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Digital Transformation Initiatives to Promote Organizational Innovation: A Case of S Enterprise in China

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ABSTRACT

The research objectives of this study were: 1) To identify the mechanisms through which digital transformation influenced organizational innovation within private enterprises in China; 2) To study the best practices employed by private enterprises in China to leverage digital transformation initiatives for fostering organizational innovation; 3) To propose guidelines for private enterprises in China to refine their digital transformation initiatives and promote organizational innovation. To achieve these objectives, a qualitative research approach was employed, involving data collection from various sources such as interviews, literature reviews, and document analysis. The key informants included 2 executives, 4 managers, and 15 employees from Company S, totaling 21 individuals. Data analysis techniques included thematic analysis, content analysis, and comparative analysis.

The research findings revealed that: 1) Digital transformation initiatives influenced organizational innovation through technological adoption, fostering changes in organizational culture, shifting management practices, and integrating digital tools. These mechanisms enhanced product development, streamlined processes, empowered employees, decentralized decision-making, and fostered innovation-driven growth; 2) Best practices of private enterprises in China leveraged digital transformation by prioritizing R&D, collaborating with external partners and startups, creating innovation ecosystems, and implementing agile innovation management systems. These practices drove data-driven innovation, fostered a culture of openness and experimentation, and optimized resource allocation, positioning them for sustained growth in the digital era; and 3) The guideline for private enterprises in China to refine digital transformation and foster innovation focused on four main pillars: strategic goal alignment, fostering an innovative culture, embracing data-driven decision-making, and adopting advanced digital tools. By aligning strategic goals with core values, fostering an open culture of innovation, utilizing data effectively, and leveraging digital tools, companies could drive successful digital transformation and promote organizational innovation.

Keywords: Digital Transformation, Organizational Innovation, Innovation Ecosystems, Best Practices, Private Enterprises.

Introduction

This study was critically evaluated in light of the role played by digital transformation towards enhancing organizational innovation within private enterprises in China. Significant investments were made in high-potential firms, utilizing advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and cloud computing to keep pace with a rapidly changing business environment (Ghosh et al., 2022). This technological adoption revolutionized processes, improved efficiency, and, most importantly, affected income distribution, particularly labor income shares within these firms. Part of the 14th Five-Year Plan economic policies included strategic considerations to increase labor remuneration in primary distribution to promote shared prosperity and optimize the pattern of income distribution (Jiaming et al., 2020).

However, there was a clear gap in these approaches when looking towards a comprehensive understanding of the specific impacts that digital transformation had on organizational innovation and labor income distribution within the private sector. Unlike state-owned enterprises, private enterprises operated under different mandates and faced different challenges and opportunities in this digital shift. Further pressure on the share of labor income came from organizational forms, workflows, and employee roles affected by digital technologies. We investigated their impacts, especially at the junction where labor income share met digital transformation.

The research dissected how digital technologies empowered organizational innovation while examining their effects on income distribution and employment dynamics. More comprehensively, it sought to cover how digital transformation influenced organizational innovation within the unique framework of private enterprises in

China by addressing current gaps in the literature (Xing et al., 2023; Kraus et al., 2022). It further aimed to provide an anchor for policy interventions and strategic decisions that would foster inclusive growth and the sustainability of digital transformation, thereby guiding the use of digital technologies within enterprises for broader societal benefits.

Purposes

- 1) To identify the mechanisms through which digital transformation influences organizational innovation within private enterprises in China.
- 2) To study the best practices employed by private enterprises in China to leverage digital transformation initiatives for fostering organizational innovation.
- 3) To propose guideline for private enterprises in China to refine their digital transformation initiatives and promote organizational innovation.

Research Methodology

The research was conducted as a qualitative study aimed at understanding the influence of digital transformation on organizational innovation within a private enterprise in China. The focus was on comprehending the dynamics of digitalization and innovation in private enterprises. Through document analysis and in-depth interviews, the study aimed to capture strategies and processes facilitating digitization and subsequent innovation. The data collection involved a review of documents related to digital transformation efforts within the selected companies, along with semi-structured interviews that utilized various organizational roles to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of digital transformation. The key informants included 2 executives, 4 managers, and 15 employees from Company S, totaling 21 individuals. Key research instruments included an interview guide containing questions on how digital technologies and strategies influenced organizational innovation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow flexibility in gathering additional information based on emerging themes.

Thematic analysis was applied to interview transcripts to identify data patterns and themes related to best practices resulting from digital transformation. This process involved data identification, coding, theme development, and interpretation of findings based on theoretical frameworks (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017). The validity and reliability of the study was ensured through member checking (Birt et al., 2016), where interpretations of questions were compared with responses from interviewees. Additionally, the study underwent expert review to assess the practicality of proposed guidelines based on research findings and their alignment with current trends in digital transformation and innovation in organizational research. These measures collectively aimed to produce rigorous, relevant findings to effectively guide private enterprises through their digital transformation journey (Nowell et al., 2017; Roberts et al., 2019).

Results

1. Mechanisms through which digital transformation initiatives influence organizational innovation

The research findings can be concluded to illustrate the mechanisms through which digital transformation initiatives influence organizational innovation, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Mechanisms through which digital transformation initiatives influence organizational innovation

Mechanisms	Key findings
Technological Adoption	Adoption of digital technologies enhances product development, process optimization, and resource allocation. Strategic investments in emerging technologies provide a competitive advantage.
Changes in Organizational Culture	Digital transformation fosters a culture of collaboration, experimentation, and empowerment. Increased employee satisfaction and engagement contribute positively to innovation.
Shifts in Management Practice	Management practices become more data-centric, emphasizing data-driven decision-making. Leadership decentralizes decision-making and fosters a culture of accountability and ownership.
Integration of Digital Tools	Digital tools streamline processes, enhance collaboration, and foster innovation. Strategic investments in digital infrastructure lay the foundation for innovation-driven growth.

Digital transformation initiatives exert their influence on organizational innovation through several key mechanisms. Firstly, through technological adoption, organizations leverage digital technologies like AI, IoT, and cloud computing to glean data-driven insights and deploy advanced analytics. These technologies enhance various facets of operations, including product development, process optimization, and resource allocation. Moreover, strategic investments in emerging technologies such as augmented reality afford organizations a competitive edge in the market. Participant said:

"The integration of digital tools such as cloud-based project management platforms and virtual collaboration tools has revolutionized our workflow. It enables our teams to collaborate in real time regardless of geography, fostering a culture of innovation and creativity."

In parallel, digital transformation fosters a profound shift in organizational culture. Collaboration, experimentation, agility, and empowerment become central tenets as organizations embrace digitalization. Participant said:

"With the advent of digital technology, our organisation has undergone a major cultural transformation. The newfound emphasis is on collaboration, experimentation and agility, replacing traditional hierarchical structures with more dynamic and flexible ways of working."

This cultural evolution is reflected in increased employee satisfaction, engagement, and motivation, all of which significantly contribute to fostering innovation and overall performance. Leadership plays a pivotal role in nurturing this culture, focusing efforts on cultivating psychological safety, encouraging risk-taking, and promoting innovation through tailored training programs and workshops.

Complementing these cultural changes are shifts in management practices. Management paradigms become increasingly data-centric, prioritizing data-driven decision-making and evidence-based management. Decentralization of decision-making empowers front-line managers to spearhead innovative initiatives, fostering a culture of accountability and ownership within teams. Effective leadership communication and transparency further bolster trust and collaboration, aligning employees with organizational goals and nurturing a proactive stance towards innovation.

The integration of digital tools and platforms serves as a cornerstone for driving innovation within organizations. Cloud computing, data analytics, and collaboration platforms streamline processes, enhance collaboration, and foster innovation across various operational domains. Strategic investments in digital infrastructure lay a robust foundation for innovation-driven growth, while a user-centric approach to digital tool integration empowers employees to experiment, iterate, and contribute to organizational agility, resilience, and bottom-up innovation.

2. Best practices employed by private enterprises in China to leverage digital transformation initiatives for fostering organizational innovation

Best practices employed by private enterprises in China to leverage digital transformation initiatives for fostering organizational innovation are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 Best practices employed by private enterprises in China to leverage digital transformation initiatives for fostering organizational innovation

Issues	Best practices
Research and Development (R&D)	Private enterprises prioritize R&D as a cornerstone of their innovation strategy, aligning it with digital transformation objectives. They utilize advanced analytics, machine learning, and predictive modeling to drive data-driven innovation. Agile methodologies and lean practices are adopted to accelerate innovation cycles and foster cross-functional collaboration.
Collaboration with External Partners and Startups	Working with external partners and startups is crucial for gaining expertise and accessing cutting-edge technology. Diverse partner ecosystems including technology providers, research institutions, and startups are cultivated to drive innovation. Innovative collaboration models like open innovation ecosystems, hackathons, and accelerators are employed to foster a culture of openness and experimentation.
Creation of Innovation Ecosystems	Private enterprises actively cultivate innovation ecosystems by collaborating with various stakeholders including universities, research institutions, and industry peers. Digital technologies play a key role in facilitating collaboration within these ecosystems, enabling virtual collaboration and agile experimentation. Innovation platforms such as incubators and accelerators empower startups and researchers to scale innovative solutions and drive industry transformation.
Implementation of Innovation Management Systems	Organizations strategically design and implement innovation management systems aligned with business objectives. Digital technologies such as innovation management software and analytics tools are leveraged to capture, evaluate, and prioritize ideas. Agile and iterative approaches to innovation management, including design thinking and lean startup methodologies, are adopted to speed up time to market and enhance customer focus.

Private enterprises in China have adopted a series of best practices in leveraging digital transformation initiatives to promote organizational innovation, which reflect the maturity and innovation of enterprises in the digital transformation process. First, the private sector focuses on technology adoption by introducing advanced digital technologies to enhance product development, process optimization, and resource allocation. For example, enterprises have adopted technologies such as advanced analytics, machine learning and predictive modeling, resulting in improved innovation. Participant said:

"Our R&D strategy is closely aligned with our digital transformation roadmap. We leverage advanced analytics, machine learning and predictive modeling to drive data-driven innovation across our portfolio."

The application of these technologies not only brings new business opportunities for enterprises, but also promotes the formation of innovation culture within the organization. Private companies focus on organizational culture change, fostering a culture of collaboration, experimentation, and empowerment. Driven by digital transformation, enterprises are gradually abandoning the traditional rigid management model and moving to a more flexible and open work environment. By encouraging communication and collaboration among employees, the private sector has succeeded in creating an atmosphere that supports innovation and learning. At the same time, the company also focuses on improving employee participation and autonomy, stimulating employees'

creativity and innovation potential, thus promoting the sustainable development of the organization. The private sector has implemented a shift in management practices towards more data-driven decision making. In the context of digital transformation, enterprises are gradually adopting a data-driven management model, relying on data analytics and business intelligence to guide decision-making and strategic planning. In addition, companies are advocating decentralized decision-making models that give teams greater responsibility and initiative. In this way, private enterprises strengthen their insight into the external environment and rational use of internal resources, thus achieving continuous improvement of organizational innovation and competitive advantage.

Private enterprises in China are strategically leveraging digital transformation to foster organizational innovation through a series of best practices. At the forefront is their commitment to Research and Development (R&D), where advanced analytics and machine learning are harnessed to drive data-driven innovation. Agile methodologies and lean practices further expedite innovation cycles while promoting cross-functional collaboration. Participant said:

"We have adopted agile methods and cross-functional collaboration to foster a culture of rapid experimentation and learning. Our iterative approach to R&D allows us to quickly adapt to market changes and customer feedback, driving continuous innovation."

Moreover, collaboration with external partners and startups has emerged as a pivotal strategy. By tapping into diverse ecosystems comprising technology providers, research institutions, and startups, enterprises gain access to cutting-edge expertise and technology, fueling innovation. Participant said:

"Working with external partners and startups complements our internal capabilities, gaining expertise and exploring emerging technologies that can drive innovation and drive competitive advantage."

"We actively foster an innovation ecosystem by working with universities, research institutions and industry partners to co-create innovative solutions that meet market needs and drive business growth"

These collaborations extend beyond traditional partnerships to embrace open innovation models, fostering a culture of experimentation and openness. Concurrently, the creation of innovation ecosystems is actively pursued, with enterprises forging strong relationships with stakeholders such as universities and industry peers. Digital technologies serve as enablers, facilitating virtual collaboration and agile experimentation within these ecosystems. Complementing these efforts is the implementation of robust innovation management systems aligned with business objectives. Leveraging digital tools and agile approaches, organizations streamline idea generation, evaluation, and implementation processes, ensuring efficient allocation of resources and optimization of innovation outcomes. These integrated strategies underscore a holistic approach to organizational innovation, positioning private enterprises in China for sustained growth and competitiveness in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

3. Guideline for private enterprises in China to refine their digital transformation initiatives and promote organizational innovation

The researchers at S Enterprise in China have meticulously crafted a set of guidelines aimed at spearheading the digital transformation journey. These guidelines encompass a multifaceted approach, incorporating initiatives such as fostering a culture of innovation, implementing agile methodologies, cultivating strategic partnerships, and strategically investing in digital infrastructure and capabilities. Following the drafting of these guidelines, a panel of experts undertook a comprehensive evaluation, assessing the initiatives based on criteria including consistency, suitability, feasibility, and usefulness. The findings of this evaluation are detailed in Table 3, providing valuable insights to further refine and optimize the implementation strategy for digital transformation at S Enterprise.

Table 3 Result of expert review of initiatives for implementing guideline

Initiatives for implementing guideline	Consistency		Suitability		Feasibility		Usefulness	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Fostering a culture of innovation	3.80	0.837	3.60	0.548	4.00	0.707	4.00	0.707
Implementing agile methodologies	4.20	0.837	4.20	0.837	4.00	1.000	3.80	0.837
Cultivating strategic partnerships	4.20	0.837	4.00	1.000	4.00	0.707	3.60	0.548
Effectively invest in digital infrastructure and capabilities	3.40	0.548	4.60	0.548	4.40	0.548	4.60	0.894

It is critical for private companies in China to refine their digital transformation initiatives and drive organizational innovation. The following provides some guidelines to help these businesses better achieve this goal. Private companies should define their strategic goals for digital transformation and align them with the organization's core values and long-term goals. This means that companies need to carefully evaluate their business models and market positioning to identify key focus and priority areas for digital transformation. For example, businesses can choose to improve the delivery of products and services through digitalization, enhance the customer experience, or optimize internal processes and employee collaboration through digital platforms, thereby fostering innovation and business growth.

Private companies need to focus on building an open and flexible organizational culture that encourages innovative thinking and experimentation among employees. This means that companies need to break down traditional hierarchical management structures, increase employee engagement and autonomy, and stimulate employee creativity and teamwork. By establishing open communication channels and encouraging cross-sector collaboration, companies can promote knowledge sharing and cross-border innovation, thereby driving organizational innovation and competitiveness. Private companies should focus on building a data-driven decision-making regime and investing in data analytics and business intelligence technologies. By effectively collecting, analyzing, and utilizing data, companies can better understand market trends, customer needs, and internal operations to provide scientific basis and strategic guidance for decision making. In addition, companies can also use data analytics to identify potential business opportunities and innovation points, so that organizational innovation and growth can be sustainable.

The private sector needs to actively explore and apply advanced digital tools and platforms to enhance organizational efficiency and innovation. This includes adopting technologies such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things to optimize business processes and improve production efficiency. At the same time, enterprises should also focus on developing employees' digital skills and capabilities, providing them with the necessary training and support to adapt to the needs and challenges of the digital age.

In the pursuit of refining digital transformation initiatives and fostering organizational innovation within Chinese private enterprises, a comprehensive guideline has been crafted. This guideline encompasses various facets crucial for success, including fostering a culture of innovation, embracing Agile methodologies, cultivating strategic partnerships, and investing in digital infrastructure and capabilities. Each aspect is meticulously designed

to address the unique challenges and opportunities faced by organizations in China's rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Through a thorough expert review process, the efficacy of these initiatives has been evaluated across key parameters such as consistency, suitability, feasibility, and usefulness. Remarkably, initiatives aimed at fostering a culture of innovation and implementing Agile methodologies have received commendable ratings, signifying their potential to drive transformative change. Similarly, cultivating strategic partnerships and effectively investing in digital infrastructure and capabilities have been recognized for their suitability and practical utility in enhancing organizational resilience and competitiveness. These insights underscore the importance of strategic planning and targeted interventions in navigating the complexities of digital transformation, paving the way for sustained growth and innovation within Chinese private enterprises.

Discussions

1. Mechanisms Influencing Organizational Innovation

The research underscores how adopting technology fundamentally drives organizational innovation, enhancing product development and optimizing processes with digital technologies such as advanced analytics, machine learning and predictive modeling (Akter et al., 2022; Alloui & Mourdi, 2023). Investing in emerging technologies is a strategic approach to sustain a competitive edge (Kaur et al., 2020). Furthermore, promoting a culture of collaboration and empowerment significantly boosts employee satisfaction and innovation (Achdiat et al., 2023; Bourdeau et al., 2021). Additionally, the shift towards data-centric and decentralized decision-making, underpinned by effective leadership and transparency, aligns with current digital transformation trends (Henao-García et al., 2021; Moccia et al., 2020). Employing essential digital tools and platforms is crucial for laying the groundwork for innovation-driven growth (Gonçalves et al., 2022).

2. Best Practices for Leveraging Digital Transformation

Chinese private enterprises have adopted several best practices in R&D, effectively linking digital strategy with cutting-edge technologies like machine learning to foster innovation (Wang & Su, 2021). Agile and lean practices are implemented to shorten innovation cycles and enhance collaboration. Engaging with external partners and startups opens access to new technologies and drives innovation through open innovation models (García-Gutiérrez & Martínez-Borreguero, 2016; Naqshbandi & Tabche, 2018). Moreover, building innovation ecosystems with stakeholders like universities and industry peers fosters collaboration and resource sharing, supported by digital technologies for virtual collaboration (Zhuang & Zhou, 2023).

3. Guidelines for Refining Digital Transformation Initiatives

To enhance digital transformation strategies, Chinese private enterprises should:

Define clear strategic goals that resonate with their core values and guide their digital transformation. Cultivate an open organizational culture that encourages innovation. Establish a data-driven decision-making regime. Investing heavily in digital infrastructure and capabilities is essential. The expert reviews underscore the importance of fostering innovation cultures and implementing Agile methodologies, highlighting their potential to significantly impact organizational transformation (Santos & de Carvalho, 2022). Strategic partnerships and robust digital infrastructures are also emphasized as crucial for sustainable growth and competitiveness (Schauerte et al., 2021; Judijanto et al., 2023; Mizrak, 2023).

Conclusions

The research findings revealed that: 1) Digital transformation initiatives influenced organizational innovation through technological adoption, fostering changes in organizational culture, shifting management practices, and integrating digital tools. These mechanisms enhanced product development, streamlined processes, empowered employees, decentralized decision-making, and fostered innovation-driven growth; 2) Best practices of private enterprises in China leveraged digital transformation by prioritizing R&D, collaborating with external partners and startups, creating innovation ecosystems, and implementing agile innovation management systems. These practices drove data-driven innovation, fostered a culture of openness and experimentation, and optimized resource allocation, positioning them for sustained growth in the digital era; and 3) The guideline for private enterprises in China to refine digital transformation and foster innovation focused on four main pillars: strategic goal alignment, fostering an innovative culture, embracing data-driven decision-making, and adopting advanced digital tools. By aligning strategic goals with core values, fostering an open culture of innovation, utilizing data

effectively, and leveraging digital tools, companies could drive successful digital transformation and promote organizational innovation.

Recommendations

1. Practical Recommendations

Private companies aiming to accelerate their digital transformation and innovation should focus on talent development through:

Training and certifications in emerging technologies and digital tools. Cultivating a continuous learning culture that keeps professionals at the forefront of technological advancements, enabling them to contribute effectively to organizational innovation. Collaboration with external organizations such as startups and academic institutions should be enhanced to foster open innovation, leveraging external knowledge and resources for innovative ideas and technologies. Additionally, implementing diversity and inclusion programs in problem-solving processes is essential for driving innovation. Companies must also adopt an iterative approach to digital

transformation, focusing on delivering incremental value and continuous improvement. Prioritizing customer-centric innovation to align initiatives with customer needs and expectations is crucial. Establishing KPIs to measure the effectiveness of digital transformation initiatives will help optimize resource allocation and ensure ongoing innovation and business success.

2. Theoretical Contributions

This research brings new insights into the mechanisms through which digital transformation influences organizational innovation and best practices in China. It highlights the significant impact of technological adoption, not only on operational efficiency but also on strengthening a culture of innovation within organizations. It emphasizes the shift towards data-centric management practices and the strategic importance of partnerships and collaborative ecosystems in driving innovation. The guidelines provided offer practical insights on aligning digital transformation with organizational goals, fostering an open culture, and investing in advanced digital tools and data-driven decision-making.

3. Future Research Suggestions

Future research should take a longitudinal approach to assess the long-term effects of digital transformation, including the impacts of emerging technologies like blockchain and augmented reality, as well as the varied cultural impacts on digital transformation practices. Additionally, exploring the ethical and social impacts of digital initiatives, the role of digital transformation in enhancing organizational resilience, and the importance of leadership and change management in successful digital transitions are crucial areas for further study. Developing comprehensive metrics to assess the impact of digital transformation on organizational performance and innovation is also recommended. These practical recommendations and theoretical contributions emphasize the dynamic and multifaceted nature of digital transformation in driving organizational innovation within Chinese private enterprises. This forms a solid foundation for future research and practical implementations to navigate the evolving digital landscape.

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