



Blue Economy Positioning and Corporate Strategic Alignment: How Maritime Enterprises in the Global Industry Reconfigure Business Models Toward Sustainable Ocean Industries

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Abstract: *The Blue Economy — broadly defined as the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and ocean ecosystem health — has emerged as a transformative strategic framework reshaping how maritime enterprises conceptualize, design, and communicate their value propositions in global markets. This study investigates how global maritime enterprises strategically position themselves within the Blue Economy paradigm, examining the processes through which shipping companies, port operators, and maritime logistics organizations reconfigure their business models to align with sustainable ocean industry principles. Drawing on qualitative thematic analysis of thirty in-depth interviews with maritime C-suite executives, Blue Economy policy architects, sustainability strategists, and port development specialists, the research identifies four strategic positioning archetypes and three business model reconfiguration pathways. Findings reveal that successful Blue Economy alignment requires coherent integration of national maritime policy frameworks, stakeholder ecosystem management, and organizational capability reconfiguration — dimensions that individually insufficient Blue Economy strategies systematically neglect. The study advances maritime strategic management scholarship by providing an empirically grounded framework for Blue Economy corporate strategy in global maritime enterprises.*

Keywords: *Blue Economy, Maritime Corporate Strategy, Business Model Innovation, Ocean Sustainability, Strategic Positioning*

1. Introduction

The concept of the Blue Economy has rapidly evolved from a nascent policy discourse into a mainstream strategic framework that is reshaping the competitive landscape of global maritime industries. Originally articulated in the context of small island developing states seeking to leverage their exclusive economic zones for sustainable development, the Blue Economy paradigm has expanded into a comprehensive vision of ocean-based economic development that encompasses shipping, port operations, maritime logistics, offshore energy, maritime tourism, aquaculture, and ocean-based biotechnology. For maritime enterprises — historically positioned as transportation and logistics service providers rather than as ocean economy actors — the Blue Economy framework represents both a strategic opportunity and a transformative challenge: an invitation to reconfigure business models, value propositions, and stakeholder relationships around the principles of ocean sustainability, but one that requires significant organizational adaptation and strategic repositioning to capitalize upon effectively.

The strategic significance of Blue Economy positioning for maritime enterprises is amplified by the convergence of three powerful external forces. First, international regulatory frameworks — including the IMO's decarbonization strategy, the UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water), and regional ocean governance agreements — are increasingly requiring maritime enterprises to demonstrate commitment to ocean sustainability as a condition of operational licensing, port access, and public procurement eligibility (Paridaens & Notteboom, 2021).

Second, the investment community is directing growing volumes of sustainability-linked capital toward enterprises that can demonstrate credible Blue Economy credentials, creating financial incentives for strategic repositioning that complement the regulatory pressures (Zhu et al., 2024). Third, the competitive landscape of global maritime services is increasingly differentiating on the basis of sustainability performance, with Blue Economy-aligned enterprises gaining preferential access to emerging maritime markets — including offshore wind farm support, ocean data services, and sustainable port development — that represent significant growth opportunities beyond conventional shipping operations (Caldeirinha et al., 2024).

Despite the growing strategic importance of Blue Economy positioning, maritime management scholarship has provided limited systematic analysis of how enterprises navigate the transition from conventional shipping and logistics business models to Blue Economy-aligned strategic frameworks. Existing literature has tended to examine Blue Economy governance at the national and international policy level (Paridaens & Notteboom, 2021), the environmental performance dimensions of specific maritime industries (Liao & Lee, 2023), and the sustainability implications of specific ocean resource uses, without adequately addressing the strategic management processes through which individual maritime enterprises configure their organizational capabilities, business model architectures, and stakeholder ecosystems for effective Blue Economy positioning.

This study fills this gap through qualitative inquiry into the strategic positioning and business model reconfiguration processes of global maritime enterprises engaged in Blue Economy alignment. The research is motivated by the urgency of the strategic choices facing maritime companies in the current period — choices about which Blue Economy markets to enter, which organizational capabilities to develop, how to structure stakeholder partnerships, and how to communicate Blue Economy credentials to investors, regulators, customers, and communities — and by the recognition that inadequate theoretical frameworks for maritime Blue Economy strategy represent a significant barrier to effective strategic decision-making. By developing an empirically grounded framework for Blue Economy corporate strategy, this study aims to equip maritime enterprise strategists and policy architects with the conceptual tools required to navigate the Blue Economy transition effectively (Du et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2024; Jian-ping et al., 2021).

2. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative research design to investigate Blue Economy strategic positioning and business model reconfiguration among global maritime enterprises. The qualitative approach is justified by the interpretive complexity of strategic positioning processes — phenomena that involve the construction of organizational identities, the negotiation of stakeholder relationships, and the creative reconfiguration of business model architectures in ways that resist standardized quantitative measurement (Yao et al., 2021). The study adopts a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, treating Blue Economy strategy as an enacted process through which organizational leaders and stakeholders co-construct new strategic identities and competitive positions.

The study population encompasses senior executives, strategy directors, sustainability officers, and Blue Economy policy specialists in global shipping companies, port development authorities, maritime investment organizations, and international maritime governance bodies. Purposive sampling recruits thirty participants with strategic responsibility for or expert knowledge of Blue Economy business development, sustainable maritime strategy, and ocean governance integration. Participants are drawn from Europe, East Asia, the Pacific, the Middle East, and Africa — regions selected to represent the diverse regulatory, ecological, and commercial contexts within which Blue Economy maritime strategies are being developed and implemented. This geographic diversity is essential because Blue Economy opportunities and constraints are profoundly shaped by national marine jurisdiction frameworks, ocean ecosystem conditions, and regional maritime policy architectures that vary significantly across global regions (Paridaens & Notteboom, 2021; Jian-ping et al., 2021).

The research instrument is a semi-structured interview protocol organized around five thematic areas: organizational understandings of Blue Economy and its strategic relevance; existing and planned Blue Economy business model initiatives; stakeholder ecosystem

management for Blue Economy positioning; barriers to and enablers of Blue Economy business model reconfiguration; and assessment of competitive positioning implications. Independent variables include organizational type (shipping company, port authority, logistics provider), scale of operations, geographic trade route profile, and existing sustainability capability maturity. Dependent variables encompass Blue Economy positioning archetype, business model reconfiguration pathway, stakeholder partnership configuration, and competitive advantage assessment. Supplementary document analysis of corporate sustainability reports, Blue Economy strategy documents, and port development master plans provides triangulating evidence for interview-derived insights.

Data collection proceeds through semi-structured interviews of 55–75 minutes each, recorded and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis follows three phases: inductive coding identifies Blue Economy strategy concepts, business model innovation patterns, and stakeholder management approaches; cross-group comparisons contrast Blue Economy strategy orientations across shipping companies, port authorities, and logistics providers, revealing structurally different strategic positioning opportunities and constraints; and narrative synthesis integrates thematic findings into a comprehensive framework for Blue Economy corporate strategy in global maritime enterprises, explaining how positioning archetypes emerge, how business model reconfiguration unfolds, and what organizational conditions enable successful Blue Economy alignment (Caldeirinha et al., 2024; Paridaens & Notteboom, 2021; Liao & Lee, 2023).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

Thematic analysis produced four Blue Economy strategic positioning archetypes, three business model reconfiguration pathways, and a set of critical enabling and constraining conditions, organized across the tables below.

Table 1. Blue Economy Strategic Positioning Archetypes in Global Maritime Enterprises

Positioning Archetype	Strategic Focus	Participant Prevalence (%)	Competitive Advantage Basis	Sustainability Integration Level
Ocean Steward	Positioning environmental protection as core value proposition	30%	Regulatory access, premium pricing	Deep (operational + strategic)
Sustainability Integrator	Embedding sustainability across existing business model dimensions	37%	Cost efficiency + green branding	Moderate (operational)
Blue Economy Explorer	Actively developing new ocean economy business lines	20%	First-mover in emerging markets	Strategic (new ventures)
Compliance Adapter	Implementing minimum sustainability standards to maintain market access	13%	Cost maintenance	Surface (regulatory compliance)

Table 2. Business Model Reconfiguration Pathways and Key Indicators

Reconfiguration Pathway	Description	Adoption Rate (%)	Strategic Complexity (1–5)	Stakeholder Collaboration Requirement	Outcome Effectiveness (1–5)
Value Proposition Extension	Adding Blue Economy services/credentials to existing offering	57%	3.1	Moderate	3.8
Revenue Stream Diversification	Entering new Blue Economy markets (offshore wind, ocean data, maritime tourism)	27%	4.3	High	4.4

Value Chain Reconfiguration	Restructuring supply chain and operational partnerships around ocean sustainability	17%	4.7	Very High	4.6
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Figure 1. Blue Economy Strategic Positioning Archetype Distribution

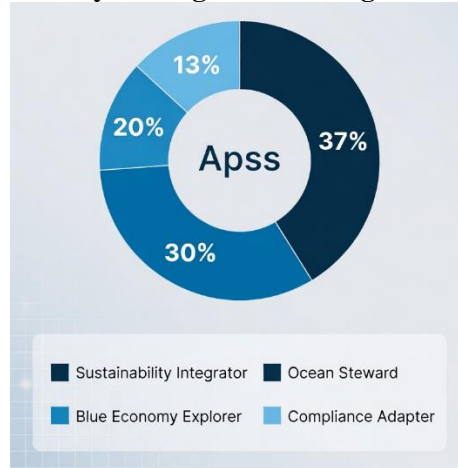
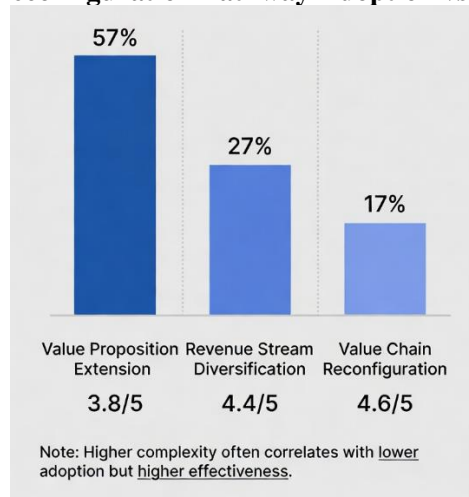


Figure 2. Business Model Reconfiguration Pathway Adoption vs. Outcome Effectiveness



The findings reveal a clear inverse relationship between the strategic complexity of Blue Economy business model reconfiguration and its adoption rate — while value proposition extension is the most commonly adopted pathway (57%), value chain reconfiguration generates the highest outcome effectiveness (4.6/5) despite its very low adoption rate (17%). This pattern suggests that the full strategic value of Blue Economy positioning remains unrealized by the majority of global maritime enterprises, which tend to adopt less transformative reconfiguration approaches that offer lower competitive advantage sustainability.

3.2 Discussion

The findings illuminate the strategic architecture of Blue Economy positioning in global maritime enterprises with empirical depth and theoretical precision that significantly extends existing scholarship. The dominance of the "Sustainability Integrator" archetype (37%) — an approach that embeds sustainability dimensions within existing business models rather than pursuing fundamentally new Blue Economy ventures — directly addresses the central research question by revealing that most maritime enterprises are pursuing incremental rather than transformative Blue Economy strategies. This finding resonates with organizational inertia theory, which predicts that capital-intensive enterprises with large sunk costs in existing assets

will prefer evolutionary rather than revolutionary strategic change, particularly when the financial returns from transformative Blue Economy repositioning remain uncertain and long-term (Caldeirinha et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2024).

Critically, the study's identification of an inverse relationship between business model reconfiguration complexity and adoption rate — while simultaneously demonstrating a positive relationship between complexity and outcome effectiveness — reveals a significant strategic gap in the global maritime industry's Blue Economy transition. The 17% adoption rate of value chain reconfiguration despite its 4.6/5 effectiveness rating suggests that the most impactful Blue Economy strategies are being pursued only by a small minority of organizationally capable and strategically courageous maritime enterprises (Du et al., 2023; Jian-ping et al., 2021). This finding has important implications for maritime industry associations and international governance bodies, suggesting that capacity building, collaborative infrastructure investment, and risk-sharing mechanisms are needed to enable a broader range of enterprises to pursue higher-complexity Blue Economy reconfiguration pathways.

The research fills a critical gap in maritime strategic management scholarship by demonstrating that successful Blue Economy alignment requires the coherent integration of three dimensions that individually insufficient strategies systematically neglect: national maritime policy alignment — as enterprises operating in jurisdictions with well-developed Blue Economy governance frameworks consistently demonstrated stronger strategic coherence than those in regulatory vacuums (Paridaens & Notteboom, 2021); stakeholder ecosystem management — with Blue Economy Explorer archetype enterprises showing significantly higher levels of multi-stakeholder partnership development than Compliance Adapters; and organizational capability reconfiguration — particularly in the development of ocean data analytics, environmental impact assessment, and multi-sector partnership management capabilities that transcend traditional shipping and logistics competency domains (Liao & Lee, 2023; Zhou et al., 2024).

The practical implications for maritime enterprise strategists are substantial: companies should assess their current positioning archetype with honesty and map the capability development investments required to move toward higher-effectiveness reconfiguration pathways. Regulatory bodies should develop Blue Economy strategy certification frameworks that reward deeper integration beyond surface-level compliance adaptation. Future research should examine the financial performance implications of different Blue Economy positioning archetypes over five-to-ten year time horizons, providing the evidence base needed to build the business case for transformative Blue Economy strategy investment.

4. Conclusion

This study has provided a comprehensive qualitative analysis of Blue Economy strategic positioning and business model reconfiguration in global maritime enterprises, developing a four-archetype positioning framework and identifying three reconfiguration pathways of varying strategic complexity and effectiveness. Through thematic analysis of thirty maritime strategy professional interviews, the research has demonstrated that the majority of global maritime enterprises are pursuing incremental Blue Economy integration strategies that capture limited competitive advantage, while a minority of strategically ambitious and organizationally capable enterprises are realizing significantly superior outcomes through value chain reconfiguration and revenue stream diversification approaches. The findings call for a strategic elevation of Blue Economy ambition across the global maritime industry, supported by capacity building initiatives, collaborative investment frameworks, and regulatory incentive structures that enable broader enterprise participation in the highest-impact Blue Economy business model transformations.

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