

The Role of Executive Feedback and Sensemaking in Shaping Digital Technology Adoption: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: This study explores the role of executive team feedback mechanisms and sensemaking processes in the adoption of digital technologies through a systematic literature review. It examines the intricate relationships among executive cognition, strategic decision-making, and organizational digital transformation. The research is structured into three main sections: the sensemaking process of executive teams, studies on digital technology adoption, and the influence of executive cognition on strategic decision-making. Employing a systematic literature review methodology, this study analyzes relevant academic literature from the past decade in the fields of management, information technology, and organizational behavior, focusing on how executive teams influence digital technology adoption and implementation through feedback mechanisms and sensemaking processes. Key findings indicate that: (1) the sensemaking process of executive teams significantly shapes organizational perceptions and acceptance of digital technologies; (2) heterogeneity in executive cognition may lead to divergences in strategic decision-making, thereby affecting the speed and effectiveness of technology adoption; and (3) feedback mechanisms play a critical role in facilitating executive team collaboration and dynamic adjustments in technology adoption. The study's theoretical contribution lies in integrating sensemaking and executive cognition perspectives to propose a comprehensive framework for understanding the role of executive teams in digital technology adoption. This framework provides a theoretical foundation for future research and offers practical insights for managers formulating digital transformation strategies.

Keywords: Sensemaking, digital technology adoption, feedback, executive team.

1. Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving business environment, digital technologies have emerged as a critical driver of strategic transformation and high-quality organizational development. The rapid advancement of globalization and information technology has reshaped market competition, giving rise to digital enterprises that leverage innovative business models and technological advantages. These enterprises optimize resource allocation, transcend traditional spatial and temporal constraints on collaborative innovation, and significantly enhance the efficiency of knowledge-intensive activities, thereby securing a competitive edge in dynamic markets [1, 2]. Research highlights that digital technology adoption yields multifaceted strategic benefits, including improved operational efficiency, enhanced innovation capabilities, and the promotion of sustainable development [3, 4]. Consequently, digital technology adoption is not only a key pathway for organizations to navigate complex market environments but also a critical determinant of their long-term competitiveness and survival.

However, the success of digital technology adoption depends not solely on the characteristics of the technology itself or external market conditions but is intricately linked to internal organizational decision-making processes, particularly the pivotal role of executive teams [5]. As the core of strategic decision-making, executive teams profoundly influence the direction, speed, and depth of digital technology adoption through their cognitive frameworks, experiential backgrounds, and value orientations [6]. Executive teams are tasked with not only formulating digital strategies but also integrating organizational resources,

coordinating internal change, and responding to external market feedback. Existing studies have extensively explored the impact of individual executive characteristics, such as digital leadership and experiential backgrounds, on technology adoption, emphasizing the importance of individual cognition and decision-making styles in driving digital transformation [7, 8]. However, these studies predominantly focus on the individual level, with limited attention to how executive teams, as a collective, influence technology adoption decisions through collaborative interactions. This gap restricts a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics underlying digital technology adoption.

Specifically, the sensemaking process of executive teams plays a critical role in digital technology adoption. Sensemaking refers to the process through which team members, via communication, feedback, and collective reflection, develop shared understandings, beliefs, and values regarding the characteristics of digital technologies, market trends, competitive dynamics, and organizational capabilities [9]. This process serves as the foundation for achieving strategic consensus within the executive team and directly influences the organization's perception, acceptance, and implementation of new technologies. Through sensemaking, executive teams translate abstract technological potential into concrete strategic actions, fostering organizational innovation and change [10]. Moreover, sensemaking is not a static cognitive activity but a dynamic, iterative process. Executive teams continuously refine their cognitive frameworks and strategic decisions by interpreting market feedback, technology implementation outcomes, and organizational performance, creating an evolving sensemaking cycle [11].

Despite the recognized importance of sensemaking in organizational behavior and management research, the literature exhibits notable limitations. First, studies on how executive teams influence digital technology adoption through sensemaking remain fragmented, lacking systematic theoretical integration. Most research focuses on external drivers of technology adoption (e.g., market competition, technological maturity) or organizational-level implementation processes, with limited exploration of the cognitive and interactive mechanisms within executive teams. Second, the role of feedback mechanisms in sensemaking has been underexplored. Feedback mechanisms serve as a critical link in intra-team communication and collaboration, integrating external market information and internal implementation outcomes to facilitate dynamic adjustments in technology adoption [12]. However, the interplay between feedback mechanisms and sensemaking, and its impact on the success of technology adoption, remains understudied. Finally, existing research often adopts a singular theoretical perspective, lacking a comprehensive framework that integrates executive cognition, sensemaking, and digital technology adoption, which limits a holistic understanding of executive teams' multifaceted roles in digital transformation.

To address these gaps, this study employs a systematic literature review to examine the role of executive team feedback mechanisms and sensemaking processes in digital technology adoption. It seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How do executive teams' sensemaking processes influence decision-making and implementation in digital technology adoption? (2) What role do feedback mechanisms play in the interplay between sensemaking and technology adoption? (3) How does the heterogeneity in executive cognition affect strategic decision-making in digital technology adoption through sensemaking and feedback mechanisms? By addressing these questions, this study aims to fill theoretical gaps and provide practical guidance for managers crafting digital strategies.

To achieve these objectives, this study adopts a systematic literature review methodology, analyzing relevant academic literature from the past decade in the fields of management, information technology, and organizational behavior, with a focus on executive teams' cognitive, interactive, and decision-making processes in digital technology adoption. The study's objectives are threefold: first, to integrate theories of sensemaking, executive cognition, and digital technology adoption to construct a comprehensive framework for understanding executive teams' roles in digital transformation; second, to analyze the specific role of feedback mechanisms in sensemaking and technology adoption, elucidating their impact on strategic decision-making; and third, to identify key directions for future research through a critical review of the literature, offering theoretical and practical insights for both academia and practice...

2. The Literature on Executive Awareness and Strategic Decision-Making

The introduction of upper-echelon theory has promoted scholars' research on the characteristics of executive teams, with a particular focus on how cognitive frameworks, attention allocation, and cognitive diversity within these teams have a crucial impact on strategic decision-making. The cognitive framework of an executive team is an important

foundation for organizational strategic decision-making. Walsh proposed that [13] executive cognitive frameworks, as knowledge structures, influence the decision-making process by guiding the filtering and interpretation of information. These frameworks reflect managers' understanding of the relationship between the environment and the organization, shaping how they recognize and respond to strategic issues [14]. Mental models, formed through organizational practices, are deep cognitive structures that encompass not only an understanding of the business environment but also assumptions and expectations regarding causal relationships [15]. Senior managers are typically the "navigators" of an enterprise and the shapers of corporate culture. Their mental models significantly influence the various procedures or behavioral norms established within the company [16]. Scholars such as Wu Ziwen further pointed out that entrepreneurs' mental models have practical guiding significance for company development, greatly impacting the company's established procedures or behavioral norms. These mental models should focus on developing an entrepreneur's understanding of their own value and whether they can achieve set goals, their understanding and beliefs about the industry environment and company positioning (or definition), how to compete, and how to influence strategic decision-making, as well as beliefs regarding how the company is organized and which organizational structure is most effective [17]. The cognitive frameworks and mental models of executives significantly influence technology adoption decisions. Gilbert's study shows that executives' understanding of technological change is closely related to a company's adaptability [18]. In particular, in the context of digital technologies, executives' understanding of technology significantly affects how companies accept and apply new technologies [19]. The attention of executives is regarded as a scarce resource within organizations, and its allocation directly impacts the quality of strategic decisions. Ocasio's "attention-based view" suggests that executives' attention allocation to different domains reflects their priorities and guides the allocation of organizational resources [20]. Cho & Hambrick further confirmed that an increase in executives' attention to specific domains is positively correlated with strategic innovation in that domain [21]. Regarding information processing, executive teams face a complex and ambiguous information environment. Dutton & Jackson pointed out that the way executives classify information (e.g., viewing information as "opportunities" or "threats") guides subsequent strategic responses [22]. Scholars such as Wu Yuhui found that executives with information technology backgrounds primarily promote digital transformation by reducing management short-sightedness and increasing digital patent outputs. Their impact on digital transformation is more significant when these executives have longer tenures, greater power, or work in industries with fierce competition and regions with lower marketization [23]. Regarding the field of digital technology, Kane's research shows that executives' ability to process digital technology information is significantly related to the success of digital transformation [24]. The information processing efficiency of executive teams has been proven to be an important predictor of the quality of technology adoption decisions [25]. Additionally, cognitive diversity within executive teams has a dual impact on the quality of strategic decisions. Miller found that moderate cognitive diversity facilitates more comprehensive problem analysis and the generation of creative solutions [26].

However, excessive cognitive differences may lead to communication barriers and team conflict [27]. Hambrick's further development of "upper-echelon theory" emphasizes that diversity in the backgrounds and experiences of executive teams influences their strategic choices. This diversity brings richer perspectives for information processing but may also increase decision coordination costs [28]. Chinese scholars Chen Zhihong and Zhou Lulu found that in the context of Chinese enterprises, team members are less accustomed to openly expressing their thoughts. Additionally, the prevalent authoritarian leadership in Chinese companies strengthens communication anxiety among team members, affecting internal information exchange and thereby reducing decision quality [29]. In the field of digital technology adoption, Pitcher & Smith's research shows that executive teams with both technological and market backgrounds are better at accurately assessing the strategic value of digital technologies [30]. Furthermore, Ding Yingjia proposed that ownership concentration weakens the positive effect of cognitive differences within the executive team on technological innovation [31].

When faced with vast market feedback, executive teams often exhibit selective attention patterns. Daft & Weick's classic research indicated that organizations, as interpretive systems, understand environmental signals through the selective attention and interpretation of the executive team [32]. Specifically, in digital technology adoption decisions, executives' selective attention to technological feedback is strongly influenced by their existing cognitive frameworks [33]. Foreign scholars, through historical case studies, analyzed the process by which the insurance industry processed computer technology information and found that executive teams filter and classify information based on their existing cognitive schemas. Executive teams' attention patterns toward digital technology feedback exhibit "hierarchical filtering," where information is selected based on organizational priorities and strategic focus. This filtering mechanism affects how companies interpret the results of digital technology experiments and make subsequent decision adjustments [34]. Studies show that executive teams' selective attention to feedback often exhibits "confirmation bias," meaning they tend to focus on information that aligns with their existing beliefs [35]. This phenomenon is particularly evident in digital technology adoption decisions and may lead to excessive optimism about technology's potential or neglect of risks [36]. Executive teams show significant differences in handling positive and negative feedback. Taylor's research shows that managers tend to accept positive feedback and attribute it to internal factors, while negative feedback is often attributed to external or temporary factors. This "self-serving attribution bias" affects the organization's ability to learn from failure [37]. The difference in handling positive and negative feedback is especially prominent in digital technology adoption decisions. Keil and others found that executive teams often display "escalation of commitment" when facing negative feedback about digital projects, meaning they invest more resources in failing projects rather than less [38]. Research by Liu in Run and Jin Dongguang suggests that Chinese executives' handling of negative feedback in digital technologies is often influenced by "face culture" [39]. Jordan & Audia further elaborated that executive teams' cognitive processing of performance feedback is influenced by self-enhancement motives, leading to systematic misinterpretations of negative feedback [40]. This

phenomenon is particularly prominent in digital technology adoption decisions and may delay necessary strategic adjustments. Executive teams' interpretations of feedback directly shape organizational actions. Traditional construction theory suggests that managers integrate feedback into existing cognitive frameworks, giving meaning to organizational experiences and guiding subsequent actions. Garud further emphasized that executives' interpretive narratives not only reflect past events but also shape future possibilities [41]. In digital technology adoption scenarios, Eggers & Kaul's research shows that executive teams' interpretation of technological trial feedback directly influences the choice of technology adoption path and resource allocation decisions [42]. Teece's dynamic capabilities framework views the ability to scan the environment, identify opportunities, and reconfigure resources as a core competitive advantage, describing the sensing→seizing→reconfiguring process [43]. Craig's research confirmed the process by which organizations translate knowledge into action, proposing that feedback must be interpreted before it can be translated into actual action, highlighting the "knowing-doing gap" issue: organizations often collect vast amounts of feedback but fail to effectively translate it into strategic change [44].

Executive cognition is also closely related to the strategic decision-making process. The cognitive processes of executive teams are first reflected in the strategic environment perception and problem definition stages. Narayanan pointed out that executive cognitive frameworks affect how they recognize environmental signals and construct strategic issues [45]. In the context of digital technologies, strategic perception is particularly critical. Mitchell's early research found that executives' perceptions and interpretations of technological changes affect corporate strategic choices [46]. Foreign scholars have found that executives' familiarity with digital technologies directly impacts the company's ability to identify digital business opportunities [47]. Strategic problem definition, as the starting point of decision-making, is profoundly influenced by executives' cognitive styles. Kiesler & Sproull's classic study pointed out that how managers define problems directly determines the range of possible solutions [48]. Wu Qiuling and Chen Hao, based on their research of Chinese enterprises undergoing digital transformation, found that how executives define digital technology problems (technology-oriented vs. business-oriented) significantly affects subsequent technology path choices [49].

Executive cognition plays a key role in strategic alternative selection and evaluation stages. Tversky & Kahneman's prospect theory suggests that decision-makers are influenced by cognitive factors such as reference points and risk preferences when evaluating alternatives [50]. Gavetti & Levinthal's research shows that executives often evaluate strategic alternatives based on cognitive representations rather than purely rational calculations [51]. Evaluating digital technology alternatives is especially complex. Eggers & Kaplan found that executive teams' technological cognition systematically influences decisions regarding the timing and scale of new technology investments [52]. Scholars have explored the issue from the perspective of executive teams, analyzing the level of board diversification and the team task fracture zone, and found that higher levels of diversification lead to higher and more efficient R&D inputs, thus easing decision-making within the team [53]. It is noteworthy that executives often exhibit cognitive biases when evaluating

alternatives. Metzga's research shows that overconfidence, anchoring effects, and other cognitive biases are common in strategic decision-making processes [54]. Li Xuefeng's study confirmed that in the digitalization decisions of Chinese companies, executives' "herding mentality" and "short-term performance pressure" are two significant cognitive interferences in the evaluation of alternatives [55]. Executive cognition also influences the process of strategy implementation and adjustment. Bettis & Prahalad's "dominant logic" concept emphasizes that executive cognitive frameworks filter information during strategy implementation, affecting adjustment decisions [56]. O'Reilly's classic study demonstrated how cognitive inertia hinders organizational responses to technological change [57]. In digital technology adoption, strategy execution and adjustment are particularly crucial. Jian Guanqun's research shows that successful digital transformation enterprises often have executive teams with "adaptive thinking," capable of flexibly adjusting strategic directions based on execution feedback [58]. Kohnke's empirical research on digital transformation projects from multiple global enterprises found a significant correlation between executive decision flexibility and the frequency of strategic adjustments [59]. Klingebiel & Joseph further explored how executive teams process digital technology execution feedback, proposing that the "selective experimentation" model is more conducive to the continuous optimization of digital strategies [60]. Yi Yaqin's empirical test of 126 Chinese enterprises found that cognitive conflict, on the one hand, improves the internal information processing quality of the team and directly influences the formation of an innovation-oriented approach. On the other hand, it may lead to emotional conflict, indirectly affecting the formation of an innovation-oriented approach. The study also found that collectivism has an inverted U-shaped moderating effect on cognitive conflict and innovation orientation and hinders the transformation of cognitive conflict into emotional conflict [61].

Executive teams play an important role in digital transformation, mainly reflected in the following three aspects: executive digital leadership, executive team cognitive interaction, and organizational digital capability building. The digital age has raised new requirements for executive leadership. Foreign scholars have proposed that digital leadership consists of three core elements: technological understanding, change management ability, and strategic vision. Domestic scholar Peng Bo further proposed a digital leadership framework, emphasizing the importance of digital literacy, innovative thinking, and adaptive decision-making [62]. Other scholars have developed a digital leadership framework that includes seven different leadership roles, which can effectively address the challenges of digital transformation: digital pioneers, innovators, networkers, managers, promoters, mentors, and digital learners [63]. Chinese scholar Li Yanping researched the characteristics of digital leadership in Chinese enterprises, finding five key dimensions: "digital strategic thinking," "digital organizational change," "digital environmental control," "digital communication and social skills," and "digital talent development" [64]. This multidimensional structure reflects the unique demands of digital leadership in the Chinese context. Digital leadership is closely related to technology adoption decisions. Li's research shows that the level of executive digital leadership directly influences the speed and scope of digital technology adoption in enterprises. Domestic

scholars further pointed out that digital leadership plays an important mediating role between management cognitive flexibility and digital transformation. This suggests that management cognitive flexibility influences the progress of digital transformation by fostering digital leadership development [65]. Empirical research has further revealed the specific impact mechanisms of digital leadership. Furthermore, through research on leading global digital transformation enterprises, it has been found that executive digital leadership influences the effect of digital technology adoption by shaping organizational digital culture, adjusting resource allocation priorities, and promoting cross-department collaboration. Boateng's research shows that executive digital leadership also promotes technology adoption by reducing internal resistance to digital transformation [66]. The cognitive interaction between the CEO and executive team members is a key influencing factor in strategic decision-making. Finkelstein & Hambrick's "executive team dynamics" theory emphasizes that cognitive interaction between the CEO and executive team members shapes the strategic decision-making process. This interaction involves information sharing, idea exchange, and consensus formation. In digital technology adoption decisions, cognitive interaction between the CEO and the executive team is particularly critical. Karimi and Walter's research shows that the degree of cognitive coordination between the CEO and CIO significantly influences the quality of IT investment decisions [67]. Li Xiaoqing and Sun Yin Feng's empirical study of 186 listed companies in the electronic, biomedicine, and information technology industries from 2008 to 2010 found that the CEO's technological cognition significantly affects technology innovation decisions [68]. It is important to note that the cognitive interaction between the CEO and executive team is influenced by various factors. Research by Nadkarni and others shows that CEO power concentration, team cohesion, and organizational communication mechanisms jointly shape the cognitive interaction patterns within the executive team [69]. Wu Jiong and Wang Feifei, based on research in Chinese enterprises, further pointed out that in the Chinese context, the "circle effect" and "relationship networks" uniquely influence cognitive interaction between the CEO and the executive team, which in turn affects the digital technology adoption decision-making process. Executive team cognition is closely related to organizational digital capability building [70]. Domestic scholar Li Xingwang pointed out that the perception, sensing, and reconfiguring abilities of executive teams are the micro-foundations of organizational dynamic capabilities [71]. In the digital environment, these abilities directly impact the success of digital transformation. Executive cognition influences organizational digital capability building through multiple pathways. Eggers & Kaplan's research shows that executive teams' digital thinking patterns affect the organization's digital learning path choices. Karimi & Walter further confirmed that executive teams' cognitive frameworks regarding digital technologies directly affect the organization's digital innovation capabilities. William and others found that the digital cognition level of executive teams in Chinese enterprises is significantly related to the breadth and depth of digital transformation [72]. Organizational digital capability building is an ongoing process, with executive cognition playing different roles at different stages. Fitzgerald's research pointed out that the establishment of the cognitive framework by the executive

team in the early stages of digital transformation has a long-term impact on subsequent capability development paths. Liu Yang and Dong Jiuyu's research found that the transition of executive team cognition from "technology-oriented" to "business-oriented" highly synchronizes with the evolution of organizational digital capabilities from "tool-based application" to "strategic transformation." Furthermore, the relationship between executive cognition and organizational digital capability building is moderated by various factors [73]. Scholars such as Shi Shenglin, based on a sample of 289 Chinese manufacturing enterprises, explored the impact of executive team cognitive styles on technological innovation and found that the cognitive flexibility of executive teams influences the speed of decision-making adjustments related to digital capability building [74].

3. Conclusion

The adoption of digital technologies by organizations is intricately shaped by the sensemaking processes, feedback mechanisms, and cognitive dynamics of executive teams. This systematic literature review highlights that sensemaking serves as a pivotal mechanism through which executive teams interpret the uncertainties and opportunities of digital technologies, thereby influencing organizational perceptions and strategic decisions. Effective sensemaking mitigates cognitive biases by fostering collective discussions and integrating diverse perspectives, but its success hinges on robust feedback mechanisms. These mechanisms—encompassing formal evaluations, market insights, informal team interactions, and cross-level communication—enable executive teams to refine their understanding, adjust strategies dynamically, and overcome barriers such as technological complexity and organizational inertia.

The review further reveals that executive cognition, shaped by factors like technological optimism or risk aversion, significantly affects the pace and depth of digital technology adoption. Heterogeneity in executive teams introduces both challenges and opportunities: while diverse cognitive frameworks can lead to decision-making conflicts, they also enrich strategic outcomes when channeled through effective sensemaking and feedback loops. However, the literature lacks a cohesive framework that fully integrates sensemaking, feedback mechanisms, and executive cognition to explain their combined influence on digital technology adoption. Existing studies often focus on isolated dimensions, such as technological characteristics or executive decision-making, without systematically exploring their interdependencies or the multi-level role of feedback mechanisms.

To address these gaps, this study proposes a comprehensive framework that integrates sensemaking, feedback mechanisms, and executive cognition to elucidate their collective impact on digital technology adoption. This framework offers a theoretical foundation for understanding how executive teams navigate the complexities of digital transformation and provides practical guidance for managers to enhance collaboration, leverage diverse perspectives, and implement effective feedback systems. Future research should prioritize: (1) empirical validation of the proposed framework through case studies or quantitative methods, particularly examining the moderating role of feedback mechanisms in sensemaking; (2) comparative analyses of formal versus informal feedback mechanisms and their impact on adoption outcomes; (3) exploration of executive team heterogeneity across industries and cultural contexts to

assess the framework's generalizability; and (4) application of the framework to emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and blockchain, to test its robustness in dynamic technological contexts. By addressing these directions, future studies can advance theoretical and practical insights into the pivotal role of executive teams in driving successful digital transformation.

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