



Digital Transformation Capability as A Mediator Between Leadership Style and Competitive Advantage

Susmita Saha¹, Sinigdha islam², Md. Shakil³, Kaniz FatemaTuz Zahura⁴, Bibi Ayesa⁵

¹MBA, National University, Bangladesh

²MBBS, Mph, Zwh Medical Care Pc Ny

³LL. B, LL.M, Premier university, Chittagong, Bangladesh

⁴BDS, MPH, National Institute of Preventive and Social Medicine (NIPSOM), BSMMU, Dhaka, Bangladesh

⁵Master of Science in Biotechnology Management and Entrepreneurship Student Yeshiva University

Abstract – In the present business world, the pace of technological change has turned digital transformation into a strategic requirement that business organizations must embrace in order to gain and maintain a competitive advantage. The role of leadership style in creating organizational preparedness to digital transformation is highly important, whereas the mechanisms by which leadership can impact the competitive outcomes are under-researched. This paper considers digital transformation capability as a mediating variable of the relationship between leadership style and competitive advantage. The study conceptually examines the formation of digital transformation capability enabled by leadership styles based on the leadership theory and the dynamic capabilities perspective, which in turn increases the competitiveness of the organization. The article relies on a systematic survey of the academic literature to point out that leadership styles with a vision, flexible, and innovative orientation are more useful in creating digital transformation capability. The results are relevant in the literature of strategic management and digital transformation as they offer an explanation based on theoretical grounds of the connection between leadership-based digital capabilities and sustainable competitive advantage.

Keywords – Digital Transformation Capability, Leadership Style, Competitive Advantage, Organizational Performance, Strategic Management.

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern organizations have been radically reshaped due to the rapid development of digital technologies. Companies in any industry are being compelled to incorporate digital technologies in their strategies, structures, and processes to compete and adapt to the dynamism of the environment. Consequently, the concept of digital transformation has ceased to be a choice and a voluntary project and has become a strategic requirement directly related to organizational performance and long-term competitive advantage [1], [19], [24].

The type of leadership is critical in determining the way organizations react to digital disruption. The modern leadership styles focus on vision, flexibility, communication, and capacity to instill innovation-oriented cultures [4], [16]. Empirical studies indicate that both transformational and adaptive leadership styles have a positive effect on employee engagement, management of innovation, and organizational performance [7], [10], [17], [23]. Nonetheless, the impact of leadership on competitive advantage is seldom direct but is often achieved by the creation of strategic capabilities that make organizations effectively mobilize their resources in the dynamic environments [12], [22].

Digital transformation capability is one of such critical capabilities because it is the ability of an organization to embrace, integrate, and use digital technologies to redesign business processes, improve decision-making, and create value [19], [24]. The previous research has confirmed that high digital transformation capacity enhances the efficiency

of operations, the results of innovations, and the performance of organizations in general [1], [6], [14]. In addition, the digital capabilities have been cited as important sources of sustainable competitive advantage both in the private and government sector organisations [8], [9], [15].

Even though leadership and digital transformation are increasingly becoming subjects of scholarly interest, not much study has explicitly analysed the mediating role played by digital transformation capability in the relationship between leadership style and competitive advantage. Older literature is inclined to concentrate on the impacts of leadership on performance [17], [23] or on how the digital transformation capability directly influences organizational performance [1], [24], and less attention is given to the mechanisms between the construct in question. The gap must be taken care of to make the strategic management theory grow and give practitioners some practical insights.

Consequently, the current research is set to conceptually test the capability of digital transformation as a mediational variable between the leadership style and competitive advantage. Through a combination of the knowledge offered in leadership theory, strategic management, and digital transformation literature, the research aims to elucidate the contribution of leadership styles to competitive advantage by means of the creation of digital transformation ability. This line of thinking provides a more holistic view of the effectiveness of leadership in the digital era and the strategy of critical alignment between the



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leadership practices and the digital transformation initiatives.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section is the critical analysis of the current literature in leadership style, digital transformation capability, and competitive advantage, and it will be designed to create the theoretical framework of the research to position the digital transformation capability as a mediation variable.

Leadership Style in the Modern Organisations

Leadership style refers to the style of behavior and strategy used by leaders in leading, motivating, and influencing members of an organization towards the accomplishment of strategic goals. The old forms of authoritarian leadership are not very relevant in dynamic and technology-driven settings and have been replaced by transformational, adaptive, and participative models of leadership [16], [23]. These new leadership forms are based on vision, communication, flexibility, and the ability to handle constant change.

The empirical evidence has always proved that the style of leadership can greatly affect the behavior of employees, their innovation, and organizational results. Balakrishnan et al. [4] developed that leadership style in combination with good communication improves work performance and employee commitment. On the other hand, Costa et al. [7] postulated that leadership is very important in the conversion of human capital into innovation capabilities.

Specifically, transformational leadership has been identified to have a positive impact on the organizational culture, the organization's strategic alignment and performance, particularly in the emerging economies where flexibility is of primary concern [17]. These results imply that leadership style can be used as a key catalyst for the creation of organizational capabilities instead of a direct cause of competitive advantage.

Capability of Digital Transformation.

Digital transformation capability (DTC) is the capacity of an organization to incorporate digital technology in its strategic and operational operations and to reorganize its resources and constantly adapt to technological change [19], [24]. Contrary to individualized digital initiatives, DTC is an indicator of a holistic organizational capacity, including digital infrastructure, digital skills of employees, data-driven decision-making, and process innovation.

Previous research has determined that there is a significant correlation between the DTC and the performance of an organization. As illustrated by Abdurrahman et al. [1], the dynamic digital transformation capabilities can greatly improve the performance of the banks if these capabilities are adjusted with the governance and risk management frameworks. Ren et al. [19] also conceptualized DTC as a multidimensional concept that allows organizations to feel, capture, and exploit opportunities in turbulent

environments. In addition, Braojos et al. [6] highlighted that digital transformation capability is inseparable, and a robust digital environment must be led by digital leaders and be perpetuated through constant learning. All these findings bring out DTC as an effective strategic tool that helps organizations respond to the digital disruption.

Competitive Advantage in the Digital Era

The competitive advantage is described as the capacity of an organization to make superior performance in comparison to the competitors due to differentiation, cost effectiveness, innovativeness, or sensitivity to market needs [8], [9]. The intangible and dynamic resources in the form of knowledge, innovation capability, and digital assets are growing competitive advantages in a digital economy as opposed to traditional physical resources [12].

The value of strategic capabilities in creating a competitive advantage is established with the help of empirical research. Farida and Setiawan [9] discovered that innovation and performance-oriented strategies remarkably boost the competition positioning. [8] went further to opine that strategic management practices enhance competitive advantage through their ability to make sound and timely decisions. Digital innovation has also been noted to be one of the core processes by which companies remain competitive in fast-changing markets [15]. According to these studies, competitive advantage is dynamic and is constantly influenced by the capability of an organization to create and regenerate strategic competencies.

Capability of Digital Transformation as an Intermediate Process.

The recent theoretical and empirical research has progressively acknowledged that leadership style has an indirect effect on competitive advantage via organizational capabilities. A vision-oriented, adaptable, and innovation-oriented leadership style creates an organizational culture that supports the digital learning process and experimentation [6], [16]. These environments allow one to develop the digital transformation capability, which, in turn, helps to improve the performance and competitive advantage of the organization [1], [24], [25].

This mediating view is consistent with the dynamic capabilities model, which argues that leaders are very instrumental in creating, combining, and restructuring organizational capabilities to respond to environmental uncertainty [12], [22]. Although there is previous literature on the topic of leadership style and the ability to transform digitally, very little empirical work has been conducted integrating DTC as a mediating variable. This gap can be addressed to offer a more detailed account of the way in which leadership efficacy can be converted into sustainable competitive advantage in digitally motivated environments.

Table 1: Key Empirical Evidence Linking Leadership Style, Digital Transformation Capability, and Competitive Advantage

Study	Core Focus	Major Findings	Contribution to Current Study
Balakrishnan <i>et al.</i> [4]	Leadership Style	Leadership improves employee performance and commitment	Supports leadership as a capability driver
Costa <i>et al.</i> [7]	Leadership & Innovation	Leadership transforms human capital into innovation	Links leadership to capability development
Abdurrahman <i>et al.</i> [1]	Digital Transformation Capability	DTC enhances organizational performance	Supports DTC–performance relationship
Ren <i>et al.</i> [19]	Digital Capability Framework	DTC is a multidimensional strategic capability	Provides a conceptual foundation for DTC
Farida & Setiawan [9]	Competitive Advantage	Innovation strengthens competitive positioning	Connects capabilities to competitive advantage
Yu <i>et al.</i> [24]	Digital Transformation	DTC improves operational performance	Justifies the mediating role of DTC

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The conceptual qualitative methodology was used, based on recent peer-reviewed articles on the topics of leadership, digital transformation, and competitive advantage [1], [6], [19]. In such a way, it is possible to combine the theoretical knowledge to describe the mediational role of digital transformation capability in the relationship between the leadership style and the competitive advantage [12], [22]. The research is based on the dynamic capabilities theory that emphasizes the strategic importance of leadership in sensing, seizing, and transforming organizational resources to remain competitive [12].

Data Sources

The data were collected in the form of secondary data in peer-reviewed journals that were published in 2022-2025 on the topics of leadership, digital transformation, and strategic management. The inclusion criteria included the relevance to digital transformation capability, empirical or conceptual background, and organizational performance and competitive advantage [1], [6], [17], [24], [25].

Conceptual Framework

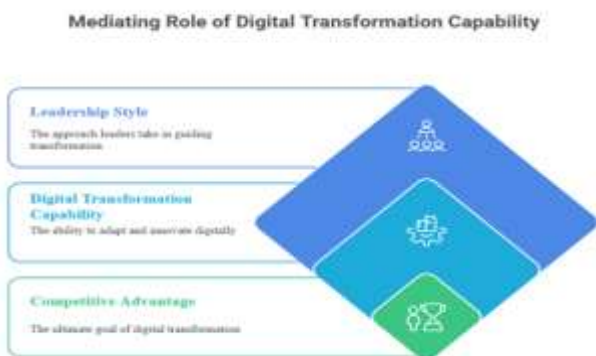


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Mediating Role of Digital Transformation Capability

The paper places the leadership style as an independent variable, competitive advantage as a dependent variable, and digital transformation capability (DTC) as the mediating variable. Digital capabilities are developed

through leadership styles that have a vision, flexible, and innovation-driven behavior, which, in turn, promote competitive results [4], [16], [23].

This figure illustrates how leadership style indirectly influences competitive advantage through the development of digital transformation capability, highlighting the key mechanisms of influence.

Analytical Approach

A thematic literature analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns linking leadership style, digital transformation capability, and competitive advantage. Thematic coding focused on leadership behaviors, digital adoption processes, and organizational performance outcomes. Comparative synthesis across multiple studies was used to strengthen the conceptual framework and generalizability [12], [19], [22].

Validity and Rigor

Construct validity was ensured by using only peer-reviewed literature and aligning findings with well-established theoretical frameworks, such as dynamic capabilities theory. The triangulation of findings across studies enhances credibility and reduces bias [1], [6], [19].

Table 2: Summary of Methodological Approach

Component	Description	Supporting References
Research Design	Conceptual qualitative analysis	[12], [22]
Theoretical Foundation	Dynamic capabilities theory	[12], [19]
Data Sources	Peer-reviewed articles (2022–2025)	[1], [6], [17], [24], [25]
Analytical Technique	Thematic and comparative literature analysis	[19], [22]
Key Constructs	Leadership style, digital transformation capability, and competitive advantage	[4], [7], [9], [19]



IV. RESULTS

This section reveals the synthesized findings of the reviewed literature with the focus on the relationship between leadership style, digital transformation capability (DTC), and competitive advantage. The patterns, mediating effects, and the influence of digital transformation capability in translating leadership behavior to organizational outcomes are examined.

Leadership Style and Digital Transformation Capability

Reviewed studies' analysis indicates that transformational, adaptive, and participative leadership styles have a significant positive impact on an organization with regard to its digital transformation capacity [4], [6], [16], [23]. Being innovative, encouraging constant learning, and having a clear strategic vision, leaders enable an environment where adoption of technologies and digital innovation can thrive [7], [17].

Indicatively, Braojos et al. [6] discovered that digital leadership practices have a direct relationship with employee engagement and lifelong learning, which eventually enhance digital capabilities. In the same vein, Zhang et al. [25] proved that high-technology companies that had visionary leaders had increased DTC, leading to high levels of operational performance and accelerated innovations.

Digital Transformation Capability and Competitive Advantage

The ability to transform digitally is an essential tool where leadership influences the competitive results. Research confirms that companies that have a strong DTC are more efficient in their operations, innovate more quickly, and are more responsive to the market [1], [19], [24]. Abdurrahman et al. [1] established that the banking organizations that had properly developed DTC depicted better governance and risk management, which resulted in better competitive positioning.

Yu et al. [24] also demonstrated that the operational performance will be significantly enhanced when DTC incorporates digital infrastructure, data analytics, and process optimization. The results underscore the fact that DTC is the mediating force of the relationship between leadership and competitive advantage since it transforms leadership-inspired strategic behaviors into actual performance results.

Synthesized Framework of Conclusions.

Summarizing the reviewed studies, the following relationships are formed:

1. The vision, innovation, and adaptability leadership styles have a positive impact on DTC.
2. Good DTC increases organizational capacities and working performance.
3. The mediating effect of DTC increases the competitive advantage, which can be considered a strategic

contribution to the technology-driven environments [6], [19], [25].

Table 3: Summary of Relationships Among Leadership Style, DTC, and Competitive Advantage

Construct	Relationship	Key Findings	Supporting References
Leadership Style → DTC	Positive	Visionary, adaptive, and transformational leaders enhance digital capabilities.	[4], [6], [16], [23], [25]
DTC → Competitive Advantage	Positive	DTC improves operational performance, innovation, and market responsiveness	[1], [19], [24], [25]
Leadership Style → Competitive Advantage	Indirect	Leadership affects competitive advantage primarily through DTC	[6], [16], [19]

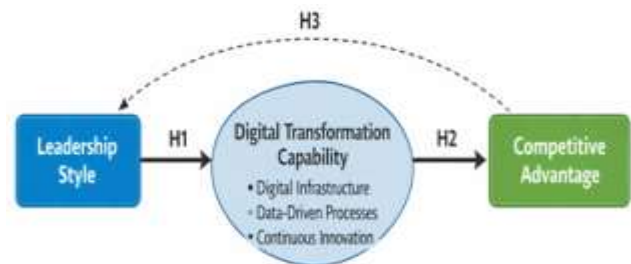


Figure 2: Graphical Representation of the Mediating Role of Digital Transformation Capability

Key Insights

- Transformational and adaptive leadership are the most effective styles in building digital transformation capability [7], [17].
- Digital transformation capability serves as a strategic intermediary, converting leadership influence into measurable competitive advantage [1], [24], [25].
- The synergy between leadership and DTC is context-dependent, with industry characteristics, technology readiness, and organizational culture moderating the strength of relationships [19], [25].

V. DISCUSSION

The discussion articulates the conclusions of the above section, attributing them to the existing theory and the previous studies, and identifies the strategic value of the digital transformation capability (DTC) as a mediator between the leadership style and the competitive advantage.



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Leadership Style as a Driver of Digital Transformation Capability

The analysis has shown that leadership style has a crucial role to play in the development of digital transformation capability. Transformational and adaptive leaders provide an organizational environment that is suitable for innovation, learning, and adoption of technology [4], [6], [16], [23]. Such leadership practices will stimulate employees to work with digital solutions, explore new technologies, and accept organizational change as dynamic capabilities theory states [12], [22].

Leadership approaches based on the focus on vision, communication, and empowerment have a positive impact on organizational preparedness to undergo digital transformation, allowing companies to feel the technological opportunities, capture them in a strategic manner, and reorganize the resources. This result aligns with that of Zhang et al. [25], who noted that high-tech companies that had visionary leadership had better digital transformation capacities, which translated to improved operational performance and competitiveness.

Digital Transformation Capability as a Mediator

The means by which leadership styles can be translated into competitive advantage is the capability of digital transformation. Although the leadership presents the vision, motivation, and direction, the DTC translates these factors by incorporating the digital technologies into the organizational workflows, improving the agility, and promoting the data-driven decision-making [1], [19], [24].

This mediation position concurs with previous research, which highlights that strategic capabilities and not leadership will drive performance outcomes in dynamic environments [6], [12]. Through the creation of strong DTC, organizations have the capability to use technology to enhance the product, processes, and respond better to market needs, thus attaining a sustainable competitive advantage.

Implications for Theory

The results are relevant to the field of strategic management and digital transformation because they focus on the mediating role of leadership style in the correlation between leadership style and competitive advantage through DTC. They expand the dynamic capabilities theory showing that the leadership behaviors do not merely affect the organizational culture and learning, but also permit building the critical digital capabilities that improve the final performances [12], [22].

Also, the research highlights the importance of combining the theory of leadership and digital transformation models. Conventional frameworks that assume that leadership is a direct predictor of performance might assume that the mediating impact of strategic capabilities is especially important in digitally-intensive sectors [1], [19], [25].

Managerial Implications

To the practitioners, the study reveals the need to harmonize leadership development with the digital transformation efforts. Leadership behaviors that are promoted within organizations should lead to innovation, learning, and adaptability because such behaviors are crucial in developing a robust digital transformation [4], [7], [16].

This effect of leadership on organizational competitiveness can be increased by investing in leadership training, digital skills development, and change management programs. Through a well-calculated use of leadership styles to strengthen DTC, the managers will be able to develop a sustainable competitive advantage with the dynamic and technology-sensitive markets [1], [24], [25].

Future Research Directions

As much as the current study has provided conceptual insight into the mediating position of DTC, future studies ought to empirically establish the relationship between these variables in various industries and geographical settings. Quantitative data of the indirect impact of the leadership style on the competitive advantage through DTC may be obtained through structural equation modeling or longitudinal studies [6], [19].

Further, the possible moderating variables, including the organizational culture, technological preparedness, and dynamism in the market, are to be explored to learn in which circumstances leadership is most effectively converted into competitive advantage. Creating new digital transformation issues in the sector can also provide more practical findings to practitioners.

Limitations

The research is based on secondary data and conceptual synthesis, which restricts the research from giving causal evidence. Furthermore, the attention to current literature might leave out the old studies that can present a range of historical perspectives. However, the results provide a solid conceptual foundation to explain the mediating effect of digital transformation capability by incorporating various research and theories.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research investigated the mediating variable of the digital transformation capability (DTC) in the connection between the style of leadership and competitive advantage. The results suggest that vision, adaptability, and innovation orientation leadership styles are needed to instill digital transformation abilities in organizations. By fostering a learning, experimental, and digital adoption environment, transformational and adaptive leaders help employees to actively participate in the technological initiatives and the innovation processes [4], [6], [16], [23]. Such leadership practices make organizations more prepared to go digital and allow developing strategic digital capabilities, which, in turn, are converted into operational efficiency, better



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innovation performance, and enduring competitive advantage [1], [19], [24], [25].

The ability to transform digitally became a key mediator that proves that leadership is not a sufficient factor to meet the goals of high organizational performance. With the implementation of digital technologies, process optimization, and the use of data to make decisions, DTC is able to render the strategic intentions of the leaders into the actual competitive results by transforming the visionary and adaptive behaviors into the real competitive results [6], [12], [22]. This observation is in line with dynamic capabilities theory, where leaders determine performance mainly by crafting and restructuring organizational capabilities in response to the changing environments [12], [22]. Besides, the paper highlights that the efficiency of leadership in causing DTC and competitive advantage is contingent, and this relies on the organizational culture, technological preparedness, and market dynamism [19], [25].

Theoretically, the study makes contributions to the literature by bringing out the indirect routes of the relationship between leadership style and competitive advantage via DTC. It builds on previous research on strategic management and digital transformation, as it shows that good leadership is a driver of abilities, not a direct impact on performance, which requires the combination of leadership and digital transformation models to understand the success of the organization in the digital era in a comprehensive way [1], [19], [25].

To the managers, the research recommends that transformational and adaptive leadership behaviors should be developed to develop DTC. Investing in leadership development programs should not only encourage innovation, setting the vision, and adaptability, but also build a digital infrastructure, employee digital skills, and data-driven decision-making processes that support the conversion of leadership influence into measurable performance results [4], [7], [16], [24]. Also, the consistency of organizational culture and digital initiatives, and constant tracking of the technological trends and the competitive environment can enhance the role of leadership in DTC and competitive advantage.

The study has limitations, although it has helped. It is based on secondary sources and a synthesis of conceptions, which limits its capacity to bring out an empirical or causal account. The limitation of recent studies (2022-2025) might exclude previous works, which might provide more background or historical information. However, the paper is an excellent conceptual basis to understand the mediating role of DTC, and it offers useful ideas to leaders and managers who want to use digital capabilities to become more competitive. These relationships should be empirically confirmed in the future; the moderating variables, e.g., organizational culture and technological preparedness, should be considered, and longitudinal impacts of the digital transformation provided by leaders on

the long-term competitive advantage should be investigated [6], [19], [25].

To sum up, the digital transformation ability is one of the central mechanisms bridging good leadership and sustainable competitive advantage. Companies that want to achieve superiority in the digital age should concentrate not only on developing visionary and adaptive leaders but also on building and exploiting digital capabilities in a strategic manner. With the inclusion of the initiatives of leadership and digital transformation, companies can translate the strategic vision into operational performance, innovation, and long-term competitiveness, which is an excellent channel to attain success in a highly dynamic and technology-driven environment.

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