



# PLATFORM THINKING



READ the past. WRITE the future.

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Platform Thinking is the ability to put platform-based mechanisms at the core of digital business transformations in any business.

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*Read the Past. Write the Future.*

Daniel Trabucchi and Tommaso Buganza

*Platform Thinking: Read the Past. Write the Future.*

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# Description

*What does **platform thinking** mean? It is the ability to put platform-based mechanisms at the core of digital business transformations in business.*

Digital platforms like Uber, Spotify, Airbnb, and Booking.com completely reshaped the daily life of millions of users. However, many innovation leaders struggle to conceive the significance of their impact. Platform-based business models are not just the real geeks of startups, digital services, and unicorns.

This book shows that their potential in creating value is higher than suspected.

Even though platform ecosystems are complex, readers will take on a journey to become platform thinkers. Their eyes will be trained to look beyond what's visible and start *reading the platform world* around them. Then, they will be guided into a step-by-step process and learn how to *write* a new platform model from scratch.

This book is the result of a decade of research. It offers both a framework and practical instruments to champion digital transformation in any organization. It is specially intended for those who are interested in the glittering platform world and are still trying to figure it out.

## Keywords

platform thinking; innovation; platforms; digital business; data; business transformation; business model; idle asset



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# Testimonials

*“This book has a clear purpose. It challenges business leaders to think differently and recognize the innovative potential of platform business models and ‘platform thinking’ more generally. This is particularly prescient message as European platforms have largely lagged the rest of the world. With a deft combination of essential frameworks and highly informative cases, Trabucchi and Buganza will surely inspire a wave of platform formation and innovation.”*

—**Peter C. Evans, PhD, Chief Strategy Officer, McFadyen Digital, and Co-Chair of the MIT Platform Strategy Summit**

*“In a challenging and fast-changing business environment, this book is a must to read for all the executives called to reframe their Company’s business model or in search for the innovation Grail. The authors guide the reader through the complex world of the platforms, providing ‘new glasses’ to see current business under a novel perspective and, if the case, rethink it. Always with the clear goal to stay competitive in the long run.”*

—**Augusto Mitidieri, Executive Director, Switzerland Innovation Park Ticino, multiawarded CEO**

*“This book shows entrepreneurs and veteran managers alike how to consider the creation or growth of a multi-sided platform. Those who ignore it will be doubly surprised when a platform recruits their customers and suppliers with a better offer. With hundreds of examples and templates, Trabucchi and Buganza also demonstrate that anyone can—and probably must—build a platform business.”*

—**Ted Ladd, Professor at Hult, Instructor at Harvard and Stanford, author of *Innovating with Impact* from the Economist**

*“Daniel Trabucchi and Tommaso Buganza take studies on platforms to a new level: as a way of thinking that may spur innovation whichever business you are in. Read this, and you can turn your own company into a platform, and benefit at most from the power of digitalization.”*

—**Roberto Verganti, Stockholm School of Economics and Harvard Business School, Author of *Design Driven Innovation*, HBS Press**

*“All of us, that are working on Digital Business Models, know the difficulties to explain what is a platform, what is the difference between digitalization and being digital, so every time that somebody is making an effort to explain and spread the word about the main characteristics of this kind of business models is a step towards the adoption because if we don’t know, we don’t choose. On this occasion, I am so glad to see the two authors Tommaso and especially Daniel that I personally know and admire have done this effort, I like how they merge the academic side with the practical side, and in the end, their main expertise as an Academics and Researchers!”*

*A book to discover and understand what we mean when we are talking about the value exchange in a platform, practical use cases Uber, Booking.com, Whatsapp, and most important reinforce the idea of ‘Platform Thinking as a mindset’”*—**Marina Planas, CEO and Founder of TheNTWK**

*“Platform Thinking offers a new, original perspective on platforms for established firms that wish to embrace a digital business transformation. We are used to consider platforms either the tech giants, often US based, or creative start ups in the digital space. Trabucchi and Buganza show how platforms can be thought of as paradigm for a much wider range of businesses and help them imagine and build a new bright, and sustainable, future!”*—**Francesco Caio, Chairman and CEO**

*“Trabucchi and Buganza introduce a new perspective on platform businesses and provide straightforward explanations replete with real world examples. They offer valuable and practical tools for managers creating and interacting with platform businesses. Platform Thinking is for anyone interested in better understanding the challenges and opportunities of platform businesses.”*—**Elizabeth J. Altman, University of Massachusetts Lowell, Author of Workforce Ecosystems: Reaching Strategic Goals with People, Partners, and Technologies (MIT Press).**

# Acknowledgments

*Platform Thinking*, to us, is not just a book, but is the cornerstone of a long, innovative, and meaningful project—a project made of 30+ scientific papers, the birth of a brand new conference called Symplatform, three Coursera massive online open courses (MOOCs), a Miro toolkit, hundreds of slides, courses, speeches, videos....travels, writing weeks, and coffees.

We didn't start together, but this project got us together.

Tommaso first had an epiphany about platforms in 2012 while running in Central Park during his visiting period at Parson's School for Design. Daniel began this journey listening to Tommaso's class in 2014 and then asking him to collaborate for his master thesis (by the way, now Daniel is a runner too).

*Platform Thinking* is to us the research project that best fits our way of living the research activity: putting passion in action, studying what gets our attention, positioning the joy of discovering and understanding before any other objective, and, finally, having a real impact on people and organizations around us.

In our journey, we met many people that had a significant and special role.

First of all, we acknowledge the work of all those people that shared with us a piece of this research journey: Elena Pellizzoni, Claudio Dell'Era, and Roberto Verganti who published with us the very first “platform-related” study on Waze back in 2015 and many others that came after. We also thank a lot all the researchers that came later for other studies and published works: Stefano Magistretti, Andrea Patrucco, Silvia Sanasi, Antonio Ghezzi, Antonella Moretto, Alan MacCormack, Federico Frattini, Philip Meier, Matthias Trischler, Luca Gastaldi, Deepak Saxena, Diletta Di Marco, Filomena Canterino, Emilio Bellini, Paola Bellis, Silvia Magnanini, and Federico Zasa.

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A huge thanks to our home, LEADIN'Lab: the lab of Leadership, Innovation and Design at the School of Management of Politecnico di Milano. We call it a home because we are like a family sharing not just projects, but also the everyday life, sparking suggestions, harsh feedbacks, insights, and ideas.

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Thanks to Business Expert Press and to Scott Isenberg who believed in this project and literally made us walking on air for days. This is just the beginning.

Not only this book but everything we do would just not exist without the support of our families. Supporting two researchers that embrace this kind of project means at least two annoying things. First is giving up a lot of time that could have been spent together. Second is having someone nearby that repeats “platform” a dozen times a day. Thanks to Aline and Clara. Thanks to Ludovica. And also thanks to our whole families: no words are needed; gratitude is the best feeling to express everything.

And finally, the two of us, for overcoming many differences and building something meaningful together—something that goes beyond the book and the research, something that changed us as human beings first. That’s what matters the most.

