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Digital management: Fit Sevice company's experience

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Abstract

The development of the digital economy is accompanied by changes in the business management system, contributing to the emergence of a new management concept. However, the theory of digital management is still in its infacy and the existing scientific research in this field seems to be very fragmentary, which determines the relevance of this article, its theoretical and practical significance. The aim of the study is to identify the specifics of digital business management and changes in management processes by analysing the experience of digital management in a real company.

The research was conducted using the case study method, with a Novosibirsk company selected as the subject of the research, where a digital management system was created for the company and several hundred of its franchise partners in Russia and the Republic of Kazakhstan.

As a result of the analysis of management practice, the conceptual features of digital management were identified, the main stages of the formation of the process of 'variance-based management' were revealed, approaches to the formation of the company's key performance indicators were described, and the change in the role and functions of management in the digitalisation of business management was shown. The article contributes to the theoretical and managerial debate on the concept of digital management.

Keywords: key performance indicators, variance-based management, changes in management under digitalisation.

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数字化管理：Fit Service公司的经验

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简介

数字经济的发展伴随着企业管理体制的变革，促进了新管理理念的出现。然而，数字化管理理论刚刚形成，该领域现有的科学研究似乎非常零散，这就决定了本文的现实意义、理论意义和实践意义。本研究的目的是在分析一家实际公司数字化管理经验的基础上，确定数字化业务管理的具体内容和管理流程的变化。

研究以案例研究法为基础；研究对象是一家新西伯利亚公司，该公司建立了数字化管理系统，覆盖其在俄罗斯和哈萨克斯坦共和国的数百家特许经营合作伙伴。

通过对管理实践的分析，突出了数字化管理的概念特征，揭示了形成偏差管理过程的主要阶段，描述了形成公司关键绩效指标的方法，并展示了在企业管理数字化过程中管理层角色和职能的变化。 文章为有关数字管理概念的理论和管理辩论做出了贡献。
关键词：关键绩效指标、偏差管理、数字化下的管理变革。

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Introduction

Digital management is becoming a new reality in business, and it is necessary to adapt to it. However, researchers note the small number of studies examining the impact of digitalisation on management [Pashuk & Tuboltseva, 2022; Ayla, 2023], which is understandable given the limited experience of such management to date. Literature has comparatively thoroughly examined digitalisation issues in specific functional areas such as marketing, human resource management, management accounting, logistics and project management [Dmitrieva, 2020; Suslov & Minaev, 2021; Monge & Soriano, 2023]. A wide range of theoretical articles have been published on the digital transformation of business, the problems of the digitalisation of management and the use of digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence and big data analysis, in production and management organisation [Antonov & Samomudov, 2018; Levchaev, 2019]. Books and textbooks on digital management are also being published [Battal, 2022; Baumers & Dominy, 2022][1].However, the practical functioning of the digital management system, the underlying principles and methods, and the formation of the concept of digital management are not well covered.

Meanwhile, digitalisation technologies have led to significant management transformations, prompting experts to discuss changes to the role of managers, the formation of a new management system that transcends time and space restrictions, changes to managers' thought processes, the development of a new management model where traditional thinking may be ineffective, and the inevitable requirement for new management practices in the face of new technologies. Essentially, we are talking about forming a digital company management system based on data (data-driven management) [Trofimov & Trofimova, 2021]. However, the contours of the new management system are still poorly defined [Arenkov et al., 2018]. In this regard, describing the practice of digitalising business management is of both scientific and practical interest.

This article describes the specifics of digital management based on an analysis of the digital management experience of a specific company using the case study method.

1. Digital management: theoretical and methodological foundations of research

- An analysis of the ways in which the term 'digital management' is defined in scientific articles (Ozornin & Terlyga, 2021; Kalyazina, 2023) shows that it is considered from two standpoints: the technologies used, and the socio-economic aspects of management. In the latter case, we can talk about the conceptual and applied characteristics of changes in management. Broadly speaking, digital management is defined as the process of implementing global digital standards (technologies) that transform the management paradigm, presenting challenges to companies from the external environment [Larionov et al., 2020]. Researchers describe the advantages of the digitalisation of management. In

[1] See also: Maslennikov, V. V., Lyanday, Yu. V., Kalinina, I. A., Popova, E. V. & Biryukov, E. S. (2024). Digital Management: Textbook. Moscow: KroNus.

particular, they note that it increases the efficiency and speed of management decision-making, including through the use of artificial intelligence. It also accelerates the detection of problems (Levchaev, 2019), makes business processes observable and manageable, and ensures that decisions are transparent, justified and less subjective (Ruban, 2024).

As the issues surrounding digital management are extensive, several key research areas can be identified.

- Data-driven management decision-making processes, including the development of predictive and prescriptive analytics [Awamleh et al., 2024; Mekimah et al., 2024].

The renowned consultancy firm Gartner included this area in its top 10 technology trends for 2023[2]. Within this framework, approaches to solving digitalisation problems in operational management are being developed to improve production efficiency. Standard software products for managing equipment maintenance and repair have emerged, enabling the avoidance of equipment downtime due to breakdowns through preventive maintenance. Other digital solutions based on the Internet of Things (IoT) and artificial intelligence technologies are also being developed. According to the Higher School of Economics, new methods of processing and transmitting information prevail among the process innovations completed over the past three years [Innovation Activity Indicators, 2024].

- New business models, including platform business models and digital platform ecosystems [Gawer, 2021; Chen et al., 2022].

In the modern economy, companies' business models are becoming a tool for competition. The management systems of platform companies, which are based on digital platforms and develop using network effects, are inherently high-tech. Traditional companies can use digital technologies to promote and organise the sale of their products and create additional value for customers when changing business models, without changing business management processes [Ivanov et al., 2024].

- The digitalisation of management in certain areas, most frequently marketing, personnel management and project management [Dmitrieva, 2020; Suslov & Minaev, 2021; Monge & Soriano, 2023].

The market offers ready-made solutions for the digitalisation of auxiliary business processes in areas such as logistics, personnel management and finance. Widespread CRM systems allow sales and client interactions to be managed. However, this 'piecemeal' digitalisation usually does not affect companies' main production processes and, consequently, does not allow us to speak of a digital system for company management.

- Practical experience of the digitalisation of management in companies from various fields, considered at an individual level. This article presents the latter direction of research.

In our opinion, the main result of the digitalisation of management is not only the development of analytics and the use of data when making management decisions, or a change in the company's business model including new structures and functions. Rather, it is the restructuring of management business processes that leads to the formation of a digital business management system and, in theoretical terms, a new management concept.

2. Research design

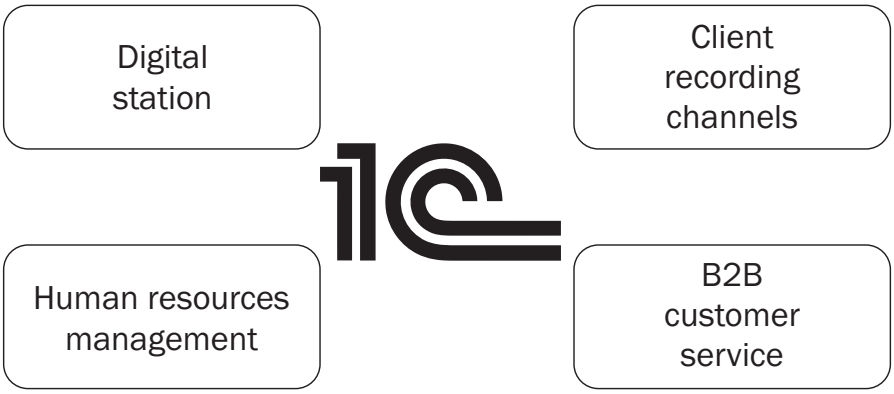
The study focuses on the Novosibirsk-based company Fit Service, which has established the largest franchise network of car service stations in Russia and the Republic of Kazakhstan, comprising over 300 stations in 157 cities. In 2023, the station network generated revenue of more than 9 billion rubles and served over 2 million clients.

The research method is a case study, involving a detailed examination and interpretation of results for a specific research subject (Thomas & Myers, 2015). This approach was chosen because sufficient experience has not yet been accumulated in the Russian digitalisation of management practices to form the basis for the theoretical development of the concept of digital management, which makes the presented article relevant.

One of the authors' involvement in the company's activities enabled a comprehensive analysis of the structure and content of the digital management system. It also made it possible to demonstrate the role of the company's key performance indicators in organising operational business management for deviations, as well as describing changes in the company's management system during digitalisation. This article does not cover organisational, technical or algorithmic tasks related to the data collection and processing system, nor the planning system. This approach allowed us to focus on conceptual changes in the company's management during digitalisation. Firstly, this concerns the operational business management system, which is based on creating a data flow panel using the company's key performance indicators. This panel then becomes the basis for daily monitoring and deviation management. This, in turn, changes the role of the company manager, freeing them from operational tasks so they can focus on the company's strategy and team development.

[2] https://trends.rbc.ru/trends/industry/cmrm/63c6ac409a794755f829a8a6?from=copy.

Fig. The main modules of the digital control system



Source: compiled by the authors.

3. Results

Fit Service has developed a multi-level digital management system based on the 1C platform (see figure). This system is continually being supplemented with new services and modules that are synchronised with other systems and partner products.

In the system under consideration, production business processes are presented in the Digital Station module. This includes the Digital Acceptance and Digital Workshop services, as well as the Planner. The former allows you to issue all documents (cash receipts, acts and work orders) electronically, as well as making online payments for orders. The Digital Workshop service is based on an automated auto mechanic workplace. It generates a digital car diagnostics report and searches for spare parts, sends a commercial offer to the client and then provides data on the results of repairing their car. Based on the issued work orders, the Planner system creates a calendar plan for the car service station, which uses colour solutions to show the station's workload by type of work over time on the screen of gadgets. Consequently, each car service employee can see what work needs to be done and when. The data generated by the Digital Station module forms the basis of management processes for the company and its partners.

The customer recording module supports the company's centralised call centre and uses chatbots and artificial intelligence technologies to automate customer communication processes. This module's services are used to record customers for servicing, change service times, send reminders to customers and send requests for repair work.

Operational data is collected based on digital modules and services, showing the state of the business in real

Table 1
Key performance indicators

Financial indicators	Auto service performance indicators	Customer service rating
Station revenue	Unique clients	Customer reviews of internet services
Purchase of spare parts from the parent company	Ratio of revenue from spare parts to revenue from services	CSI (Customer Satisfaction Index): a measure of customer satisfaction
Markup on spare parts	Number of standard hours worked	
Average revenue per client over the period	Number of work orders, including those with recommendations	

Source: Fit Service data.

time. This data is aggregated into key performance indicators and visualised on a data panel (dashboard) for owners and managers at different levels of management. The full version is available to company owners and managers on a phone or computer and contains data on the activities of all network stations. This allows you to identify and respond to emerging problems quickly. You can automatically receive reports for any time period, territory or station upon request, and view any indicator in comparison with the standard or over time. Overall, the Fit Service team manages the business based on data collected, aggregated and visualised online.

An analysis of the experience of implementing digital management in a real company has highlighted the key features of digital management. Let's consider these features.

- Transition from managing objects and functions to managing real processes.

Since its foundation in 2008, digitalisation of business has been considered a key investment project in Fit Service's strategy. As the initial goal was to develop a franchise network of car service centres, great attention was paid to building and debugging business processes, automating them, and creating a system for collecting and analysing data on which to base operational management. This enabled clear standards and regulations for the franchise to be established within a few years. When it comes to existing businesses, transitioning to process management involves consistently describing the main business processes and digitising them, i.e. transferring all data to a digital format.

- Creation of a set of key performance indicators to reflect the health of the business and monitor their achievement online.

The company's experience shows that key performance indicators should reflect different aspects of the business, such as its financial condition, production indicators in the context of a specific business and customer feedback on the quality of its goods or services. The indicators generated by the company in question are presented in Table 1. Depending on their position, managers can view any indicator in dynamics online for the company as a whole and for each station. Car service owners can also compare their indicators with those of other stations in the network to identify growth and development opportunities.

The next step is to establish the desired standard level for each indicator, as well as the permissible deviations from these standards. Excesses require management decisions. These standards and their associated deviations are determined through experience and expert knowledge, and can be adjusted as necessary.

- Organisation of operational business management based on deviations of the company's key performance indicators from the standards set for the planning period. This is made possible by defining a list of key performance indicators, their standard levels and acceptable deviations, and by generating these indicators online and presenting them on a dashboard.

Experts note that deviations can be precisely detected when analysing streaming data; aggregated data conceals them and is therefore useless [Jacobides & Reeves, 2020, p. 45]. Methodologically, deviation management differs from the approach to deviation management developed in the quality management system (QMS). Deviation management aims to prevent possible problems, errors and unexpected events by detecting, analysing and managing them early on. These processes can also be digitised [Kovrigin & Vasiliev, 2020]. In digital management, deviations from established parameters act as indicators used according to the traffic light principle: a green mark shows that everything is normal in the management system; a yellow mark draws managers' attention to an indicator; and a red mark requires intervention and the adoption of management decisions. During digitalisation, the organisation of deviation management of business processes lies in the fact that managers only intervene in current processes if a red mark appears on the data panel in the colour-coded indicator display, indicating a deviation from the norm.

- Development of regulations for how to act when deviations occur for each key indicator, and delegation of daily control of the system to company managers.

At Fit Service, control is delegated to bus station support managers, whose working day begins with analysing data on their assigned stations in the context of the planner and dashboard of indicators. If any indicators show red, an action plan is promptly adopted, involving employees from various management company departments if necessary.

The digital management features determine the specifics of the Fit Service franchise: entrepreneurs acquire a transparent business that is under control, where the owner always knows how efficient the processes and staff are. At the same time, many business processes are performed by the management company, which has eight departments with over 300 employees focused on the efficient operation and development of franchise stations. Equally important is the fact that key performance indicators reflecting different aspects of the business facilitate communication between partners, enabling them to speak the same business language.

- Changing the role of the company's manager to emphasise strategic activities and the development of his team, for which he will act as a mentor and coach.

Delegating operational control to managers frees up their time, as they only get involved in solving

Table 2
The manager's work plan with businеschi support managers

Frequency of meetings	Topic of the meeting
Once every two weeks	General team meeting: global tasks.
Once every two weeks	One-to-one meetings between managers to discuss individual development plans and problems.
Once a month/quarter	Monthly/quarterly results
Once every six months/year	Final meetings on the company's overall strategy
As needed	Cross-functional team meetings/working with other departments.

Source: Fit Service data.

current problems in the event of significant deviations. Consequently, they can dedicate more time to formulating strategies and making strategic decisions regarding the company's development and expansion, creating new products, collaborating with partners, and engaging with the external environment. The company analyses market and technological trends, studies best business practices (including those in other industries), acts as an expert on a large number of industry projects, promotes the brand, and actively shares its experience.

The change in the role of the Fit Service Manager when working with the team is reflected in their work plan with the company's managers (Table 2). Managers can still contact the manager directly with a problem or for advice when they are free.

The management system, formed through a lengthy digitalisation process, ensures transparency for owners, managers and partners. The openness and well-coordinated nature of all processes make the company attractive to employees and allow management to avoid "firefighting" situations. Describing the Fit Service company's experience of digital management contributes to forming a theory of management in the digital economy. However, the issue of creating comprehensive performance indicators that reflect the state of the business and form the basis for operational management based on deviations remains open for further research. Further theoretical understanding of changes to business management processes, particularly planning and operational control processes during digitalisation, is required.

Conclusion

The digitalisation of management, which involves organising the collection, aggregation and visualisation of online data on business activities, leads to a conceptual change in management within the company. This is evident in the fact that the primary principle of operational management is management by deviations, allowing control of processes to be transferred to company specialists. Consequently, company managers have more time to organise strategic activities and develop the management team. A planning and operational control system is necessarily formed in a digital management system, increasing the speed of response to deviations from planned results while creating prerequisites and opportunities for developing a strategy as a vector of company development. It should be noted that, alongside developing a strategy, management retains decisions that require expert knowledge.

The digital management system is oriented towards achieving the company's planned results with maximum openness and transparency, creating the basis for employee development, involvement in company activities, and increased responsibility for results. Therefore, a personnel management module is a mandatory component of the digital management system.

The digital management system was gradually developed in Fit Service and continues to evolve. This has enabled the company to become a market leader and innovator in technology, developing and scaling a network of car service stations while transforming the car service industry to meet the highest global standards.

In conclusion, we note that the company is open to sharing its successful experience of digitalisation.

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