A Study of Dynamic Capabilities for Digital Transformation Among Top Rated Norwegian Law Firms

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Abstract: Digital technologies are reshaping knowledge work, yet the organizational capabilities that enable digital transformation in traditional law firms remain unclear. We report findings from a multiple-case study of six of Norway's 25 largest business law firms. The theoretical framework of dynamic capabilities is used as a theoretical lens to analyze and reflect upon the current status and the potential for future development. The six dimensions used to analyze the data in this study are Strategy and Ecosystem, Innovation, Technology, Operations, Organizational Design, and at last Leadership and Culture. Interesting insights is how digital transformation is adopted as well as how artificial intelligence is handled in the top leading law firms in Norway. The special characteristics of professional service firms are also taken account of in order to capture the operating logic of the top-notch law firms. The business model based on hourly billing with lack of external owners, and strong institutional norms make law firms stand out as the archetype of professional business firm where knowledge is the key production factor. This qualitative case study is based on six expert interviews conducted in the six largest business law firms in Norway, from informants who are leaders with special responsibility or insight into the areas of digitalization and artificial intelligence. What we discover is how technology is a major change driver, but the law firms analyzed face persistent barriers such as time constraints, low user adoption, and weak incentives. The findings include enabling capabilities—willingness to invest, efficient core processes, and deliberate efforts to build a digital culture. Areas requiring further development include collaboration across value networks, systematic innovation practices, user adoption at scale, and incentive design aligned with transformation goals. The study identifies critical capabilities that enable digital transformation in business law firms and offers practical implications and guidance for leaders seeking to accelerate progress.

Keywords: Digital transformation, Law firms, Dynamic capabilities

1. Introduction

Considering the rapid development of information technology and generative AI, an increasing number of questions have emerged regarding the future of knowledge work and the sustainability of existing business models in professional service firms (Løwendahl, 2009). Business law firms have traditionally been regarded as conservative organizations that are resistant to change. However, several scholars argue that the traditional law firm is approaching a crossroads (Kronblad, 2020; Schmidt, 2023), as digital technologies increasingly challenge established ways of creating and capturing value. New technologies offer opportunities to streamline knowledge-intensive work and enable new business models (Breunig & Skjølsvik, 2017; Chanias et al., 2019; Pemer, 2020), while simultaneously creating pressure on firms whose competitive advantage has historically rested on specialized expertise and labor-intensive service delivery. The potential magnitude of this disruption is substantial. McKinsey estimates that 20-25% of all working hours in Denmark could be automated using existing technologies (McKinsey, 2019). While generative AI is expected to play a complementary role in many industries, its impact on legal work may be particularly disruptive (Christensen et al., 2013; Dipshan, 2023). Goldman Sachs estimates that as much as 44% of legal tasks in the United States could be automated (Dipshan, 2023). Although such changes have not yet fully materialized in Norwegian business law firms, many firms have initiated digitalization and AI-related transformation efforts in response to these developments. Digital transformation refers to the fundamental organizational changes driven by digital technologies that reshape strategic decisions, business logic, and organizational processes (Schneider et al., 2023). Prior research demonstrates that successful digital transformation can be a source of competitive advantage (Gurumurthy et al., 2020; Klos et al., 2023; Konopik et al., 2022; Warner & Wäger, 2019). At the same time, digital transformation is particularly challenging for established organizations because existing structures, routines, and business models may inhibit change (Warner & Wäger, 2019). Consequently, an extensive body of literature has sought to identify the organizational capabilities that support successful digital transformation (Karimi & Walter, 2015; Soluk & Kammerlander, 2020; Warner & Wäger, 2019). However, despite this growing body of research, important gaps remain. Existing studies on digital transformation capabilities have largely focused on established firms in general, manufacturing firms, or technology-intensive industries. Comparatively little attention has been paid to professional service firms, and particularly to business law firms, whose partnership structures, professional norms, and reliance on expert knowledge make them a distinctive organizational context. As a result, limited empirical knowledge exists regarding which organizational capabilities are mobilized and developed when business law firms pursue digital transformation.

This gap is especially significant given the increasing transformative potential of generative AI for legal services and the strategic challenges currently facing the legal sector. To address this gap, this study asks: Which organizational capabilities are expressed when business law firms undergo digital transformation? The study provides an empirical contribution based on expert interviews with six senior leaders from six leading Norwegian business law firms selected from the country's top-tier firms (Schmidt, 2023). All informants hold leadership positions and possess direct insight into their firms' strategic digitalization initiatives. The firms studied operate according to a traditional partnership model and primarily rely on hourly billing, making them particularly relevant cases for understanding how established professional service firms respond to digital transformation.

1.1 Digital Transformation

Digital transformation is about how organizations utilize digital technologies to change the current state and develop new business models, business processes, capabilities, products, and services to create value (Bharadwaj et al., 2013; Fitzgerald et al., 2014, p. 2; Verhoef et al., 2021). Digital transformation lacks a clear definition (Osmundsen, 2020, p. 1; Vial, 2019; Verhoef et al., 2021). Liu et al. (2011) argue that digital transformation is "an organizational transformation that integrates digital technologies and business processes in a digital economy." Digital transformation is about more than just the emergence of digital technologies. Digital transformation is particularly used to describe the general and larger changes organizations undergo in the technological age (Osmundsen, 2020) and should be distinguished from other related concepts such as digitalization and digital innovation (Plekhanov et al., 2023, p. 823; Vial, 2019; Osmundsen, 2020). While digitalization is about utilizing digital technologies to improve existing processes (Vial, 2019). However, Vial (2019) provides a definition we will use: “Digital transformation is a process that seeks to improve an organization by triggering significant changes in its characteristics through combinations of information, computing, communication, and connectivity technologies” (Vial, 2019, p. 121).

The emergence and adoption of information technology make professional service firms particularly vulnerable to digital transformation in the coming years (Chanias et al., 2019; Kronblad, 2020; Pemer, 2020). Despite the pervasive power of digital transformation, professional service firms, however, appear largely to have escaped the predicted disruption (Christensen et al., 2013). It is argued that dominant logic and strong industry norms have prevented digital innovation among law firms (Christensen et al., 2013; Thornton et al., 2012; Kronblad, 2020; Kronblad et al., 2023). It is necessary to highlight the distinctive characteristics in law firms, as well as drivers and barriers to change.

1.2 Professional Service Firms - Knowledge as the Competitive Weapon

Professional service firms (PSFs) in general and law firms in particular, have their distinctive characteristics been subject of several studies (Løwendahl, 2009; Von Nordenflycht, 2010; Kronblad, 2021). Law firms are often characterized as pure PSFs, and Von Nordenflycht (2010) identifies three specific characteristics of PSFs: high knowledge intensity, low capital intensity, and professionalized workers. High knowledge intensity means that value is generated by the intellectual capital possessed by the lawyers within the firm (Von Nordenflycht, 2010; Kronblad, 2021, p. 9). The business model is based on employees' knowledge as the primary source of revenue, and law firms are recognized by low capital intensity (Von Nordenflycht, 2010; Kronblad, 2021). As a result, law firms are largely organized as professional partnerships, where highly trained individuals provide expert advice to clients based on hourly billing (Kronblad et al., 2023, p. 219).

1.3 Technology as a Driver for Change

Law firms operate in increasingly digital contexts and are progressively exposed to new technologies and practices (Susskind & Susskind, 2015). Legal tech is used as a collective term for the adoption and use of information and communication technology (Aabakken et al., 2023, p. 6). Technological development through legal tech creates new demands from clients, and market forces are drivers for change (Rodgers et al., 2023, p. 311). There is broad agreement that technological advancements have driven changes in the work processes of knowledge workers (Kronblad et al., 2023; Christensen et al., 2013; Susskind & Susskind, 2015). Rodgers et al. (2023) explore the impact of technology on law firms and find that although the predicted disruption of PSFs (Christensen et al., 2013) and traditional law firms have not yet materialized, legal tech has already made its entrance and streamlined the industry.

Digital tools and legal tech of various kinds generally play a significant role in today's legal advisory services (Kronblad et al., 2023, p. 220). At an overarching level, information and communication technology such as email and internet searches are highly relevant legal tech. The same applies to the use of digital platforms for collaboration with clients and developing better customer experiences (Kronblad et al., 2023, p. 220). Rodgers (2023) points out that the use of generic technology such as computers, the internet, cloud computing, video conferencing tools, and similar solutions provided by Microsoft is very widespread (Rodgers et al., 2023). The use of more legal-specific IT for storage, knowledge management, and billing is common (Rodgers et al., 2023, p. 303). A widely used software is iManage and its system for document management and email (Rodgers, 2023, p. 303).

When it comes to AI-driven legal tech, its use is still at a relatively early stage. Machine learning and artificial intelligence are mainly applied in connection with due diligence and contract review (Rodgers et al., 2023, p. 303). However, generative AI, particularly following the launch of the language model ChatGPT, is highlighted as potentially disruptive technology that will radically change the legal industry in the coming years (Hadfield & Koh, 2025; Schmidt, 2023). This is illustrated through legal tech providers' increasingly extensive implementation of AI in existing legal tech and adoption of language models in law firms.

1.4 Dynamic Capabilities as an Analytical Lens

Digital transformation in our society introduces a new reality, and the question of competitive business operations appears increasingly complex (Gong & Ribiere, 2021; Vial, 2019). Digital transformation is dynamic in nature (Chanias et al., 2023), and the subsequent change requires that organizations are aware of their resources and capabilities (Ellström et al., 2022). Dynamic capabilities (Teece et al., 1997) provide a suitable theoretical lens for studying this phenomenon (Warner & Wäger, 2019; Konopik et al., 2022; Schneider et al., 2023; Karimi & Walter, 2015). Teece et al. (1997) define dynamic capabilities as "higher-level skills that determine a firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments" (p. 516). The definition has been central to the development of dynamic capabilities theory and is repeated in most works in the field, thus guiding the further presentation in this study.

1.5 Dynamic Capabilities for Digital Transformation

In line with the ongoing relevance of digital transformation, an increasing number of empirical and literary studies have analyzed digital transformation through the lens of dynamic capabilities (Warner & Wäger, 2019, Ellström et al., 2022; Soluk & Kammerlander, 2020; Jantunen et al., 2012). Several studies argue that organizations that are more dedicated and have an active approach to which organizational capabilities should be developed are more successful in digital transformation processes (Breznik & Lahovnik, 2016; Warner & Wäger, 2019; Teece, 2007; Konopik et al., 2022). Konopik et al. (2022) identify a total of six overarching themes of organizational capabilities that prove central to digital transformation and create a roadmap to guide organizations facing digital transformation. Dynamic capabilities build on organizational capabilities, and the digital transformation process can be seen as a sequence of sensing changes in the environment, seizing opportunities, and transforming the resource base (Mele et al. 2023; Soluk & Kammerlander 2020; Konpik et al. 2022). During a digital transformation process, the need for organizational capabilities shifts. The relevance of different capabilities will vary depending on where in the process the organization is situated (Konopik et al., 2022, p. 6).

The six analytical dimensions developed by Konopik et al 2022 are presented below:

1. Strategy and ecosystem: Strategy forms the foundation for how organizations operate. In the context of digital transformation, key capabilities in the category of strategy and ecosystem are related to how the business model can be adopted to the new opportunities (Verhoef et al., 2021), while sustaining relationships with key partners (Konopik et al., 2022, p. 6).
2. Innovation: Mastering digital transformation requires the ability to capture external information so that strategic choices and innovative projects are based on informed decisions. Capabilities to dedicate disruptive technology, social, and business opportunities in the environment, alongside the ability to map what will drive future customer needs (Konopik, 2022, p. 9; Feroz et al., 2023, p. 8). Innovative abilities are particularly relevant early in the digital transformation process, and Konopik et al. (2022) find that the sensing mechanism (Teece, 2007) has the highest relevance for innovation capabilities.

3. Technology: Digital transformation arises as new technology that affects business models and operations. Possessing technological capabilities entails organizations' abilities to monitor and understand disruptive technology circulating in the market (Osmundsen, 2020) to maintain competitiveness. This implicitly suggests that technological capabilities should be developed from the early stages of the process. Konopik et al. (2022) point out that capabilities associated with the sensing mechanism are most relevant for technological capabilities.
4. Operations: Where technological capabilities ensure the organization's ability to explore and adopt new technology, operational capabilities pertain to the organization's ability to maintain and exploit existing business activities through existing technology (Konopik et al., 2022). Operational capabilities therefore also have a connection to ambidextrous capabilities (Kronblad et al., 2023; Chang et al., 2012) as existing operations must be balanced with renewed digital focus.
5. Organizational design: The change process that arises as a result of digital transformation challenges the structures within the organization. To create a resilient and dynamic organization, companies must possess organizational capabilities related to organizational design and the modification of established structures in line with digital strategies, innovation, and adoption of new technology (Warner & Wäger, 2019; Konopik et al., 2022).
6. Leadership and culture: Organizations' ability to lead the transformation within the organization forms the foundation for whether the process remains successful or not. Capabilities related to the organization's leadership also concern culture and permeate all levels of the organization (Konopik, 2022; Warner & Wäger, 2019). In the following part, we will present the empirical data from this study.

1.6 Methodology

Three criteria have been used to select informants for this study. 1) The selection of firms for this study has been from the top 25 largest law firms in Norway. 2) The informants possess a key leadership position in the form. 3) And have decision power to influence digitalization and technology development at a strategic level. Based on the "snowball" orientation, one firm has been approached after the other, in total six firms were willing to participate in this study. All interview data has been transcribed and coded, based on the raw material from the interviews. Because of business secrecy we cannot display the raw data in this paper. Coding of each interview has been conducted, according to the theoretical dimensions developed by Konopik et al. (2022). To ensure internal validity, the interview guide as been developed from the theoretical basis of Konopik et al (2022). In terms of external validity, it is not possible to make numerical generalizations with few firms and few interviews. Generalization can only be based on theoretical sampling, and drawing insights from the data presented. Below is a presentation of interview details.

Table 1: Overview of interviews, length and form

Law Firm/informant	Length of the interview	Form
F1	60 minutes	Personal presence
F2	55 minutes	Teams
F3	1:20 minutes	Personal presence
F4	55 minutes	Personal presence
F5	46 minutes	Personal presence
F6	55 minutes	Teams

2. Empirical Data

2.1 Strategy and Ecosystem

AI leads to changing client needs, and utilizing technology will be a source of competitive advantage:

> *"And the technology affects everyone, not just the legal industry. And it also means that you get pushed by customers and clients like... 'If you use this, can you deliver this in a different way?' And that push you get from clients to bring about change; I think that is necessary." (F2)*

> *An informant says that "There are many projects ongoing, and a lot is about the small changes that create smaller, but continuous, developments all the time." (F3).*

"So I think that, combined with more insight from the clients and becoming more customer-centric, combined with more focus on people and culture and the people dimension, I think will become extremely important in our industry." (F3) The empirical findings show that the companies collectively have strong capabilities in strategy and ecosystem. All the companies appear to shape strategic decisions based on considerations of contributing to successful digital transformation.

2.2 Innovation

> *"It is the incremental nature of innovation that happens all the time, not one big transformation." (F4).*

For innovative capabilities in the central sensory mechanism, all the companies show strong capacities related to identifying innovation. The companies are relatively similar and use and are offered much of the same new technology. This is in line with the theory of distinctive characteristics for such companies and industries. With the exception of company 2, there is little internal innovation within the companies, beyond the more organic. This diminishes the innovation capabilities in the grasping and transformation mechanism. In extension of this, our findings indicate that none of the informants aim to be early adopters of new technology, which may explain why there is a low level of innovation in the companies investigated.

2.3 Technology and Data

> *"Even though the industry and management have raised their sights and are investing, it is the user base itself that is the final step that lags behind. User adoption is something I work on a lot. To get more out of tech, I also need to ensure that we have enough basic knowledge to support it. For I cannot be support for everyone all the time." (F4) "It is easy to buy technology. It is the implementation that presents challenges." (F5)*

Within technological capabilities where the sensory mechanism is particularly relevant, the companies score on average high. This is because all have dedicated employees with a background and/or education in technology. Our findings show a high willingness to invest in new technology, but they indicate, however, that all the companies face challenges related to user adoption, and they have varying degrees of internally change-willing employees. Nevertheless, several place a strong focus on user adoption, which makes the capabilities within the seize and transformation mechanisms around moderately strong.

2.4 Operations

"I wish I had a way to identify inefficiency. It is demanding because it requires that the lawyers allocate some time. We need to have workshops, we need to have working meetings to map things out. Questions such as: What do you do today? Are there any deviations? And then outline and create a process description, identify pain points, and then see if you could do it in a different and more efficient way." (F3) All companies operate efficiently and profitably and make good use of existing business processes. There is some variation in the approach and level of mapping inefficiencies in existing operations, and few use internal data to carry this out. There is also a low degree of capabilities related to exploring new ways of doing things based on external data, which indicates generally low ambidextrous capabilities.

2.5 Organizational Design

“We have good information flow, but as an organization, we probably have the potential for it to become even better. The lawyers have a lot to do and are focused within their field. So even though information about, for example, new tools has been communicated, it still turns out that the information has not always been received.” (F2) The empirical findings show that well-implemented data management systems facilitate important knowledge management in the transformation mechanism. Although the data material indicates that several experience some issues regarding information flow and reaching employees, this is largely due to employees being focused on their own work areas. The companies' capabilities within the sensing and seizing mechanism are therefore moderate.

2.6 Digital Transformation: Leadership and Culture

"We have been working quite a lot with culture and organization now, in relation to digital transformation and change. These are things that are not so easy to explain and be very concrete about to the employees, but which I still believe are extremely important for us to work on." (F2) The findings indicate that companies generally score high in capabilities related to culture and leadership. While several companies have invested in and increased such capabilities by hiring capable and competent leaders for digitalization, the data also shows a generally willing workforce to embrace change, given sufficient time. One company has also succeeded with

an incentive scheme to maintain engagement and openness around new technology, by allowing billing for innovation projects. This can be a key tool for overcoming time constraints in companies, and something that other companies should seek to implement.

Comparison of the six law firms:

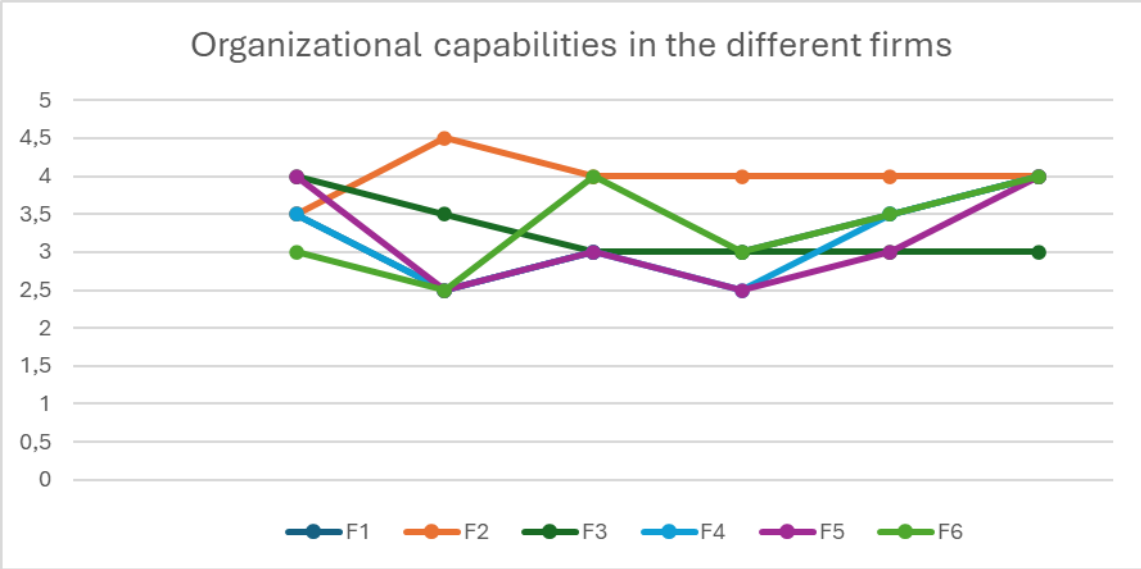


Figure 1: Organizational capabilities in the different law firms

Figure 1 have the following legends: F1: Strategy and ecosystem, F2: Innovation, F3: Technology, F4: Operations F5: Organizational design, F6: Leadership and culture

3. Discussion

The study has explored and compared traditional business law firms, and their organization and capabilities in digital transformation. The study aims to answer the following research question: Which organizational capabilities are expressed when business law firms undergo digital transformation? We have examined which of the key organizational capabilities in digital transformation companies possess. Our empirical findings indicate that companies to varying degrees have important organizational capabilities, and that processes and routines in combination with management directives contribute to creating dynamic capabilities. The data shows that all the companies have strategies for digital transformation, either directly or indirectly. There is generally a high willingness to invest in technology and resources in connection with technology. There is a high level of digital competence in the management of the companies, and ongoing digitalization projects are carried out to ensure user adoption. The findings also show good data management systems and knowledge management. Several of the companies have change-oriented employees and place a strong focus on creating a culture for change. Our empirical findings, however, also show that the companies have room for improvement in collaborating within value networks and creating ecosystems. There is a low degree of innovation, although one company stands out, and generating more innovation is therefore essential. Furthermore, the data indicates that user adoption and time pressure are central barriers preventing knowledge workers from realizing the potential of legal tech solutions. Where the company excels at streamlining existing processes, our findings show that they lack ambidextrous capabilities to exploit simultaneously. Finally, despite a high focus on culture, it will be crucial to create a greater understanding of digitalization and innovation within the companies.

4. Conclusion

With our research question in mind: Which organizational capabilities are expressed when business law firms undergo digital transformation? Our findings enrich the dynamic capability perspective presented by Konopik et al. (2022) as we highlight the critical dimensions of digital transformation and AI. Our extension of the analytical framework applied shows how this framework functions as a roadmap for change. From our analysis of the different dimensions, it appears evident that there are large differences in each law firm's approach to innovation and organizational design. The organizational design factors are in addition to leadership and

culture deemed to be critical for digital transformation and utilization of AI. Thus, it is not innovation or IT in itself – but the abilities to incorporate and use the technology in the organization by developing dynamic capabilities, as organizational design, culture and leadership are key drivers, as shown in this study.

It can further be problematized that the size of the sample is a limitation. The study provides insight into six traditional business law firms, all of which have offices in Oslo. The geographical context is therefore limited. A larger and more diverse study in the field could help to confirm or refute the findings. In extension of the idea that dynamic capabilities can provide competitive advantages in dynamic environments, it would be interesting to study and compare whether law firms with stronger organizational capabilities in digital transformation are able to demonstrate better results than others. Finally, more in-depth observations and long-term studies of law firms can reveal why traditional business models and longstanding practices have been maintained over time, as well as uncover variations that may explain how organizational capabilities are developed.

AI Declaration: Both Google and Microsoft AI have been used to spell check and to ensure correct language in this document, and ChatGPT5 was used to check references. For the review, ChatGPT5 was used as a discussion partner for improving the abstract, introduction and the theoretical template.

Ethics Declaration: Ethical clearance was not required for the research.

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