Management Power, Open Strategy, and Organizational Structural Agility: A Dual-Mediation Framework for Digital Transformation Performance

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ABSTRACT

Despite extensive scholarly attention to individual antecedents of digital transformation, the joint governance mechanisms through which management power, open strategy adoption, and organizational structural agility collectively generate digital transformation performance remain undertheorized and empirically underexplored, particularly in Southeast Asian emerging markets. Drawing on Upper Echelon Theory and the Dynamic Capabilities Framework, this study proposes and tests a dual-mediation model in which management power, open strategy adoption, and organizational structural agility serve as independent variables; digital transformation intensity and organizational learning capability function as sequential mediators; and digital transformation performance constitutes the dependent variable. Survey data collected from 312 senior executives in Vietnamese manufacturing and technology enterprises were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling. The findings reveal that management power exerts the strongest direct effect on digital transformation intensity, while open strategy adoption generates the largest indirect contribution through organizational learning capability. Organizational structural agility functions as a necessary enabling condition for both direct transformation intensity and the learning-to-performance pathway. All nine proposed hypotheses are supported. These results extend Upper Echelon Theory to the governance-transformation nexus, provide the first PLS-SEM validation of dual sequential mediation in this domain, and offer actionable guidance for executives, boards, and policymakers seeking to accelerate digital transformation in emerging market contexts.

Keywords: Management Power, Open Strategy, Organizational Structural Agility, Digital Transformation, Upper Echelon Theory, Dynamic Capabilities.

1 Introduction

In the contemporary digital era, organizations face an environment that is evolving more rapidly, becoming progressively unstable, intricate, and unclear owing to swift alterations in competition, demand, technology, and regulatory restraints (Sacavém et al., 2025). Digital transformation — broadly defined as a sociotechnical process of deploying digital technologies across organizational operations and practices to create value and improve competitive positioning (Vial, 2021) — has emerged as a strategic imperative rather than a discretionary undertaking. For enterprises in Southeast Asian emerging markets, where institutional environments are still maturing and digital infrastructure is expanding rapidly, the governance conditions that enable or constrain digital transformation represent a particularly salient research priority (Zhang et al., 2025).

Three governance-related constructs have attracted growing, albeit fragmented, scholarly attention. First, management power — defined as the asymmetric control of valuable organizational resources by the firm's management team (Magee & Galinsky, 2008); has been identified as a primary antecedent of digital transformation, with high-powered executives demonstrating greater strategic risk tolerance and longer-term commitment to digital investment (Zhang et al., 2025). Second, open strategy adoption; the practice of broadening strategic participation and transparency to include actors beyond the traditional top management team through digital platforms, has been proposed as a mechanism for generating richer information inputs, fostering organizational commitment, and enabling adaptive strategy-making (Ortner et al., 2025; Seidl et al., 2019). Third, organizational structural agility — reflecting reduced formalization, flattened hierarchy, and enhanced cross-functional integration — has been identified as a structural prerequisite for capturing the benefits of digital transformation investments (Shahzad et al., 2025).

Despite these individual contributions, a critical theoretical gap persists. The mechanisms through which these three governance constructs jointly generate digital transformation performance remain undertheorized, and the role of sequential mediation — specifically, whether digital transformation intensity and organizational learning capability function as a dual-mediation chain — has not been empirically tested in an integrated governance framework. Prior research has examined management power and digital transformation in isolation (Zhang et al., 2025), open strategy and digital transformation as a review framework (Ortner et al., 2025), and organizational structural change and digital transformation outcomes as qualitative case evidence (Shahzad et al., 2025), but no study has combined these three governance antecedents with dual mediation in a quantitative model targeting digital transformation performance as the ultimate dependent variable.

To address this gap, the present study proposes an integrated dual-mediation model grounded in Upper Echelon Theory (Hambrick & Mason, 1984) and the Dynamic Capabilities Framework (Teece et al., 1997). The model posits three independent variables (management power, open strategy adoption, organizational structural agility) that influence digital transformation performance through two sequential mediators (digital transformation intensity and organizational learning capability).

This study makes three principal contributions. First, it extends Upper Echelon Theory by integrating open strategy and structural agility as complementary governance antecedents alongside management power, providing a more comprehensive account of how executive and organizational governance shapes digital transformation outcomes. Second, it provides the first PLS-SEM validation of a dual sequential mediation chain — digital transformation intensity → organizational learning capability → digital transformation performance — in this governance domain. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical background and develops the hypotheses and research model; Section 3 describes the methodology; Section 4 reports the results; and Sections 5 and 6 present the discussion, conclusions, and implications

2 Literature review and Hypotheses

2.1 Upper Echelon Theory and Dynamic Capabilities

Upper Echelon Theory (UET), introduced by Hambrick and Mason (1984), posits that organizational outcomes partially reflect the cognitive structures, values, and behavioral orientations of senior leaders. In the digital transformation context, UET has been extended to incorporate executives' digital knowledge, risk appetite, and power configurations as predictors of digital strategic behavior (Firk et al., 2022). Zhang et al. (2025) demonstrate that management power activates what the approach-inhibition theory of power describes as a "readiness to act" orientation, enabling high-powered executives to prioritize digital transformation returns over risks. The Dynamic Capabilities Framework (Teece et al., 1997) complements UET by explaining how sustained competitive advantage in turbulent environments derives from firms'

capacity to sense opportunities, seize resources, and reconfigure organizational assets — a tripartite capability structure directly relevant to digital transformation (Warner & Wäger, 2019).

2.2 Hypotheses

Drawing on the approach-inhibition theory of power (Keltner et al., 2003) and Upper Echelon Theory (Hambrick & Mason, 1984), high-powered executives are expected to drive higher digital transformation intensity through three mechanisms. First, high-powered executives influenced by the power approach system pay more attention to the positive results of actions and prioritize the expected returns of digital transformation, leading them to focus on the potential benefits of digitalization rather than its costs and risks. Second, high-powered executives experience positive emotions like optimism and self-confidence, enabling them to believe in their ability to manage the outcomes of risky long-term decisions, such as sustained digital transformation investments. Third, high-powered executives exhibit a greater willingness to take action, securing valuable resources including timely investments in human capital and research and development necessary for digital transformation (Zhang et al., 2025).

Hypothesis H1: Management power has a significant positive influence on digital transformation intensity.

Open strategy adoption is expected to accelerate and deepen digital transformation intensity by generating the organizational commitment, knowledge diversity, and behavioral alignment necessary for successful digital transformation execution. When employees at multiple organizational levels participate in strategy formation, they develop stronger personal investment in implementation success and contribute contextually relevant knowledge that improves the quality of digital transformation decisions (Khoa, 2026; Stieger et al., 2012). Ortner et al. (2025) document that digital technologies enable practices of inclusion — through crowdsourcing platforms, digital forums, and collaborative dashboards — that extend the reach of strategic participation and thereby strengthen organizational readiness for transformation. The transparency dimension of open strategy reduces information asymmetry between top management and operational employees, minimizing the resistance that frequently derails digital transformation initiatives (Buell & Kalkanci, 2021). Accordingly, enterprises with higher open strategy adoption are expected to achieve greater depth and breadth of digital transformation.

Hypothesis H2: Open strategy adoption has a significant positive influence on digital transformation intensity.

Organizational structural agility enables higher digital transformation intensity by removing the formalization and hierarchical barriers that impede the rapid, iterative, and cross-functional execution that digital transformation demands. Shahzad et al. (2025) empirically demonstrate that industrial organizations with lower formalization, flatter hierarchies, and stronger cross-functional integration achieve more effective digital transformation outcomes. Their case evidence reveals that organizations focused on lowering formalization, reducing hierarchical layers, and enhancing integration can achieve their digital transformation goals, while those with rigid, traditional structures inevitably struggle in the digital age unless they adapt (Attar & Abdul-Kareem, 2020). Structurally agile organizations can reallocate resources quickly in response to digital opportunities, form cross-competency digital teams without bureaucratic delays, and establish goal-oriented working practices that accelerate digital strategy operationalization (Björkdahl, 2020).

Hypothesis H3: Organizational structural agility has a significant positive influence on digital transformation intensity.

Enterprises with high digital transformation intensity develop superior organizational learning capabilities by leveraging digital platforms for knowledge creation, sharing, and application. Deep digital transformation provides the technological infrastructure — artificial intelligence analytics, cloud-based collaboration tools, digital knowledge management systems — that enables organizations to sense environmental signals more rapidly, interpret data more effectively, and apply insights more systematically (Sacavém et al., 2025). The

integration of digital tools into organizational processes facilitates continuous learning cycles in which operational data, customer interactions, and market signals are converted into organizational knowledge that improves adaptive capacity (Hanelt et al., 2021). Furthermore, the cultural and structural changes accompanying digital transformation — including increased information transparency and cross-functional collaboration — create conditions conducive to organizational learning by reducing knowledge silos and enabling broader participation in knowledge generation.

Hypothesis H4: Digital transformation intensity has a significant positive influence on organizational learning capability.

Organizational learning capability translates digital transformation investments into performance outcomes by developing the adaptive capacity to continuously improve processes, identify new value creation opportunities, and respond effectively to competitive challenges. Organizations that develop superior learning capabilities from their digital transformation efforts are better positioned to leverage digital data for innovation, optimize digitally enabled processes for efficiency, and personalize digital customer experiences for competitive differentiation (Hanelt et al., 2021; Zhai et al., 2022). Learning capability enables a self-reinforcing virtuous cycle in which digital performance improvements generate new data and insights that further enhance learning, ultimately producing sustained competitive advantages attributable to digital transformation. Khoa and Huynh (2025) confirm that digital transformation positively impacts firm performance through multiple value creation mechanisms, consistent with the proposed learning-mediated pathway.

Hypothesis H5: Organizational learning capability has a significant positive influence on digital transformation performance.

The dual-mediation structure proposes that the effects of management power, open strategy adoption, and organizational structural agility on digital transformation performance are transmitted sequentially through digital transformation intensity and organizational learning capability (Zhang et al., 2023). This sequential mediation captures the value creation chain through which governance-level antecedents are converted into performance outcomes: governance inputs generate digital transformation intensity, which builds organizational learning capability, which ultimately produces digital transformation performance (Zhang et al., 2021). Each governance antecedent is expected to generate significant indirect effects through both mediators individually and through the full serial chain.

Hypothesis H6a: Digital transformation intensity mediates the relationship between management power and organizational learning capability.

Hypothesis H6b: Digital transformation intensity mediates the relationship between open strategy adoption and organizational learning capability.

Hypothesis H6c: Digital transformation intensity mediates the relationship between organizational structural agility and organizational learning capability.

Hypothesis H7: Organizational learning capability mediates the relationship between digital transformation intensity and digital transformation performance.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual research model. The model depicts three independent variables (management power, open strategy adoption, organizational structural agility) influencing digital transformation performance through two sequential mediators (digital transformation intensity and organizational learning capability), with the full serial mediation chain represented by dashed arrows

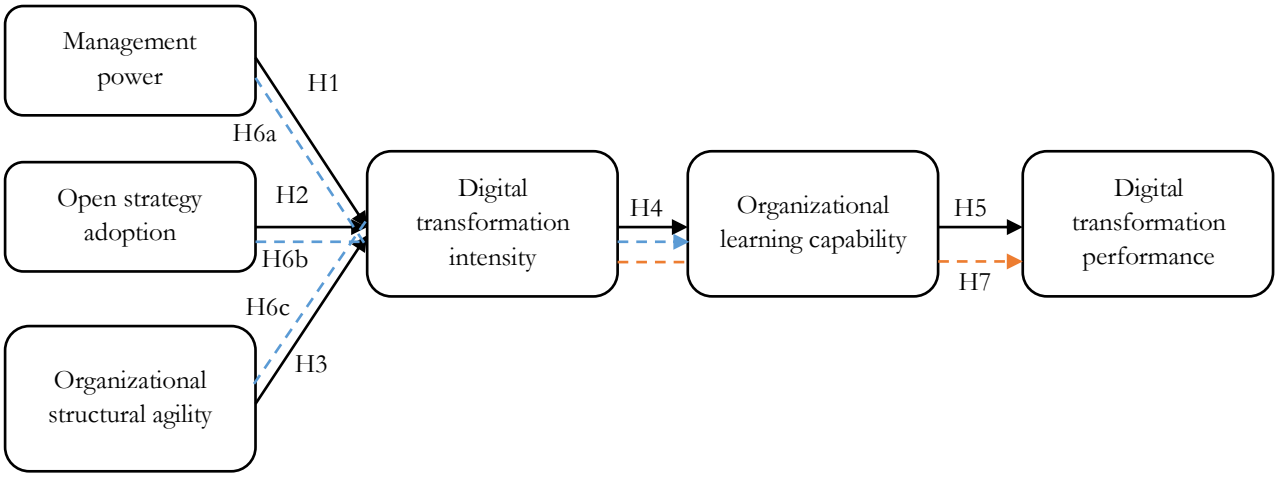

Figure 1: Proposed research model

3 Method

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was adopted to empirically test the proposed dual-mediation model, consistent with the deductive and explanatory objectives of the inquiry. A structured questionnaire was administered to eligible respondents via an online survey platform between January and April 2026. From an initial sample frame of 850 enterprises, 347 responses were received (response rate: 40.8%). After removing incomplete responses and applying the outlier screening protocol recommended by Hair et al. (2022), the final usable sample comprised 312 respondents, exceeding the minimum sample size of 183 calculated using G*Power for PLS-SEM with medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), power = 0.80, and maximum predictors = 5. A pilot test was conducted with 40 executives prior to full data collection, resulting in minor wording adjustments to four items. Common method bias was assessed using Harman's single-factor test (first-factor variance = 22.3%) and a marker variable approach, both confirming that common method variance did not constitute a critical concern.

All measurement scales were adapted from validated instruments in the extant literature. Management Power (MP) was measured using a 12-item composite scale synthesizing four power dimensions: structural power (3 items, reflecting formal authority position), ownership power (3 items, reflecting management shareholding), expert power (3 items, reflecting tenure and educational background), and prestige power (3 items, reflecting board membership and social connections), adapted from Finkelstein (1992); Zhang et al. (2025). Open Strategy Adoption (OSA) was measured using an 8-item scale adapted from Hautz et al. (2017); Ortner et al. (2025), capturing transparency practices (4 items: strategy blogging, information dashboards, public strategy presentations, transparent reporting) and inclusion practices (4 items: employee crowdsourcing, stakeholder consultation, cross-level strategy workshops, digital idea platforms). Organizational Structural Agility (OSAg) was assessed using a 9-item scale adapted from Shahzad et al. (2025), capturing formalization reduction (3 items), hierarchy flattening (3 items), and cross-functional integration (3 items). Digital Transformation Intensity (DTI) was measured using a 5-item scale adapted from Vial (2021); Zhang et al. (2025), capturing the scope, depth, and pace of digital technology adoption across business functions. Organizational Learning Capability (OLC) was measured using a 6-item scale adapted from Argote and Miron-Spektor (2011), capturing knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, and knowledge application sub-dimensions. Digital Transformation Performance (DTP) was assessed using a 6-item scale adapted from Zhai et al. (2022), capturing operational efficiency improvements (2 items), innovation outcomes (2 items), and competitive positioning gains (2 items) attributable to digital transformation. All items employed a seven-point Likert scale anchored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), implemented using SmartPLS 4.0, was employed for hypothesis testing. PLS-SEM is well-suited to the present study for three reasons: first, the model is exploratory in nature, extending prior frameworks to a new governance configuration and context; second, data non-normality was confirmed (Mardia's multivariate kurtosis = 17.4, $p < 0.001$), violating the distributional assumptions of CB-SEM; and third, the complex mediation structure benefits from bootstrapping-based indirect effect estimation native to PLS-SEM. Analysis followed a two-stage procedure: measurement model evaluation (outer loadings, reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity) followed by structural model assessment (path coefficients, R^2, Q^2, f^2, mediation analysis). Bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples and bias-corrected confidence intervals was used for all significance tests

4 Result

Of the 312 respondents, 61.2% were male and 38.8% female. The majority held CEO/President (29.5%), CDO/CIO (24.7%), or Vice President (31.1%) positions. Approximately 74.4% reported university degrees, while 25.6% held postgraduate qualifications. Enterprise size distribution was: small (< 100 employees, 18.3%), medium (100–499 employees, 43.3%), and large (≥ 500 employees, 38.5%). Industries represented included manufacturing (41.3%), information technology (24.7%), retail/e-commerce (18.3%), and financial services (15.7%). The mean reported duration of formal digital transformation programs was 2.7 years (SD = 1.2), and 67.3% reported having a dedicated Chief Digital Officer or equivalent role.

The measurement model was evaluated following the guidelines of Hair et al. (2022). All outer loadings exceeded the 0.708 threshold (range: 0.718–0.881), confirming indicator reliability. Composite reliability (CR) values for all constructs surpassed 0.70, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50, confirming convergent validity. Table 1 presents the full measurement model results.

Table 1. Measurement Model Evaluation

Construct	Items	Loading Range	Cronbach's α	CR (ρc)	AVE
Management Power (MP)	12	0.718–0.859	0.912	0.924	0.598
Open Strategy Adoption (OSA)	8	0.731–0.867	0.893	0.909	0.614
Org. Structural Agility (OSAg)	9	0.724–0.852	0.901	0.916	0.587
Digital Transformation Intensity (DTI)	5	0.749–0.863	0.879	0.906	0.657
Org. Learning Capability (OLC)	6	0.738–0.881	0.903	0.920	0.632
Digital Transformation Performance (DTP)	6	0.741–0.874	0.909	0.926	0.647

Note: All outer loadings significant at $p < 0.001$. CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations. All HTMT values fell below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (range: 0.418–0.793), confirming that each construct captures a distinct facet of the proposed model. Inner Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all predictor constructs ranged from 1.387 to 2.614, well below the threshold of 5.0, indicating that multicollinearity was not a critical concern.

The structural model was assessed following the guidelines of Hair et al. (2022). The model demonstrates substantial explanatory power: R^2 for Digital Transformation Intensity = 0.441 (moderate-substantial); R^2 for Organizational Learning Capability = 0.473 (moderate-substantial); and R^2 for Digital Transformation Performance = 0.527 (substantial). Q^2-predict values for all endogenous constructs were positive (DTI = 0.402; OLC = 0.431; DTP = 0.474), confirming predictive relevance. Table 2 presents the full structural model results.

Table 2. Structural Model Assessment and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Std. β	T-Value	P-Value	f^2	Decision
H1	MP → DTI	0.341***	6.82	0.000	0.161	Supported
H2	OSA → DTI	0.241***	5.47	0.000	0.086	Supported
H3	OSAg → DTI	0.198***	4.93	0.001	0.061	Supported
H4	DTI → OLC	0.438***	7.61	0.000	0.228	Supported
H5	OLC → DTP	0.412***	7.24	0.000	0.209	Supported

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. Std. β = standardized path coefficient; f^2 = effect size.

Specific indirect effects were estimated using bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples and bias-corrected confidence intervals. Table 3 presents the mediation results, all of which support the proposed dual-mediation pathways (H6a–H6c, H7).

Table 3. Specific Indirect Effects (Mediation Analysis)

Hypothesis	Indirect Path	Indirect β	T-Value	P-Value	95% CI	Decision
H6a	MP → DTI → OLC	0.149***	5.87	0.000	[0.099, 0.203]	Supported
H6b	OSA → DTI → OLC	0.106***	5.12	0.000	[0.064, 0.153]	Supported
H6c	OSAg → DTI → OLC	0.087**	4.48	0.000	[0.049, 0.130]	Supported
H7	DTI → OLC → DTP	0.181***	6.33	0.000	[0.122, 0.244]	Supported

Note: Bootstrap 95% CIs based on 5,000 replications. *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$.

5 Discussion

Management power exerts the strongest direct effect on digital transformation intensity ($\beta = 0.341$, $p < 0.001$; $f^2 = 0.161$, a medium effect), confirming Upper Echelon Theory's central proposition that executive governance characteristics shape organizational strategic outcomes (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Khoa & Nguyen, 2026). This finding is consistent with Zhang et al. (2025), who document a significant positive effect of management power on enterprise digital transformation in Chinese manufacturing firms, and extends their panel-data finding to the survey-based PLS-SEM context of Vietnamese enterprises. The present result is particularly significant because it demonstrates that management power — operationalized as a composite of structural, ownership, expert, and prestige dimensions — maintains its predictive power when tested alongside two complementary governance antecedents, suggesting that executive authority represents the primary governance lever for digital transformation acceleration. The serial mediation chain from management power through digital transformation intensity and organizational learning capability to digital transformation performance (β-serial = 0.061, $p < 0.001$) confirms that the competitive returns of management power are not direct but require the full governance-to-capability value chain to be operative. This finding implies that firms seeking to leverage executive power for digital competitive advantage must simultaneously invest in the organizational learning infrastructure that converts digital transformation intensity into performance outcomes.

Open strategy adoption generates a meaningful positive effect on digital transformation intensity ($\beta = 0.241$, $p < 0.001$), confirming Ortner et al. (2025)'s theoretical framework that digital technologies enabling practices of inclusion and transparency accelerate organizational transformation. The significant indirect effect through organizational learning capability (β-indirect = 0.106) is the largest learning-mediated indirect effect among the three governance antecedents, suggesting that strategic openness generates not only transformation depth but specifically the knowledge diversity and collective engagement that build superior organizational learning. This aligns with Stieger et al. (2012)'s finding that open strategy processes foster

shared understanding and stronger commitment, and with Hutter et al. (2017)'s demonstration that employee participation in strategy platforms cultivates community and understanding. Importantly, the positive effect of open strategy adoption on digital transformation intensity holds when controlling for management power, suggesting that open strategy is not merely an expression of powerful leadership but an independent governance mechanism that complements executive authority. This finding is theoretically significant for governance design: firms can partially compensate for moderate management power through deliberate investments in strategic openness, broadening the governance pathways available for digital transformation acceleration.

Organizational structural agility demonstrates a significant positive effect on digital transformation intensity ($\beta = 0.198$, $p < 0.001$), confirming Shahzad et al. (2025)'s empirical findings that structural changes — particularly reductions in formalization, hierarchy, and inter-departmental silos — are necessary enabling conditions for effective digital transformation. The relatively smaller effect size ($f^2 = 0.061$) compared to management power and open strategy suggests that structural agility functions as a prerequisite condition that enables other governance mechanisms to operate effectively, rather than as a standalone driver of transformation intensity. This interpretation is consistent with Shahzad et al. (2025)'s conclusion that structural changes are necessary but insufficient for digital transformation success without appropriate leadership and strategic orientation.

The confirmation of the full dual-mediation chain — governance antecedents → digital transformation intensity → organizational learning capability → digital transformation performance — represents the study's most important theoretical contribution. The finding that digital transformation intensity does not directly produce performance but does so through organizational learning capability (β-indirect = 0.181, $p < 0.001$) is consistent with the Dynamic Capabilities Framework (Teece et al., 1997), which positions capability reconfiguration as generating intermediate capabilities (learning) as its proximate output and competitive advantage as its ultimate outcome. This sequential structure challenges simplistic linear models of digital transformation performance and establishes that the learning mediator is empirically non-trivial: enterprises that invest in digital transformation without simultaneously developing organizational learning infrastructure may generate insufficient learning capability to produce competitive performance improvements.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Theoretical Implications

This study makes three principal theoretical contributions. First, it extends Upper Echelon Theory beyond individual executive characteristics to a multi-dimensional governance architecture integrating management power, open strategy adoption, and organizational structural agility as complementary antecedents of digital transformation performance. This extension provides a more comprehensive account of how governance configurations shape digital transformation outcomes, addressing a gap identified across the management power, open strategy, and organizational structure literature streams.

Second, by empirically validating the dual-mediation chain (governance → digital transformation intensity → organizational learning capability → digital transformation performance) using PLS-SEM, this study provides the first survey-based evidence for the sequential mechanism through which governance investments generate performance returns in the digital era. The mediating role of organizational learning capability is particularly significant, establishing that digital transformation generates performance primarily through the superior learning it enables, rather than through direct technological adoption

6.2 Practical Implications

For executives and boards, the findings highlight that sustainable digital transformation performance requires simultaneous investment in all three governance dimensions. Firms that invest disproportionately

in one dimension while neglecting others are likely to experience diminished transformation intensity and suboptimal performance returns. Specifically: (1) Organizations should cultivate management power through talent development and succession programs that identify and promote digitally capable leaders with the authority, resource access, and risk orientation necessary to drive sustained digital transformation. (2) Organizations should institutionalize open strategy practices — including digital strategy forums, employee crowdsourcing platforms, and transparent strategy communications — to generate the knowledge diversity and collective commitment that accelerate digital transformation adoption. (3) Organizations should systematically dismantle structural barriers by reducing excessive formalization, flattening hierarchical layers, and building cross-functional digital teams that can execute transformation initiatives with the agility the digital environment requires.

For policymakers, the dominant role of management power suggests that corporate governance reforms aimed at developing digitally competent leadership pipelines — through director education programs, CDO role incentivization, and digital literacy requirements for listed company boards — may generate significant national digital transformation dividends. The significant role of open strategy adoption further implies that regulatory frameworks promoting strategic transparency and stakeholder inclusion could amplify enterprise digital transformation at the economy-wide level.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

This study is not without limitations. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; future longitudinal research should track how the governance-to-performance chain evolves as enterprises mature in their digital transformation journeys. Second, management power was operationalized as a survey-based composite; future research could triangulate with archival measures (management shareholding, board composition) to enhance measurement validity. Third, the study did not examine potential moderators of the dual-mediation chain; future research should investigate whether industry dynamism, enterprise size, or digital infrastructure quality moderate the governance-to-performance pathways. Finally, the rapidly evolving role of artificial intelligence in executive decision support suggests that future research should examine whether AI-augmented leadership represents an emerging fourth governance dimension that supplements or substitutes for traditional management power.

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