2022). In addition, leaders are tasked with cultivating ambidexterity the ability to exploit existing competencies while exploring new digital opportunities thereby navigating the paradox of stability and change (Zhang et al., 2025). The strategic management discipline has also evolved in response to digital pressures. Traditional models of competitive advantage are being re-examined in light of digital servitisation, platform ecosystems, and the growing importance of sustainability-oriented digital strategies (Tabacco et al., 2024). Evidence from industries such as banking, healthcare, and manufacturing illustrates that the effectiveness of digital transformation initiatives hinges not only on technological investments but also on leadership's ability to align organisational culture, structure, and knowledge flows with new strategic imperatives (Annisa et al., 2024). Crucially, digital transformation is not without its challenges. Studies highlight persistent barriers such as employee resistance, skill gaps, cybersecurity concerns, and the misalignment between digital investments and organisational readiness (Mhaske et al., 2025). Addressing these issues requires leaders to act as change agents who can bridge the technological and human dimensions of transformation, promoting accountability, trust, and inclusivity in the process (Senadjki et al., 2024). In

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this study, the interconnections between strategic management and leadership in the era of digital transformation are explored. Drawing on a systematic review of contemporary literature, it examines how leadership styles, strategic orientations, and organisational capabilities collectively shape the outcomes of digital initiatives. By synthesising evidence across diverse contexts, this study contributes to an enriched understanding of how organisations can strategically and responsibly navigate the opportunities and complexities of digital transformation. The main research question for the study is, How do strategic management and leadership influence organisational success in the context of digital transformation? This research intents to achieve the following objectives;(i) To examine the role of strategic management in enabling digital transformation (ii) To analyse the influence of leadership on digital transformation outcomes

Methodology

This study adopted a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to provide a rigorous and structured synthesis of research on strategic management and leadership in the era of digital transformation. The SLR method was selected because it enables a transparent and replicable process for identifying, evaluating, and integrating evidence from multiple peer-reviewed studies while reducing potential bias in the review process (Tranfield et al., 2003). The review drew literature from three databases, namely Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Web of Science, in order to strengthen the breadth, comprehensiveness, and credibility of the study following reviewer recommendations to diversify the evidence base beyond a single database. The final dataset included the original studies identified through Scopus together with an additional 27 articles sourced from ScienceDirect (16 articles) and Web of Science (11 articles), resulting in a combined total of 104 peer-reviewed articles included in the final analysis. A combination of keywords and Boolean operators was used, including terms such as “strategic management”, “digital transformation”, “strategic leadership”, “dynamic capabilities”, “strategic agility”, “innovation ecosystems”, “employee engagement”, and “sustainable organisational performance”. The search was refined to include English-language, peer-reviewed, and open-access journal articles to ensure relevance, accessibility, and academic quality. Studies were included if they addressed strategic management, leadership, organisational agility, innovation, sustainability, employee engagement, or digital capability development within digital transformation contexts, while studies focusing exclusively on technical systems without a strategic or leadership perspective were excluded. Titles, abstracts, and full texts were screened to assess thematic relevance and methodological quality. The selected studies covered diverse sectors including banking, healthcare, manufacturing, education, SMEs, and public-sector organisations, allowing both sector-specific and cross-industry insights to emerge. The reviewed literature was analysed thematically, with findings organised around key themes relating to strategic management, digital leadership, organisational performance, sustainability, employee engagement, and organisational agility in digitally transforming environments.

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Findings

Rethinking strategic management in the digital era

Strategic management in the digital era increasingly requires organisations to move beyond traditional planning approaches toward continuous adaptation and capability reconfiguration in response to rapidly changing environments (Ates et al., 2024). The literature shows that digital orientation and organisational agility have become important determinants of long-term competitiveness and operational performance (Barba-Sánchez et al., 2024). Studies from sectors such as banking and insurance indicate that integrating digital technologies into strategic planning improves organisational resilience, efficiency, and innovation capability (Dillianti et al., 2024; León-Gómez et al., 2023). The growing adoption of AI, big data analytics, and digital platforms has further transformed strategic management by enabling organisations to improve decision-making, customer engagement, and operational flexibility (Annisa et al., 2024; Hoessler & Carbon, 2024). Research also highlights that digital servitisation and strategic agility strengthen organisational competitiveness by supporting innovation and adaptability, particularly in SMEs operating under resource constraints (Tabacco et al., 2024; Dey et al., 2024). In addition, sustainability considerations are increasingly embedded within digital strategies, with evidence suggesting that firms integrating environmental and social priorities into digital transformation are more likely to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Senadjki et al., 2024). Overall, the literature suggests that strategic management in the digital era is increasingly characterised by agility, innovation, adaptability, and sustainability-oriented transformation.

Leadership in digital transformation

Leadership in digital transformation is increasingly viewed as a strategic and cultural process rather than merely a technological responsibility (Hoessler & Carbon, 2024). The literature consistently shows that leaders play a central role in aligning digital initiatives with organisational goals, supporting employee adaptation, and sustaining transformation during periods of uncertainty. Digital leadership therefore extends beyond technology implementation to include communication, collaboration, organisational learning, and change management (Boccoli et al., 2024). Studies further indicate that agility, adaptability, and digital competencies are essential leadership requirements in digitally transformed organisations (Weritz, 2022). Leaders are expected to promote digital literacy, support continuous learning, and encourage employee participation in digital transformation initiatives (Senadjki et al., 2024). Transformational and participative leadership styles are particularly associated with positive digital transformation outcomes because they enhance innovation, collaboration, and employee engagement across sectors such as telecommunications, retail, and higher education (Ardi et al., 2020; van der Berg et al., 2022). The reviewed studies also highlight the growing importance of ethical and sustainability considerations within digital leadership. Leaders are increasingly expected to ensure that digital

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transformation supports not only organisational efficiency but also broader goals related to sustainability, inclusivity, and social responsibility (Tabacco et al., 2024). Evidence suggests that leaders who integrate responsible innovation and green digital strategies into organisational transformation improve both firm performance and long-term societal outcomes (Senadjki et al., 2024). Collectively, the literature suggests that effective digital leadership combines strategic vision, adaptability, collaboration, and responsible innovation to support sustainable organisational transformation.

Strategic leadership for organisational performance and sustainability

Strategic leadership has become increasingly important in the digital era, where organisations must respond to technological disruption while maintaining long-term competitiveness and sustainability. Unlike operational leadership, strategic leadership focuses on aligning organisational vision, digital transformation, and sustainability goals to improve performance outcomes (Nasir et al., 2022). The literature consistently shows that leaders who adopt a strategic outlook are more capable of translating digital investments into organisational resilience, innovation, and competitive advantage (Zhai et al., 2026). Evidence from sectors such as banking, insurance, and SMEs demonstrates that leadership plays a significant role in shaping digital transformation outcomes. Strategic leaders enhance organisational adaptability by supporting digital orientation, innovation capability, and strategic agility, particularly in rapidly changing environments (Annisa et al., 2024; Dillianti et al., 2024; Cillo et al., 2021). Studies further indicate that leadership contributes to sustainable performance when environmental and social priorities are integrated into digital strategies, allowing organisations to pursue both competitiveness and responsible innovation (Tabacco et al., 2024; Senadjki et al., 2024).

The literature also highlights that strategic leadership strengthens organisational performance by promoting accountability, collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and continuous learning (Ferede et al., 2024; Muridzi & Dhliwayo, 2025). Across the reviewed evidence, strategic leadership emerges not only as a driver of digital transformation, but also as a mechanism for ensuring that digital initiatives deliver sustainable and long-term value for organisations and society.

Leadership and employee engagement in digital workplaces

The transition toward digital workplaces has significantly transformed how employees interact, collaborate, and engage in organisations. In this context, leadership plays a central role in shaping employee experiences and supporting effective adaptation to digitally mediated work environments (Boccoli et al., 2024). The literature suggests that leaders who demonstrate strong digital communication skills and supportive leadership practices are better able to maintain trust, engagement, and team cohesion in virtual and hybrid work settings. Transformational and participatory leadership styles are consistently associated with higher levels of employee engagement in digital environments. Leaders who communicate a clear vision, empower employees, and encourage collaboration help employees

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adapt more effectively to digital transformation processes (Dey et al., 2024; Weritz, 2022). Similarly, shared leadership approaches promote collective accountability and stronger workplace relationships, particularly in sectors where digital technologies increasingly shape daily operations (van der Berg et al., 2022; Wipulanusat et al., 2020). The reviewed studies further show that leadership contributes to employee well-being and resilience during digital transformation. Supportive leadership practices reduce resistance to change and help employees view digitalisation as an opportunity for growth rather than a threat (Annisa et al., 2024). In addition, leaders who encourage continuous learning and digital literacy strengthen organisational adaptability and long-term employee engagement in technology-driven workplaces (Bindel Sibassaha et al., 2023). Literature demonstrates that effective digital leadership combines communication, empathy, collaboration, and learning support to sustain employee engagement in increasingly digital work environments.

Sector	Strategic Leadership Focus	Key Digital Priorities	Dominant Challenges
Education	Vision for digital learning, staff capability development	Digital pedagogy, learning platforms, administrative systems	Cultural resistance, digital skills gaps
Manufacturing	Alignment of digital strategy with operations	Industry 4.0, automation, data integration	Workforce reskilling, system integration
Public Sector	Public value creation and governance	Digital services, transparency, efficiency	Regulation, risk management, legacy systems

Table 1: Digital Transformation across organisational Sectors

Strategic agility and innovation ecosystems

Strategic agility has emerged as a defining capability for survival and growth in the digital era, it reflects an organisation's capacity to anticipate shifts, reconfigure resources, and continually adapt strategy amid turbulence and uncertainty (Sulaimiah, 2024). Empirical and large-sample evidence likewise shows that agility is not an abstract ideal but a practical, performance-relevant response to digital disruption enabled by leadership that mobilises people and knowledge to navigate dynamic markets and renew business models (Peter, Kraft, & Lindeque, 2020), and by strategic processes that help organisations flex, learn, and reorganise quickly in volatile environments (Ramadan et al., 2023). Unlike traditional strategic planning, which is often rigid and linear, strategic agility is dynamic, iterative, and responsive (Zhai et al., 2026). Leaders play an instrumental role in embedding this capability, ensuring that digital transformation is not a one-off initiative but an ongoing process of renewal and adaptation.

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Empirical studies emphasise that strategic agility serves as a mediator between digitalisation and sustainable performance. Research in Indonesian hospitals, for instance, has shown that leadership-driven digital adoption capabilities improve service outcomes when agility is embedded in decision-making structures (Binsar et al., 2024). In SMEs, digital agility allows firms to experiment with new business models and pivot quickly in response to market shocks, enabling resilience even under resource constraints (Cillo et al., 2021). Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, family businesses that integrated agility into their digital strategies were better positioned to innovate, demonstrating that agility is not only about short-term responsiveness but also about long-term sustainability. Closely linked to agility is the rise of innovation ecosystems, where organisations collaborate across industries, technologies, and geographies to create shared value. Digital transformation has accelerated the growth of such ecosystems by breaking down organisational silos and enabling open, networked models of innovation (Tabacco et al., 2024). Evidence from Swiss SMEs indicates that participation in digital ecosystems helps firms pool resources, share knowledge, and accelerate innovation cycles, with leadership serving as a critical enabler in orchestrating collaboration and managing interdependencies (Primario et al., 2020).

Leaders in innovation ecosystems act as connectors, shaping collective goals while balancing competition and cooperation. For instance, studies on platform ecosystems reveal that leadership decisions influence whether firms derive value from core clusters or from ecosystem-specific collaborations (Riasanow et al., 2020). By fostering trust and encouraging open knowledge flows, leaders make it possible for diverse stakeholders including suppliers, customers, regulators, and competitors to co-create solutions to complex challenges (Ramadan et al., 2023). Importantly, leadership in ecosystems requires not only strategic vision but also humility and adaptability, as control is often distributed rather than centralised effective leaders build cooperative networks, enable knowledge transfer, and cultivate agile cultures so that partners can recombine resources and co-innovate (Ramadan et al., 2023; Wibowo et al., 2024). From a broader inter-organisational perspective, intensive collaboration with institutions and multi-level government cooperation helps actors find, acquire, and utilise external knowledge a prerequisite for ecosystem co-creation and coordinated problem-solving (Wibowo et al., 2024).

The human element of ecosystems cannot be overlooked. Research on rural microbusinesses highlights that cooperative leadership in local government networks fosters innovation capabilities, enabling smaller enterprises to adopt digital tools and benefit from collective knowledge (Purnomo et al., 2024). Similarly, in sectors such as education and public administration, ecosystem-based approaches have been shown to enhance organisational learning, creating opportunities for employees to experiment and innovate in ways that are otherwise not possible in siloed environments (Oliver et al., 2025). The integration of sustainability into innovation ecosystems is emerging as a defining feature of strategic

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leadership in the digital era. Leaders who embed green strategies into digital innovation processes contribute not only to firm competitiveness but also to societal well-being. Evidence suggests that when digital ecosystems align with sustainability goals, organisations can simultaneously reduce costs, create new markets, and achieve legitimacy among stakeholders (Senadjki et al., 2024; Okorie et al., 2023).

Challenges and future research directions

Despite the immense opportunities associated with digital transformation, organisations continue to grapple with a series of persistent challenges. These challenges are not only technological but also strategic, cultural, and ethical in nature, highlighting the complexity of navigating transformation in practice. One major challenge is the misalignment between digital investments and organisational readiness. Research shows that while firms are eager to adopt advanced technologies, many lack the structural and cultural capabilities to integrate them effectively (Faiz et al., 2024). For instance, higher education institutions in Jordan demonstrated that without strong network strategic capabilities, digital initiatives often failed to achieve their intended outcomes (Afaishat et al., 2022). Similarly, studies in SMEs reveal that digital readiness is frequently hindered by inadequate leadership support, resource constraints, and resistance to change, limiting the ability of firms to fully leverage digital opportunities (Dey et al., 2024).

Another significant barrier is employee resistance and anxiety. Evidence from the banking and public sectors illustrates that digitalisation can provoke fears of redundancy, workload intensification, or loss of autonomy (Annisa et al., 2024; Wipulanusat et al., 2020). Leaders must therefore act not only as strategists but also as empathetic change agents who communicate transparently, build trust, and provide reskilling opportunities. Without this human-centred approach, even the most sophisticated digital strategies risk failure. The rise of advanced technologies has also amplified concerns around ethics, security, and inclusivity. Studies on information security awareness highlight that human behaviour remains a critical vulnerability in digital ecosystems, with HR training emerging as a vital yet often overlooked component of organisational resilience (Asfahani, 2024). Similarly, humanoid robot adoption and AI-driven platforms raise questions about the balance between efficiency and human creativity (Del Giudice et al., 2022). In many contexts, women, rural entrepreneurs, and employees in developing economies remain excluded from digital opportunities, pointing to a widening digital divide that requires urgent leadership and policy attention (Singh et al., 2025).

Sustainability presents another layer of complexity. While digital tools offer opportunities for greener operations and circular business models, research warns that without visionary leadership, digitalisation can inadvertently increase environmental footprints (Okorie et al., 2023). The challenge for leaders lies in embedding sustainability into digital strategies from the outset, ensuring that technological progress aligns with social and ecological responsibilities. Looking forward, several avenues for future research

emerge. First, there is a need for longitudinal studies that capture the evolving nature of leadership competencies in digital contexts. Much of the current literature focuses on short-term outcomes, yet digital transformation is a long-term, iterative process. Second, future research should explore leadership in underrepresented contexts such as rural enterprises, non-profits, and public services in developing nations, where the dynamics of digital adoption may differ significantly from large corporate settings (Yadav et al., 2022). Third, greater scholarly attention should be directed toward the intersection of digital transformation, inclusivity, and employee well-being, particularly as automation and AI reshape the very nature of work. Finally, methodological innovation is needed mixed-method approaches, bibliometric reviews, and AI-assisted analysis can enrich the evidence base and provide a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between strategy, leadership, and technology. While digital transformation offers organisations pathways to competitiveness and sustainability, the challenges it poses are formidable. They demand leadership that is not only strategically agile but also ethically grounded and socially responsible. For scholars, the future lies in unpacking these complexities in ways that inform practice and ensure that digital transformation becomes a force for equitable and sustainable development.

Sector-Specific Leadership Requirements in Digital Transformation

The reviewed literature demonstrates that digital transformation is experienced differently across sectors because industries operate under different technological, institutional, operational, and sustainability pressures (Gong & Ribiere, 2021; Kraus et al., 2022). Digital leadership is therefore increasingly viewed as a strategic capability that aligns technology, organisational processes, employees, and long-term business objectives rather than simply introducing digital tools (Rakovic et al., 2024; Verhoef et al., 2021). In banking and financial services, digital leadership is associated with customer trust, platform competition, efficiency, and FinTech-driven innovation (Gomber et al., 2017; Felipe et al., 2025). Studies on digital banking indicate that leaders must balance technological innovation with regulatory compliance, cybersecurity, operational efficiency, and customer-centred service delivery (Shanti et al., 2024; Qiao et al., 2025). In healthcare, leadership priorities are linked to technology acceptance, workforce readiness, workload reduction, and patient-centred systems (Jeilani & Hussein, 2025; Stoumpos et al., 2023). Digital transformation in healthcare therefore requires leaders to support organisational learning, staff adaptation, and institutional readiness while ensuring service quality and resilience (Foroudi et al., 2025). Manufacturing and industrial sectors place greater emphasis on digital servitisation, AI integration, sustainability, and operational flexibility (Ruffoni & Reichert, 2024; Saunila et al., 2025). The reviewed studies indicate that digital transformation can improve ESG performance, reduce carbon emissions, and strengthen environmental responsibility through digital capability development and smart production systems (Lin et al., 2025; Zhou & Shao, 2025). In contrast, public-sector digital transformation is more strongly associated with transparency, public value, ethical

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governance, and citizen responsiveness (van Roekel et al., 2025). Across SMEs, the literature highlights digital readiness, capability development, and organisational agility as central leadership requirements for successful transformation (Taherizadeh & Beaudry, 2023; Peter et al., 2020). Collectively, the evidence suggests that digital leadership requirements are sector-contingent and shaped by different organisational and institutional realities (Warner & Wäger, 2019; Kraus et al., 2022).

Operationalising Sustainable Performance in Digital Transformation

The reviewed studies indicate that sustainable performance in digital transformation extends beyond financial outcomes and includes operational, environmental, social, and governance dimensions (Cosa & Torelli, 2024; Verhoef et al., 2021). In banking and digital finance, sustainable performance is reflected through operational efficiency, service quality, customer accessibility, and strategic responsiveness enabled by digital systems and FinTech innovation (Gomber et al., 2017; Shanti et al., 2024). Healthcare studies similarly associate digital transformation with improved worker performance, reduced workload, and enhanced service delivery when technological and organisational conditions support implementation (Jeilani & Hussein, 2025; Foroudi et al., 2025). Environmental sustainability is strongly emphasised in manufacturing-related studies, where digital transformation contributes to carbon reduction, resource optimisation, ESG performance, and circular economy practices (Okorie et al., 2023; Zhou & Shao, 2025). Digital technologies are shown to support environmentally sustainable production systems and strengthen corporate environmental responsibility in manufacturing firms (Lin et al., 2025). Social and governance dimensions of sustainable performance are reflected through responsible innovation, stakeholder trust, ethical leadership, employee empowerment, and organisational resilience (Memon & Ooi, 2023; Qiao et al., 2025). The performance measurement literature further suggests that digitally transformed organisations require flexible and adaptive performance systems capable of capturing sustainability, agility, innovation, and long-term organisational resilience rather than focusing exclusively on financial indicators (Cosa & Torelli, 2024). Sustainable performance in digital transformation environments should therefore be operationalised using combined economic, environmental, social, operational, and governance indicators (Abbes, 2025; Cheng et al., 2025).

Measuring Sustainable Performance in Digital Transformation Contexts

Sustainable performance in digital transformation contexts extends beyond traditional financial outcomes and increasingly incorporates operational, environmental, social, governance, and innovation-related dimensions. The reviewed literature indicates that digitally transforming organisations assess sustainable performance through measurable indicators such as operational efficiency, productivity improvement, service quality, organisational agility, customer satisfaction, innovation capability, and long-term resilience. Financial indicators including profitability, cost reduction, revenue growth, and

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return on digital investment also remain important measures of transformation success, particularly in banking, manufacturing, and SME environments.

The findings further show that environmental sustainability has become an increasingly important performance dimension in digitally transformed organisations. Studies across manufacturing and industrial sectors associate sustainable digital performance with reduced carbon emissions, resource optimisation, energy efficiency, waste reduction, and circular economy integration. In addition, governance and social dimensions of sustainable performance are reflected through indicators such as employee engagement, workforce adaptability, digital skills development, ethical leadership, transparency, cybersecurity readiness, and stakeholder trust. The reviewed evidence therefore suggests that sustainable performance in digital transformation environments should be understood as a multidimensional construct measured through combined financial, operational, environmental, employee-related, governance, and innovation indicators rather than through short-term economic performance alone.

Digital Leadership, Capabilities, and Sustainable Value Creation

The reviewed literature indicates that digital leadership creates value primarily through capability development, strategic alignment, innovation enablement, and organisational renewal (Warner & Wäger, 2019; Rakovic et al., 2024). Digital transformation requires leaders to develop dynamic capabilities that allow organisations to sense technological opportunities, seize digital possibilities, and transform structures, cultures, and business models (Warner & Wäger, 2019). These capabilities are especially important because digital technologies reshape innovation processes, ecosystem boundaries, customer relationships, and value-creation mechanisms (Nambisan et al., 2019; Verhoef et al., 2021). Leadership is also central to sustainable digital transformation because it connects digital investments with long-term organisational, social, and environmental outcomes (Hariyani et al., 2025; Cheng et al., 2025). Sustainable digital transformation requires strategic alignment, change management, talent empowerment, ecosystem collaboration, regulatory adaptation, and stakeholder value creation (Hariyani et al., 2025). Digital leadership enhances organisational sustainability both directly and indirectly by strengthening digital organisational culture and digital capability, especially where absorptive capacity and innovation climate are present (Cheng et al., 2025). This suggests that sustainability outcomes depend not only on the presence of digital technologies but also on how leaders embed those technologies into organisational culture and capability systems (Cheng et al., 2025; Abbes, 2025). Digital servitisation studies further show that leadership must support complex transitions from product-based models to digitally enabled service ecosystems (Tagscherer & Carbon, 2025; Ruffoni & Reichert, 2024). Transformational leadership is particularly relevant in digital servitisation because leaders must provide direction, support employees, and create innovative and collaborative environments (Tagscherer & Carbon, 2025). Capability configurations such as integration, provision,

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orchestration, and manufacturing capabilities also determine how firms create value from digital servitisation strategies (Ruffoni & Reichert, 2024). AI platform characteristics further support digital servitisation by enabling SMEs to improve operations, create new revenue streams, reduce costs, and enhance customer outcomes (Saunila et al., 2025). The additional conceptual literature strengthens this argument by clarifying that digital transformation is not equivalent to simple digitisation or digitalisation (Gong & Ribiere, 2021; Kraus et al., 2022). Digital transformation involves deeper organisational change that alters business models, operations, stakeholder relationships, and value creation processes (Gong & Ribiere, 2021). This distinction matters because leadership must manage transformation as a strategic and cultural process, not merely as the adoption of isolated digital tools (Kraus et al., 2022; Verhoef et al., 2021). The evidence therefore supports a capability-based interpretation in which digital leadership enables sustainable value creation by aligning technologies, people, strategy, culture, and stakeholder outcomes (Warner & Wäger, 2019; Hariyani et al., 2025).

Sector	**Leadership Focus**	**Key Digital Priorities**	**Major Challenges**	**Sustainable Performance Focus**
Banking & Financial Services	Strategic agility, customer trust, digital governance	FinTech integration, cybersecurity, digital platforms, customer experience	Regulatory compliance, cybersecurity risks, rapid technological disruption	Service efficiency, customer satisfaction, operational responsiveness
Healthcare	Workforce readiness, patient-centred leadership, organisational learning	Digital health systems, AI-supported healthcare, electronic records	Technology acceptance, staff resistance, workload pressures	Service quality, patient outcomes, operational resilience
Manufacturing	Innovation leadership, operational integration, sustainability alignment	Industry 4.0, AI, automation, smart production systems	Workforce reskilling, system integration, infrastructure costs	Productivity, resource efficiency, carbon reduction, ESG performance

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Education	Transformational leadership, digital capability development	Digital learning platforms, online collaboration, administrative systems	Skills gaps, cultural resistance, digital inequality	Learning accessibility, institutional adaptability, knowledge sharing
Public Sector	Ethical governance, transparency, public value creation	E-government systems, digital services, data management	Bureaucratic rigidity, legacy systems, governance constraints	Public trust, transparency, service accessibility
SMEs	Adaptive leadership, strategic flexibility, capability building	Digital readiness, cloud systems, digital innovation	Financial limitations, low digital maturity, limited expertise	Business resilience, innovation capability, market adaptability

Table 2: Comparative Leadership Requirements and Digital Priorities Across Organisational Contexts
Source: Author´s own work

Discussion

The findings of this review demonstrate that strategic management and leadership have become central determinants of organisational success in digitally transforming environments. The evidence suggests that digital transformation should not be understood merely as technological adoption, but rather as a broader organisational and strategic renewal process that requires the alignment of leadership, culture, employee capabilities, and long-term organisational objectives. Organisations that successfully integrate digital technologies into strategic decision-making appear to achieve greater agility, innovation, resilience, and sustainable performance because digital initiatives are embedded in wider organisational systems rather than implemented as isolated technological projects. The review further highlights that transformational, participatory, and strategically agile leadership styles play a critical role in enabling employee engagement, reducing resistance to change, and fostering collaborative and innovation-oriented cultures. Another important insight emerging from the findings is that sustainable digital transformation depends heavily on capability development, particularly digital literacy, organisational learning, adaptive governance, and ecosystem collaboration. This suggests that organisations can no longer rely solely on technological investments to achieve competitive advantage, but must also invest in people-centred capabilities that support continuous adaptation and innovation. Across sectors such

as banking, healthcare, manufacturing, education, and SMEs, leadership effectiveness increasingly depends on the ability to balance technological innovation with human-centred management, ethical responsibility, and sustainability priorities. The findings therefore reinforce the growing argument that leadership in digitally transforming organisations must become more adaptive, collaborative, and strategically integrated in order to manage the complexity associated with rapidly evolving digital environments. The review also indicates that digital transformation outcomes are strongly influenced by organisational readiness and the extent to which digital initiatives align with broader strategic objectives. Organisations that demonstrate clear strategic direction, supportive organisational cultures, and strong employee engagement appear better positioned to translate digital transformation into meaningful performance outcomes. Conversely, many organisations continue to experience challenges associated with skills shortages, resistance to change, weak digital cultures, and the misalignment between digital investments and organisational capabilities. These challenges imply that digital transformation is not a linear or purely technological process, but rather an ongoing organisational change journey that requires sustained leadership commitment, strategic flexibility, and continuous capability renewal. Overall, the review suggests that successful digital transformation is driven less by technology itself and more by how effectively organisations align strategy, leadership, culture, innovation, and sustainability within dynamic and uncertain business environments.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between strategic management, leadership, and organisational transformation in the digital era. The findings indicate that successful digital transformation requires more than technological investment, it depends on strategic leadership, organisational agility, employee engagement, and the development of adaptive capabilities that support long-term sustainability and competitiveness. The review further demonstrates that organisations are more likely to achieve positive transformation outcomes when leadership integrates innovation, collaboration, continuous learning, and responsible digital practices into organisational strategy. Overall, the study reinforces the importance of leadership as both a strategic and human-centred driver of sustainable digital transformation.

Recommendations: Organisations should strengthen leadership development programmes that focus on digital competencies, strategic agility, and change management to improve readiness for digital transformation. Greater investment is also needed in employee reskilling, digital literacy, and collaborative organisational cultures to reduce resistance and improve engagement during transformation processes. In addition, organisations should integrate sustainability, ethics, and stakeholder considerations into digital strategies to ensure that digital transformation contributes to long-term organisational and societal value. Future research should focus on longitudinal and context-specific

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studies, particularly within developing economies and underrepresented sectors, to better understand how leadership capabilities evolve in increasingly digital and AI-driven environments

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