



The rise of platform operating models in enterprises

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Executive summary

Over the past decade, a quiet revolution has reshaped how **conglomerates, digital-native firms and asset-heavy enterprises structure themselves**. Traditional organisational models that are— anchored in vertical business units (BUs), siloed capabilities, local autonomy , and limited integration, — are increasingly inadequate in a world that demands the following:: Traditional organisational models that are— anchored in vertical business units (BUs), siloed capabilities, local autonomy , and limited integration, — are increasingly inadequate in a world that demands the following::



Scalable capabilities



Seamless customer experiences



Rapid innovation



Monetisation beyond core industries

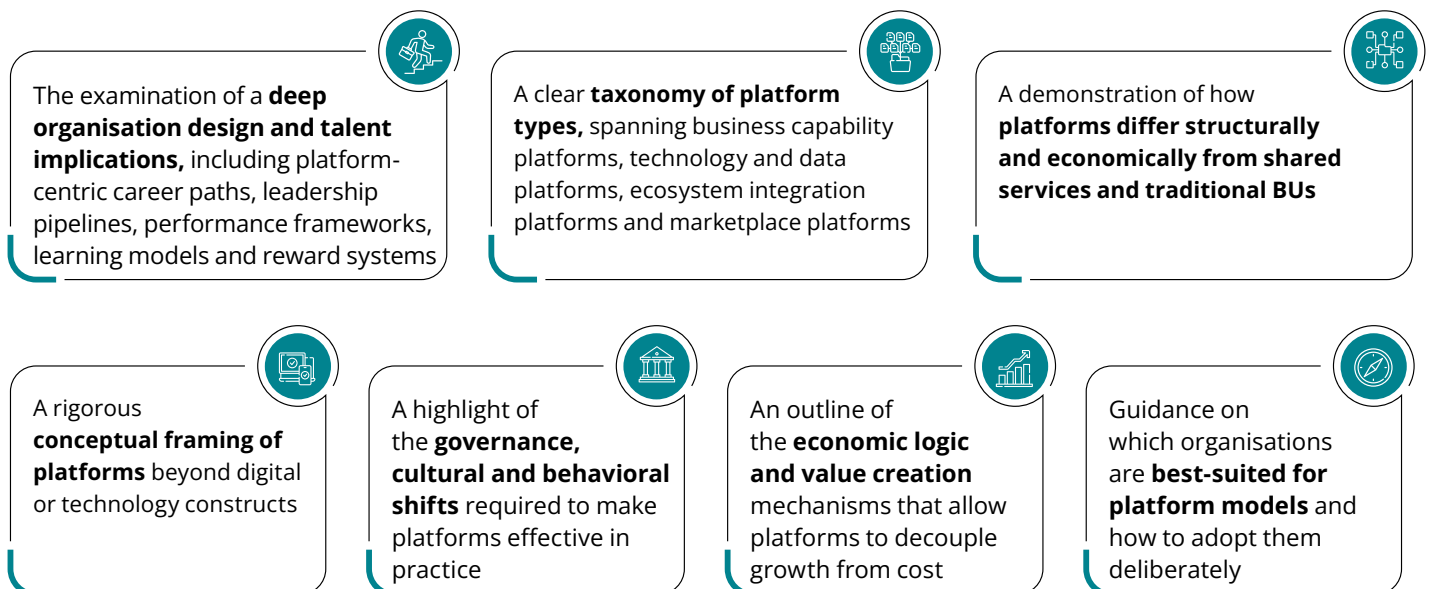


Data-driven operations

Platform-based operating models have emerged as a comprehensive response to these challenges. Across global and Indian conglomerates, there is a clear shift from **vertically-integrated businesses towards horizontally-scalable platform-based models**.

A platform organisation is not defined by technology alone. It is an **integrated business + operating + technology + governance architecture** in which capabilities, data, systems and processes are built once and deployed many times across assets, businesses, markets and customer segments.

This paper provides an overview of the following:



The paper draws on **publicly observable patterns** across digital ecosystems, asset-heavy enterprises, infrastructure operators and diversified conglomerates to illustrate how **platform thinking is being applied in practice, without treating platforms as a one-size-fits-all solution**.

Platform-based operating models are not universally applicable, nor should every capability be platformised. However, for complex, multi-business, asset-intensive and ecosystem-oriented enterprises, platforms offer a powerful mechanism for scaling capabilities, accelerating adjacencies and unlocking new sources of enterprise value.



Introduction

Why platform thinking has become an organisational imperative?



Shift 1 — From business portfolios to business ecosystems

The world's most successful enterprises no longer operate as collections of standalone businesses, but as interdependent ecosystems, where:



Customers move fluidly across offerings



Capabilities are shared



Products and services plug into common layers

Growth is exponential, not incremental. However, traditional BU structures cannot support this.



Shift 2 — From asset ownership to capability ownership



Enterprises previously gained advantage through assets (factories, land, stores, fleets). Today, they win through capabilities (data analytics, category management, AI models, loyalty engines, cloud infrastructure, supply chains).



Capabilities scale horizontally; BUs do not. Platforms become the mechanism through which capabilities are built, owned, governed and scaled.



Shift 3 — From linear value chains to platform value networks

Modern enterprises increasingly operate in value networks rather than linear chains.



A large digital consumer ecosystem in India integrates telecom + OTT + payments + enterprise services.



A global media and entertainment ecosystem integrates content + parks + streaming + merchandise.

This integration requires a platform architecture.



Shift 4 — From organization charts to operating systems

Leading enterprises now think of themselves as operating systems that are modular, interoperable, scalable and adaptable. Platform operating models are the organisation design equivalent of:



Standardised protocols



Interchangeable modules



Shared libraries



Application Programming Interface (APIs) between business lines

Definition of a platform

A platform is often confused with technology platforms (cloud, AI, payments). But structurally, a platform is:

A reusable capability system, combining business logic, operations, data and technology that multiple BUs or assets can plug into, enabling scalable value creation and external monetisation.

Platform operating model architecture



Local execution and channels

On-ground execution (airports, malls, plants, stores), digital channels (apps, portals, web), partner/merchant interfaces



Ecosystem orchestration

Matching, search, recommendations, personalisation, pricing, merchant/partner onboarding, service orchestration



Tech and data platform

Cloud, microservices, API gateway, data lake, analytics, AI/ML, identity, DevOps, observability, IoT



Operating backbone

SOPs, QA/QC, workforce standards, compliance, safety frameworks, training protocols, design standards, operational governance



Business capability engine

Reusable enterprise engines: Category management, pricing and revenue science, asset operations, project delivery



Platform operating models

Platform model types



Type 1: Business capability platforms

Reusable enterprise engines powering multiple BUs or assets

Examples: Duty Free, Retail, Airport Land Development (India's Leading Airport Operator)



Type 2: Technology and data platforms

Shared digital foundation providing APIs, data, identity, payments, AI/ML.

Examples: A hyperscale cloud and digital services backbone; A national-scale digital infrastructure platform enabling telecom, payments and data services.



Type 3: Ecosystem integration platforms

Combine business, tech and assets into multi-product ecosystems

Examples: A national digital ecosystem integrating connectivity, content, cloud and financial services, a global entertainment ecosystem spanning content creation, distribution, experiences and consumer products.



Type 4: Marketplace/Two-sided transaction platforms

Reusable enterprise engines powering multiple BUs or assets

Examples: Large-scale consumer marketplaces, asset-light mobility and delivery platforms, local commerce and services aggregation platforms.

How platforms differ from traditional structures?

Platforms are **often misunderstood as an extension of either shared services or BUs**. This comparison is essential because most enterprises attempting platform transformations start from one of these two models. However, **platforms are not an incremental evolution of either. They represent a fundamentally different organisational construct** with a distinct purpose, governance logic and talent profile.

- **Shared services are designed to improve efficiency by centralising transactional activities.**
- **BUs are designed to optimise end-to-end performance within defined product or market boundaries.**
- **Platforms, by contrast, are designed to build, own and scale reusable enterprise capabilities that serve multiple businesses, assets and ecosystems simultaneously.**

The table below highlights these structural differences

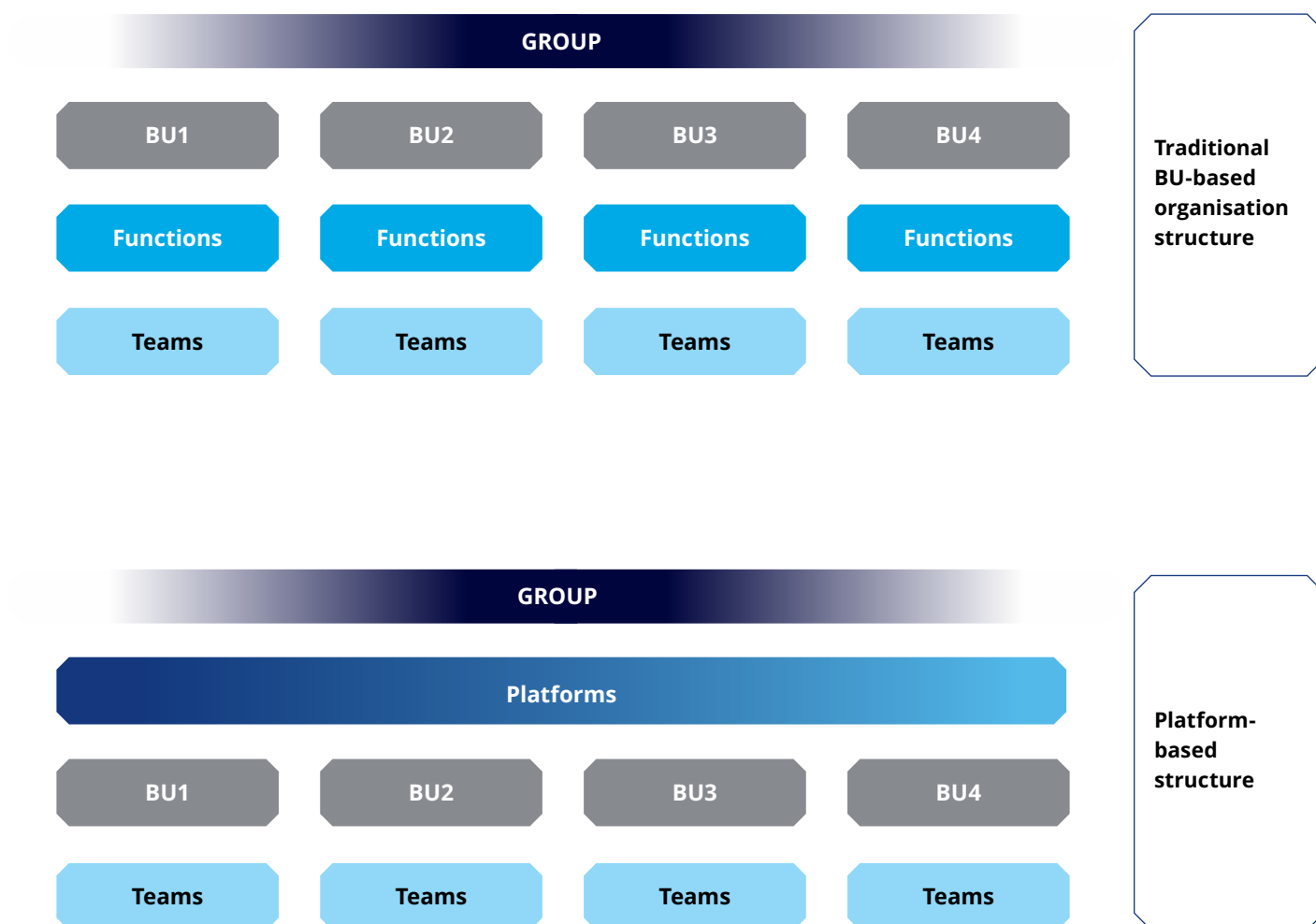
Dimension	Shared services	Business unit	Platform
 Purpose	Cost efficiency	Profit & Loss ownership	Capability reuse + growth
 Scope	Transactions	End-to-end value chain	Horizontal capability engine
 Technology	Standardised tools	BU-specific tools	Reusable enterprise tech
 Data	Operational	BU siloed	Shared enterprise data fabric
 Governance	Service Level Agreements (SLAs)	BU autonomy	Platform P&L + product roadmap
 Skills	Functional expertise	General management	Architecture, product, data, domain

- Platforms are designed for **scale and growth**, not just efficiency (shared services) or local P&L optimisation (BUs).
- Platform governance differs fundamentally, shifting from SLAs or BU autonomy **to product roadmaps, adoption metrics and capability economics**.
- Platform talent requirements are distinct, **emphasizing architecture, product ownership, data and deep domain expertise** over transactional or generalist skills.
- **Treating platforms as shared services limits value**, reducing them to cost centres instead of enterprise growth engines.

Why BU-based models are breaking down

Capabilities have become enterprise-wide, not BU-specific: Capabilities such as data, digital, CX, pricing and product innovation now cut across businesses, making BU siloes inefficient, duplicative and slow.

- **Customer value is created across businesses, not within them:** Customers expect integrated, cross-product experiences, which BU structures cannot deliver because they optimise locally, not enterprise-wide.
- **Growth has shifted from core businesses to ecosystems and adjacencies:** Growth increasingly comes from adjacencies and ecosystems, requiring shared platforms, not isolated BUs, to scale rapidly and cost-effectively.

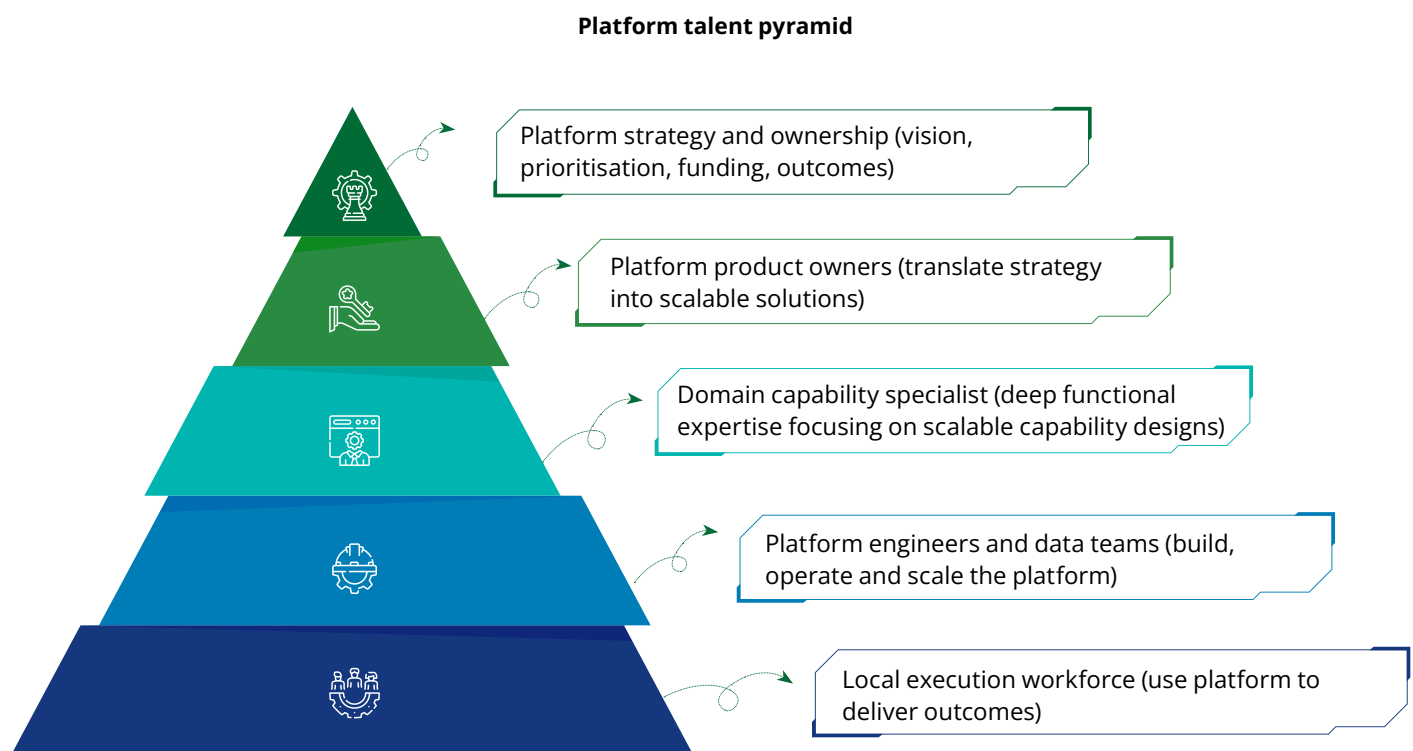




Organisation and talent

Platform talent architecture and capability model

Platform-based operating models fundamentally alter the nature of enterprise capabilities. As capabilities move from BU-embedded, localised execution to horizontal, reusable platforms, the talent system must also shift, particularly in terms of skills composition and career progression logic.



Applying the platform talent pyramid: An illustrative example | Enterprise cloud and digital infrastructure platform (1/2)

In many large technology-driven enterprises, infrastructure, data, security and developer tooling were originally embedded within individual applications or business lines. As scale increased, these capabilities were consolidated into enterprise platforms to support multiple products, services and external customers, while application teams retained responsibility for customer-facing delivery.

Platform talent pyramid – Role placement

Platform architects



Platform structure	Earlier location	Rationale
- Group head – Cloud and digital platforms - Chief platform architect (infrastructure, data, security)	- Application or BU-level IT leadership - Solution architects embedded within individual products	Architecture authority moves to the enterprise level to ensure scalability, security and interoperability across all consuming teams.

Platform product owners



Platform structure	Earlier location	Rationale
- Product head – Compute platform - Product head – Storage platform - Product head – Data and analytics platform	- Application-level product teams - Technology product managers embedded in BUs	Product ownership shifts from optimising individual applications to managing platform roadmaps, adoption and ecosystem usage.

Domain capability specialists



Platform structure	Earlier location	Rationale
- Security and compliance experts - Pricing and monetisation specialists - Capacity planning and scalability experts	Embedded within application or BU delivery teams	Deep specialists are centralised to design capabilities-as-products, rather than solving similar problems repeatedly within each BU.

Platform engineers and data teams



Platform structure	Earlier location	Rationale
- Core platform engineering teams - Shared data engineering and analytics teams - API, tooling and automation teams	Distributed engineering teams aligned to individual products	Engineering effort shifts from bespoke builds to reusable platforms consumed by multiple products and services.

Local execution workforce 	
BU/ Service structure	Rationale
• Customer-facing solution teams • Sales engineering and support teams	Execution teams remain close to customers and use the platforms to deliver differentiated solutions.

Applying the platform talent pyramid: An illustrative example | Integrated digital consumer ecosystem platform (2/2)

In the initial growth phase, consumer digital services such as connectivity, media, commerce and payments operated as separate BUs, each with its own product, technology, analytics, and monetisation teams. As customer journeys began to overlap, these capabilities were reorganised into enterprise platforms to enable reuse, speed and cross-service integration.

Platform talent pyramid – Role placement

Platform architects 		
Platform structure	Earlier location	Rationale
• Group head- Digital platforms • Chief architect- Consumer and enterprise platforms • Head- Data and AI architecture	• BU-level IT or digital leadership teams	Architecture decisions move from BU optimisation to enterprise-level system design, ensuring interoperability across services.

Platform product owners 		
Platform structure	Earlier location	Rationale
• Product head- Identity and customer platform • Product head- Payments platform • Product head- Content distribution platform • Product head- Commerce and marketplace platform	• Service-specific product leadership teams	Product ownership shifts from service roadmaps to platform roadmaps focused on reuse, adoption and ecosystem value.

Domain capability specialists



Platform structure	Earlier location	Rationale
• Data science and personalisation specialists • Pricing and monetisation experts • Partner and ecosystem integration specialists	• Embedded within individual service businesses	Capabilities are designed once and deployed across multiple services rather than recreated within each BU.

Platform engineers and data teams



Platform structure	Earlier location	Rationale
• Core platform engineering teams • Shared data and analytics teams • API and integration middleware teams	• BU-specific technology and analytics teams	Engineering shifts from service-specific builds to enterprise platforms serving the entire ecosystem.

Local execution workforce



BU/ Service structure	Rationale
• Service-level product teams • Content, commerce and service operations teams • Customer acquisition and service teams	Execution remains closest to customers and markets, using enterprise platforms to deliver differentiated services.

As we can observe from the above examples, The **value shifts upward in the talent pyramid**—from local execution to enterprise-level capability design. Organisations that **formalise this pyramid reduce duplication, improve scalability and create clearer, more sustainable career paths.**

Key capability shifts in platform-based operating models v/s the traditional operating models. From local problem-solving to enterprise capability design Skills shift from optimising individual businesses or assets to designing reusable, scalable solutions that work across multiple contexts.

From generalist management to deep specialist and architect expertise

Broad BU management capabilities give way to domain specialists and architects who build, codify and evolve enterprise capability platforms.

From BU-bound execution to system-level, transferable skills

Skills evolve from role- and BU-specific execution to portable, system-level expertise that enables enterprise optimisation, horizontal mobility and rapid redeployment.

Talent implications

Platform-based operating models require **end-to-end realignment of talent systems**. Careers, performance management, learning and rewards must all reinforce enterprise capability ownership and reuse, not BU-level optimisation.

A. Career path and leadership pipeline: From vertical ladders to enterprise leadership lattices

What changes

In platform-based structures, **careers and leadership pipelines evolve from linear, BU-bound ladders to enterprise career lattices**. Progression combines **vertical advancement with horizontal movement across platforms, businesses and assets**.



Leadership readiness is no longer defined only by P&L ownership, but by:

- **Depth of capability expertise**
- **Platform ownership and architectural influence**
- **Exposure to multiple businesses and ecosystems**

Platform leadership roles become formal feeders into enterprise and group-level leadership, alongside traditional business leadership roles.

Example

In large platform-led enterprises, senior leaders often progress through ownership of enterprise platforms (e.g., digital, marketplace, logistics, data) before assuming broader enterprise leadership roles, such as building system-level perspective rather than single-BU depth alone.

B. Talent sourcing: From BU experience to capability-centric hiring

What changes

In the traditional BU-based model, hiring focuses on prior industry-specific experience and end-to-end functional generalists are preferred. In the platform-based model, **hiring shifts to capability-centric profiles, irrespective of prior BU or industry**. Cross-industry talent becomes a strategic input rather than an exception.



Example

Large digital consumer ecosystems have built leadership benches by hiring product, data and platform talent from e-commerce, fintech and technology firms, prioritising capability over legacy industry familiarity.

C. Workforce mix: Rebalancing specialists and execution roles

What changes

Platform models **create leaner execution layers** supported by **strong central pools of specialists** who design, codify and evolve enterprise capabilities. Local teams focus on delivery using standardised platforms rather than building bespoke solutions. This increases the importance of:

- **Structured upskilling programmes**
- **Internal mobility across platforms and businesses**



Example

A multi-asset infrastructure operator centralises category strategy, pricing, supplier negotiations and analytics into enterprise specialist platforms, while asset-level teams focus on execution, reducing duplication and improving consistency.

D. Performance management and performance frameworks: From BU metrics to platform impact

What changes

Objectives and Key Results (OKR)-based frameworks are commonly used for platform roles (platform architects, product owners, platform engineering teams), as they emphasize enterprise outcomes such as adoption, reuse, scalability and enablement speed.

Platform performance frameworks typically include:

- **Adoption and reuse across businesses/assets**
- **Capability scalability, stability and evolution**
- **Enterprise-level performance uplift enabled by the platform**



Example

In platform-led enterprises, platform leaders are evaluated on enterprise adoption and capability performance, while business teams are assessed on customer and revenue outcomes enabled by those platforms, ensuring alignment without diluting accountability.

E. Learning and development: From role training to enterprise capability building

What changes

L&D shifts from **BU- and role-specific training to enterprise capability development**, focused on:

- **Platform architecture and product thinking**
- **Data, analytics and systems-level decision-making**
- **Cross-business and ecosystem exposure**
- **Development pathways are designed to support T-shaped growth, using platform assignments and rotations as core learning mechanisms.**



Platform leadership roles become formal feeders into enterprise and group-level leadership, alongside traditional business leadership roles.

Example

Diversified enterprises increasingly use platform rotations as leadership development milestones, ensuring future leaders understand enterprise systems rather than only individual businesses.

F. Compensation and rewards: From hierarchy to capability value

What changes

Compensation structures evolve to recognise:

- **Scarcity of platform capabilities**
- **Enterprise-level impact and reuse**
- **Long-term capability value creation**



Platform architects, product owners, and domain specialists may be compensated on par with BU leadership roles. **Variable pay increasingly reflects platform adoption and enterprise outcomes**, discouraging BU talent hoarding.

Example

In large platform organisations, critical platform roles are benchmarked against senior business roles, signalling that owning enterprise capabilities is as valuable as running a P&L.



Governance and value creation

Platform governance, culture and behavioural shifts

As enterprises transition from BU-based structures to platform-based operating models, success depends as much on governance and culture as on structure and talent. Platforms fail not because of poor design, but because decision rights, incentives and culture remain anchored in BU-era thinking,

Core governance principles



- Platforms own **design, standards and evolution of capabilities**
- Businesses and assets **own execution and outcomes**
- Decision rights are separated between *“build and evolve”* and *“consume and perform”*

Funding and accountability



- Platforms operate with **clear funding models** (chargebacks, transfer pricing, platform P&L)
- Success is measured through **adoption, reuse, performance improvement and cost leverage**, not headcount or SLAs

Cultural and behavioural shifts required



Platform models require a profound **shift in organisational behaviour**, particularly among senior leaders and high performers.

- **From ownership Stewardship of enterprise capabilities**

- **From local optimisation System-level optimisation**
- **From bespoke solutions Repeatable, scalable systems**
- **From BU identity Enterprise identity**

Typical resistance patterns



- BU leaders perceive platforms as loss of autonomy
- High performers fear reduced visibility in centralised roles
- Platforms are initially viewed as slow or bureaucratic

Cultural enablers for platform success



Platform-based operating models succeed only when supported by the **right leadership behaviours and cultural mindset**, not just formal structures.

- **Visible leadership sponsorship**

Senior leaders actively champion platform thinking, reinforce enterprise-first decisions and model collaboration across businesses rather than reinforcing BU silos.

- **Enterprise-first mindset**

Leaders and teams shift from “my business” thinking to stewardship of enterprise capabilities, valuing reuse and shared success over local optimisation.

- **Tolerance for iteration and early imperfection**

Platform development is treated as a learning journey. Early failures, course corrections and incremental improvement are accepted as part of building scalable capabilities.

- **Trust and partnership between platforms and businesses**

Platform teams and business teams operate as partners, built on trust, transparency and shared problem-solving rather than control or compliance.

Platform economics and value creation

1. Cost structure shift: Replication to reuse

Traditional BU models replicate capabilities, leading to linear cost growth. Platform models incur higher upfront costs but sharply reduce marginal costs through reuse, creating strong operating leverage.

A large multi-business digital marketplace reduced duplicated product, analytics and logistics teams by centralising them as enterprise platforms, enabling new businesses to scale without proportionate cost increases.

2. Capability reuse as a core value lever

Platforms build capabilities once and deploy them across multiple businesses and assets, lowering cumulative cost while improving consistency and performance.

A multi-airport infrastructure operator built a single commercial, retail and pricing capability platform that is reused across all airports, improving consistency while avoiding repeated capability build-out at each location.

3. Speed-to-market advantage

New products, services or assets plug into existing platforms, significantly reducing launch timelines and accelerating revenue realisation.

A consumer ecosystem enterprise launches new digital services by plugging into existing identity, payments and customer data platforms, significantly shortening time-to-market compared to BU-led launches.

4. Data scale and performance uplift

Shared enterprise data enables better analytics, forecasting and decision-making, improving outcomes across all consuming units.

A global retail and marketplace platform aggregates data across sellers, customers and transactions, allowing enterprise-wide pricing and demand forecasting models that outperform BU-specific analytics.

5. External monetisation potential

Mature platforms can be extended to partners or third parties, turning internal capabilities into new revenue streams.

A real estate and land development platform initially built to serve internal assets later extends its development, leasing and analytics capabilities to third-party projects, creating new revenue streams beyond the core business.

Platform value journey

Phase 1: Internal value creation

- Cost reduction
- Performance consistency
- Faster launches



Phase 2: External monetisation

- Third party usage
- Platform services
- Ecosystem revenues





Adoption and way forward

Who should adopt platform-based operating models and how?

Platform-based operating models create the greatest value for organisations with one or more of the following characteristics:



Multi-business or conglomerate structures

Enterprises operating across multiple businesses, assets or geographies where similar capabilities are repeatedly built and can be reused at scale.



Asset-heavy enterprises with replicable operations

Organisations managing multiple physical assets (airports, retail locations, infrastructure, hotels, industrial parks) that can standardise and scale operating and commercial capabilities.



Ecosystem-oriented businesses

Firms delivering integrated offerings across customers, partners and services, requiring shared platforms to enable seamless journeys and value exchange.



Organisations expanding beyond core industries

Enterprises pursuing growth through adjacencies, such as digital services, real estate, data or marketplaces, where platforms prevent capability duplication.



Data- and capability-intensive enterprises

Organisations whose competitive advantage is driven by analytics, pricing, customer experience, product innovation or supply chain orchestration at enterprise scale.

Organisations that should be cautious

Platform models may be less effective or premature for organisations that:



Operate a single, tightly-scoped business with limited reuse potential



Lack scale or complexity to justify platform investment



Are early in operational maturity and still stabilising core processes



Lack leadership willingness to rebalance decision rights and incentives

In such cases, targeted capability hubs or shared services may be a more appropriate first step.

How organisations should approach platform adoption

Start with high-leverage capabilities:

Begin by platformising capabilities that are used across multiple businesses or assets, are costly or scarce, and are critical to growth or differentiation.



Separate design from execution early on:

Clearly distinguish between platform teams that design and evolve capabilities and business or asset teams that execute and deliver outcomes.



Invest in the right talent first:

Platform success depends heavily on early investment in architects, product owners and domain specialists; under-investment which is a common failure point.



Scale gradually, not universally:

Not every capability should become a platform; leading organisations selectively platformise where enterprise-level leverage is highest.



Conclusion

Platform-based operating models mark a **fundamental shift** in how enterprises create and scale value. They are not a technology construct or an incremental reorganisation, but a new operating logic that replaces isolated business optimisation with enterprise-wide capability leverage.

As this paper has shown, traditional structures struggle to meet today's **demands for integrated customer experiences, rapid innovation, data-driven decision-making and growth** beyond core industries. Platform models address these challenges by enabling capabilities to be built once and reused across businesses, assets and ecosystems, decoupling growth from proportional increases in cost and complexity.

Critically, platform success depends **as much on organisation design as digital investment**.

Clear separation of capability design and execution, redefined governance and funding models, platform-centric talent architectures, T-shaped career paths and leadership pipelines anchored in enterprise capability ownership are all essential. **Without these shifts, platforms remain structural overlays rather than true engines of scale.**

Platform models are **not universally applicable**, nor should every capability be platformised. However, for **complex, multi-business and ecosystem-oriented enterprises**, they offer a powerful mechanism to scale capabilities, accelerate adjacencies and unlock new sources of value.

The strategic question for leaders is no longer whether to adopt platform thinking, but where it creates the most leverage and how deliberately it is executed.

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