

**CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG**  
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**A Case Study to Understand Digital Transformation:  
Exploring the Changing Roles of Digital Leadership  
using Upper Echelons Theory**  
**數位化轉型案例研究：  
利用高層管理理論探討企業領袖角色的變化**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the progression of digital transformation (DT) by examining senior management leadership and observing the evolution of role changes at various stages within a Chinese fast-food retail organization. A qualitative interpretivist approach was employed to comprehend the perspectives of the CEO and top management team members regarding DT, their challenges, and the strategies adopted to navigate the shifting roles and responsibilities in the rapidly growing fast-food retail sector. Thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted. The study revealed an unorthodox management style and a bricolage approach, influenced by the dynamic digital landscape in China and the 'wolf-like' corporate culture and values. The case study confirms that DT is an ongoing process without a definitive endpoint. This research extends Upper Echelons Theory by incorporating the adoption and advancement of digital technologies. It proposes the complementary Mixed Echelons Theory that incorporates the critical contributions of junior and frontline managers. As the organization progresses in its DT journey, with the appropriate conditions in place, including like-minded talent, trust, and effective working relationships, it is prudent for senior management to engage with junior frontline managers. This bottom-up influence can better address the rapidly changing demands of digital adoption, decentralize decision-making authority across various employee levels, and foster more relevant marketing and product solutions, thereby driving innovations, enhancing financial performance, and standing out in the crowded market.

Keywords: Digital Transformation, Digital Leadership, Chief Digital Officer, Top Management Team, Upper Echelons Theory.