

From vision to roadmap: structuring digital change in sports organizations

Introduction: the role of roadmaps in digital transformation

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving sports landscape, digital transformation is no longer a side project or an experimental initiative; rather, it has become a **strategic necessity**. From expanding global fan engagement to driving commercial growth and data monetization, sports clubs, leagues, and federations increasingly rely on digital solutions to compete and thrive in a fast-changing environment. However, while many organizations articulate ambitious **digital visions**, few succeed in executing them effectively due to the absence of a clear, structured **roadmap**.

A digital roadmap acts as the crucial link between **strategic vision and execution**. It defines not only *what* needs to be done, but also **how, when, and by whom**. The roadmap enables organizations to coordinate initiatives across departments, manage dependencies, prioritize resources, and adapt to change. Without it, even the most well-crafted strategies risk becoming siloed projects that fall short of driving measurable impact (KPMG, 2022).

The challenge of building roadmaps is particularly complex in the sports industry. Clubs and leagues must account for **seasonal calendars**, player transfers, sponsor demands, and fluctuating fan attention. These unique dynamics make it essential to **sequence digital initiatives around sporting cycles**, ensuring minimal disruption to core operations while capturing key engagement windows (Deloitte, 2023). Furthermore, organizations often struggle with **balancing innovation and tradition**, as stakeholders may be resistant to rapid change in favor of preserving legacy systems or longstanding practices (McKinsey and Company, 2022).



Research from *PwC Sports Survey 2023* reveals that while 86% of sports executives see digital transformation as essential for future success, only a fraction report having a fully integrated roadmap aligned with business strategy and operational readiness (PwC, 2023). This disconnect reflects a broader industry trend where digital programs are launched in isolation, often lacking the governance, prioritization, or cross-functional alignment needed for long-term success.

In this reading, we explore how sports organizations can **translate strategic ambitions into structured roadmaps** that are both realistic and transformative. Through conceptual frameworks, real-life examples, and practical tools, we outline the essential components of roadmap creation, from organizational readiness and calendar-based planning to governance and iteration. The goal is to equip leaders with a practical methodology to structure digital change in a way that is sustainable, strategic, and aligned with the realities of the sports ecosystem.

From strategic vision to actionable roadmap

Introduction

A compelling digital strategy begins with a clear **vision**, a high-level ambition that captures where a sports organization wants to go. But turning that vision into tangible outcomes requires a **structured roadmap**: a plan that translates strategy into phased actions, resources, and measurable milestones. In sports, this becomes especially vital, as clubs and leagues must synchronize technological innovation with deeply rooted fan traditions, seasonal business cycles, and stakeholder complexity.

Defining a digital vision around the fan

In a customer-centric environment, a digital vision is not just a statement of organizational ambition, it is a **commitment to evolving fan experience**. Leading sports organizations now build their digital strategies around the idea of placing the fan at the center of every interaction, both online and offline. This means that visions such as “A growth” must be rooted in **customer journey understanding**, a key theme established in program 1.

A digital vision must be integrated with overarching business goals such as increasing loyalty, unlocking new revenue streams, and improving sponsorship performance, all of which are now deeply dependent on a robust digital foundation (PwC, 2023). For instance, FC Barcelona (2022) set out a long-term digital vision focused on delivering personalized experiences across its owned channels, grounded in fan data and a unified content

strategy. This was not a tech-first vision, but a **fan-first transformation** enabled by technology.

Translating vision into customer-centric strategic pillars

To become actionable, digital visions need to be broken down into **strategic pillar**, core themes that guide decisions across platforms, content, and services. In a customer-centric roadmap, these pillars are defined by what matters most to the fan, such as:

- seamless multi-channel engagement,
- access to exclusive and relevant content,
- personalized offers, communications, and journeys,
- control over data and preferences.

For example, a vision focused on “building lifetime fan relationships” might lead to pillars such as implementing a **customer data platform (CDP)**, redesigning digital membership models, and launching fan segmentation capabilities to tailor content and offers. These initiatives directly support a connected, individualized fan experience, a concept emphasized in earlier readings on customer journey orchestration and digital maturity models

Prioritization and sequencing with the fan in mind

Prioritization within a digital roadmap should follow the principle of **maximizing value for both the organization and the fan**. Instead of defaulting to internal efficiency, modern roadmaps increasingly consider **journey-based sequencing** asking: “**Which part of the fan journey is broken, fragmented, or underleveraged?**”. This insight, often derived from analytics, CRM data, or customer interviews, then drives initiative ordering.

For instance, an organization that identifies inconsistent onboarding for new fans might prioritize improving early digital touchpoints, personalized welcome campaigns, educational content, or onboarding flows in apps. These steps can yield faster ROI and build internal confidence in digital processes (McKinsey and Company, 2022).

Example: from global vision to regionalized fan engagement

Let’s consider the example of a club with the strategic vision to “build a global, data-driven fanbase”. A customer-centric roadmap could unfold like this:

- **Phase 1:** audit regional fan behavior and digital preferences.

- **Phase 2:** deploy multilingual websites and local content hubs.
- **Phase 3:** integrate a CDP to unify global fan data.
- **Phase 4:** launch geo-targeted marketing campaigns and loyalty apps.
- **Phase 5:** offer region-specific memberships or tokenized fan experiences.

Each phase responds to fan needs and behaviors, not just internal pressures. This phased rollout supports digital maturity progression from the **start-up** to **capitalize** phases, as discussed in program 1.

From vision to action with the fan at the center

Ultimately, customer-centric digital transformation is not about implementing the most advanced technologies. It's about making **every touchpoint more meaningful** for the fan. A structured, sequenced roadmap grounded in fan insights ensures that strategy turns into action, and action turns into long-term value, both emotional and financial.

Structuring the roadmap: components and formats

Introduction

Translating a digital vision into action demands more than inspirational strategy, it requires a **structured, realistic roadmap**. A roadmap serves as both a planning instrument and a communication tool, helping sports organizations visualize how their transformation will unfold across **technology, data, content, and customer experience**, the four pillars introduced in program 1. At the same time, it must account for the **building blocks of digital transformation**: digital services, data-driven operations, and automated processes, ensuring tactical initiatives drive strategic goals.

Structuring around the four pillars of transformation

An effective roadmap should explicitly organize its initiatives around the **four foundational pillars of digital transformation**.

- **Technology** – Systems infrastructure (e.g., CRM, CDP, mobile apps, OTT platforms).

- **Data** – Architecture, governance, and insight development (e.g., fan analytics, segmentation).
- **Content** – Personalization and storytelling across channels (e.g., DAM integration, campaign orchestration).
- **Customer-centricity** – Journey design, personalization, and lifecycle-based engagement.

For example, if a club’s roadmap includes a **CDP launch**, that falls under both the **data** and **technology** pillars. If it’s accompanied by content personalization and email automation, it also activates **content** and **customer-centricity**, showing the interdependence of the pillars.

This approach reinforces the **building blocks**:

- **Digital services** (e.g., multilingual website or fan loyalty app).
- **Data-driven operations** (e.g., analytics dashboards, segmentation tools).
- **Automated processes** (e.g., journey orchestration, AI-powered content).

Each roadmap initiative should reflect one or more of these blocks, with maturity increasing over time.

Visual formats that reinforce strategy

The roadmap’s format plays a crucial role in stakeholder understanding. Among the most effective are the following.

- **Swimlane diagrams**: ideal for visualizing workstreams per pillar or department
- **Customer journey-based maps**: aligning initiatives to specific stages of the fan lifecycle.
- **Digital maturity overlays**: showing how initiatives help the organization move from start-up to capitalize.
- **Pillar-mapped gantt charts**: demonstrating dependencies and integration across tech, data, content, and experience.

For example, a roadmap may show **content orchestration workstreams** tied to fan acquisition and **data workstreams** tied to personalization and sponsor value creation (Salesforce, 2023). This layered view reinforces the organization’s path to maturity and helps anchor leadership conversations.



Organizational readiness and governance

Introduction

Even the most carefully structured roadmap will fall short without a supportive organizational environment to bring it to life. To move from vision to reality, sports organizations must develop **the right governance models, leadership structures, and operational readiness** to sustain their digital transformation journey.

This requires aligning internal processes and culture to the four pillars of transformation (technology, data, content, and customer-centricity) while building internal accountability to drive the execution of roadmap initiatives across departments.

Governance as an enabler of execution

A clear governance model ensures that digital efforts are **not isolated projects**, but integrated, strategic programs that connect with business and customer outcomes. In program 1, we highlighted that organizations in the **start-up phase** of digital maturity often lack alignment between departments and digital goals. As a result, marketing, ticketing, content, and IT may each operate with their own disconnected digital projects, leading to inconsistent fan experiences and poor ROI.

To mature beyond this, organizations must adopt a governance structure that includes:

- **executive-level ownership** of digital transformation (often through a Chief Digital Officer or transformation committee),
- **cross-functional leadership teams** representing content, marketing, data, IT, partnerships, and operations,
- **dedicated digital steering groups** to monitor progress, resolve cross-team blockers, and adjust sequencing.

For example, **FC Bayern Munich** established a Chief Digital Officer role specifically to drive integration of digital transformation across ticketing, media, e-commerce, and CRM — ensuring clear accountability and unified vision (FC Bayern Munich, 2021).

Capability building across departments

Organizational readiness also includes the capability to **execute initiatives aligned with the roadmap**. As discussed in program 1, digital maturity requires evolving from siloed, ad hoc work to **collaborative, cross-functional delivery**.

A key enabler here is building multidisciplinary teams with skills in:

- **data analytics and insight generation,**
- **content creation, automation, and orchestration,**
- **CRM and CDP operations,**
- **digital product ownership and agile workflows.**

Without these capabilities in place, the roadmap becomes aspirational rather than executable. In fact, research shows that **lack of skills and leadership alignment** is one of the top reasons digital strategies fail (McKinsey and Company, 2021).

Embedding customer-centric thinking

Organizational readiness is not just about digital skills, it is also about **adopting a fan-centric mindset** across departments. In program 1, we emphasized that a customer-centric transformation demands each part of the organization understand the full **fan journey**, not just their siloed role in it.

- Content teams must align with CRM for personalized messaging.
- Marketing and data teams must coordinate on segmentation logic.
- Commercial departments must understand how digital touchpoints influence sponsor value.

One best practice is to **align roadmap governance with customer journeys**, using journey owners and KPIs tied to fan lifecycle stages (e.g. acquisition, retention, reactivation). This helps shift the mindset from internal efficiency to external experience, a key shift from **start-up** to **capitalize** maturity.

Champions and change agents

Roadmap execution often requires **changing how people work**, not just what gets built. Champions, both formal and informal, are critical to modeling the new way of working. In many sports organizations, these are digital-savvy marketers, data analysts, or operations managers who bridge old and new practices.

Formalizing these roles within roadmap governance (e.g., journey leads, digital product owners) increases the likelihood of success. Change agents are essential for socializing transformation goals and making them relevant to the day-to-day work of teams across

departments.

The role of partners and technology vendors

Introduction

Executing a digital roadmap at scale rarely happens in isolation. Most sports organizations, regardless of their size or maturity level, rely on **external partners and technology vendors** to provide the platforms, tools, and expertise required to deliver transformation. These collaborators can **accelerate progress**, close capability gaps, and ensure that execution aligns with industry best practices.

However, partnership success depends on more than just selecting the right platforms, it requires **clear governance, strategic fit, and alignment with customer-centric goals**.

From vendor to strategic partner

In the early stages of digital maturity (start-up phase), organizations tend to view vendors primarily as **technical suppliers**, responsible for building websites, managing ad campaigns, or deploying CRM tools. As digital maturity progresses toward the acceleration and capitalize phases, this model evolves. Technology providers become **strategic partners**, co-creators in building customer journeys, data architectures, and content delivery ecosystems (KPMG, 2022).

For example, **Manchester United's partnership with HCL Technologies** goes far beyond infrastructure. It involves the co-development of fan data platforms, mobile experience optimization, and content automation, all tied directly to strategic fan engagement and monetization goals (HCL Technologies, 2022).

Aligning partners with the four transformation pillars

In program 1, we introduced four interconnected pillars: technology, data, content, and customer-centricity. Digital partners should be selected and managed with the following domains in mind.

- **Technology partners** should integrate flexibly with your architecture and support future scaling (e.g., CRM, CDP, OTT platforms).
- **Data partners** must help unify insights across channels and comply with governance requirements (e.g., analytics platforms, segmentation tools).



- **Content partners** should enable creative agility and distribution orchestration (e.g., DAM systems, personalization engines).
- **Customer experience partners** must understand the end-to-end fan journey and support seamless multi-touchpoint experiences.

This model helps avoid “tool overload”, where multiple unaligned vendors result in fragmented journeys, data silos, and inconsistent fan experiences (Salesforce, 2023).

Governance of partner ecosystems

A critical aspect of roadmap execution is the **governance of partner relationships**. As sports organizations mature, they often manage dozens of vendors across platforms, countries, and use cases. Without structured governance, this can quickly lead to duplication, cost inefficiencies, and loss of control over fan data.

Best practices for vendor governance include the following.

- **Creating a vendor strategy board** to evaluate platforms against roadmap objectives and maturity needs.
- **Centralizing procurement processes** for digital and marketing tools.
- **Establishing performance metrics** tied to roadmap delivery (e.g., timeline adherence, impact KPIs).
- **Conducting integration audits** to ensure that tools support unified fan journeys.

This centralized model becomes especially important when working with agencies or integrators who support cross-functional rollouts (e.g., CRM + content + loyalty program).

Case example: Real Madrid’s layered partner model

Real Madrid’s digital strategy includes a **layered vendor model**, where different platforms and agencies are aligned to roadmap milestones. Their OTT platform, Real Madrid TV, their e-commerce platform, and CDP integration have all been delivered through long-term partners, but governed under centralized digital leadership that ensures consistency in data flows, fan experience, and monetization strategy (Real Madrid, 2023).

This model enables agility while still maintaining strategic control, a hallmark of organizations in the **capitalize phase** of digital maturity.

Managing and sustaining roadmap execution over time

Introduction

Creating a roadmap is only the beginning. In the fast-evolving digital environment of sports, organizations must be capable of **managing execution over time**, adapting to shifting priorities, and **sustaining momentum** beyond the initial launch of projects. Execution isn't just about delivery, it's about learning, iterating, and driving ongoing value through every digital touchpoint.

From linear projects to continuous development

In start-up phase organizations, roadmaps are often interpreted as **one-time projects**: launch a new website, build a mobile app, implement a CRM. While these deliverables are important, they are **not endpoints**, rather, they are enablers of a larger, more dynamic transformation.

Digitally mature sports organizations move toward **continuous improvement models**, where roadmap execution becomes a **rolling process**. This means revisiting priorities quarterly, embedding feedback from fans and internal teams, and aligning delivery with changing business cycles (McKinsey and Company, 2020).

For example, **City Football Group** structures its roadmap around agile sprints, where small cross-functional teams develop and release improvements iteratively, such as adding a new personalization feature or optimizing e-commerce checkouts based on real-time fan behavior (City Football Group, 2023).

Connecting execution to strategic goals

Execution is sustainable when teams are **motivated by shared strategic outcomes**, not just tasks. That's why modern sports organizations often establish **value-based prioritization frameworks**, asking:

- Does this initiative help us drive fan engagement or retention?
- Will this investment improve our ability to monetize content or data?
- Is it aligned with our long-term vision and maturity phase?

These guiding questions link roadmap tasks back to the **pillars**, ensuring that technology

investments translate into fan value, data initiatives support personalization, and content orchestration connects with real-time journeys.

Performance measurement and learning loops

To sustain progress and optimize delivery, **KPIs should be defined for each roadmap workstream**, ideally tied to both operational metrics (e.g., system uptime, sprint delivery) and customer-facing outcomes (e.g., engagement rates, NPS, conversion). This builds a bridge between tactical execution and strategic value creation.

Learning loops are key: when something doesn't work, teams should review and course-correct. When something does work, it should be scaled or optimized further. Digitally mature clubs formalize this through:

- **post-release retrospectives,**
- **sprint reviews and velocity tracking,**
- **continuous stakeholder check-ins across departments.**

This agile mindset is particularly relevant in sports, where calendars, seasons, and market dynamics change quickly.

Talent and retention for long-term execution

Execution also depends on **retaining skilled people** and creating an internal environment that supports innovation. In program 1, we discussed the importance of **multi-skilled teams** and **growth mindsets**. These cultural traits are essential for sustaining delivery.

When teams feel empowered, connected to the roadmap, and clear about strategic purpose, they can navigate through priority changes, technology shifts, and leadership transitions without losing momentum.

Conclusion

Turning vision into executable momentum

Digital transformation in sports is no longer about experimenting with new tools or chasing trends, it's about deliberately executing a **clear, customer-centric strategy** that drives value across every digital touchpoint. To move from ambition to reality,



organizations must be able to **translate vision into actionable roadmaps**, embed transformation across departments, and sustain delivery through governance, culture, and agile operations.

This reading has explored how sports organizations can approach roadmap creation as both a **strategic exercise** and a **change management process**. As outlined in program 1, achieving digital maturity requires more than technology: it hinges on aligning **tech, data, content, and customer-centricity** under one unified model, supported by the foundational **building blocks** of digital services, data-driven operations, and automated processes.

From structuring roadmaps around fan journeys, to choosing the right partners, building internal readiness, and managing long-term execution, the journey demands **cross-functional collaboration, continuous measurement**, and the courage to pivot when needed. Organizations that embrace these practices move faster, connect more meaningfully with fans, and position themselves for sustained growth.

Ultimately, successful digital transformation is not defined by how ambitious the vision is, but by how effectively that vision is executed, step by step, sprint by sprint, season by season.

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