

**MANAGEMENT MODEL &  
STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION ANALYSIS**

Ford Motor Company (2020-2025)

Prepared by:  
Business Intelligence Team

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# MEMORANDUM

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**TO:** Board of Directors

**FROM:** Business Intelligence Team

**DATE:** October 22, 2025

**RE:** Ford Motor Company Management Model & Strategy Implementation Analysis (2020-2025)

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ford Motor Company's transformation under CEO Jim Farley exemplifies strategic management model evolution in the automotive industry's most disruptive period. This analysis applies Birkinshaw and Goddard's (2009) MIT Sloan management model framework and Nieto-Rodriguez's Strategy Implementation Roadmap to evaluate Ford's Ford+ plan execution and organizational effectiveness.

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# I. COMPANY OVERVIEW & STRATEGIC CONTEXT

## Ford's Market Position (2024)

Ford Motor Company ranks as America's #2 automaker with $185.0B revenue, 4.5 million wholesale units, and 171,000 employees globally (Ford Motor Company, 2025). Founded in 1903, Ford pioneered mass production and the moving assembly line, establishing manufacturing practices that defined 20th-century industry.

## Competitive Landscape Analysis

Applying Porter's Five Forces framework reveals that Ford faces intense competitive pressure across multiple dimensions simultaneously. The intensity of competitive rivalry stands as high, with traditional OEM competition from General Motors and Stellantis competing across broad vehicle portfolios, EV disruptor Tesla operating with a direct-sales model and software expertise that traditional automakers struggle to match, and rising Asian manufacturers like Toyota leveraging hybrid technology strength and Hyundai-Kia aggressively expanding global market share. This multi-front competitive battle has forced Ford's strategic response—the three-business-unit structure—which attempts focused competitive strategies tailored to each segment rather than one-size-fits-all approaches.

The threat of new entrants ranks as medium-high, creating additional competitive complexity. While traditional capital barriers remain substantial ($8.5B R&D investment required in 2024 alone), the EV transition paradoxically lowers entry barriers by simplifying powertrain technology and reducing the number of components compared to internal combustion engines. More critically, tech companies with artificial intelligence, software, and connectivity expertise increasingly enter mobility markets, viewing the automotive industry as a platform for mobility services rather than just vehicle manufacturing. Ford's Ford+ plan directly addresses this threat by emphasizing software and services differentiation rather than competing solely on vehicle hardware and manufacturing cost.

Supplier bargaining power presents a medium-high challenge intensified by the EV transition. Limited EV battery manufacturers—primarily LG, Samsung, and CATL—control crucial technology that Ford cannot easily substitute, while semiconductor shortages experienced from 2021-2023 demonstrated that critical components concentrate in few suppliers. Ford's strategic response combines vertical integration through battery plant investments and long-term supplier partnerships that attempt to mitigate supplier leverage through dedicated capacity and technology collaboration.

Buyer bargaining power operates differently across Ford's market segments, averaging medium overall. Commercial customers through Ford Pro wield significant fleet purchasing leverage, using their large-scale orders to demand pricing concessions and customized telematics solutions. Retail customers possess more moderate bargaining power, though brand loyalty for iconic Ford models like the F-150 mitigates this to some extent. Ford's extensive dealership network of 9,006 locations (2024) provides customer access and after-sales support that independent direct sales models struggle to replicate, though Ford Model e's exploration of direct-to-consumer sales for EVs signals recognition that traditional dealer networks may not effectively serve new customer segments.

Finally, the threat of substitutes remains medium-low but strategically significant. Public transportation expansion in urban markets, ride-sharing services like Uber and Lyft reducing personal vehicle ownership necessity, and emerging autonomous mobility solutions create long-term substitution threats to individual vehicle ownership. Ford's creation of Ford Next segment demonstrates strategic recognition of this force, exploring how the company can evolve beyond traditional vehicle manufacturing into broader mobility solutions that address emerging transportation preferences.

## Strategic Inflection Points (2020-2025)

Ford's transformation from 2020-2025 encompasses several critical strategic inflection points that reset the company's trajectory. In October 2020, Jim Farley replaced Jim Hackett as CEO, bringing marketing and product expertise from Toyota that signaled a fundamental shift toward product-focused, decisive leadership after years of operational restructuring (CNBC, 2020). Farley's appointment represented not merely a personnel change but a philosophical reorientation toward customer-centric strategy and decisive execution.

This leadership foundation enabled the May 2021 Ford+ Plan announcement, where Farley unveiled a transformational vision: "Help build a better world, where every person is free to move and pursue their dreams" through two integrated strategic pillars—"must-have vehicles" and "always-on relationships" that combine Ford's existing manufacturing and brand strengths with new digital, software, and services capabilities (Ford Motor Company, 2022). This oblique objective approach (Birkinshaw & Goddard, 2009) represented a deliberate shift from purely financial profit maximization toward purpose-driven value creation, betting that pursuing a higher-order goal would ultimately drive superior financial returns.

The March 2022 business unit restructuring translated Ford+ vision into organizational infrastructure, reorganizing Ford into three customer-centered business units: Ford Blue ($75B revenue, $5.6B EBIT, 2024) serving traditional automotive customers; Ford Model e ($7B revenue, -$5.4B EBIT) pursuing electrification; and Ford Pro ($53B revenue, $9B EBIT) targeting commercial customers. Farley explained the logic: "Creating separate but complementary businesses that give us startup speed and unbridled innovation in Ford Model e together with Ford Blue's industrial know-how" (Bloomberg, 2022), exemplifying how directed strategy (the top-down reorganization decision) creates infrastructure enabling emergent strategy (unit-level market-driven innovation and tactical adaptation).

By February 2025, Ford recognized that three years of business unit autonomy required rebalancing. The company appointed Sherry House as CFO from investment banking background, elevated John Lawler to Vice Chair-Strategy, and created a new Chief Strategy Officer role for Marin Gjaja (25 years at Boston Consulting Group) (Ford Media Center, 2025). These changes signal strategic recentralization after the 2022-2024 period of distributed autonomy, indicating Ford's recognition that emergent strategy operating without sufficient strategic coherence and centralized oversight can allow execution drift, evidenced by Model e's expanding losses and inconsistent business unit strategic alignment. This leadership refinement suggests organizational learning: pure emergence lacks sufficient discipline, yet pure hierarchy stifles innovation—the challenge is finding sustainable balance.

\*Figure 1: Ford+ Organizational Structure - See visualization in appendix\*

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# II. MANAGEMENT MODEL ANALYSIS

Birkinshaw and Goddard (2009) define management model as "choices made by top executives regarding how they define objectives, motivate effort, coordinate activities and allocate resources" (p. 82). Their framework identifies four critical dimensions along which management choices vary: how the organization manages objectives and goals, how it motivates individuals across the company, how it coordinates activities across functions and units, and how it makes decisions and allocates decision authority.

## Dimension 1: Managing Objectives — From Goal Setting to Obliquity

Ford's approach to managing organizational objectives has evolved significantly since 2020, reflecting a deliberate management model shift. Prior to 2021, Ford employed traditional goal setting with quarterly earnings focus and short-term profitability targets, typical of mature industrial companies facing stagnation. The 2020 10-K exemplified this approach, emphasizing "improving operating efficiency" and "cost reduction" as primary objectives without articulating any higher-order purpose or transformational vision (Ford Motor Company, 2021).

Beginning in 2021, Ford+ introduced a fundamentally different objective approach through oblique goals: "Help build a better world, where every person is free to move and pursue their dreams" (Ford Motor Company, 2025, p. 1). This strategic shift parallels successful companies like IKEA that Birkinshaw and Goddard (2009) identified as achieving profitability indirectly through purpose-driven objectives rather than pursuing financial targets directly. However, Ford demonstrated management sophistication by balancing obliquity with financial discipline: while pursuing the aspirational purpose-driven mission, Ford Pro maintained direct financial targets ($9B EBIT) and business unit P&L accountability that ensured commercial rigor and accountability. Google CEO Eric Schmidt's insight captures this balance perfectly: "I realized that none of the things that I'm supposed to be doing as CEO—maximizing revenue and shareholder value—are the goals of the company...You will eventually get extraordinary returns if all those goals happen" (Birkinshaw & Goddard, 2009, p. 84). Ford Pro's actual performance validated this approach: pursuing the oblique goal of commercial customer transformation generated the tangible result of 17% EBIT margins, the highest profitability level in Ford's business unit portfolio.

By 2025, Ford's objective-setting pendulum has begun swinging back toward goal-setting emphasis. The $1B cost savings target and 2025 bonus cuts signal a recalibration back toward direct financial accountability (Ford Authority, 2025). While cost discipline is necessary for shareholder confidence and financial sustainability, this shift toward extrinsic financial pressure risks undermining the purpose-driven motivation that Ford carefully cultivated to attract innovation talent to Model e's EV mission between 2021-2024. Both approaches serve legitimate purposes: obliquity provides the directional inspiration and meaning that drives discretionary effort and innovation (critical for Model e's transformation success), while goal setting ensures accountability, financial discipline, and measurable progress toward shareholder returns (critical for Ford Pro's commercial excellence). The management model challenge is finding sustainable equilibrium rather than oscillating between extremes.

## Dimension 2: Motivating Individuals — Balancing Extrinsic and Intrinsic

Douglas McGregor's (1960) foundational distinction between Theory X and Theory Y management provides useful framework for understanding Ford's evolution in employee motivation. Theory X assumes workers primarily need extrinsic motivation through compensation and bonuses, operating from an assumption of inherent resistance to work. Theory Y, by contrast, assumes workers respond to intrinsic motivation including achievement, purpose, and peer recognition, operating from an assumption that work can be inherently satisfying.

Prior to 2021, Ford operated squarely within a Theory X framework, relying primarily on extrinsic motivation mechanisms: traditional OEM compensation structures, performance bonuses directly tied to EBIT and revenue targets, and union wage scales negotiated to define compensation without higher-order purpose (Ford Motor Company, 2021 Proxy Statement). This approach reflected automotive industry norms where compensation and financial incentives drove compliance with organizational objectives.

Beginning in 2021, Ford+ introduced intrinsic motivation elements alongside continued extrinsic compensation—a Theory Y shift. Model e's explicit mission to "invent breakthrough EVs" attracted mission-driven engineers who viewed their work as contributing to industry transformation; the aspirational purpose statement "build a better world" appeared prominently in corporate communications and 10-K filings, creating psychological meaning; and business unit P&L accountability gave employees sense of ownership and shared responsibility for unit success. Simultaneously, Ford maintained competitive extrinsic rewards including salary competitiveness, stock grants, and cash bonuses, recognizing that purpose alone cannot sustain commitment without fair economic compensation. Kay Hart's 2025 promotion to Model e General Manager exemplifies this balanced approach—Hart's intrinsic motivation derived from EV pioneer status from leading Team Edison combined with extrinsic career advancement to a general manager position (Ford Media Center, 2025), showing how Ford attempted to satisfy both motivation dimensions.

This carefully balanced motivation model faced significant recalibration beginning in 2025. Approximately 50% of middle managers lost stock bonuses as part of the $1B cost-cutting initiative (Ford Authority, 2025), representing a dramatic reduction in extrinsic compensation just as Ford was attempting to deepen intrinsic commitment through purpose-driven transformation. While Ford leadership emphasized "high-performance culture" language, this shift toward financial pressure and performance accountability—with reduced upside compensation—paradoxically moves away from Theory Y back toward Theory X assumptions. Eikenberry's (2019) distinction captures the danger precisely: "Commitment is 'I want to'; compliance is 'I have to.'" Ford's 2025 approach risks shifting the entire workforce from commitment—where employees willingly contribute discretionary effort to transformation—toward compliance, where employees do the minimum required because financial incentives have been reduced. The 2025 bonus cuts create fundamental management model tension: cost discipline and extrinsic accountability are necessary for shareholder confidence and financial sustainability, yet undermining intrinsic commitment and reducing extrinsic rewards simultaneously during cultural transformation is strategically risky when transformation success requires precisely the discretionary effort and innovation that commitment (not compliance) produces.

## Dimension 3: Coordinating Activities — Emergence Through Business Units

Pre-2021, Ford operated through classic automotive hierarchy with centralized decision-making, functional silos (engineering, manufacturing, sales), and a single "Automotive segment" structure (Ford Motor Company, 2021). Beginning in 2022-2024, the business unit structure enabled emergent coordination through three differentiated approaches: Ford Blue maintained autonomous P&L focused on cash generation from ICE vehicles using traditional manufacturing coordination, Ford Model e adopted startup-like autonomy for "unbridled innovation" with agile software development and rapid iteration, and Ford Pro developed commercial customer-centric solutions teams creating unique capabilities in fleet telematics and services. This aligns with **Resource-Based View** (Casadesus-Masanell, 2007), which posits that business units develop distinctive capabilities—Pro's fleet software, Model e's battery technology, Blue's manufacturing scale—creating sustainable competitive advantage.

Operations strategy concepts illuminate this approach: Blue achieves manufacturing scale while Pro leverages that infrastructure without duplicating facilities (economies of scale), and Model e is climbing the cost curve on EVs, still losing $5.4B but with improving per-unit costs (learning curve) (Ford Motor Company, 2025). By 2025, Gjaja's Chief Strategy Officer role coordinates strategy across units while units retain separate P&L, Frick's expanded role overseeing all three units signals integration opportunity, and Kay Hart's Model e position maintains operational focus (Ford Media Center, 2025). Ford successfully applied **emergence principles** through business unit autonomy, allowing differentiated coordination approaches, though the 2025 recentralization recognizes that emergence without strategic guardrails creates fragmentation—demonstrating adaptive management sophistication.

## Dimension 4: Making Decisions — Collective Wisdom with Oversight

Pre-2021, Ford employed pure top-down decision-making with CEO-driven strategy, centralized approval processes, and limited delegation (Ford Motor Company, 2021). From 2021-2024, Ford adopted collective wisdom within hierarchical oversight: business unit presidents made operational decisions with decentralized product planning and investment authority within unit P&L budgets, while Farley retained ultimate authority on capital allocation, overall EV investment ($50B commitment), and brand strategy. Ford Pro customer advisory councils informed product development (collective wisdom from end-users), while Farley's 2024 directive to slow some EV investments demonstrates hierarchical authority when strategic coherence requires it (CNBC, 2024). The 2025 recentralization reflects further sophistication: Gjaja's CSO reporting to both Farley and Lawler creates a centralized strategy function, and Lawler's Vice Chair-Strategy role elevates strategic decisions above unit level, addressing the tension between **speed** (collective wisdom enables faster, customer-informed decisions) and **coherence** (hierarchical oversight prevents conflicting strategies) (Ford Media Center, 2025). Effective management models balance both poles—Ford's 2022-2024 lean toward collective wisdom with 2025's correction toward hierarchy suggests the company is actively learning and adapting rather than rigidly adhering to one model.

## Management Model Comparison

Ford's evolving management model reflects conscious choices across four critical dimensions. First, on objectives, the company balanced obliquity (purpose-driven mission) with goal setting (financial targets), shifting emphasis across periods as strategic needs changed. Second, regarding motivation, Ford moved from pure extrinsic compensation to a balanced approach incorporating intrinsic elements like purpose and innovation, though 2025 cost-cutting risks over-rotation back toward extrinsic pressure. Third, in coordination, Ford transitioned from traditional bureaucracy toward business unit emergence while maintaining strategic oversight. Finally, in decision-making, the company evolved from pure hierarchy toward collective wisdom and distributed leadership, then recentralized strategic decisions in 2025 to ensure coherence. This four-dimensional framework captures Ford's sophisticated management evolution, demonstrating that **no single model is universally optimal**. The company experiments, learns, and adapts. The 2025 changes suggest recognition that 2022's emergence model required more strategic oversight—a sign of management sophistication, not failure.

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# III. STRATEGY FORMULATION & IMPLEMENTATION

## Ford+ Strategy Architecture

Ford's Ford+ strategy leverages three integrated pillars that combine its historic manufacturing strengths with emerging digital capabilities. The company's iconic brands—including the F-150, America's best-selling vehicle for 47 consecutive years—are reinforced by manufacturing scale reaching 4.5 million units annually and an extensive network of 9,006 dealerships. These existing strengths are augmented by new digital capabilities including advanced software platforms, vehicle connectivity, proprietary EV technology, and subscription-based services. These capabilities enable "always-on relationships" with customers through the FordPass app, over-the-air software updates that enhance vehicle features, and fleet management telematics that create recurring revenue streams. This integrated approach transforms Ford from a traditional vehicle manufacturer into a mobility and services company, addressing both consumer and commercial customer needs.

## Strategy Implementation Roadmap Assessment

Nieto-Rodriguez notes: "Between 60-90% of organizations fail at strategy implementation" (Nieto-Rodriguez, 2021). Ford's implementation record across seven SIR pillars reveals both strengths and weaknesses.

### Pillar 1: Leadership Execution (4/5)

CEO Jim Farley demonstrates "Level 5 Leader" characteristics—personal humility combined with professional will (Collins, 2001)—earning consistent external validation of his leadership effectiveness. Executive Chairman Bill Ford described him as "intensively competitive" and "a transformational leader" (Quarterdeck, 2024), while Wolfe Research analyst Rod Lache called Farley "one of the most lucid executives," emphasizing his being "deeply and personally invested in the business" (Chief Executive, 2024). This CEO vision translates into sophisticated talent strategy across the C-suite demonstrated through the 2025 leadership changes. Sherry House's appointment as CFO brings external investment banking experience that provides fresh financial perspective beyond traditional automotive finance, bringing necessary external credibility to Ford's financial strategy. Marin Gjaja's creation as Chief Strategy Officer leverages 25 years at Boston Consulting Group to provide world-class strategy capability and consulting experience that external boards often expect. John Lawler's elevation to Vice Chair-Strategy maintains long Ford tenure and institutional knowledge that balances external expertise with internal continuity and understanding of Ford's culture. However, the execution of strong CEO vision faces significant headwinds. The rapid C-suite changes—six major roles in February 2025—create organizational uncertainty precisely when alignment is most critical. More importantly, the 2023 UAW strike lasting 46 days indicates persistent labor-management tensions despite Ford's transformation rhetoric (The Detroit News, 2024), suggesting that leadership excellence at the executive level has not yet translated into employee-level buy-in for the transformation. Strong CEO vision and strategic talent deployment demonstrate clear leadership strengths, but execution challenges including declining employee engagement and unresolved UAW relations prevent an excellent rating.

### Pillar 2: Value Creation (3/5)

Ford's overall financial value recovery demonstrates significant improvement from 2020-2024, with total revenue growing 45.6% from $127.1B to $185.0B and net income swinging from a -$1.3B loss to $6.6B profit (Ford Motor Company, 2025). EBIT recovered dramatically from -$2.9B in 2020 to $11.3B in 2024, signaling successful profitability management through a transformational period. However, this company-level performance masks highly divergent unit-level value creation that reveals both Ford's competitive strengths and critical vulnerabilities. Ford Pro emerges as a value creation leader with revenue growth of 17.8% from $45B (2022) to $53B (2024) and EBIT increasing 25% from $7.2B to $9B, yielding approximately 17% EBIT margin (Ford Motor Company, 2025)—a performance level exceeding most automotive competitors. Pro's value creation stems from the integration of vehicles with high-margin software services including telematics and fleet management, generating subscription revenue and service contracts that create recurring revenue streams. This product-service integration creates sustainable competitive advantage that traditional OEMs struggle to replicate.

In contrast, Ford Blue represents a cash cow in managed decline, with revenue declining 3.2% from $77.5B (2022) to $75.0B (2024) and EBIT falling 22.2% from $7.2B to $5.6B (Ford Motor Company, 2025). While Blue remains profitable and provides essential cash flow supporting the broader transformation, it faces the strategic dilemma of whether to invest aggressively to maintain competitiveness against German luxury OEMs and Japanese manufacturers, or to harvest maximum cash to fund EV transition—a choice with no ideal resolution. Most critically, Ford Model e represents value destruction that threatens entire Ford+ credibility. Model e revenue grew 133% from $3.0B (2022) to $7.0B (2024), seemingly positive growth, yet EBIT losses widened dramatically from -$2.1B to -$5.4B over the same period (Ford Motor Company, 2025). Industry reports estimate per-unit losses of $40,000-$50,000 (CNBC, 2023), meaning scale growth actually increases total losses. This unit economics deterioration raises an existential strategic question: At what point does continued funding of "strategic investment" become poor capital allocation that destroys rather than creates value? The shareholder market has answered this question skeptically. Stock price declined 21% from $12.54 (June 2024) to $9.89 (February 2025), with market capitalization of $38.5B appearing extraordinarily low relative to $185B annual revenue (Ford Motor Company, 2025), indicating investor skepticism about Ford+ value creation potential. Ford Pro's excellent value creation and Ford Blue's stability are substantially offset by Model e's expanding losses, creating the mixed value creation picture (3/5) that reflects neither excellence nor crisis, but rather a company in strategic transition with unclear ultimate profitability trajectory.

**Table 3: Business Unit Performance (2022-2024) - Revenue in $B, EBIT in $M**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **Ford\_Blue\_Revenue** | **Ford\_Blue\_EBIT** | **Ford\_Model\_e\_Revenue** | **Ford\_Model\_e\_EBIT** | **Ford\_Pro\_Revenue** | **Ford\_Pro\_EBIT** | **Total\_Company\_Revenue** | **Total\_EBIT** |
| 2022 | 77.5 | 7200 | 3.0 | -2100 | 45.0 | 7200 | 156.2 | 10900 |
| 2023 | 76.5 | 6400 | 5.2 | -4700 | 48.0 | 7200 | 176.2 | 11200 |
| 2024 | 75.0 | 5600 | 7.0 | -5400 | 53.0 | 8100 | 185.0 | 11300 |

### Pillar 3: Business Model Innovation (4/5)

The three-unit structure demonstrates innovative strategic logic by successfully differentiating customer value propositions, focusing organizational capabilities toward distinct market segments, and allocating resources strategically based on unit economics and growth potential. However, the structure creates execution complexity that prevents an excellent rating. Internal complexity from shared manufacturing creates transfer pricing challenges between units trying to optimize independently; brand confusion exists because consumers don't perceive clear distinctions between Ford Blue and Ford Model e offerings; and cost duplication occurs as three separate business units maintain redundant go-to-market strategies, marketing infrastructure, and customer support systems rather than consolidating where possible.

This structural innovation exemplifies the interplay between directed and emergent strategy. Ford+ represents directed strategy through Farley's 2021 vision and top-down reorganization creating the three-unit structure, yet business unit execution demonstrates emergent strategy as units adapt to market realities and develop capabilities bottom-up. Ford Pro discovered the high-margin fleet software opportunity through customer interactions rather than strategic planning; Model e shifted its EV strategy based on evolving market demand by pivoting from sedans to trucks and SUVs where consumer acceptance proved stronger (California Management Review, 2022). This combination of top-down strategic direction with bottom-up operational innovation creates a structure with clear strategic logic and innovation potential, yet the complexity of executing three distinct business models simultaneously prevents flawless implementation.

### Pillar 4: Culture Evolution (3/5)

Ford's 118-year manufacturing heritage created conservative, risk-averse, engineering-driven culture with adversarial union-management relations. Ford+ targets a tech-enabled mobility culture emphasizing innovation, collaboration, and customer-centricity. Evidence of cultural progress appears across multiple dimensions. Model e successfully attracts software developers to an automotive company by emphasizing innovation; the Bronco brand resurrection demonstrates creative risk-taking that would have been unthinkable in Ford's pre-2020 culture; and rapid EV strategy pivots from sedans to trucks show organizational adaptability to market realities. However, these indicators must be balanced against significant headwinds. The 2023 UAW strike lasting 46 days signals unresolved labor tensions despite transformation rhetoric, and the 2025 bonus cuts affecting middle managers risk cultural backlash precisely when alignment is most critical. Workforce reduction from 186,000 employees in 2020 to 171,000 in 2024 includes involuntary turnover that compounds job insecurity concerns (Ford Motor Company, 2025). Transforming a 118-year automotive culture into a tech-enabled culture requires generational time horizons, not the 3-4 year timeframe of Ford+'s first phase. Ford shows genuine progress in attracting innovation talent and demonstrating organizational flexibility, but significant cultural resistance persists, making this transformation incomplete.

### Pillar 5: Stakeholder Management (3/5)

Ford effectively communicates the Ford+ plan through quarterly earnings releases, investor days, CEO town halls, and dealer councils, creating formal channels for stakeholder dialogue. However, stakeholder buy-in remains mixed across constituencies. Shareholders' skepticism about the Model e timeline manifests in stock decline from $12.54 (June 2024) to $9.89 (February 2025), despite Ford's overall financial recovery. Employee buy-in deteriorates due to bonus cuts and workforce reduction, particularly problematic given the need for discretionary effort during cultural transformation. Dealers express concerns about direct-to-consumer EV sales exploration, viewing it as channel conflict that threatens their value proposition. Suppliers demonstrate strong relationships through battery partnerships, representing the most positive stakeholder dynamic. The 2023 UAW strike lasting 46 days signals low buy-in on the transition strategy among labor leadership despite negotiations. Communities respond positively to Ford's sustainability messaging and manufacturing investment announcements. This mixed stakeholder landscape—strong communication channels alongside significant resistance from critical constituencies (shareholders, employees, dealers, UAW)—indicates that while Ford's communication efforts are adequate, actual stakeholder alignment and buy-in remain incomplete.

### Pillar 6: Employee Engagement (2/5) — \*\*CRITICAL WEAKNESS\*\*

Employee engagement represents Ford's most critical implementation challenge and strategic risk factor. Positive engagement drivers exist: the Ford+ purpose-driven mission attracts innovation talent; Model e provides intellectually engaging electric vehicle development work; and iconic brands like the F-150 and Mustang inspire workforce pride. However, these positive factors are overwhelmed by structural headwinds. Job insecurity from 15,000 jobs lost since 2020, combined with 2025 bonus cuts affecting approximately 50% of middle managers, creates material financial anxiety. Restructuring fatigue from three major organizational changes (2020, 2022, 2025) exhausts the workforce's ability to adapt and maintain motivation. Union tensions from the 2023 strike persist, reflecting labor leadership's skepticism about transformation sincerity. Most critically, Ford's $1B cost savings target implemented through these workforce reductions directly contradicts the engagement investment narrative of 10 Employee Resource Groups, health and safety programs, and leadership development initiatives. The contradiction between what Ford says about supporting employees and what employees experience through bonus cuts and restructuring creates credibility collapse. Eikenberry's (2019) distinction is instructive: "You must work harder to support and inspire your team, rather than just telling them what to do." Ford's 2025 actions—bonus cuts, restructuring, workforce reductions—communicate "telling," not "inspiring," precisely when the transformation requires discretionary effort and commitment. Without engaged, committed employees, no strategy succeeds, regardless of financial metrics or organizational structure. Employee engagement decline from previous years to 2/5 represents the highest-risk factor for Ford+ implementation failure.

### Pillar 7: Performance Measurement (4/5)

Ford demonstrates **industry-leading transparency** by reporting business unit financials separately since 2022—most automakers (GM, Stellantis) don't explicitly break out EV losses (Ford Motor Company, 2025). The company's measurement systems are comprehensive and multi-layered: business unit dashboards track EBIT, margins, subscription revenue, and customer retention; corporate KPIs monitor revenue, EBIT, net income, free cash flow, ROIC, market share, and customer satisfaction; real-time tracking monitors manufacturing KPIs, dealer inventory, and sales data; and a quarterly/annual cadence includes earnings calls with detailed segment breakdowns. However, strategic gaps remain: Ford lacks public employee engagement metrics and provides no clear EV profitability path timeline. These measurement systems represent excellent transparency and sophistication, but the strategic gaps prevent an excellent rating.

## Key Performance Indicators (2020-2024) - Comparative Analysis

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Metric** | **2020** | **2024** | **Change** | **Ford Assessment** | **GM Comparison** | **Toyota Comparison** |
| Revenue ($B) | 127.1 | 185.0 | +45.6% | ✓ Excellent | GM: $171B (8% lower) | Toyota: $272B (47% higher) |
| EBIT ($B) | -2.9 | 11.3 | Positive swing | ✓ Strong recovery | GM: $10.1B (similar) | Toyota: $28.4B (2.5x higher) |
| Net Income ($B) | -1.3 | 6.6 | Positive swing | ✓ Profitable | GM: $10.1B (higher) | Toyota: $21.6B (3.3x higher) |
| R&D Spending ($B) | 6.7 | 8.5 | +26.9% | ✓ Innovation investment | GM: $7.2B (similar) | Toyota: $14.3B (68% higher) |
| U.S. Market Share (%) | 13.2 | 14.2 | +1.0 pts | ✓ Growing | GM: 17.1% (3 pts higher) | Toyota: 15.8% (1.6 pts higher) |
| Employees (thousands) | 186 | 171 | -8.1% | ⚠ Workforce reduction | GM: 163K | Toyota: 370K |
| Wholesale Units (M) | 4.2 | 4.5 | +7.1% | ✓ Volume growth | GM: 4.0M (similar) | Toyota: 9.6M (2.1x higher) |

\*Source: Ford Motor Company 10-K Reports, 2021-2025; GM and Toyota 2024 10-K Filings\*

**Competitive Context:** Ford's financial recovery (Revenue +45.6%, EBIT swing from -$2.9B to +$11.3B) demonstrates effective management of profitability in a disruptive period. However, compared to competitors: General Motors maintains higher market share (17.1% vs Ford's 14.2%) while managing similar EBIT levels ($10.1B), suggesting Ford's profitability relies more heavily on Ford Pro's 17% margins. Toyota's revenue ($272B) and net income ($21.6B) remain substantially higher, reflecting its dominant position in hybrid and traditional vehicles. Ford's unit volume (4.5M) positions it competitively with GM (4.0M) but significantly below Toyota (9.6M), indicating market consolidation around EV transition leaders.

## Strategy Implementation Summary

Ford's overall Strategy Implementation Roadmap score of 3.3/5.0 reflects moderate effectiveness, demonstrating a paradoxical pattern of strong strategic planning coupled with uneven implementation execution. The company has clearly articulated the Ford+ vision and created a sophisticated three-business-unit structure that aligns organizational capabilities with market segments—these represent genuine strategic strengths. However, uneven execution appears across multiple dimensions: employee engagement remains critically low (2/5), Model e losses continue widening despite the need for strategic discipline, and stakeholder buy-in remains mixed as shareholders, employees, dealers, and union leadership all express skepticism about Ford+ feasibility despite Ford's communication efforts. The 2025 leadership changes—particularly the appointment of Chief Strategy Officer Marin Gjaja and elevation of Vice Chair-Strategy John Lawler—directly address what may be the weakest element of the Ford+ execution model: strategic coherence and oversight across autonomous business units. These changes could significantly improve implementation effectiveness if they successfully balance strategic discipline with the operational autonomy that has enabled innovation.

The most critical risk to Ford+ success, however, transcends any organizational structure or strategic framework: employee engagement decline threatens the entire plan because no strategy succeeds without a willing, committed workforce. Ford's workforce has experienced 15,000 job losses since 2020, endured three major restructurings in five years (2020, 2022, 2025), absorbed significant bonus cuts affecting middle management, and absorbed the credibility damage of a 46-day UAW strike signaling labor skepticism about transformation sincerity. While Ford Blue, Model e, and Ford Pro each represent legitimate strategic responses to market conditions, employees throughout the organization face genuine uncertainty about job security, career trajectory, and whether management's stated purpose ("build a better world") aligns with its cost-cutting actions. This employee engagement crisis—the gap between Ford's aspirational transformation narrative and employees' lived experience of restructuring and cost pressure—represents the highest-leverage risk to implementation success. Strategic vision requires human capital committed to execution, and Ford's current employee engagement trajectory (whether measured at 2/5 or trending lower) threatens to undermine even well-conceived strategy.

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# IV. CHALLENGES, RISKS & STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

## Challenge 1: EV Transition Execution Gap

Ford Model e's -$5.4B EBIT loss (2024) with no clear profitability path creates strategic urgency (Ford Motor Company, 2025). Root causes include unfavorable EV unit economics (battery costs, scale inefficiency), market demand slower than projected (consumer range anxiety, inadequate charging infrastructure), and intense competition (Tesla price cuts, Chinese EV manufacturers). The strategic dilemma is stark: continuing to fund these losses risks exhausting shareholder patience and capital, while pivoting away from the EV strategy risks falling behind in the critical technology transition defining the automotive industry's future. Emergent strategy and Model e's operational autonomy allowed losses to widen without sufficient strategic oversight, suggesting that the 2025 strategic centralization through Chief Strategy Officer Marin Gjaja's appointment may impose the needed financial discipline.

To address this challenge, Ford should implement a three-horizon strategy balancing short-term cost reduction, medium-term product focus, and long-term revenue diversification. In the near term (2025-2026), the company should reduce per-unit losses from $45,000 to $25,000 through battery cost reduction via scale and in-house production, manufacturing efficiency improvements through learning curve acceleration, and platform sharing with Ford Blue to eliminate duplication. These efforts should target Model e EBIT losses of -$3B in 2025 and -$1.5B in 2026. In the medium term (2026-2027), Ford should pursue selective product focus by prioritizing the F-150 Lightning truck in the growing commercial EV segment and through Ford Pro synergies, deprioritizing EV sedans where Tesla dominance and weak market demand make profitability unlikely, and launching an affordable EV in the $30-35K range using lower-cost battery technology. This selective approach targets breakeven by the end of 2027. Looking longer term (2027-2030), Ford should develop software and services revenue streams including subscription services for BlueCruise autonomous features and over-the-air capability updates, fleet charging solutions integrated with Ford Pro, and battery recycling business models supporting circular economy objectives, targeting 10-15% of Model e revenue from these high-margin services. This three-horizon approach applies operations strategy principles of economies of scale and learning curves to create a clear path to profitability while maintaining EV transition momentum and restoring shareholder confidence.

## Challenge 2: Cost Pressures and Restructuring Impacts

The $1B cost savings target requiring 2025 bonus cuts and potential layoffs creates significant management model tension (Ford Authority, 2025). Root causes include investor profitability pressures, the cash drain from EV investments, and competitive pricing pressure in traditional vehicles. The core strategic risk is that cost-cutting damages precisely the organizational capabilities needed for transformation—culture, innovation capability, and employee engagement. The shift from intrinsic motivation (purpose, innovation) to extrinsic pressure (performance, cost discipline) risks destroying the cultural progress Ford made between 2021-2024. Eikenberry's (2019) distinction captures the danger perfectly: "Compliance is 'I have to,' commitment is 'I want to.'" Cost cuts drive compliance when the transformation requires commitment.

Ford must address this challenge by applying stakeholder capitalism principles that emphasize employee value alongside shareholder value. This begins with transparent communication through monthly CEO town halls explaining Ford+ progress and challenges, unit-level forums for employee voice, and clear job security communication paired with EV transition workforce planning. Simultaneously, Ford should invest $500M in an EV workforce training program providing guaranteed opportunities for ICE workers to transition to EV jobs with company-sponsored training and UAW partnership on curriculum development. To create shared success, Ford should restore bonuses for middle managers on a performance basis rather than blanket cuts, implement profit-sharing if the company exceeds EBIT targets, and establish unit-level team achievement bonuses tied to transformation milestones rather than financial metrics alone. Beyond compensation, Ford should invest in work-life balance through flexible arrangements where feasible, mental health support programs, and recognition beyond purely financial compensation. These investments signal genuine commitment rather than rhetoric and are essential for employee engagement improvement from 2/5 to 4/5, reducing turnover, improving innovation, and supporting the cultural transformation Ford requires.

## Additional Strategic Imperatives

**Refine Management Model for Sustainable Balance:** Ford's management model has swung excessively between 2022's emergence model and 2025's recentralization. The company should stabilize on a balanced hybrid model that captures the best elements of both poles. On objectives, Ford should maintain the oblique vision of building a better world while setting realistic unit-specific targets such as Model e breakeven by 2027. On motivation, Ford should restore the intrinsic/extrinsic balance by reversing 2025 bonus cuts for top performers and implementing innovation rewards separate from financial bonuses, preventing the cultural shift from commitment to compliance. On coordination, Ford should preserve business unit autonomy with strategic guardrails, allowing Gjaja's Chief Strategy Officer role to coordinate strategy without dictating tactics to unit presidents. On decision-making, Ford should clarify the decision authority matrix, specifying that unit presidents control operations and pricing decisions while the CEO and CSO retain authority over capital allocation and brand strategy. This refined management model would drive organizational stability, improve employee engagement from 2/5 to 4/5, and maintain innovation while adding strategic coherence. Birkinshaw and Goddard (2009) note: "There is no one best management model." Effective organizations consciously choose positions on each dimension based on competitive context, and Ford's challenge is finding sustainable balance rather than oscillating between extremes.

**Leverage Ford Pro Success for Competitive Differentiation:** Ford Pro stands as the company's star performer with $9B EBIT in 2024, yet its competitive advantage potential remains underlevered at the enterprise level. Ford should make Ford Pro the strategic differentiator by extending its integrated vehicle-software-services model across the company. First, Ford should apply the Pro model to Ford Blue by developing subscription telematics for F-150 retail customers, bringing fleet management capabilities to consumer segments. Second, Ford should create integrated EV solutions by bundling Model e commercial vehicles with Pro fleet software, offering charging infrastructure as a service, and providing total cost of ownership calculators demonstrating EV savings versus diesel alternatives. Third, Ford should pursue a B2B2C strategy using Ford Pro's commercial customer relationships to reach consumer markets, turning fleet drivers into brand ambassadors and creating employee purchase programs through commercial channels. Fourth, Ford should monetize data through aggregated, anonymized fleet data that provides urban planning insights, predictive maintenance data sold to parts suppliers, and benchmarking services to fleet managers. This enterprise-wide extension of Ford Pro's integrated approach would differentiate Ford from all competitors—none have equivalent commercial-software integration—creating a sustainable competitive moat. Operations strategy principles derived from Casadesus-Masanell (2007) suggest sustainable competitive advantage derives from unique, hard-to-imitate capabilities, and Ford Pro's integration of vehicles, software, and services represents exactly such a capability.

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# VI. CONCLUSION

Ford Motor Company's management and strategy transformation (2020-2025) demonstrates both the **promise and peril** of management model innovation in legacy industry disruption.

Applying Birkinshaw and Goddard's (2009) MIT Sloan framework to Ford's evolution reveals sophisticated management model innovation. From 2020-2025, Ford progressed from pure hierarchy under Jim Hackett through hybrid emergence during the 2022-2024 business unit expansion, to balanced integration in 2025 with recentralized strategic oversight. This evolution demonstrates management sophistication through deliberate experimentation, organizational learning, and adaptive refinement rather than rigid adherence to any single model. The company successfully balanced across four critical dimensions—objectives (obliquity with goal setting), motivation (intrinsic with extrinsic), coordination (emergence with oversight), and decision-making (collective wisdom with hierarchical coherence)—showing that effective management requires dynamic equilibrium rather than choosing between extremes.

Evaluating Ford's strategy implementation using Nieto-Rodriguez's Strategy Implementation Roadmap yields a 3.3/5.0 score, reflecting moderate effectiveness with significant variation across seven pillars. Ford demonstrates strong execution in leadership capabilities and business model innovation, moderate performance in value creation and culture evolution, but critically weak employee engagement representing the highest implementation risk. This uneven performance landscape reveals a fundamental transformation challenge: strategic vision alone proves insufficient without consistent execution excellence across all organizational dimensions.

The performance paradox illuminates this gap starkly. Ford Pro delivers exceptional value creation with $9B EBIT in 2024, validating the core Ford+ strategic logic that integrated products and software services generate sustainable competitive advantage. Yet Ford Model e's -$5.4B EBIT loss and widening per-unit losses reveal execution difficulty at the precise moment when EV transition success is most critical. Ford Blue's 22% EBIT decline signals core business pressure as traditional ICE vehicle markets face structural headwinds. This mixed performance—excellence in Pro, crisis in Model e, managed decline in Blue—underscores the fundamental organizational transformation truth: ambitious strategic vision matters little without implementation excellence that translates plans into results across the entire enterprise.

Ford's transformation demonstrates both genuine strengths and critical vulnerabilities. What's working includes clear strategic vision articulated through Ford+ plan, effective organizational structure through business unit focus, commercial excellence within Ford Pro's $9B EBIT achievement, strengthened leadership talent through 2025 C-suite enhancements (Farley, Gjaja, Lawler, House), and industry-leading transparency through separate business unit financial disclosure. These represent real competitive assets and strategic accomplishments. However, what's not working threatens implementation success: unfavorable EV economics creating Model e losses with no clear profitability path, declining employee engagement driven by cost-cutting and restructuring fatigue, mixed stakeholder buy-in evidenced by UAW strike, dealer concerns, and shareholder skepticism reflected in 21% stock decline, and slow Model e learning curve where scale increases losses rather than improving unit economics.

Ford's management model transformation itself is ambitious and necessary. The automotive industry's fundamental transition to electrification, autonomous mobility, and software-enabled services requires organizational capabilities that traditional hierarchical structures cannot provide. Ford's experiment with business unit autonomy, balanced intrinsic-extrinsic motivation, and collective wisdom with hierarchical oversight represents genuine management innovation addressing real competitive requirements. Without this transformation, Ford would remain locked in legacy organizational structures incapable of competing with Tesla's innovation speed or Chinese EV manufacturers' cost structures. However, implementation challenges are equally significant. The 2025 cost-cutting measures and bonus cuts risk undoing the cultural progress Ford carefully cultivated between 2021-2024, precisely when transformation requires discretionary effort and commitment. Model e's expanding losses test shareholder patience and raise questions about sustainable capital allocation. Most critically, employee engagement decline threatens the human capital transformation requires—no strategy succeeds without a committed, engaged workforce.

The 2025 leadership changes signal that Ford recognizes these challenges and is adapting. Adding Chief Strategy Officer Marin Gjaja and Vice Chair-Strategy John Lawler while maintaining business unit structure demonstrates an attempt to capture benefits of both emergence and coherence. This move reflects the organizational learning that Peter Drucker (1994) emphasized: "The theory of the business must be known and understood throughout the organization." Ford+ provides that theoretical foundation; whether refined management model execution will translate vision to results remains the critical question for 2025-2026.

Ford's management and strategy transformation is partially effective (3.2/5.0 overall) with significant upside potential if recommendations are implemented. The next 18-24 months will determine whether Ford+ becomes a case study in transformation success or a cautionary tale of strategic ambition exceeding organizational capability. Success requires neither reverting to traditional hierarchical management nor doubling down on pure emergence, but rather finding sustainable balance between goal-setting and obliquity, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, bureaucracy and emergence, hierarchy and collective wisdom. As Birkinshaw and Goddard (2009) conclude: "There is no one best management model" (p. 90). Ford's journey proves this insight—the company's willingness to experiment, learn, and adapt represents exactly the management sophistication required for 21st-century competitiveness.

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# WORKS CITED