

## Stronger Digital Leadership for Greater Business Strategy: A Study Using Mixed Methods

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**Abstract:** This study analyzes the influence of Digital Leadership (DL) on Digital Business Strategy (DBS) in an organization as an activity with a digital systems mindset even though it does not only use digital technology when implementing it. The research model was tested on a multinational company in the field of computer technology and information systems in Indonesia, headquartered in Japan, and has a long history of advocating personal and environmental harmony. A survey given to respondents in the category of senior positions representing the company is one of the strengths of this research. To carry out the analysis, the survey was processed using mixed methods that combine qualitative and quantitative approaches. The results show DL has a significant influence on DBS and this DL and DBS evaluation model can be used by organizations that want to assess their DL and DBS, as a basic reference to review governance, policies, and business strategies that support competitiveness and business sustainability. Further research can explore indicators of digital leadership and digital business strategy in this study according to the locus and character of the unit of analysis and the role of government regulation as one of the external parties supporting the company's business.

**Keywords:** *Business strategy, Competitiveness, Digital leadership, Governance, Meso level.*

### 1. Introduction

The word *digital* has been used more and more frequently in recent years. Especially, when the world is experiencing the Covid-19 outbreak which requires us to keep physical distance from each other for almost two years and forces us to use digital technology to conduct daily activities. Studying and exploring digitalization and its benefits for business growth and the environment is always interesting. In the September 2019 issue of the Forbes.com website, 70% of the digital transformations conducted by companies have failed. Companies that experience failure in conducting digital transformation encounter obstacles. On the other hand, one of McKinsey's April 2020 surveys in Europe revealed that around 70% of executives from countries such as Austria, Germany, and Switzerland said the 2019 Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic allowed their digital transformation to accelerate. This shows that companies need to see digital leadership and business strategy through internal organs of the company as revenue generators and run the business well. Looking back over almost two decades ago, some examples of how business is done over the internet and have transformed entire industries by themselves or are more likely to cooperate with their competitors in an all-digital way are given by Tapscott (1994, 2014). Tapscott's all-digital approach is in line with Teece (2017) which sees companies across all industries embracing internet-based digitalization strategies to expand or enhance their business. Cotarelo et al. (2018) also reveal that the internet can be used as a worldwide sales channel to address scarce resources and foreign obligations, and accelerate internationalization (Arenius et al., 2006).

The use of the internet is certainly inseparable from information and communication technology (ICT) devices that run concurrently. Clementine et al. (2016) reveal that the advancement of ICT in any country requires expertise to use highly technical tools effectively. The advancement of ICT has accelerated the growth of society 5.0, a vision of a society where the virtual and physical worlds are increasingly connected. The presence of digital technology in society 5.0 is integrated with people's lives, so we need to improve our abilities and skills as one of the supporting factors for the economic growth of the area where we live. In our research, digital meaning is in the context of digital systems that make small changes in one way and can result in other changes. The change occurs either when there is a change or there is no sudden change in something else, then one of the values changes to the other. The way digital system changes work does not occur in the analog system concept where a small change in one thing implies a small change in another (Kernighan, 2017). The business operation gap between the analog and digital worlds can be bridged by companies through intelligent document processing, with humans in the circle (Choy et al., 2022). AlNuaimi, et al. (2022) revealed many organizations failed with digital transformation because they started with

technological change without developing a coherent digital strategy and plan. According to Cennamo, et al. (2020), the spread and influence of digital technology have enabled important transformations to occur in corporate processes, structures, roles, and interactions. They revealed that digital transformation is not only a traditional IT back-end process.

But also influences the organization as a whole, including entrepreneurial, innovation, and governance processes as well as redefining strategy. The strategy related to the digitalization context in this research is called a digital business strategy (DBS) which can help company policies be implemented to achieve company goals through the influence of digital leadership (DL) skills that exist in the organization. This study wants to see the effect of DL on DBS which can make business strategies work well. The results of the research are expected to be used as a tool for companies who want to see whether their DL and DBS are in line and can make the company's business governance grow and have a competitive advantage. The DL will be positioned as an exogenous variable and the DBS as an endogenous variable to answer the research question: How does the influence of DL on DBS make the company's business sustainable? One of the novelties of this research is DL and DBS conducted on homogeneous objects, a multinational company with a brand that has a long history and plays an important role in the ICT business in the world. Using the type of company that is classified as advanced in digitization can be a precise example. Another novelty that supports the results of the study is respondents in senior positions in all business units representing a company.

## 2. Literature Review

**Digital Leadership:** Regarding the role of leadership in organizations, Hesselbein, et al. (2009) revealed that leaders at all levels should focus on their organization in terms of its capabilities, not its structure. The relationship between leadership and digitalization in research conducted by Auvinen, et al. (2019) shows data on emphasizing the presence of a leader (in any way) as important for followers to feel led (see for example Gabriel, 2015). So, instead of building a leadership influence for good organizational governance, digital platforms only serve as a communication tool for leadership work related to strategy narratives. Therefore, according to him, for now, more traditional leadership practices that involve face-to-face presence and interaction have value for followers. This is evidenced by the echoing statement of an experienced practitioner who was involved in the research: 'What I see going on around me has made me even more convinced that presence and face-to-face interaction are paramount to leadership. It cannot be just social media and Skype alone. A study on digitization and leadership that adopts the perspective of macro and micro analysis has been carried out by Cortellazzo et al. (2019). From a micro perspective, according to their research, the context of digitization and leadership is classified into four categories based on whether the research focuses on the following: the relationship between e-leaders and organizations and how leaders adopt technology to solve complex organizational problems.

The impact of digital technology on leadership ethics and also the use of digital technology to influence social movements by leaders. Meanwhile, from the study side, microanalysis is classified into three different categories, depending on whether they focus on: the increasing complexity of the C-level role; necessary skills for e-leaders; and practice to lead virtual teams effectively. Looking at the synthesis of research on leadership and digitalization, then our study sees a gap, where the problem to be investigated in the research focuses on the meso (organizational) level that combines macro and micro (individual) perspectives and also the use of the term 'e' as electronic-versus digital, thus adding a novelty in research and studies related to the topic of digital leadership. This research selects previous studies related to leadership and digitalization in business conducted by the MIT Sloan Management Review with Deloitte for five years (Kane et al., 2019) as indicators of digital leadership variable as follow: **(a)** transformative vision, **(b)** forward-looking perspective, **(c)** digital literacy, and **(d)** adaptability. The indicators are new skills that differentiate Digital leadership from traditional ones as a result of digital disruption. The MIT Sloan Management Review with Deloitte surveyed more than 20,000 business executives, managers, and analysts worldwide to understand the challenges and opportunities associated with digital transformation over a long period (2014-2019), and this is one of our considerations for using these indicators in this research.

**Digital Business Strategy:** The most profitable alternative business strategy must be selected and decided by the organization (David, 2017). According to them, this is done because no organization has unlimited resources, so strategy formulation decisions bind the organization to certain products, markets, resources, and technologies over a long time. For better or worse, strategic decisions have large multifunctional consequences and lasting effects on organizations. In this regard, top managers have the best perspective to fully understand the consequences of strategy formulation decisions; they have the authority to use the necessary resources for profitable strategy implementation. David also revealed that strategy determines long-term competitive advantage. The basic tenet of good strategy is about the whole company and not just individuals, so a strategic plan needs to involve the entire management team working together to think about the industry.

Competitors, opportunities, and value chain, and finally make some choices about positioning and direction. Then, the team needs to develop implications for further action (Magretta, 2012). From a question-and-answer session with Michael Porter regarding his concept of competition and strategy, Magretta writes that so many managers confuse operational effectiveness with strategy. According to Ross, et al. (2017) operations and strategy are in line, where companies that cannot carry out their business activities or enterprise capabilities will not be able to provide reliable operations, thus they will not be able to compete digitally. Furthermore, a strategy based on digital solutions is changing what companies sell, meaning companies seek to integrate diverse products and services into solutions, to improve products and services with information and expertise that helps solve customer problems, and adds value throughout the product and service life cycle. Over time, digital solutions can transform a company's business model by shifting its revenue stream base from transactional sales to value-laden, sophisticated offerings that generate recurring revenue.

In addition, Correani, et al. (2020) specifically revealed that digital strategy formulation refers to the determination of guiding policies for value creation and appropriation by utilizing digital technology to achieve long-term goals. It includes factors related to the external environment, the potential of the technology in the current competitive scenario, and the evolution of the market. These factors are in line with the concept of business sustainability, and Wheelen (2018) revealed that there was a time when the word *sustainability* was used to describe competitive advantage, not the environment. But currently, according to him, the term is also reflected in the company's 'triple bottom line' annual report, namely Traditional Profit/Loss, People Accounts (organizational social responsibility), and Planet Accounts (organizational environmental responsibility), where according to Wheelen it was first used by John Elkington in 1994. Regarding digital leadership which requires new skills the organization must have, then the same goes for its business strategy. The formulation of a digital strategy must identify the elements of the company's business model that must be modified according to the new strategy (Correani et al., 2020).

The indicators of the digital business strategy variable used in this research adapt findings from their study. The following are indicators of the digital business strategy variable used in this research:

- a. Scope,
- b. Data sources (External & Internal),
- c. Data Platform,
- d. People,
- e. Partner,
- f. Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- g. Information & Knowledge,
- h. Processes & Procedures,
- i. Transformed Activities,
- j. Tasks & Services, and
- k. Customers.

**Concept Operationalization:** From the digital leadership and digital business strategy variables in an organization that has been described above, through this study the indicators of each variable were developed into questionnaire items that can be distributed evenly to all senior positions in all business units in the company. This is to keep the narrative meaning of each statement in the questionnaire in line with the

concept of variables in this research model. In addition, it also aims to compile survey items that will be given to respondents according to the research method used. The literature review is carried out carefully and focuses on the organizational level (meso). Focusing on the meso level also considers Anderson (2019) which reveals that the leader's position has responsibility for the business unit or the entire business so they must understand and be committed to higher organizational goals including the organization's vision, mission, and strategy.

### **3. Methodology**

This type of research is qualitative research with quantitative data processing (mixed methods research). The quantitative method in this study uses PLS-SEM (Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling). The data processing technique was carried out descriptively and inferentially using the SmartPLS3 software. The company that becomes the research locus is a multi-national company domiciled in DKI Jakarta, Indonesia. A total of 42 senior positions (C-level, Department Head, Manager, and Senior Staff) from all divisions in the company participated in filling out the questionnaire. The survey was conducted taking into account the common method bias and the use of statistical controls to overcome the shortcomings. Qualitative data on digital leadership and digital business strategy variables as well as indicators were obtained through discussions with various related parties. Through this qualitative approach, the study of this research becomes deeper.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

Descriptive analysis is done by looking at the Mean value of the indicators that describe the situation of digital leadership and digital business strategy in the company. The range of Mean values used is from 'Very Low' to 'Very High' with an interval scale of 1 to 5. The results of Mean values for Digital Leadership (DL) and digital business strategy (DBS) indicators show a high category (Table 1). Starting from the DL variable, the indicator with the highest Mean value (4.072) in Digital Leadership is digital literacy. That is, understanding technology is the most important skill to be able to grow the skill of digital leadership in the company. Digital literacy according to Kane, et al. (2019) is not core technical skills like programming or data science, but it is the knowledge or skills in the digital field in general. The high-level digital understanding that the company has through the Mean value above shows the company understands how technology works or not, thus enabling the company to make the right decisions in an uncertain environment. According to Bawden (2001), the term 'digital literacy' has been used by many writers throughout the 1990s (about 30 years ago).

So, the term digital literacy is not something new to us now. A study by Kozanoglu, et al. (2021) revealed a concept of digital literacy shows that digital literacy is not only the interaction between employees and technology but also employees through their practices during digital transformation. According to him, there are many digital literacy challenges, such as assessment and integration into several company systems including human resource management. And once these challenges are resolved, digitally literate employees can bring many benefits to digital transformation projects in organizations. By the order of the Mean values of the indicators for digital leadership in Table 1, digital literacy is considered a trigger for other indicators in digital leadership. That is, triggering indicators of transformative vision, adaptability, and having a forward-looking vision that makes the company responsively lead the business to environmental changes. This also allows the company to change its business direction when technology and markets develop unexpectedly toward digital business strategy and business sustainability.

**Table 1: The Mean Value Test Results**

Variables	Indicators	Mean Value	Criteria	Order based on Research Result
Digital Leadership (DL)	Transformative Vision	4.012	High	2
	Forward-looking perspective	3.816	High	4
	Digital literacy	4.072	High	1
	Adaptability	3.841	High	3
Digital Business Strategy (DBS)	Scope	3.834	High	2
	Data Sources (External and Internal)	3.500	High	8
	Data Platform	3.655	High	7
	People	3.750	High	5
	Partner	3.679	High	6
	Artificial Intelligence (AI)	4.000	High	1
	Information and Knowledge	3.786	High	4
	Processes and Procedures	3.357	Medium	9
	Transformed Activities, Tasks, and Services	3.833	High	3
	Customers	4.000	High	1

The next analysis is the Mean value of indicators in the DBS variable. Referring to Table 1, the highest indicators of DBS are Artificial Intelligence (AI) and also Customers, with the same Mean value of 4,000 each. Because these two indicators have the same Mean value, this study looks at AI and Customers are two indicators that become one and inseparable and act as the main indicator of the company's DBS. Correani, et al. (2020) revealed that the formulation of a digital (business) strategy refers to the establishment of policy guidelines for the creation and allocation of value by utilizing digital technology. Then, the high Mean value of AI and Customers in Table 1 support the digital business model by defining the AI strategies and capabilities needed to turn data into information and, ultimately, generate knowledge that can be used to create value for customers. Customers according to Correani et al. (2020) are from internal and external companies. The view on the effects of Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems that affect the important nature of customer relationship management (CRM) has been expressed by Libai, et al. (2020). Their study sees that AI-CRM systems can be of concern and consideration for both regulators and human rights groups. For example, it was revealed that the World Economic Forum might become one of the events for developing an AI-CRM system, identifying problems, and making recommendations on how to address the new customer relationship environment we all face. Regarding the use of data owned by organizations, the idea from Libai, et al. (2020) briefly states that acquiring and maintaining a more diverse data set will be a significant source of AI-CRM competitive advantage.

The Mean Values of AI and also Customers in Table 1 show how these indicators have become a key business strategy of the company in today's rapidly growing digital environment. After AI and Customers, the other indicators of DBS in a row according to Table 1 are Scope, Transformed Activities, Tasks, and Services, Information and Knowledge, People, Partners, Data Platforms, Data Sources (External and Internal), and the last is Processes and Procedures. As the name implies, these indicators play a complementary role while building partnerships with stakeholders to drive the company's business processes. The Mean value in Table 1 also correlates with the company's business which has been running for more than 30 years in Indonesia and has made a significant contribution to digital innovation and cybersecurity through its products and services for commercial and social customers. Recently, one of the real efforts of the company related to AI and customers is to provide products with High-Performance Computing (HPC) technology to help organizations/companies that need very fast and reliable IT infrastructure to process, store and analyze large amounts of data to one step ahead of the competition and optimize business processes. Next, we conduct an inferential analysis to see the influence of digital leadership (DL) on digital business strategy (DBS) and answer research questions and draw conclusions. Using the PLS-SEM method, in this study convergent validity was determined by considering Hair, et al. (2021) and Memon, et al. (2020) who do not encourage researchers to justify their sample size by relying solely on statistical programs but also consider the target population, such as sample research population.

**Table 2: The Inner Model Test Results**

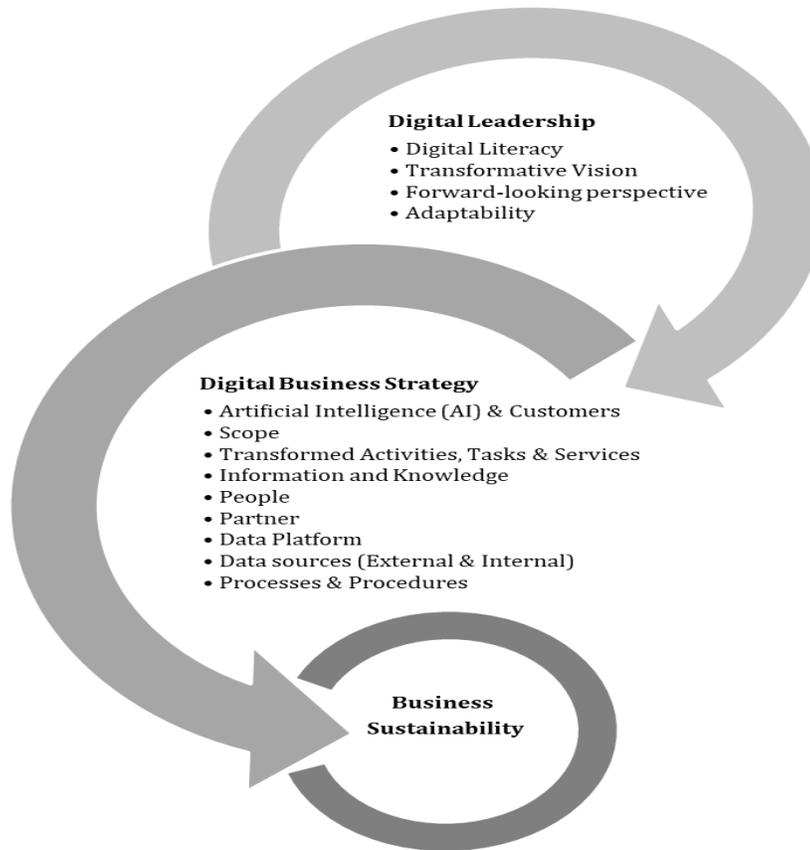
Path	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	Significance (T >= 1.96)	P Value	Significance (p < 0.05)
DL → DBS	0.291	0.278	0.146	1.989	+	0.047	+

Through a series of procedures and data processing according to the requirements of the PLS-SEM method, the results of hypothesis testing indicate that there is a significant influence between DL and DBS. The inner weight coefficient value is 0.291 with a T-statistic value of 1.989 and a P-value of 0.047 as shown in Table 2. This number indicates that the higher the digital leadership, the higher the digital business strategy, and vice versa. This shows that the company's digital leadership skills have a strong influence on the digital business strategy being implemented. The significant effect of DL on DBS from the inferential analysis can also be seen in the business condition of the company. As a multinational company that has been in business for almost 30 years in Indonesia and a subsidiary of a global company that has its headquarters in Japan which has also been operating for more than 87 years, it is one of the most admired companies in the world and is included in the Global 500 company group (Fortune, 2022).

The age of business operations is relatively long, and the company shows good performance. Then the indicators of the digital leadership and digital business strategy variables used in this study show their role. The company's digital leadership also leads to strategies for achieving sustainable living through digital innovation for the benefit of business, society at large, and the planet. Being domiciled in Jakarta, the province with the highest digital index number in Indonesia (East Venture, 2021), is also one of the things that support the company's business strategy. We also held discussions with the company and other parties related to the context of human resources, leadership, digitalization, and business strategy. This activity demonstrates the company's role in supporting digital transformation for social (other than commercial) purposes. Helping regions that are not yet 'literate' in ICT and digitalization, in collaboration with local governments.

Indonesia is one example of the company's activities that support the welfare of the community and the environment. Indirectly, it practices the company's philosophy of operating ethics and how to treat each other, suppliers, customers, employees, people, and the planet. The company's digital leadership and business strategy can also be seen from these activities. Refers to the meaning of digital in the context of digital systems that make small changes in one way and can lead to changes in other and even produce better and more value than it has been seen in this study through the significant influence between digital leadership and digital business strategy in the company. All indicators in DL and DBS are the driving force for the company's business. Here DL is a form of leadership owned by the company (meso level) running a business with the support of people within the company (micro level). Through understanding and commitment at the micro level –people within the organization– DL and DBS towards higher corporate goals including the organization's vision, mission, and strategy, DL and DBS in the meso level -the company-are also strong. Together with other support systems such as a healthy company's financial condition, DL and BS will support the company's business to run well.

Figure 1: The DL on DBS



This study reveals that the digital system mindset does not only use digital technology when implementing it, but Digital literacy as the main indicator of DL as well as AI and customers as the main indicator of DBS shows that facilities and infrastructure for information, communication, and technology (ICT) are needed. Budgets for facilities and infrastructure are prepared along with future business strategies. But without realizing it, companies often make business strategies that only generate profits in a certain time and ignore the benefits that will be obtained in the future. In today's digital era, companies can no longer carry out such a strategy, but must also pay attention to sustainable success through DL and DBS indicators. According to the studies by David (2017) and Correani, et al. (2020) in the literature review above, strategy can determine long-term success and competitive advantage, as well as business sustainability as disclosed in Wheelen (2018). To make it easier to see the indicators and the relationship between DL and DBS in the company according to the results of our research, these are arranged in Figure 1. The order of indicators of DL and DBS is arranged based on the Mean value, starting from the highest to the lowest. Digital literacy is the strongest indicator of DL while Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Customers is the strongest indicator of DBS. From the DL circle, there is an arrow toward the DBS circle, which means that DL has an impact on DBS. Next, from the DBS circle, there is an arrow pointing to the 'Sustainability' circle.

This model has been proven through our research at the company and the sustainability of the company is proven by its longevity the business and its successful headquarters in a global position. This can be seen in terms of leadership and strategy from the headquarter which is also passed down to its subsidiaries throughout the world even though there are diverse cultures between countries where they operate. As we stated in the introduction to this paper, some companies have failed and succeeded in carrying out their digital transformation, so the indicators of the DL and DBS variables that have been tested on the company that is the object of this research can use to evaluate those failures and successes.

## 5. Conclusion & Recommendations

The significant influence of Digital Leadership on Digital Business Strategy shows that having these skills is a valuable asset for the company toward a competitive and sustainable business. In this company, Digital literacy is the highest indicator of the digital leadership variable. AI and Customers are the highest indicators of digital business strategy variables. Looking at the high Mean value of the indicators of Digital Leadership and Digital Business Strategy variables also a significant effect between the two variables, in line with the company profile and this is a good example. This company's success is expected to impact private organizations and state-owned enterprises, especially for implementing indicators in Digital Leadership and Digital Business Strategy when they want to compete digitally. As part of a sustainable national economic system, the company's policies and efforts towards the development of human resources and infrastructure that promote Digital Leadership and Digital Business Strategy may require external support, such as the government's policy and real role in providing secure digital infrastructure and digital space.

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