Vision for the Future: Theoretical Perspectives on Management

(LCDB_7008)

Technology advances-specifically in the area of e-commerce and e-Business has rendered traditional models of organizational structure and theories of management roles obsolete in the light of the changing nature of 21st century corporations.

Evaluate whether this claim is justified-in relation to business sector of your choice- and provide evidence for or against it, especially in relation to the management change it implies.

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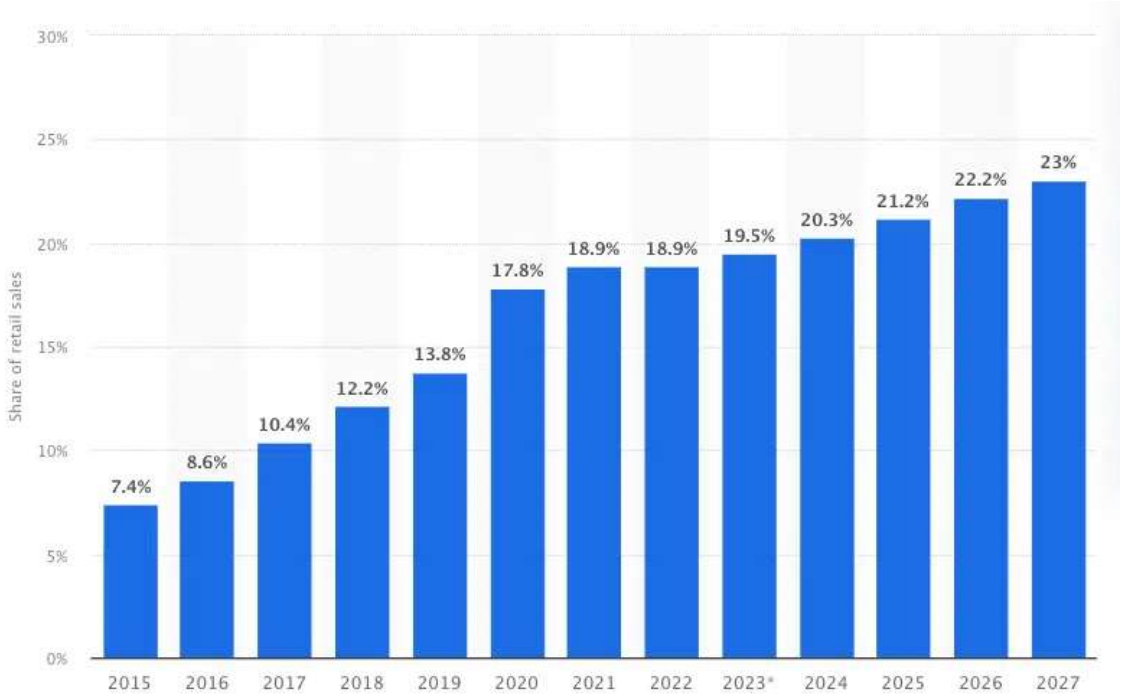
1. Introduction

1.1 Background

One of the more controversial claims of modern management science is that traditional organizational structures and theories of management are now redundant because of technological advances, especially in e-commerce and e-business. It is indicative of the notion that the 20th century Corporation has undergone a radical transformation in the 21st century and that the theory developed to explain the 20th century Corporation may be obsolete. But if traditional management theory is described as obsolete, it means that it is totally superseded. Whether this has happened is still a question that needs to be carefully thought through and not taken for granted.



https://www.invespcro.com/blog/online-retail-statistics-and-trends/

In fact, a fascinating context to look at this proposition is the US retail sector, as it has been significantly disrupted over the last two decades. According to JS (2025), global retail e-commerce sales are expected to reach US$6.4 trillion by Forrester (2024) projects that sales will grow to US$6.8 trillion by 2028, which will be about 24 per cent of global retail sales. Amazon, Alibaba, JD.com, Shopify and Zalando have created new business systems, with the logic of

their platforms, the algorithms with which they make decisions, and the relationships they build with customers based on data.

Meanwhile, traditional hierarchical structures have been maintained at Walmart, Tesco, Carrefour and Marks & Spencer, alongside the digitalization of their value chains. The report thus critically reviews if it is a replacement or adaptation of the traditional management theory. It reflects both classical and contemporary views on management from Taylor, Fayol, Weber, Mintzberg, Drucker, Hamel, Christensen, and Brynjolfsson and McAfee, as well as the latest information to emerge from the retail sector. These theories offer various views as to management, organisation, control, innovation and technological change. By comparing these perspectives, the report can determine if the traditional organisational architectures and managerial roles still explain and are useful in an e-business context (Daly & Walsh, 2010). The analysis is thus based on the question of whether traditional management principles are being supplanted or adapted by digital transformation, or whether both are being integrated with new management practice.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This research has threefold aims. It critically tests, first, the suggestion that e-Commerce and e-Business have made the old organizational structures and management theories irrelevant, using the context of global retail industry. Secondly, it discusses how the changes that people observe may or not be a real paradigm shift, but rather an evolution of existing forms, a hybridization. Third, it explains the management implications, especially pertaining to the leadership, technological literacy, data governance, algorithmic supervision and human aspect of digital transformation. The research aims to display a balanced view of digital transformation in retail business rather than simply describing it. It discuss that traditional management practiced have not completely replaced. Instead, they have been modified and combined with digital way of working. Therefore, modern retail (hybrid model) can be existing and management principle are being improved and supported by digital technologies.

1.3 Scope, Method and Structure

It is a critical literature-based study filled with illustrative examples of case evidence offered by major retailers, such as Amazon, Alibaba, Walmart, Tesco, Marks and Spencer Co-op. It is not a formal systematic review but based on the standards of this kind, it relies mainly on peer-revised journal articles published during the past five years mainly and conservative older articles. Grey

literature (established consultancy and industry associations) is applied only in cases where they have a complementary relation to scholarly evidence. The rest of the report follows in a literature review, a discussion of the transforming nature of the twenty-first century corporations, an analysis of structural change, a discussion of the managerial roles, an evaluation of the main challenges and opportunities and a final synthesis with the implications to future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Evolution of Technology in Business

Technology-organizational form relationship is not a new one. Scientific management, which it is linked with Frederick Winslow Taylor, was in its turn, a reaction to the industrial technology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, especially to the assembly line and the mechanized factory (Taylor, 1911). The bureaucracy theory by Weber (1947) also echoed the needs of the large-scale industrial and administrative systems to be predictable, calculable and rule-based in their coordination. Toms and Wilson (2014) recorded the development of the multidivisional structure in the middle part of the twentieth century based on size and scale provided by mass production, transport infrastructure and communications. In each case the technological substrate was not just determining structure but it significantly determined the set of possible and efficient forms.

A similar line of idea has been taken with the digital revolution: new technologies open up new possibility of coordination and thus new forms of organizations. The point that makes digital innovation to be distinctive in the present-day, as Dong and Mcintyre (2014) put it, is that digital innovation is not only becoming more and more combinatorial, a positive development in computing, sensors, data storage, networking, and machine learning reinforces the other, creating rapid, non-linear change. In his popularly referenced review of 282 studies, Vial (2019) points out that digital transformation cannot be taken as the implementation of a particular technology but as the process, where constellations of digital technologies cause radical transformation to the properties of an entity by developing novel value-generating pathways. Verhoef and Broekhuizen (2021) differentiate between three stages of digitization, and digital transformation, and the latter is the only one where the underlying basis of business model and organization is changed fundamentally.

These dynamics have in the retail sector been experienced through the emergence of e-commerce platforms, mobile commerce, personalization by algorithms, automated warehousing, and most recently through generative artificial intelligence applications, in customer service, merchandising and creative production. Sascha Kraus (2021)insist that this is specifically the reason why retail and consumer industries have been so visible in the literature of digital transformation: the transformations have always been so visible and significant.

2.2 The Rise of e-Commerce

The buying and selling of goods and services via electronic networks, narrowly defined as e-commerce has become a major channel in numerous categories of retailing that existed out as a marginal activity in the mid-1990s. Andonov, Dimitrov and Totev (2021) demonstrate that a broad selection of retail sub-sectors have a positive correlation with the adoption of e-commerce with firm performance, whereas Barnes and Hinton (2002) predicted more than 20 years ago that e-commerce would transform a business internally and externally, which is largely realized.

However, the retail industry has gotten the ups and downs of ecommerce. While most Western markets achieved over 50% online penetration in categories like books, electronics and fashion, grocery continues to struggle to achieve that level penetration even a decade after massive investment, and by mid-2020s was under 15%. This variation is significant, as it implies that the pressures for organisational change is not uniform across categories, thus caution should be used when asserting the 'death' of the traditional models generally without qualification, due to the specific characteristics of each sub-sector. While some companies across many different sectors are implementing highly complex digital tools to match their in-store counterparts, a multinational grocery giant still needs set of organizational skills that are distinctly different from a pure-play online apparel retailer (Cheng, 2021).

2.3 Emerging Business

E-business is a broader concept than e-commerce. Define to e-commerce, which is mainly concerned with transactions, e-business, as first coined in the late 1990s by IBM, entails applying digital technologies to all facets of an organization’s activities, such as supply chain management, customer relationship management, human resource management and knowledge management. Gunasekaran (2002) suggested that e-business would eventually have more

organizational implications than e-commerce since it penetrates the internal fabric of the firm as opposed to being limited by the customer interface.

The difference is noteworthy in retail. A conventional retailer which incorporates an online front store without much change in its buying or merchandising and store business has transformed e-commerce and not e-business. An open-system like Amazon, in contrast, has designed its whole operating model on digital primitives, both its service-based internal software architecture and its small-team organizational structure (AWS, 2024).

Electronic business is more than online selling (ecommerce). Digital technology is applied across the entire business from supply chains, customer service, to HR and more. It can have much greater impacts on organization and management as it affects the way the firm operates within rather than faces the customer. A traditional retailer with a website is nothing like being e-business retailer like Amazon.

2.4 Organizational Structure

The entirety of the modes in which an organization separates labor into specific tasks, and then attains coordination of activities, is organizational structure, according to (Meriem, 2025). Mintzberg (1979) has developed five simple coordinating mechanisms (mutual adjustment, direct supervision, standardization of work processes, standardization of outputs and standardization of skills) and five simple structures (the simple structure to adhocracy) in all. More conventional types of retail organizations have traditionally been structured as machine bureaucracies, which make use of heavy work process standardization and which were characterized by tall hierarchies, centralized purchasing, functional departmentalization, and geographical divisions.

There are three classic forms of structure that are of special interest. The first is the functional structure where employees are organized based on specialism like buying, merchandising, store operations, marketing and finance, this helps to facilitate depth of the expertise but also results in silos. The second is the divisional structure where the company is structured according to the product line, geography or customer segment whereby each division has a large degree of autonomy. The third one is the matrix: where employees report to functional and divisional or project manager, it is theorized to merge the advantages between the two (Galbraith, 1973). Both of them also have their critics, and the needs of e-business have challenged them, in various

ways. Daft (1992) has synthesized its continued development in the sense that each of them has since then grown due to environmental pressures and not totally abandoned.

2.5 Theories of Management Roles

Classical management roles theories are based on some of the works of Bacud (2020) and Taylor (1911). Fayol (1949) proposed five functions of management, namely, planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating and controlling, which have formed the basis of the majority of the management textbooks. The scientific management of Taylor underlined the distinction between conception and execution with managers to plan and workers to execute. These theories evolved under fairly stable industrial settings and presupposed that the managers possessed, or could acquire, enough information to plan and manage the work of the subordinates.

It was a radically different account by Mintzberg (1973), Mintzberg (2009) who based his account on empirical observation of what managers actually do. He distinguished between ten roles that fell into three categories: interpersonal (figurehead, leader, and liaison), informational (monitor, disseminator, spokesperson) and decisional (entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator). The work by Mintzberg disputed the neat Fayolian model because it demonstrated that managerial work is irregular, responsive and very dependent on verbal and informal communication. His version has been resilient and, more to the point here is not so plainly reduced by the digital technology. Perhaps, sit-down digital tools have intensified the informational and liaison roles that he had identified.

The contingency theory Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) and systems thinking further made the issue more complicated stating that choice of managerial approach is subject to environmental conditions. The concept of contingency thought is especially important today, in the digital age, because it is open-minded to the idea that each management model can be optimal. This echoes the more recent discussion of Muller (2024) that digital leadership competencies as such must be perceived contingently, as the competencies in the portfolio must vary depending on the digital context.

2.6 Implications for Traditional Models

There are two opposing views on digital transformation presented in the literature. The first suggests that the traditional focus on hierarchy, control and standardization is becoming less and

less relevant for networked and knowledge-based organizations where more autonomy, purpose and self-management are required. From this point of view, the traditional management must undergo significant changes. The second, more moderate, view, linked with Mintzberg (2009) and Drucker (1993), maintains that the fundamental issues surrounding the coordination, motivation, allocation of resources, accountability and strategic direction of management continue to exist, but that how these issues are addressed has evolved. The second position is more likely to be convincing in the context of the evidence from contemporary retail. The digital organizations have brought in flexibility, data-driven decision making, and team autonomy, but still need hierarchy, accountability, and coordination to operate on a large scale. Some of the giants such as Amazon and Alibaba, however, have introduced relatively autonomous teams and formal organizational authority, but larger retailers like Walmart and Tesco have brought digital practices into the fold without dispensing of the old ways of organizing.

The algorithmic management also gives rise to certain aspects of ‘Taylorist control’ in the form of digital monitoring and the measurement of performance: sometimes, algorithmic control can complement and not contradict traditional managerial control. Digitalization is thus granting more autonomy and establishing new surveillance mechanisms.

Total obsolescence is, therefore, not the only alternative suggested by the literature, but is opposed by adaptation and hybridization in equal measure. Traditional methods remain "explanatory" but need to be adapted to meet the need for digital technologies, evolving work expectations, multi-functional work setups and algorithmic decision-making. It doesn't mean traditional models of management are out of fashion; rather it's that organizations are increasingly putting modern management of flexibility, digital coordination and employee autonomy into practice in tandem with traditional management of control and accountability.

3. The Changing Nature of Twenty-First Century Corporations

3.1 Increased Connectivity and Globalization

The retail industry has become quite different from what it was in the 90's and connectivity has played a significant role in this. Third party logistics services, payment technology and digital marketplace enable small businesses to reach customers from across the country via Shopify and

Amazon Marketplace in the 21st century. The global retail e-commerce market continues to grow, and cross-border e-commerce sector has grown quickly (Statista, 2025; Forrester, 2024). The developments have made competition more fierce as organizations can reach customers and resources from outside national borders without having to establish a physical presence in all markets.

Digital technologies have thus brought about greater connectivity and globalization. The use of cloud technologies, digital platforms and real-time communication enables organizations to share information in real time and coordinate activities across geographical distance. Companies are able to keep track of their businesses and connect with customers without depending solely on physical locations. While the world is becoming more digital, it also poses issues with cultural differences, cyber security, data protection and reliance on digital infrastructure. This connectivity is both a chance and a management challenge.

Hierarchy does not have to be given up when operating globally. Multiple countries are served by Amazon, Alibaba and JD.com, but there are clearly identifiable levels of management and organizational authority. This goes against the idea that digital businesses need to be fully-flattened. They need to be able to use digital connection and good cross-country, time zone and culture coordination for success. While digital technologies enhance speed and access to information, management is also required to interpret information, allocate resources and to set strategic priorities. The traditional vs. modern divide is thus reversed in the case of Amazon and Alibaba. They operate models that are different from those of the twentieth century: their models are based on platforms and place a heavy emphasis on data and digital ecosystems, as well as coordinating through technology. These organizations have, however, not done away with management hierarchy. Digital transformation does not mean that hierarchy has to be eliminated; it is how it works that is shifting. The ideas of coordination and control that have always been relevant are now applicable via a more rapid flow of information and more decentralized units in the context of digital technologies. This is also relevant for comparing retailer Jolly with retailer Walmart and Tesco, which are digital-brick retailers. Digital-native organizations may have been able to design their operating models around digital technologies earlier; for established organizations, digital has been brought in from the outside and needs to be embedded in the physical, assets and culture. But seasoned retailers have valuable assets like their physical

branches, supplier relationships, logistics systems and brand recognition. Accordingly, it is not a given that any particular organization structure is a recipe for digital success. The effectiveness of an organization is reliant on the integration of technology with current capability.

3.2 The Shift towards Digital Transformation

Digital transformation in the retail sector isn't confined to the e-commerce channel. In an increasingly digital retail landscape, the time for retailers to rethink technology across the entire operating model—merchandising and pricing, fulfillment, workforce management, customer service has arrived, says McKinsey & Company (2022). Academic studies also indicate that Omni channel management is becoming an increasingly crucial aspect of retail transformation (Cai & Lo, 2020).

Digital transformation thus impacts both customer buying processes and internal coordination within the organization. An example is Walmart. The organization has integrated its online and physical retail platforms to leverage its existing assets for online activities. Organizations don't have to abandon their current model to achieve a successful digital transformation. Walmart has brought together their brick and mortar skills and the digital technology. With its physical stores, supply-chain expertise and management systems, it continues to be a strategic asset, and its digital capabilities enhance customer access and operational efficiency. It forms an important difference between digital transformation and organizational replacement. While Walmart leverages digital technologies in a large organization, Amazon built many of its operating fundamentals around digital technologies. Either method can work. One of the reasons for Amazon's success is the ability to bring together technology, data, logistics and customer information into a single unified operating model.

Walmart shows the power of traditional and new digital tools. The comparison questions the notion that traditional management structures can be obstacles to digital transformation. But, it is not possible to insert technology without changing the way things are done in traditional organizations. Managers need to decide on the technologies to invest in, rework systems around customer journeys, keep existing skills and knowledge up to date and manage times when both old and new systems need to work. When giving guidance is lacking, digital programmers can

remain fragmented and not generate sustainable competitive advantages (Kinderis, 2020). Organizational capability thus plays a key role, and digital transformation is most effective when technological innovation is coupled with it. The possibilities of technology can be realized into organizational performance through management. Digital transformation is a big paradigm shift in management practice but does not eliminate the need for planning, organizing, coordinating and controlling.

3.3 The Importance of Adaptability and Agility

The field of organizational agility has evolved a broad body of knowledge. The dynamic nature of the market and the evolving customer and tech needs means that agility and adaptability is essential as businesses that do not move fast enough could miss market and new opportunities altogether. Based on surveys of over two thousand employees around the world, (Mckinsey & Company, 2018) outlines five typical characteristics of agility firms that include a north star that is represented throughout the organization, a system of empowered teams, a fast cycle of decision and learning, an agile people model that sparks passion, and enabling technology of the next generation. In turbulent times, the popularity of strategic agility has emerged as a strategy for competitively surviving.

The ability to move fast in response to the pandemic saw firms are gaining large market share, while slower business struggled to compete. If not properly guided and monitored, quick iteration and empowered teams can lead to inconsistency, duplication and coordination issues. The ones that work best as retailers, that have a balance of flexibility in their customer-facing disciplines and control in disciplines like finance, safety and regulatory compliance, seem to be doing this best. It is similar to Mintzberg's (1979) hybrid approach, which is a flexible and innovative form of business organization that merges flexibility with the management control. To conclude, adaptability and agile assist to foster flexibility in structure and decision making that boosts effective management practice to mitigate uncertainty, secure sustainable growth and sustain long-term competitive success.

4. Reconfiguring, Not Abolishing, Traditional Organizational Structures

There is a strong argument that conventional forms of organizations have been rendered obsolete. The evidence of Retail Corporation dictates a different formulation: the traditional

structure has been realigned, crossed-over and, in a few instances, overlaid with other structures instead of being replaced. This reconfiguration takes three dimensions, which are reflected in the following sub-sections.

4.1 Hierarchical Structures versus Flat Organizations

There is truth in the idea that the hierarchy is lost to digital retailers as the flat organization has taken its place but this is mostly a myth. The example of Amazon, the prototypical digital retailer, which is represented by a formal structure with specific levels starting with the positions of its entry, up to the levels of senior vice presidents and the chief executive. Alibaba also has a multi-layered structure that has a powerful central holding company that manages different business units. The hierarchy of the company designed to support the smooth flow of information that does not means they do not have hierarchy.

The two-pizza team rule that Jeff Bezos is credited with, states that no team should be too large to be nourished on two pizzas, which are five or eight, in most cases. The teams have end-to-end responsibility and accountability over a particular product or service and have distinct interfaces with other teams. AWS (2024) reports how teams based on two-pizza evolved into so-called single-threaded leadership, where a single leader is entirely accountable in one area of the product, which adds to the argument of innovation at Amazon being organisational, as well as post-hierarchical. It is not a design of the dissolution of the large organisation, but a design of small, independent units of the large organisation. It is closely related to Mintzberg (1979) professional bureaucracy as well as the modular designs by (Raghu Garud, 1995).

Nowadays, many organizations combined with flatter organizational structure which offers fewer management levels and gives employees greater responsibility and decision making authority. These structures encourage open communication, collaboration, innovation and faster response to hierarchy. These approaches are becoming common in new retailers because they support agility and quick decisions - making. However, they also adopted hybrid model approach, redesigned hierarchy concept with flatter organizational model, which means hierarchy are still exit with new flatter concept to create innovation and grab fast paced technological change.

Offline retailers like Walmart and Tesco still work with more traditional hierarchies, in part due to the coordination demands required by the physical retail estate that trade-off standardization.

A grocery chain consisting of several thousand stores requires a significant number of regional and district managers in order to execute all of them in a similar manner. The difference is that these managers are now aided by real-time data dashboards, algorithm-based scheduling systems and by mobile communications, which transform the nature of their work but not the job.

The claim of Obsolescence with reference to the hierarchy is then partially supported. Hierarchy is still there but it is being re-modeled but now around smaller units, quicker feedback loops and even richer information streams. The functions of planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating and controlling highlighted by Fayol (1949), are still apparent in retail organizations but the tools with the help of which they are implemented have evolved significantly.

4.2 Matrix Organizations and Cross-Functional Teams

In theory, matrix organizations were first developed by Galbraith (1973), and have taken on new meaning in digital retail. The traditional type with all workers reporting to each of a functional manager and a project or product manager. It has been criticized as resulting in conflict, uncertainty and delays in decision. Digital retailers have adapted the matrix model to generate a higher impact on the product/customer-journey and ensure that the tools they leverage with are digital do faster and clearer decision-making.

In this digital era, matrix and cross functional teams can leverage in address the dynamics of customer wants by responding rapid change in purchasing tendency and market scenarios. Various departments like IT, marketing, finance, operation brings together and makes faster decision, improve communication, and solve problems more effectively. This approach also encourages coordination, allowing them to remain flexible, competitive and rapid respond to grab the upcoming opportunities. Technological advancement can provides the more support to this concept because of innovation in communication, networking, coordination functions. Decision making can be effectively done due to collaboration among different new ideas from multiple teams' members.

Cross-functional teaming of technologists, merchandisers, marketers and operations specialists has become the norm in retail. These teams typically have a customer journey (e.g. search, checkout/returns), and they have authority to make decisions within a given range. For example, Amazon's two pizza teams and WalMart's e-commerce–store teams show the real-world

implications: technology can be used by small teams that can act fast on customer data while leveraging deep functional expertise. According to Giacosa, Mazzoleni and Usai (2018), horizontal coordination is possible to a certain extent due to the use of business process management strategies with the support of digital platforms. The study by Kraus et al. (2022) has revealed that especially the companies who succeed in the combination of cross-functional working and functional depth have a better performance than companies looking for pure functional or pure cross-functional working (Mahadik *et al.*, 2024).

4.3 Decentralization and Empowerment

Decentralization is a common theme in the history of management theory, starting with the 1920s reorganization of General Motors by Sloan. Getting new in the digital age is the level to which non-centralized information can be permitted without losing control through the use of real-time data. A store manager with a tablet displaying real-time sales, inventory, and labour information can make decisions previously needing headquarters approval, whilst the headquarters still get real-time feedback. This is a kin to what Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) call one of the paradoxes in the second machine age: both decentralization and centralization are possible to be done at the same time.

These are important practices because they accelerate decision making, enhance local responsiveness and engagement with skilled employees, and allow for real-time access to information to avoid loss of overall control. Decentralization delegates the decision making power to the lower levels of the organization rather than keeping all power in central. Empowerment enables employees to take responsibility, authority and facilitates resources. Success of the retail organization depends on the balance of autonomy with clear leadership and strategic control. It can provide the self-realization to take responsibility and feeling of encouragement and motivation to accomplish the assigned tasks.

Laloux (2014) presents a more radical vision, in which self-managed organizations get rid of the hierarchy of management altogether such as Buurtzorg in the Netherlands and Morning Star in the United States (Nixon, 2015). Amazon encourages employees at all levels to think independently to think independently, share their opinion, criticize the ideas when necessary and assist to take rational decision (Amazon Jobs, 2024). This is more a kin to Drucker (1993) vision of the knowledge worker than separation of thinking, where employee use their skills and

judgment to make decisions, rather than Taylor's traditional management approach, where manager made decision and workers simply followed instructions. This shows that significant transformation of the modern management philosophy.

5. Redefining Management Roles

5.1 Transformational Leadership in a Digital Era

Transformational leadership, initially theorized by Burns (1978) and since developed by Bass (1985) highlights the leader who effectively describes an inspirational vision, infuses commitment, offers intellectual stimulation and offers individualized attention to followers. The move to digital in retail has also put a premium on these traits as the changes involved can often be drastic, unpredictable and threatening to previous norms.

In a content analysis of leadership traits in the digital transformation era, Klein (2020) finds that various recurring traits exist, starting with digital vision and technological mastery, all the way to empathy, adaptability and comfort with ambiguity. Sune Dueholm Müller (2024) builds on this and proposes a contingency digital transformation leadership competency framework, where four archetypical competency portfolios (the Challenger, the Bricoleur, the organizer, and the Competitor) are proposed to apply to the different digital contexts. However, the two studies clearly point out that digital leadership is not a "retail" version of a transformational leadership, but is rather a support of the same leadership principle.

Leaders are good at inspiring followers, establishing a vision for the future, demonstrating by example and possess a learning attitude, which stresses an understanding of how to use digital technologies in order to set milestones for the organization's goals and successfully manage change.

Gilli (2024) states that digital knowledge and skills are essential for transformational leadership, while the traditional leadership traits such as integrity, humility and face-to-face relationships, and are most salient traits that influence the leadership behavior. Combining the results of their research based on the interviews with senior leaders, they propose that digital leaders need to integrate both technological literacy with good human skills and never substitute them.

In this digital business era, a leader demonstrates the vital role to shaping organization through rational guidance. They provide leadership and clarity on an effective vision for digital use, opportunities from the fog of uncertainty, champion and reinforce healthy cultural norms and values, and foster innovation. This wills simultaneously encouraging transformation, human relationship and adapting the change.

Leaders also have to ensure the technological support to the employee's decision by including all peoples shared ideas and prospective. Staffs may fully inspire, motivated and support each other to achieve common goal in front of transformational leadership. It promotes brainstorming of ideas, learning by doing and positive change instead of always providing direction. It is used in retail, for instance.

At Walmart, Doug McMillon has spearheaded the organization's big digital transformation without sacrificing the values and culture. Ken Murphy, head of Tesco, has also managed to combine an investment in being digital and a revival of retail abilities. Similarly, at Amazon, Andy Jassy has held the culture of "Day 1" that ensures the customer-driven focus at all times when continuing the innovation in the digital world. This case serves as an example of successful leaders who are able to strike a balance between digital transformation and their current values and sustainable goal.

5.2 Embracing Technological Literacy

Retail managers have been subject to technological literacy as a minimum requirement. This does not imply that all managers are required to write code but it implies that all managers must know something about the way underlying technologies work to make competent decisions in relation to their implementation. This considers the appreciation of the potential and constraints of artificial intelligence, awareness of data governance and analytics, background of working in cloud computing and its cost implications, and cyber security risk awareness.

The use of artificial intelligence in this instance is transforming the work of managers in the retail sector. The authors of McKinsey and Company (2024) project that generative AI alone can unlock between 240 and 390 billion in economic value to the global retail industry, especially through productivity, personalization and content, creation. The systematic reviews, including the one by Chowdhury, Bandapati and Chilakapati (2025), prove that generative AI is not only

deployed in the areas of merchandising, providing customer support and marketing already, but it also already starts redefining the scope of human vs. machine labor. This does not eradicate the manager but alters the role of the manager to be more of a coach rather than supervising but performing exception management and strategic thinking.

The analytics of data has also revolutionized decision-making. The use of predictive analytics by retailers like Amazon and Alibaba is widespread to predict demand, optimize prices and customize the customer experience. The managers of such firms should have an unhesitating grasp of how to interpret data, but not how to produce it. Here it is a development of the monitor role by Mintzberg (1973) and not its substitution.

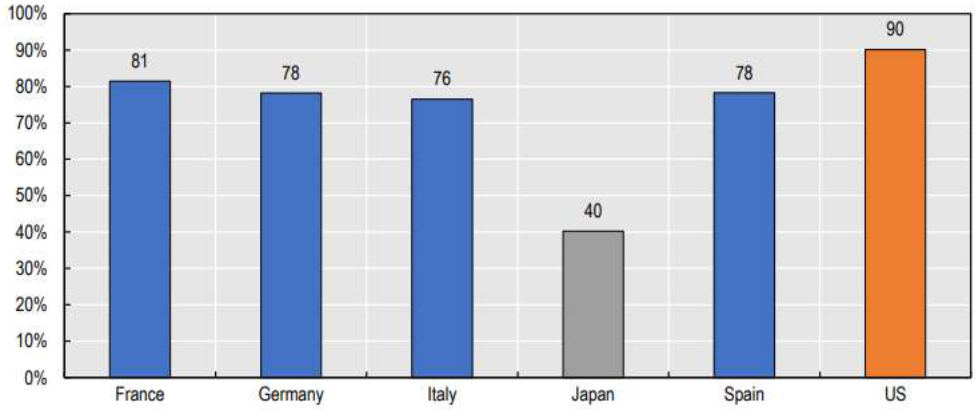
There must be a word of warning. Critical judgment is essential in technological literacy; without it, relying on the results of algorithms is likely to cause excessive reliance on computers and failure to consider factors are hard to measure. The retail managers who seem to find the right balance between technological literacy and Grant (2013) explains as the strategic ability to look beyond the data are the best. Vial (2019) also says that any digital leadership competency frameworks should be equipped with ethical judgments including bias sensitivity and fairness in case they continue to be fit to purpose.

5.3 The Rise of Algorithmic Management

One of the unique features of the given era is the emergence of algorithmic management, which is the allocation of tasks with the help of software and information, performance monitoring and evaluation of workers with minimum human involvement. The new findings of organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) employer survey suggest that algorithmic management is now common not just in platform work, but also in traditional workplaces, such as warehouse work in retail, logistics and store work (Milanez, 2025). The researcher Nilsson (2025) records the health impact of the occupational practices in logistic contexts, which results in intensive algorithmic surveillance being linked to increased stress and less autonomy. Schmid (2026) asserts that traditional organizations are becoming more hybridized with algorithmic and human managerial roles, and has critical implications on accountability and worker voice.

Figure 1. Prevalence of algorithmic management varies substantially across countries

Percentage of managers whose firms provide at least some form of algorithmic management software



https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/02/algorithmic-management-in-the-workplace_3c84ed6d/287c13c4-en.pdf

The retailing is the leading one in these developments. The use of algorithmic productivity monitoring has been the subject of long-lasting academic and regulatory screening of Amazon warehouses. Algorithms Scheduling Systems in major supermarket chains follow a forecast-based algorithmic scheduling approach, assigning shifts to demand forecasts. The use of the algorithmic dispatch and rating systems is applied to delivery workers regularly, both with retail platforms incorporated. Whether these systems will continue to spread out or not is not the critical question but will they be on what conditions and with what safeguards.

The division of conception and execution presented by Taylor is being reinvented in a new digital version, potentially rolling decades of progress in knowledge work and empowerment. It is a truly new and, in some way, disturbing trend.

6. Challenges and Opportunities

The online revolution of retail poses both challenges and opportunities. Four warranted considered analysis: resistance to change, data security and privacy, competitive advantage based on the use of technology and human and sustainability considerations.

6.1 Overcoming Resistance to Change

One of the best-researched areas of organizational behavior is resistance to change, and this continues to be the focus of retail digital transformation. In an integrative review of sixty-three empirical studies of employee resistance to digital transformation, Cieslak and Valor (2025) reveal that the greatest degree of resistance is related to perceived threats to resources, mainly to job security, skills, autonomy and status. They come up with a three-step framework of threat perception to emotional response to behavioral expression and they provide a more advanced view, as compared to previous literature, which perceived resistance substantially as irrational hindrance.

Scholkmann (2020) provides a complementary theoretical explanation, identifying individual, systemic and learning-related sources of resistance to digital change. Her framework is practical since it attracts focus on resistance as a valid indicator of issues in implementation and not a mad obstacle that needs to be resolved. The innovator dilemma by Christensen (1997) is an additional dimension. Existing retailers are not always opposed to change because they do not understand digital technology; rather, they are prone to it because their current model of business and the capabilities it offers create damaging financial challenges that require them to focus on improvement (not discontinuous) and growth. This is a logical reaction to the immediate demands but this reaction is frequently counter-productive in the long run. A case in point would be Sears in the United States, Debenhams in the United Kingdom and Karstadt in Germany, which demonstrate the destiny of those incumbents who were not able to respond promptly.

Best practices in managing the resistance in retail seem to be a best combination of multiple factors: the coherence of communication about the business need, the authentic involvement of employees in the implementation process, a significant amount of investment in reskilling, and the tangible dedication of the executives.

One example of a systematic approach to the reskilling challenge at Walmart is the investment made in its "Live Better U" program where associates receive subsidized education (Furxhi, 2021). The question of whether these efforts are adequate on the scale needed is still under discussion, especially with the accelerated rate of change brought about by generative AI.

Small companies that have successfully establish change in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI) by treating AI as a tool to achieve business goals rather than as a separate project. The executive must provide clear direction on what AI is going to be used for, allow space for employees to experiment with new tools and make it clear to workers what they can and can't do. It is important to communicate with people honestly and early why it is needed for change to happen, get staff involved in designing new ways of working, carefully teach new training so people become confident and are able to adapt as leaders. Monitoring for any positive impact and/or safeguarding and maintaining of the key jobs also lowers fear.

6.2 Ensuring Data Security and Privacy

The privacy and security of data have become a matter of life and death to online retailers. According to the Cost of a Data Breach Report 2024 by IBM, the average cost of a data breach in the globe was at US 4.88 million, the highest price in all time, a ten-per-cent increase relative to 2023, and the biggest annual increase since the pandemic (IBM, 2024). Subsequent 2025 report registered a nine per cent drop to US4.44 million, the first drop in five years, as more quickly identified and contained thanks to the use of AI-powered security devices (IBM, 2026). Retail is found again and again as exceptionally vulnerable, with the amount of personal and payment data that it has to handle and the complexity of its supply chain.

Significant losses and damage to reputation have been caused by major retail breaches, such as those of Marks and Spencer and Co-op in United Kingdom in the year 2025 all because of ransom ware. After that Co-op estimated the attack had cost the company some £206 million in sales and some 80 million in profit during the first half of 2025 (BBC, 2025). In addition to direct expenses, the breaches destroy the trust that the digital retail relies on. Customers who lack trust in retailers and who do not trust them with their data will be reluctant to submit it and this will weaken the personalization strategies of most of the digital retailers, which have considered it as the core of their competitive advantage.

Knorr and Röhrig (2002) were writing at the start of the e-business era and thus they showed a lot of the security requirements, which would emerge to be characteristic of digital business. Their focus on integrity, confidentiality, availability, authentication and verifiability is still pertinent. The only thing that has evolved is the magnitude of the problem, and the level of

threats. The emergence of ransom ware, supply chain attacks and more powerful government-connected threat agents have raised the crypto currency security of retailers to a higher level.

With the advent of the AI age, data security and privacy are now central issues in an organisation instead of being treated as minor technical or budget issues. Consumers' and the operation's information is valuable and at the same time a potential risk to the retailer. It necessitates high level accountability, quality governance, ongoing investment in security and implimentation of compliance (GDPR, CCPA etc.).

6.3 Leveraging Technology for Competitive Advantage

Competitive strategy literature with (Porter, 1985), Porter (1998) believes that cost leadership, differentiation or focus can help firms to gain competitive advantages. All the three have been influenced by digital technology. Automation and scale economics in cloud computing and algorithmic optimization of operations is redefining cost leadership. Several areas through which differentiation is being sought include the personalization, service innovation and platform effects. The digital channel has enabled focus strategies to be made viable with the ability to reach niche customers all over the world.

Alibaba and Amazon are examples of opposite ways. Amazon has been engaged in a vertical integration and infrastructure ownership strategy, which has particularly made massive investments in the fulfillment centers, delivery networks and even cloud computing capacity. Alibaba has focused on platform strategy, matching buyers and sellers without having any inventory itself and making its money mainly through advertising and platform. Both the approaches have been commercially successful but they yield very divergent organizational forms and management issues.

In the case of the traditional retailer, the strategic question is a bit more complicated. Their usual competitors are digital natives who have poorer technology, and other conservative retailers, who have more physical resources. Walmart has also embarked on an Omni channel approach where it leverages its stores as e-commerce fulfillment factors; this approach has achieved much success and would not have been the same with Amazon. Tesco has also utilized the network of stores to create a competitive online grocery business. This is just such an example of how

Christensen (1997) would define incumbencies to respond to disruption and find complementary assets.

To summarize, AI, e-commerce and big-data analysis, and generally digitalization can provide clear competition benefits: cost reduction by means of automation and optimizations, customization and service improvement as competitive differentiator and viable selection of focus strategies by virtue of targeting the right customers. The point is that in itself technology is not a source of sustainable competitive advantage. Both Snowdon (2011) and Grant (2013) note that technology is likely to spread among the firms, and that an enduring advantage can be achieved only with the help of combining technology with other resources and capabilities.

Retailers that have benefited most in the digital transformation are those that are integrate technology and strong brands, good logistics, rich customer relationships and disciplined execution of business. This is a recognizable strategic-management concept, and an area where the classical ideas still play a major role.

6.4 Sustainability, Ethics and the Human Dimension

One aspect of the practitioner literature on digital retail that is often ignored over is the sustainability, ethics and human impact of the change claimed. There is a large environmental impact of digital retail, especially with the rise of same-day and next-day deliveries, especially when it comes to the amount of packaging consumed, the number of deliveries made, use of databases and data centers, and energy use associated with AI. But retailers who don't are facing greater risk of regulatory and reputational fall-out, and especially in the E.U. The Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive is tightening disclosure requirements.

The ethical implications of algorithmic decision-making, as described in section 5.3, go beyond the issue of worker welfare to those of personalized pricing and the use of dark patterns and manipulative features in personalization with consumers. Ethical issues should be embedded in every research program on digital transformation as noted by Vial (2019), especially in the retail sector, where there is a significant difference in information between platform and customer today and all of this difference is increasing at the speed of light.

Additionally, the human aspect involves how humans react and adjust to the impacts of digital transformation. The Cieslak and Veronika (2024) model of threat and emotional response has

been clear that transformation is not solely a technical or structural transformation. It is a process that is also emotional and about identity. People face the scenario that skills they have built in many years may be discounted. To manage digital transformation successfully, therefore, one has to pay attention to systems and structures while also managing meaning, purpose and dignity at work. In this area, classical humanistic approaches to management thought still hold some influence.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Summary of Findings

The digital technology has revolutionized retail in ways few fields can match. E-commerce is increasingly taking the retail sales volume with a figure of about US$6.4 trillion in the year 2025 with the figures projected to rise further with 6.8 trillion by the year 2028 (Statista, 2025; Forrester, 2024). E-business operating has changed the way of business operation in many large retailers and organizations. Amazon and Alibaba have established new methods of organizing that were difficult to imaginable three decades ago. They are reorganized old hierarchies in terms of smaller and empowered teams. Data, algorithms and feedback have created cross-functional structures. That improves decision making. As a result, managers are no longer responsible only for supervising decisions-making. Today's digital retailers are not just hierarchical, top-down businesses. Rather, they are becoming built on constant flow of data, machine learning (algorithms), and quick cycles of learning (feedback loops). These three elements take work out of the box of traditional departments and transform the nature of the manager's work.

However the architecture of the running of retail organizations is still a distinctly traditional one in significant aspects. There is still hierarchy, there is still an emphasis on functional depth, and the classical functions of managerial control of planning, organizing, coordinating and controlling can still be seen in all of the big retailers. The ten managerial roles that were examined by Mintzberg can still be identified although their weighting and tooling is changed. As a theory, transformational leadership was theorized in the 1970s and 1980s, but continues to dominate the model of effective leadership in the digital age instead of a digital-era concept replacing it (Gilli, Lettner and Güttel, 2024; Müller et al., 2024). The competitive strategy

frameworks provided by Porter still light on the decisions that retailers have to make, despite certain sources of advantage changing.

The better conceptualization is then a layering, hybridization and restructuring. The traditional models have not been made obsolete; they have been extended, adapted and redesigned to work with digital technology. Companies that totally ignoring core principle of management and replace them with digital concept may create big issues in the organization. Even though company treated digitalization as simply tools of online to existing business model might create big challenges to compete with digitally advanced stakeholders. Thus, balancing of management practices with digital innovation is the key to success.

A few significant thinkers have arrived at conclusions, which are more or less alike. Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) point to the integrative and ever-changing essence of digital change. According to Mintzberg (2009), the fundamentals of managerial work do not change with the change in the context of managerial work. Drucker (1993) envisaged rise of the knowledge worker and the management having to change its control to support. Hamel (2007) provides radical criticism of traditional management but argues that management should not be completely removed, recommending the reinvent, and improve management practices to make them more agile and innovative. Vial (2019), Verhoff et al. (2021) and Kraus et al. (2021, 2022), each define digital transformation as a multidimensional and extended transformation, instead of a break.

As far as retail in particular, there is evidence of a hybrid meaning. New organizational form Amazon and Alibaba still have high levels of hierarchy and functional specialization in addition to their effective team design innovations. The traditional incumbents, Walmart and Tesco, have implemented both traditional and digital forms of practices as well as cross-functional teams that integrate into their organizational framework. The outcome in both instances is a merged organizational form that relies on both old and new sources.

Simultaneously, a critical attitude should also take into consideration the fact that not everything that comes with the digital transformation is safe. The emergence of algorithmic management in general opens up the prospect of a partial reversion to Taylorism variations of control, with digital garb (Milanez, 2025; Nilsson, 2025; Schmid, 2026). Breach of data is common and expensive, with the examples of the M&S and Co-op attacks of 2025 being the perfect instances

(IBM, 2024, 2025; BBC, 2025). Digital retail presents its environmental and social those are big and partially mitigated. An informed acceptance of the obsolescence thesis, however, requires careful attention and a degree of criticality, but also a certain degree of confidence, not easily gained, in the thesis itself.

7.2 Implications for Future Research

There are a number of avenues of future research. To begin with, there is a need to conduct empirical research on how classical and contemporary management practices have been integrated in successful digital retailers to combine it. The current trend among the literature is to treat them as choices but the evidence shows that they tend to be combined more frequently. Case studies of companies that have successfully learned to navigate digital transformation would be particularly valuable, especially when studies over long period of time to understand how they changed, adapted, and developed.

Second, greater attention should be paid to the human aspects of retailing digital change, especially as to retraining the management, as well as front-line personnel. The challenges of developing new skills are very large, and there is still limited evidence about which approaches are most effective. There is some compares across different industries and countries that would help to examine the managing employee's reskilling and supporting successful digital change.

Third, algorithmic management as related to retail has ethical implications that should be given a long-term consideration. With the increasing supervisory roles of algorithms, ethical concerns of fairness, accountability and worker voice come into growing importance. The practice and the policy that needs to be informed would be assisted by research on the intersection of management studies, ethics and law. The studies by Milanez (2025), Nilsson (2025) and Schmid (2026) offer helpful points but leave numerous empirical gaps, mainly in the context of the impact of algorithmic management on career development and organizational commitment.

Fourth, the effect of generative artificial intelligence on the business of retail management is a relatively new field, and it should be studied carefully. There are early signs that generative AI can increase certain tendencies identified in this report, particularly the shift from manager direct supervising employees to providing guidance, coaching, and dealing with unusual situation.

However, the full impact of generative AI on management practices might only become clear over time.

Fifth, and, probably, the most crucial, the boundary conditions of digital transformation need to be further established. Not all areas of retail industry are changing at the same speed or in the same way. There is not understanding of when, why to keep traditional approaches and when to adopt new digital method will help companies manage change more effectively.

To sum up, the digital revolution of a retail business is not the end of the traditional management or the superficial change of tools. It represents a radical reform of the organizational form and management of retail organizations where even as they are extended and adjusted to new conditions classical theories retain most of their value. The management scholarship challenge, and that of the management practice, is to build both resources of the intellect and practice to make this restructure with wisdom in both directions, using the finest of both classical and modern traditions. Managers who develop such intellectual breadth, a mixture of technological knowledge and humanistic instincts, structural creativity and depth knowledge of managerial principle, are more likely to become successful leaders in the future retail business. Thus, best managers will be those who can combine digital innovation with traditional management knowledge.

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