



**Technological Advances in E-commerce and E-business:
Have They Rendered Traditional Organisational
Structures and Theories of Managerial Roles
Obsolete?**

A Critical Evaluation of the Media and Digital Publishing Sector

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and significance

In an increasingly digital world, technology is more than just a way to get work done; it shapes strategies by connecting products, processes, data, customers, and external stakeholders. Bharadwaj et al. (2013) describe this connection as digital business strategy, while Vial (2019) explains that digital transformation changes organisational structures, capabilities, and ways of creating value. As a result, the purpose of this report is to assess whether existing organisational structures and managerial roles are still suitable for today's businesses.

In media and digital publishing, digital developments have changed the way editorial, commercial and technology teams work together and made organisations more dependent on platform ecosystems, which are interconnected networks of platforms, publishers, users and advertisers. The Digital News Report 2026 shows that online platforms are now more commonly used as news sources than television and publishers' own websites or apps, putting pressure on established media companies to rethink how they distribute content, engage audiences and manage operations (Egan et al., 2026).

1.2 Research problem

The claim that traditional structures and managerial roles are obsolete is strong because digital innovation is becoming more common across different companies and requires collaboration between various departments and organisations (Nambisan et al., 2017). Yet change alone does not prove obsolescence. Media organisations still need clear direction, editorial accountability, legal compliance, coordination, and control. I have two questions: do traditional structural models still help explain how things work and guide managers, and do descriptions of managerial roles still accurately reflect the work done in systems that are data-heavy, involve multiple functions, and rely on platforms?

1.3 Aim and Objectives

My aim is to closely examine whether progress in e-commerce and e-business has made old ways of managing companies and traditional ideas about management roles no longer relevant, especially when looking at the media and digital publishing fields.

To achieve this aim, I focus on five main points: first, I look at both traditional and recent ideas about how organisations are structured and what managers do. Second, I explain how e-

commerce and e-business change the way information moves, who makes decisions, and how different parts of an organisation depend on each other. Third, I review the evidence that either supports or questions the idea that traditional ways of doing business are becoming outdated. Fourth, I apply these discussions to media and digital publishing. Lastly, I give suggestions based on what the evidence shows.

1.4 Structure of the report

After this introduction, I will move to the conceptual, technological and industry context. I then review and assess the relevant organisational, management and digital-transformation literature. Next, I compare different views and apply them to evidence from media and digital publishing organisations. Finally, I explain the practical implications for managers and present my conclusion and recommendations.

2. Background and context

2.1 E-commerce, e-business and digital transformation

Although e-commerce and e-business refer to various levels of digital activity, the OECD explains that an e-commerce transaction is when goods or services are sold or bought online through computer networks using methods designed specifically for placing or receiving orders (OECD, 2025). Orders can be placed through websites, apps, or electronic data systems; payments and delivery do not have to be done online.

E-business covers a wider range of activities: it involves using internet technologies, platforms, information systems, and data in areas like marketing, customer relationships, supply chains, knowledge management, human resources, finance, production, and strategy (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2022). In media and digital publishing, this includes subscriptions and licensing, editorial processes, audience data analysis, automated content recommendations, remote collaboration, and links to various platforms.

In this report, I highlight three ways that e-commerce and e-business lead to changes within organisations: first, transactions collect customer data; second, integrated systems link different business functions; and third, platforms create dependencies that go beyond the company itself. These changes alter how information is handled, who makes decisions, and who is responsible. Selling subscriptions online does not by itself require a publisher to change its management approach; the real change happens when they alter how editorial, commercial and technology teams work together.

Figure 1 shows how digital technologies trigger wider organisational change.

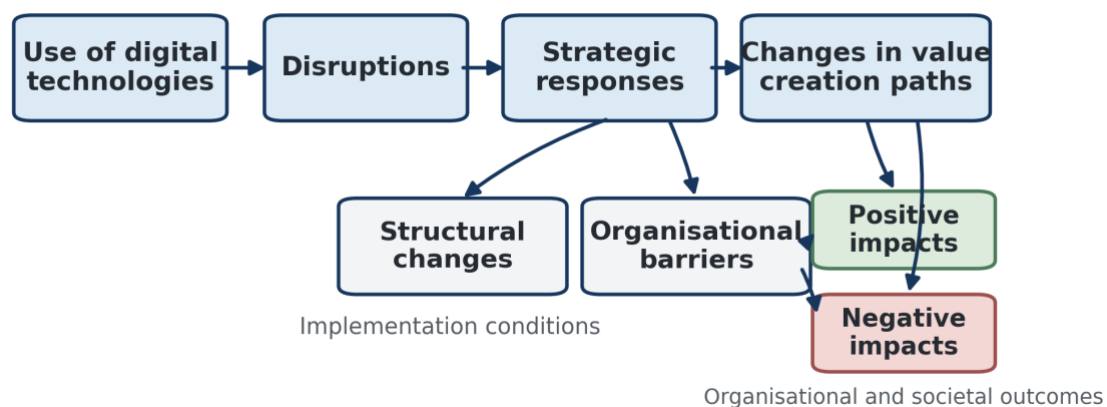


Figure 1: Digital transformation as an organisational change process (adapted from Vial, 2019)

2.2 Evolution of media and digital publishing

The production of newspapers, magazines and books traditionally followed a set process of acquisition, editing, production, printing, promotion, and physical distribution. These arrangements promoted functional expertise and hierarchical coordination.

Digitisation has made the lines between different formats and channels less distinct. Multimedia journalism brings together written, visual, audio, video, and interactive elements, which has transformed the way professionals work and how content is created (Deuze, 2004). Newsroom convergence has led to various structures instead of a single model that works for every organisation: integrated newsrooms now share space with cross-media systems where different units remain partly independent (García Avilés and Carvajal, 2008). Digital transformation means that organisations need to work together across their existing professional boundaries instead of just forming flat structures automatically.

Digital platforms influence how cultural content is created, shared, and used to generate revenue through their systems, business strategies, and guidelines (Nieborg and Poell, 2018). Search engines, social networks, application stores, video platforms, and aggregators offer wide reach and strong technical support, but they also play a role in how easily content is found, how much money is earned, and how much audience data is accessible. Platformisation, meaning the growing organisation of markets and work around digital platforms, affects infrastructure, governance and labour (Poell, Nieborg and Duffy, 2022).

2.3 Changing revenue and audience relationships

The transition from earning money through print to generating income through sustainable digital methods is not happening at the same pace everywhere. A study of 50 US newspapers found that digital subscriptions are not a major source of reader revenue, indicating that just offering digital subscriptions does not necessarily lead to readers paying for them (Chyi and Ng, 2020). Publishers need to manage different sources of income while maintaining high standards for content and providing value to the public.

Website activity, social-media responses, subscription behaviour, and content engagement can all affect what content is created and how it is produced (Lee and Tandoc, 2017). Recommender systems help tailor content to individual preferences, but they also raise issues related to editorial judgement, diversity in recommendations, transparency, and the role of technology experts (Mitova et al., 2023).

2.4 Current trends and challenges

The Digital News Report 2026 shows that online platforms are now more widely used around the world for news than television and publishers' own websites or apps (Egan et al., 2026). Generative AI, answer engines, synthetic content, deepfakes, video-based news, and individual creators all increase strategic pressure (Newman, 2026).

These changes create opportunities for reduced distribution costs, wider global access, more testing, and closer interaction with the audience. They also create risks related to false information, copyright issues, privacy concerns, cybersecurity threats, reliance on algorithms, subscription fatigue, and skills shortages. The OECD (2024) also points out that connectivity, data, cloud services, and artificial intelligence are key factors driving digital growth, while highlighting the importance of governance and security.

2.5 Rationale for investigation

I chose media and digital publishing because digital commerce has changed how revenue is made, how work gets done, what roles people play, and where organisational boundaries are set. I assess traditional theories using four criteria: how well they describe practice, whether their functions are still needed, how well they explain results and how useful they are in practice. This allows me to tell the difference between total obsolescence and partial adaptation, and it gives me a clear way to compare hierarchy, professional authority, agile teamwork, and platform coordination.

3. Literature review

3.1 Traditional organisational structures and theories of managerial roles

Taylor's scientific management separated the design of work from its execution and focused on measurement, task specialisation, standard methods, managerial selection and worker training (Taylor, 1911). Fayol (1949) shifted the focus from tasks to the broader administrative functions of planning, organising, commanding, coordinating, and controlling. Weber's analysis of bureaucracy stated that formal rules, specialist offices, hierarchy, and rational-legal authority would create continuity and predictability that were not based on personal relationships (Weber, 1978). In contrast, Mayo (1933) pointed out the social structure of work and the role of communication, group relationships, and employee attitudes. Taylorism emphasises task efficiency; Fayol focuses on managerial coordination; Weber emphasises legitimate authority and reliable administration; and human-relations theory highlights the social aspects of work. I think it is a mistake to consider all of them as outdated. Judgement is an essential part of creative media work, and it is difficult to separate design from execution in the way Taylor proposed. But measurement and standardisation are used in content-management systems, workflow automation, dashboards and audience metrics. Digitalisation can modernise, but not eliminate, Taylorist control.

Planning can be a process of repeated review and improvement, coordination can occur through product teams and collaboration platforms, and control can use real-time data. While Fayol only briefly addresses rapid environmental change, informal power and ecosystems, his focus on resource allocation, coordination and accountability is still relevant. Although Weberian bureaucracy can be an obstacle to creativity, formal authority still matters when organisations face defamation, copyright, privacy, advertising, financial and editorial duties. Its value therefore depends on organisational scale, uncertainty, and accountability.

Mintzberg (1973) categorises ten roles as interpersonal (figurehead, leader, and liaison), informational (monitor, disseminator, and spokesperson) and decisional (entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator). E-business transforms how they are done: dashboards extend monitoring, collaboration platforms accelerate information flow, platform dependence adds liaison and negotiation responsibilities, while fast product cycles add entrepreneurial and resource-allocation tasks. Automation may eliminate routine reporting, but it does not eliminate these roles. I use this framework carefully because it does not fully address algorithmic governance, meaning the use of algorithms to guide or shape

organisational decisions, and distributed expertise. Even so, I believe that a role is not outdated if the work it involves does not go away.

Figure 2 summarises Mintzberg's ten managerial roles and their three categories.

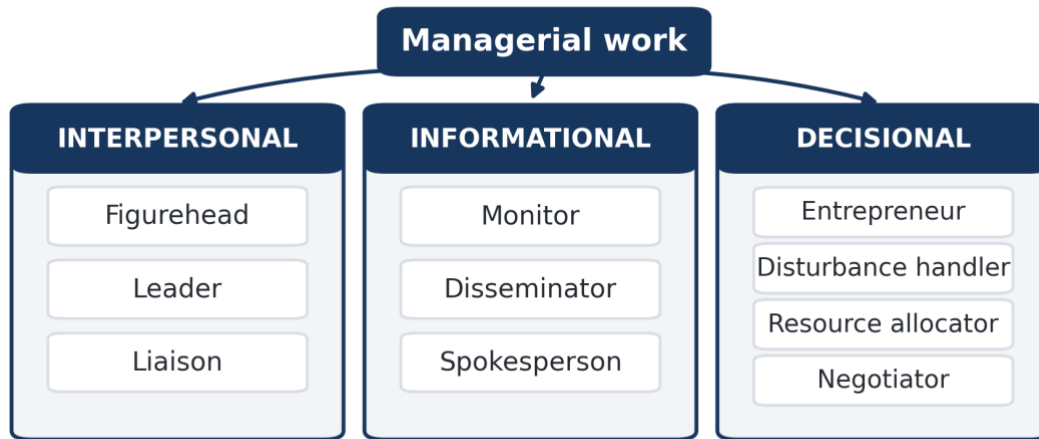


Figure 2: Mintzberg's ten managerial roles (adapted from Mintzberg, 1973)

3.2 Contingency, information-processing and structural configuration perspectives

Burns and Stalker (1961) distinguished mechanistic systems for stable situations from organic systems involving communication between teams and flexible roles and decentralised judgement. Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) also noted that the more complex the environment, the greater the need for specialist units and integration. This helps explain digital organisations: media companies require different editorial, technology, data and commercial skills, and success depends on linking them.

Organic and mechanistic systems can coexist in the same organisation. A publisher can have multiple teams of multidisciplinary professionals for innovative digital product development and retain formal editorial, financial, cybersecurity and regulatory approval processes. This strict division between traditional and digital organisations is thus too simplistic. Contingency theory asks which structures and controls are suitable for specific tasks, environments, and risks.

When there is high uncertainty, an organisation must obtain more information, either through other departments, information systems, or self-contained teams (Galbraith, 1974). Digital technologies can boost the volume and velocity of information, but not necessarily the quality of judgement. Audience analytics can help to reduce uncertainty about consumption but add new uncertainties about platform algorithms, data quality, privacy, and changing formats.

Matching uncertainty with information-processing capacity, meaning an organisation's ability to gather, share and use information, is therefore an important design challenge.

Mintzberg's (1983) organisational forms are machine bureaucracy, professional bureaucracy and adhocracy, a flexible form organised around expert project teams. Media and publishing companies can display all three: standard production processes, editorial professionalism, and project-based innovation teams. The configuration approach also has drawbacks because real organisations do not completely fit one type and may shift from one form to another. Their importance is that they show hierarchy, professional expertise, standardisation, and mutual adjustment, meaning coordination through direct discussion between colleagues, as approaches that can work together.

Organisations are defined by Katz and Kahn (1978) as systems that import resources, transform inputs and rely on feedback. Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) are concerned with the power that comes from reliance on outside parties. This is relevant to digital publishing because it is built on cloud services, search engines, social networks, application stores, payment services, advertising, and suppliers of technology. These theories provide insight into why digital organisations are not simply boundaryless; boundaries can be made more open, but the choices of managers are limited by more powerful external actors.

Puranam, Alexy and Reitzig (2014) argue that organisations must still divide tasks and integrate efforts, while the solutions may be novel. Lee and Edmondson (2017) also find that less hierarchy can be linked to greater autonomy, but that authority must be assigned in any organisation, conflict must be negotiated between parties, and interdependent work must be coordinated. Unclear decision rights can slow publication in media organisations, create confusion over accountability, and reinforce informal power.

3.3 Contemporary theories of adaptation and digital organisation

Teece, Pisano and Shuen (1997) link long-term advantage to the ability to integrate, build and reconfigure internal and external capabilities. Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) define dynamic capabilities as explicit organisational processes, while Teece (2007) categorises them as sensing, seizing, and transforming. This is important because established companies need to monitor audience behaviour, develop digital products and subscriptions, and alter editorial, production and commercial practices.

It is difficult to separate capabilities from results, and this can lead to a circular argument: a company can be evaluated as being capable largely because it has produced successful results. The framework may also give too much weight to senior management and too little to

professional resistance, labour relations, institutions, and digital platforms. Nonetheless, it challenges the idea that managerial roles disappear.

March (1991) differentiates exploitation of established knowledge from the exploration of new opportunities. Media organisations need to improve their print, advertising or subscription businesses while testing new podcasts, video, generative artificial intelligence, and distribution formats. To deal with these competing activities, O'Reilly and Tushman (2013) suggest that ambidextrous organisations need separate units linked by senior management.

Bharadwaj et al. (2013) pinpoint the increased cross-functional scope, scale, speed and dependence on an ecosystem, and Hess et al. (2016) relate transformation strategy to technology use, value creation, structural change, and finance. Information technology is no longer an issue for the technical department alone. However, strategic integration does not ensure operational integration and can fail to recognise boundaries between professions and competing editorial, commercial and technological objectives.

According to Nambisan et al. (2017), digital innovation crosses company boundaries; it is shared by more participants and can combine products in new ways. In a long-term study, Svahn, Mathiassen and Lindgren (2017) argue that digital innovation introduces tensions with respect to capabilities, products, processes, collaboration, and governance. Formal structure does not disappear; organisations still need to find ways to deal with these tensions.

Vial (2019) connects the disruption of digitisation with strategic response, structural change, and changes in value creation. Warner and Wäger (2019) define transformation as continuous renewal, which is facilitated by sensing, seizing, and transforming capabilities. Hanelt et al. (2021) attribute it to flexible designs and business ecosystems and emphasise the importance of context. Verhoef et al. (2021) differentiate between digitisation, digitalisation, and business-model transformation. I read these studies as evidence of major adaptation, but not evidence that one new structure has replaced all others.

3.4 Media and digital publishing scholarship

Multimedia journalism covers different formats and brings together various professions (Deuze, 2004), while newsroom convergence can involve fully integrated production or more flexible collaboration across different media platforms (García Avilés et al., 2009).

Verification, independence, accuracy, and public responsibility cannot be reduced to customer demand or short-term engagement. Product teams might look at audiences through data on how people behave, while journalists see audiences as publics whose needs extend

beyond clicks, subscriptions or conversions. Integration can therefore lead to conflicts, highlighting a weakness in digital transformation research that views organisations as though they all share a single commercial goal.

Thompson (2021) states that e-books, audiobooks, self-publishing, and powerful intermediaries have transformed the book publishing industry, but they have not replaced the role of print books or the functions of publishers in selecting titles, managing rights, and investing in books. Scholarly publishing systems connect the processes of submitting, reviewing, producing, distributing, analysing, and selling content, but these systems can vary between commercial publishers, academic societies, and university presses (Bergstrom, Rieger and Schonfeld, 2024). Digital channels alter the way work is done and how tasks depend on each other, but they do not create a single, unified structure. In my opinion, the success of a redesign should be measured by sustainability, innovation, staff capability, editorial quality, and public trust, rather than only by technology use or revenue growth.

Feedback plays a role in shaping how news is created and used (Lee and Tandoc, 2017), and the use of analytics can help enhance products, support audience development, and boost subscription numbers. Engagement metrics might place more importance on widely viewed content rather than on content that contributes to the public good. Metrics can also provide individuals with influence, but their interpretation may vary between journalists and managers, as noted by Elsheikh, Jackson and Jebril (2024).

Digital platforms influence how culture is created by shaping the underlying systems, economic structures, and rules that guide online activities (Nieborg and Poell, 2018). Publishers can expand their reach and improve their technical abilities, but they might also experience a loss of control regarding how their content is discovered, how revenue is generated, and how they interact with their audience. Managers need to collaborate with platforms, suppliers, creators, advertisers, and data providers beyond formal organisational boundaries. Network and ecosystem theories explain aspects that internal hierarchy alone cannot, yet reliance on platforms can lead to concentration of power in platform companies that control visibility, data, and revenue.

Mitova et al. (2023) highlight various issues related to personalised news, including technical, commercial, editorial, ethical, and public interest concerns. Recommender systems rely on collaboration between editors, data scientists, software developers, and product managers, but they also involve making important decisions on diversity, transparency, bias, and accountability. These are still issues related to how organisations are run and managed, rather than problems that can be fixed simply by using modern technology.

3.5 Critical synthesis and literature gap

First, speed, cross-functional integration, data and external ecosystems are more important than ever before in the digital era. Second, rigid silos and communication that flows only up and down a hierarchy are ineffective in a high-uncertainty environment. Third, transformation involves more than innovative technology; it also involves skills, culture, and management changes. There is disagreement about the extent of change. Some research associates digitalisation with decentralisation and flexibility, whereas research on analytics, platforms and professional governance shows that digitalisation can also lead to more monitoring, dependence, and central control.

A substantial part of the evidence is based on case studies, conceptual frameworks, and reviews. These explain how change occurs but make it more difficult to prove cause and effect and to make findings applicable across different settings. Surveys can identify a connection between digital capability and performance without showing which came first. Research focuses on journalism and large established organisations, while evidence on magazines, small book publishers and specialist presses remains limited.

Mechanistic, administrative, professional and human-relations theories are still part of traditional theory, and digital organisations continue to rely on hierarchy, rules, and standardisation as well as agile teams, networks, and partnerships. Research also mainly focuses on large, tech-heavy companies, and is less applicable to smaller publishers with limited resources. Another divide is between commercial change and the editorial, public and ethical responsibilities of media organisations.

My overall conclusion from the literature is that digital transformation changes the form of management more than the underlying problems. Coordination, authority, specialisation, motivation, and control are still required, and interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles are carried out through different practices and relationships. I therefore define obsolescence as the loss of functions and roles, not simply the appearance of new practices.

4. Critical analysis and discussion

4.1 Evaluating the meaning of “obsolete”

Strict obsolescence would mean that hierarchy, specialisation, coordination and managerial roles no longer describe practice, perform needed functions or explain results. A model may fail as a rule for all organisations but still be useful for specific tasks and risks. I do not think the evidence indicates complete obsolescence; it indicates selective limits.

Digital transformation impacts strategy, processes, skills, structures and external relationships, but the impact is not the same across organisations (Plekhanov, Franke and Netland, 2023; Hanelt et al., 2021). I therefore look at what traditional functions are still required and how they are integrated with digital practice, rather than assuming that a new structure has replaced all others.

I also make a distinction between the obsolescence of a structure and that of a managerial role. Digital tools can be used to replace reporting layers, approval processes, or distribution channels without removing coordination and accountability. I evaluate the claim based on evidence of functions that remain necessary rather than just job titles, technologies, or organisational charts.

4.2 Evidence supporting the claim

4.2.1 Speed, experimentation, and organisational agility

Publishers have to deal with platform algorithms, audience preferences, devices, advertising technology, subscription conversion, and content formats. The more layers there are in an approval system, the slower development becomes, as people who see a problem can be separated from those who are permitted to take action. Walter (2021) defines agility as the ability to change, learn and coordinate, rather than merely the use of short projects. A firm is not agile if budgets, technology, and decision rights are kept within separate departments.

Repeated testing is not well suited to a step-by-step structure, in which each department completes its step before handing off to the next. Cross-functional teams reduce feedback time and allow for changes based on evidence from the audience. This is a challenge to the classical notion that tasks can be fully planned in advance as knowledge is distributed across professions and day-to-day judgement often sits below senior management.

Team autonomy is beneficial only if objectives, resources, and escalation paths are transparent. The shift is thus from detailed command to enabling coordination, as managers

establish boundaries and resolve dependencies between teams instead of instructing people on how to perform each task.

4.2.2 Networked production and porous organisational boundaries

The traditional view of the organisation as a closed hierarchy is challenged by e-business. Digital innovation is becoming increasingly distributed across organisational boundaries (Nambisan et al., 2017), and platform infrastructures are influencing how cultural products are produced, discovered, and used to generate revenue (Nieborg and Poell, 2018). Management, therefore, requires internal coordination and negotiation across the external ecosystem.

Managers cannot direct these actors through formal authority; they must manage dependence, negotiate partnerships, and support alternative channels. Network and resource-dependence theories, which explain how organisations rely on external actors for important resources, thus account for some aspects of digital publishing that the internal hierarchy does not. But opening organisational boundaries does not automatically distribute power: control over infrastructure and audience information could centralise power in external platforms.

4.2.3 Data-driven and customer-centred decision-making

Digital channels offer real-time data on subscription conversion, retention, engagement, referrals, and content consumption. This is a challenge to models that depend mainly on periodic reporting and senior executives' professional intuition. Having live evidence means teams can make changes to products and audience journeys faster, giving them greater control over some day-to-day decisions.

Ferrucci (2020) shows that news organisations use analytics differently according to their market position. Metrics do not define one management approach; they are read in the context of current priorities. Commercially oriented organisations may allow traffic data to influence story selection strongly, while professionally oriented organisations might use the same information more selectively. Data-driven management supplements rather than replaces judgement.

Guardian Media Group's (2025) annual report states that digital revenue represented 72 per cent of revenue and recurring digital supporters reached 1.3 million. The results show strong digital business performance, but do not indicate that the structure was the cause of the performance. I consider them to be evidence, not proof. I find the case useful because reader

revenue requires coordinated product, data, and editorial work, while mission and editorial authority shape how audience evidence is used.

4.2.4 Changing managerial roles

I think the strongest argument for obsolescence is when traditional management is understood as command and control. E-business alters Mintzberg's roles, broadening the scope of monitoring, accelerating the flow of information, expanding platform dependence for liaison and negotiation, and expanding entrepreneurial and resource-allocation activities because of rapid product cycles. Managers are now able to support multidisciplinary work, translate between professions, assign resources for experiments, and manage partners. To me, this undermines the perception of the manager as a vertical supervisor, but does not make interpersonal, informational, or decisional roles unnecessary.

Automated systems can aid research, routine content production, translation, recommendation, and moderation, but they can also alter jobs and journalistic authority (Carlson, 2015). Managers need to figure out which tasks can be automated, where human review is required and who is responsible for errors. I believe the role is more focused on people, technology, and support, but responsibility does not disappear.

4.3 Evidence against the claim

4.3.1 The persistence of hierarchy, accountability, and strategic control

Digital firms may reduce layers and spread operational decision-making, but boards and executives still have control over strategy, major investments, appointments, risk and organisational performance. Autonomous teams cannot independently decide which teams should exist, which resources they are given, or which goals are prioritised.

Editorial decisions may have legal, reputational, and public consequences involving defamation, privacy, copyright, source protection, and election coverage. Public-service media also have impartiality and public-value requirements. Research at the BBC revealed a gap between the growing use of algorithmic systems and journalists' understanding of them, showing a need for organisational as well as individual AI literacy (Jones, Jones and Luger, 2022). I read this as evidence for better governance, not for the end of management.

4.3.2 Coordination remains a fundamental management problem

All organisations must divide tasks and bring work together; digital technology changes the solutions rather than removing these problems (Puranam, Alexy and Reitzig, 2014). Cross-

functional teams can minimise hand-offs, but can also lead to duplication of effort, inconsistent standards, and competition for limited specialists. If teams share publishing systems, data, brand standards, or legal resources, complete freedom for each local team may impose organisation-wide costs.

The agility literature contains unclear and inconsistent definitions (Walter, 2021), and Oludapo, Carroll and Helfert (2024) link repeated organisational and people issues with unsuccessful digital transformations. Technology programmes often fail when treated as adoption projects with insufficient governance, culture, skills, and integration. Formal structure can therefore be replaced by loosely defined flexibility, which can result in unclear roles instead of a quicker response.

This is particularly serious for smaller publishers that may not have the resources to maintain a full-time multidisciplinary team and rely heavily on external vendors. Organisational arrangements must fit organisational scale, task uncertainty, professional demands, and resources. The stronger explanation is contingency, not universal replacement.

4.3.3 Digital technologies can intensify managerial control

The idea that digitalisation always leads to flatter, more autonomous organisations overlooks the fact that digital systems can keep track of employees. Analytics, workflow platforms, and remote communication make employee activity visible in detail. Hayes and O’Sullivan (2024) found that digital-first newsroom production was associated with higher levels of work pressure, performance monitoring, and pressure to produce more content. This is not the end of scientific management, but rather its technology-supported form.

Analytics providers also influence the professional work of news production (Bélair-Gagnon and Holton, 2018), while tensions between professional values and managerial control limit journalists' freedom (Waldenström, Wiik and Andersson, 2019). Managers can support editorial independence while still influencing attention through dashboards and targets. There may thus be fewer visible instructions and more indirect control.

Taylorist tools have evolved, but measurement, performance comparison and the distinction between system design and execution remain. For me, classical concerns become more relevant when algorithms are the benchmark for acceptable performance and employees have little influence on the metrics applied to them.

4.3.4 Editorial judgement and public value cannot be reduced to market signals

Treating audiences as customers helps generate sustainable reader revenue but may clash with the public and professional responsibilities of journalism. Popularity, conversion, and retention metrics assess behaviours that can be measured; they do not account for all aspects of social importance, accuracy, or diversity. A less popular investigation can still serve a significant public interest, while content that is highly engaging might be of little importance or even misleading.

Ferrucci (2020) and Elsheikh, Jackson and Jebril (2024) show that metrics gain meaning through organisational interpretation and power dynamics. I therefore believe that managers should ensure that commercial indicators are not the only measure of value. The Guardian's reader-funded approach is important because reader income supports the publication's editorial goals (Guardian Media Group, 2025).

4.4 Application to media and digital publishing

4.4.1 News publishers: hybrid rather than post-hierarchical organisations

Integrated newsrooms and product teams enhance coordination across various platforms such as print, web, audio, and mobile, but editorial leadership continues to oversee standards and major publication decisions. García Avilés et al. (2009) found multiple models of newsroom convergence rather than a single final structure, reinforcing the idea that factors such as ownership, available resources, professional culture, and market conditions influence the degree to which newsrooms integrate or remain separate.

Digital revenue models depend on collaboration among editorial, product, data, and commercial teams to manage aspects like registration, pricing, onboarding, retention, and bundling. Willingness to pay is partly influenced by the publisher's credibility and how independent its editorial process is. Excessive separation can stop audience evidence from affecting product development, while too much integration can let short-term business goals impact editorial decisions. Effective design therefore depends on having common goals and collaborative discussions across different areas, while also maintaining specific zones of professional responsibility.

I describe this as differentiated integration, where different functions collaborate but do not completely lose their separate identities or decision-making powers. Successful publishers combine strong editorial skills and established strengths with experiments in new formats and revenue models. Smaller companies might benefit more from forming partnerships or using

shared services instead of trying to replicate the team structures that are commonly seen in larger organisations.

4.4.2 Public-service media: innovation constrained by legitimate accountability

Public-service media must compete for visibility in markets influenced by platforms, while also fulfilling their public responsibilities, adhering to regulations, and upholding editorial standards. Public value cannot be measured just by looking at subscriptions, reach, or engagement levels, which is why I still think formal governance is necessary even when production processes become more flexible.

Jones, Jones and Luger (2022) say that journalists can collaborate with algorithmic systems without having a complete understanding of how they function. Cools and Koliska's (2024) study of The Washington Post also found that internal knowledge sharing was incomplete, even though the organisation made efforts to be transparent in its external communications. Therefore, relying solely on cross-functional collaboration is not enough to ensure accountability; it is still necessary to have proper documentation, clear escalation procedures, professional supervision, and well-defined responsibilities.

4.4.3 Book and scholarly publishing: digital workflows under enduring governance

E-books, audiobooks, self-publishing, and online retail have shifted more control to digital platforms, yet print books continue to exist. Publishers still play a key role by choosing which manuscripts to publish, handling rights, covering the costs of producing books, and organising marketing efforts (Thompson, 2021).

Enterprise systems integrate processes such as manuscript submission, peer review, production, distribution, analytics, and e-commerce. Larger organisations may develop their own customised systems, while smaller publishing houses typically rely on shared or pre-made systems (Bergstrom, Rieger and Schonfeld, 2024). Editorial independence, research integrity, and preservation still require formal governance.

4.4.4 Platform businesses: decentralised creativity under central architecture

Creative and product-related decisions can be made locally when local knowledge is useful, whereas technology architecture, data standards, pricing strategies, rights management, and capital allocation should be coordinated centrally. These businesses' ability to adapt is based on shared infrastructure and well-defined strategic limits, rather than the lack of a structured hierarchy.

Standardised interfaces, data models, and recommendation goals help align actions across teams in different locations without the need for constant managerial instruction. This can seem decentralised in everyday operations, yet it remains highly centralised in the design of the core system. Digital organisation shifts some decision-making power from supervisors to technical standards and strategic platforms.

I believe the key lesson is not complete freedom, but rather a clear distinction between areas that need consistency and those where experimentation can be beneficial.

4.5 Central contradictions of digital organisation

First, digitalisation increases access to information for more people, but it also centralises control over the systems that gather and analyse data. Teams can view dashboards independently, but it is up to executives and technical specialists to determine which metrics are accessible.

Second, digital work can offer greater flexibility, but it also comes with increased monitoring. Remote and project-based working arrangements reduce direct supervision, but workflow tools can track output continuously; autonomy and surveillance can therefore coexist (Hayes and O’Sullivan, 2024).

Third, the boundaries within an organisation become more flexible, while reliance on external platforms continues to grow. Publishers can work with content creators to access a worldwide audience, but the owners of the platforms have control over how content is found, the data collected, and the revenue generated. Artificial intelligence could increase reliance on technology firms (Simon, 2024), meaning that even with flatter organisational structures, economic power may not necessarily become more evenly distributed.

Fourth, personalisation can enhance relevance but may come at the cost of reducing diversity and transparency. Algorithmic systems include built-in decisions about goals, data usage, and how risks are handled. Transparency can be challenging to achieve but is important in principle (Diakopoulos and Koliska, 2017), and in my opinion, publishers should clearly explain how personalisation impacts users and aligns with their editorial standards (van Drunen, Helberger and Bastian, 2019). These responsibilities cannot be left entirely to autonomous teams or machines.

4.6 Overall evaluation and defended position

I do not believe the evidence fully supports the claim. E-commerce and e-business have made some traditional structures unsuitable, especially rigid hierarchies that separate technology

from strategy, completely isolate editorial, and product work, and keep operational information restricted to senior managers. Media and digital publishing companies require faster coordination across functions, multidisciplinary expertise, experimentation, and management of complex digital-platform environments.

However, I find that the fundamental functions identified by traditional theory remain. Organisations continue to divide tasks, allocate resources, coordinate interdependent work, define roles and responsibilities, motivate staff, monitor performance, and accept accountability. Digital technologies can enhance control by using metrics and algorithms, but editorial and legal duties, together with responsibilities to serve the public interest, mean that full decentralisation is not appropriate.

I also disagree with technological determinism, which is the belief that technology alone dictates the outcomes of an organisation. Technology enables quicker communication, automated processes, and teamwork across various locations, but the outcomes depend on how it is managed, the ethical standards followed, the limitations of available resources, and the decisions made by those in charge. Similar tools can help empower one publisher while causing more work pressure for another. For me, the key issue is not what digital technology naturally does to shape structures, but rather how organisations use it to help achieve their goals and fulfil their responsibilities.

In my view, the most straightforward conclusion is that digital transformation leads to hybrid models that combine hierarchy with networks, professional authority with audience evidence, centralised control with team independence and common systems with experimental offerings. Traditional theories are not applicable as strict rules for all organisations, yet they still help explain practices in situations where their functions are relevant. I conclude that technology has made rigid traditionalism outdated, not management structures, hierarchy, or classical organisational principles.

5. Managerial implications and application to practice

5.1 Design hybrid governance rather than remove hierarchy

Based on my analysis, I suggest dividing decisions into two categories: those that require central oversight, such as editorial standards, legal risk, data governance, technology design, major investments and platform agreements, and those that can be made by individual teams, such as product testing, audience engagement, and format development. Karimi and Walter (2015) demonstrate that newspaper companies develop their digital platform capabilities by altering their resources and operational practices. Decision rights (who has authority to make particular decisions), budgets, and workflows should be organised around products and audiences rather than simply assigned to separate functional areas.

Boards and executive teams should set the level of risk they will accept and define strategic goals, while cross-functional product leaders should receive authority to make decisions on agreed operational matters. A written framework should clearly outline who handles recommending, approving, carrying out, and reviewing each type of decision. For high-risk content, commercial and product teams may provide input, but the final decision should remain with the appropriate editorial leaders.

A chief digital officer or a transformation unit can manage this model, but its organisational position, responsibilities and links with different departments should align with the overall strategy (Singh, Klarner and Hess, 2020). A senior position that lacks a budget and does not have access to editorial, technology, and commercial leaders will result in change only in name. Governance should include a cross-functional group, time-limited priorities, and clear routes for escalating unresolved issues to senior leaders. Separate units can help safeguard experimental efforts, while senior leaders can link these initiatives to existing operations (O'Reilly and Tushman, 2013).

Figure 3 shows the hybrid model supported by this evaluation.

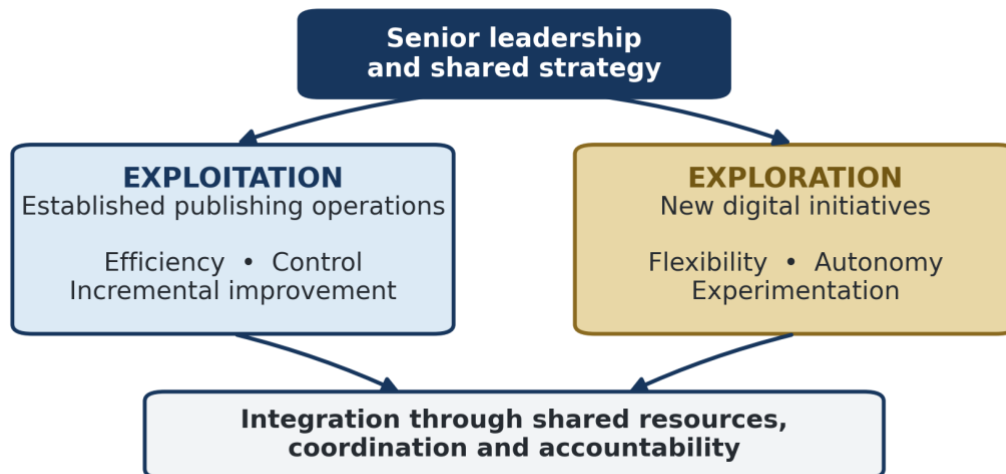


Figure 3: Ambidextrous organisational design for media and digital publishing (adapted from O'Reilly and Tushman, 2013)

5.2 Build organisational capability and employee commitment

I suggest treating digital capability as a combination of technology, data, skills, established practices, and interpersonal connections. Mikalef and Gupta (2021) indicate that AI capability depends on technology, people, and other less visible resources. Jöhnk, Weißert and Wyrski (2021) also highlight strategy, resources, knowledge, culture, and data as essential factors for AI readiness, meaning an organisation's preparedness to adopt and manage AI effectively. Managers should not assess readiness solely from purchased software. They need to evaluate the quality of data, how different systems are connected, the skills of product managers, the effectiveness of cybersecurity measures, the communication between editors and developers, and the ability of staff to critically review automated results.

Managers should outline key workflows, decide which tasks can be automated or restructured, and assess how current skills compare with future requirements. Priorities could involve improving data skills for editors, enhancing understanding of editorial practices for developers, developing product-management abilities for cross-functional leaders, and providing legal or ethical education for teams that use personalisation and generative AI. Training should be connected to actual projects and supported through coaching, peer-learning groups, and dedicated time for learning, instead of being presented as separate and isolated courses.

Digital transformation may challenge professional identity, job stability, and autonomy, particularly when performance is measured through individual productivity metrics. Weber, Büttgen and Bartsch (2022) conclude that leadership focused on change is more effective when it is also concerned with staff well-being. Managers should explain the purpose and limits of change, engage employees in designing work processes, establish and share guidelines for monitoring employee activities, and provide genuine opportunities for retraining or pathways to new job roles. Participation does not ensure agreement on all decisions, but it can help identify issues and maintain trust in editorial decisions.

5.3 Establish responsible AI and editorial governance

I suggest that organisations manage artificial intelligence as an integrated system rather than buying it as a separate tool. Managers must establish what uses of AI are permitted and prohibited, include human oversight in the process, specify where the data comes from, outline how information is shared, determine the steps to take when issues arise, and identify who is accountable for any mistakes. Raisch and Krakowski (2021) suggest that automation and human augmentation, in which AI supports rather than replaces human work, are closely connected and that relying too much on either can lead to negative outcomes. In the publishing industry, it is easier to justify the use of AI for tasks such as research, transcription, translation, recommendation, and routine work, but high-risk decisions require accountable human review.

Papagiannidis, Mikalef and Conboy (2025) describe responsible AI governance as the organisational structures, working relationships and procedures used to ensure that AI is managed accountably. Organisations should appoint a senior person to take responsibility and form a cross-functional AI review group that includes members from editorial, technology, legal, data protection, and commercial areas. Managers should set up ways for employees and the public to raise questions about decisions made by automated systems. In terms of procedures, each critical system must be properly documented, thoroughly tested prior to being put into use, and regularly reviewed throughout its operation.

Low-risk tools might require simple approval and regular checks, but systems that influence publication, recommendation, moderation, or personal data processing need more thorough testing, clear records of activity, and an escalation process. Managers should document the purpose of each system, the input data it uses, its known limitations, the person responsible for it, and the situations where human involvement is necessary. AI literacy has become an organisational need because journalists may use systems they do not fully understand (Jones,

Jones and Luger, 2022). Internal knowledge sharing is also important because public disclosure alone does not ensure accountable practice (Cools and Koliska, 2024).

5.4 Manage implementation risks and external dependence

I suggest selecting carefully planned pilot projects that are connected to specific editorial, audience, or commercial challenges. Each pilot project must have an owner, a defined scope, initial measurements, a scheduled review date, and a clear decision on whether to stop, revise, or expand the programme. Managers should also consider risks such as unclear roles, resistance to change, excessive reliance on particular vendors, privacy breaches, cyberattacks, biased automated systems and conflicts between editorial and commercial goals.

Publishers should focus on building and enhancing their direct subscription models, strengthening connections with their own audiences, developing their own applications, maintaining newsletters, and creating integrated data systems. Platforms play a significant role in shaping cultural creation, and the use of AI could increase dependence on technology companies (Nieborg and Poell, 2018; Simon, 2024). Managers should evaluate partners by price and market reach, but also by access to data, the ability to transfer data, transparency, contractual rights to leave and alignment with editorial standards.

Useful measures include subscription retention, direct audience share, time taken for product development, employee engagement levels, completion of training programmes, system reliability, rate of editorial errors, unresolved AI-related incidents, and dependence on major platforms. In my opinion, the goal is not to achieve full digitalisation, but to create a strong hybrid organisation where innovation, independence, and responsibility work together effectively in practice.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

I find the claim only partly justified. Digital technology has transformed the way organisations produce, share, and generate income from content, yet this does not imply that the need to organise and manage these processes has disappeared.

I find the strongest support for the claim in the weaknesses of rigid, slow-moving, and isolated structures. Managers now focus on fostering teamwork, analysing evidence and governing technology, rather than overseeing step-by-step tasks. Mintzberg's roles of monitor, liaison, entrepreneur, negotiator, and resource allocator are still evident through data systems, cross-disciplinary teams, and platforms. Command-and-control behaviour becomes less effective when information is widely distributed and situations change rapidly.

Media organisations continue to allocate resources, coordinate dependent tasks, establish roles and responsibilities, manage risks, motivate staff, and accept accountability. Editorial standards, copyright, privacy, finance, data governance, and public-service responsibilities all demand clear accountability. Digital systems can also enhance control by using dashboards, monitoring tools, performance indicators, and algorithms. I therefore disagree with the idea that hierarchy, bureaucracy, or classical management principles have completely lost their practical usefulness.

In my view, the clearest conclusion is that media and digital publishing organisations employ hybrid structures. They merge a central governing structure with team-based decision-making, combine editorial control with audience data insights, and balance standardised processes with opportunities for experimentation. I think the right balance depends on factors such as size, business model, regulation, professional goals, and the use of technology. Contingency and ambidexterity provide a more accurate explanation for this variation than the idea that a single new structure has completely replaced all others.

Based on this conclusion, I suggest making clear organisational choices. Managers should establish clear guidelines for decision-making, form diverse teams that include both product and audience perspectives, ensure responsibility for editorial and legal matters remains with the appropriate individuals, and allocate resources to develop data capabilities, improve products, enhance cybersecurity, and promote understanding of artificial intelligence.

I believe implementation should recognise the compromises involved rather than promise a completely smooth and trouble-free change. Faster production can harm accuracy; excessive measurement might reduce professional autonomy; personalisation could limit diversity; and decentralisation might create uncertainty about responsibility. Future studies should examine

hybrid structures in various publishing sectors, including news, books, magazines, academic journals, and specialist publications, with a particular focus on smaller organisations and the impact of generative AI. Overall, I believe that digital transformation has made strict traditionalism outdated, but it has not made structure, management, or classical principles obsolete; instead, it has made careful adaptation necessary.

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