



## Fundamental Values of Organizational Culture in Higher Education

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**Abstract:** The research objectives refer to the analysis of the fundamental values that define organizational culture, referring to established theoretical models (Schein, Hofstede, Cameron & Quinn) and the cultural specificity of the university environment; outlining the model in which these values influence the quality of education, organizational efficiency, and the academic experience of students and teachers; measuring the degree of acceptance and manifestation of four fundamental values (university mission, interpersonal collaboration, innovation, and organizational climate) by applying a questionnaire to 35 university teaching staff; reflecting on strategic directions for institutional development based on the consolidation of the identified fundamental values. Previous studies present the opinions of authors renowned for their representative works: Schein (1985) showed that common values, norms, and assumptions constitute the core of organizational culture; Hofstede (2011) and Hofstede Insights developed the Multi-Focus model, which allows for the investigation of cultural dimensions at the institutional level; Cameron and Quinn (2011) proposed the Competing Values Framework for diagnosing cultural typologies. In the academic context, the works reflected in Manning (2000), Kuh and Whitt (1988), Warter (2019) emphasize that universities, as complex organizations, define their culture through mission, traditions, disciplinary subcultures, and socialization processes. The approach to the fundamental values of organizational culture in higher education is based on a

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theoretical and applied analysis of organizational culture values, which includes the interpretation of cultural levels (artifacts, stated values, basic assumptions) and organizational functions (internal integration and external coordination – Furnham & Gunter, 1993). At the same time, the influence of knowledge management (Mudor, 2014) and organizational communication (Bess & Dee, 2008; Taguam, 2025) on institutional efficiency is examined. From an applied perspective, the questionnaire results show that interpersonal relationships and collaboration obtained an average score ( $M = 3.3$ ), which indicates the existence of potential for improving the climate of communication and interdepartmental cooperation. The results highlight differences in intensity between the fundamental values analyzed. Innovation, adaptability, and change management ( $M = 2.9$ , medium level) are partially manifested, which shows that although the university values innovation, its concrete application remains fragmented. In contrast, the organizational climate and social engagement ( $M = 3.6$ , high level) outline a positive perception of the academic environment, characterized by mutual support and participation, even if satisfaction sometimes remains fluctuating. These results confirm the hypothesis that fundamental values are not evenly distributed and that some dimensions need to be strengthened through institutional strategies. The value of the research lies in providing an integrated perspective on organizational culture in higher education by correlating international theories with the realities of the academic environment. The study adds value by identifying gaps in the literature and highlighting the role of fundamental values in creating an organizational climate conducive to academic development and institutional efficiency. The fact that the mission and organizational climate are perceived at a high level, while collaboration and innovation are at medium levels, provides a balanced picture of strengths and vulnerabilities that can guide managerial and academic interventions.

**Keywords:** organizational culture; core values; higher education; institutional efficiency; knowledge management

## 1. Introduction

Over the last decade, interest in the study of *organizational culture* has grown significantly, particularly in the fields of management, economics, and public administration. This trend can be explained by the need for organizations to adapt their structures and practices to a complex and competitive socio-economic environment, where performance and sustainability are becoming major criteria for validation. Numerous studies have shown that cultural values, norms, and practices directly influence how objectives are achieved and, implicitly, the level of efficiency (Schein, 1985; Hofstede, 2011; Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

In *terms of education*, the literature proves to be insufficiently developed. Although universities are complex organizations with a pronounced cultural dynamic, there are few studies analyzing the extent to which the fundamental values of university organizational culture are effectively reflected in institutional practices and in the experience of academic staff and students, and how these influence institutional quality and efficiency. Most approaches focus on specific issues, such as quality management, internationalization, or research performance, while less explored

issues are defined by the *convergence or discrepancy* between officially assumed values (mission, strategies, policies) and how they are perceived and practiced in everyday university life; *relational dynamics* (trust, respect, communication) and their impact on the academic climate; *the role of innovation and change* in relation to traditions and institutional structures.

This gap opens up fertile ground for research into organizational culture, as the way an institution cultivates its values, norms of interaction, and learning strategies directly influences administrative efficiency and the quality of the educational experience.

## 2. Theoretical Meanings of Organizational Culture

The theoretical and applied analysis of the fundamental values of organizational culture highlights relevant perspectives and dimensions in higher education, contributing to an understanding of how they influence educational processes, teaching quality, and institutional efficiency.

The organizational mission refers to how the institution's participants define the organizational ideology. In part, an organization's mission is defined by the institution's history; it is an interpretive act that provides meaning, direction, and purpose. "Moreover, to speak of any social institution is to speak of an organization that exists in a particular environment," notes W. G. Tierney, and the way in which participants in an institution define that environment is elaborated within a cultural framework that is "constantly reevaluated, redefined, and reinterpreted" (Tierney, 1994).

Organizational culture has been conceptualized over time through solid theoretical models that emphasize the shared values, norms, and assumptions that give coherence to an organization (Schein, 1985; Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010; Cameron & Quinn, 2011). An effective organizational culture can be a strategic advantage for the organization, as it increases adaptability and fit between the organization and its environment, or a disadvantage in the case of an "inappropriate" culture, disrupted by various contradictions.

Because organizational culture reflects the *norms, values, and rules* of conduct used by individuals to interpret the circumstances they face, it can influence management styles and organizational priorities. Correctly diagnosing organizational culture and determining effective strategies, policies, and practices in line with the organization's

culture will enable it to achieve the desired organizational efficiency, depending on the stability or variability of the internal and external environment (Warter, 2019, p. 174).

This statement is a response to practitioners and researchers who ask themselves whether it is reasonable to allow each organization to define and develop its own principles of organizational ethics as it sees fit, or whether it would be necessary for global society to provide the basis for a universal ethic, on which organizations can structure their practices and policies, as argued by Warter and Warter (2018). Models developed by established authors show that an institution's values manifest themselves on multiple levels and in multiple ways, which explains why the same strategic approach produces different effects in different organizations.

Schein (1985) describes three levels (*artifacts, stated values, basic assumptions*) that directly target daily practices and decisions, noting that "in the absence of synchronization of these levels, reforms remain 'superficial'," (Schein, 1985, p. 32).

The elements of organizational culture outlined by Schein (1985) include the following components: (a) the apparent behavioral order in organizational interactions, (b) the norms developed within groups, (c) the dominant values of the organization, (d) the organization's philosophy, (e) rules for maintaining group harmony, and (f) the organizational climate, reflected in the physical environment and interactions between individuals.

In the same context, Schein (1985) emphasized that these six elements represent organizational culture, but none of them individually constitute the essential core of culture, the most significant foundation of organizational culture being "collective beliefs, internalized and put into practice by the members of the organization" (Ololube (Ed.), 2016, p. 384).

In a study of organizational culture, Mudor analyzed the relationship between knowledge management and organizational efficiency, emphasizing that institutional practices that leverage and distribute knowledge lead to a significant increase in performance. When organizations implement clear systems for collecting, storing, and transferring knowledge (know-how, procedures, innovations), they become more efficient both operationally and strategically, with knowledge management being considered a direct determinant of organizational performance (Mudor, 2014).

Some studies have taken organizational communication and climate as indicators of organizational effectiveness. „Organizational communication and climate function as central indicators of institutional effectiveness. A supportive climate and open

channels of communication enhance faculty motivation, student engagement, and administrative efficiency, whereas poor climate and ineffective communication constrain organizational performance and individual achievement” (Bess & Dee, 2008, p. 73).

Taguian (2025) shows that an open communication climate, characterized by accountability and transparency, is a predictor of employee trust in public universities. According to Furnham and Gunter (1993), organizational cultures fulfill two essential functions: internal integration and coordination. Internal integration involves processes such as socializing new members, defining organizational boundaries, strengthening collective identity, and stimulating member commitment.

In contrast, the coordination function aims to achieve a competitive advantage, define the framework of acceptable behaviors in relation to the external environment, and ensure the stability of the social system. Effective communication is only possible on the basis of shared meanings and beliefs. In situations where organizational cultures fail to perform these functions satisfactorily, there is a risk of diminished organizational effectiveness.

The Multi-Focus model, developed by Hofstede Insights (n.d.), is a strategic tool that presents organizational culture through six dimensions (called focuses), considered independent variables of analysis: *means orientation versus goal orientation*, *internal orientation versus external orientation*, *strict control versus loose control*, *local orientation versus professional orientation*, *openness versus closure*, and *normative orientation versus pragmatic orientation*. This model is based on research conducted by Prof. Geert Hofstede and his research team (Warter, 2019, p. 174.).

### 3. Values of Organizational Culture in Higher Education

To understand the significance of university organizational culture, it is necessary to learn, read, and interpret the modes of operation, languages, and cultural elements within these environments. As institutions that carry culture, higher education maintains its fundamental values (Manning, 2000).

Kuh and Whitt have stated that the “institutional culture” of higher education provides the framework for understanding university life and decisions, including disciplinary and professional subcultures that shape the curriculum, assessment, and student relations. European approaches to quality assurance place an emphasis on “quality culture,” based on a set of values and practices that anchor

program design to learning outcomes, systematic feedback, and continuous improvement. European University Association (EUA).

The university is a unique organization, but one that encompasses multiple characteristics that facilitate the implementation of flow-oriented concepts, such as curriculum development Maciag (2019).

*The organizational culture of the university* is based on the self-organizing nature of the educational institution, founded on the principles of knowledge and learning. It serves as a platform for various relationships: internal relationships between management, employees, and students (considered consumers of educational services); external relationships with graduates, prospective students and their parents, employers (as beneficiaries of educational services); partnerships and competitions with other educational institutions. *The complexity and diversity* of these relationships make it necessary to study the university's organizational culture from the perspective of students' attitudes towards it and their involvement in its development. (Vasyakin, Ivleva, Pozharskaya & Shcherbakova, 2016).

Existing studies have shown that organizational values are not mere statements, but become practical benchmarks that shape educational processes, institutional performance, and adaptability to external changes. "The development of these values, adapted to the university environment, is necessary for improving institutional performance," emphasize Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010).

Based on this theoretical support, the present research aimed to transpose established models into an operational framework, oriented towards identifying and measuring key values of university organizational culture. The selection of these values was based on their direct relevance to the dynamics of the contemporary academic environment and their ability to capture how universities build their identity and institutional efficiency: (1) *academic excellence and professional responsibility*, (2) *collaboration and interpersonal relationships*, (3) *innovation and change management*, (4) *organizational climate and social engagement*.

Through this focus, the study aims to highlight how these values become measurable and verifiable in the university setting, providing a solid basis for diagnosing academic culture and formulating institutional development strategies. A questionnaire was developed based on the theoretical foundation of organizational culture, as conceptualized by renowned authors such as Hofstede (2010), Cameron and Quinn (2011), and Schein (2017), and adapted to the specificities of the university environment. Through statistical processing of the responses, the results obtained will highlight the degree of acceptance and manifestation of cultural values

within the organization, providing an integrated picture of how the institution's stated values are reflected in everyday academic experience and practice.

- 1) *Fundamental values and the university mission* are strongly influenced by long-term orientation and low uncertainty avoidance, according to Hofstede, and are crystallized in the following values: *orientation toward academic excellence through research and taking responsibility for academic career development* (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010; Neculau, 2004; Jigău, 2007).
- 2) *Interpersonal relationships and collaboration in the academic environment* refer to institutional communication and the degree of mutual trust and respect between faculty and students (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Cojocaru-Borozan, 2014; Lesenciuc, 2017).
- 3) *Innovation, adaptability, and change management* are supported by *pro-innovation values characteristic of organizational culture and openness to experimenting with new teaching-learning methods* (Rogers, 2003; Fullan, 2007; Antonesei, 2008; Munteanu, 2013).
- 4) *Organizational climate and social engagement* are based on mutual support, stimulating the active involvement of students and teachers and the level of satisfaction of academic staff (Schein, 2017). Organizational culture and leadership (Wiley & Hatos, 2014; Vlăsceanu, 2015).

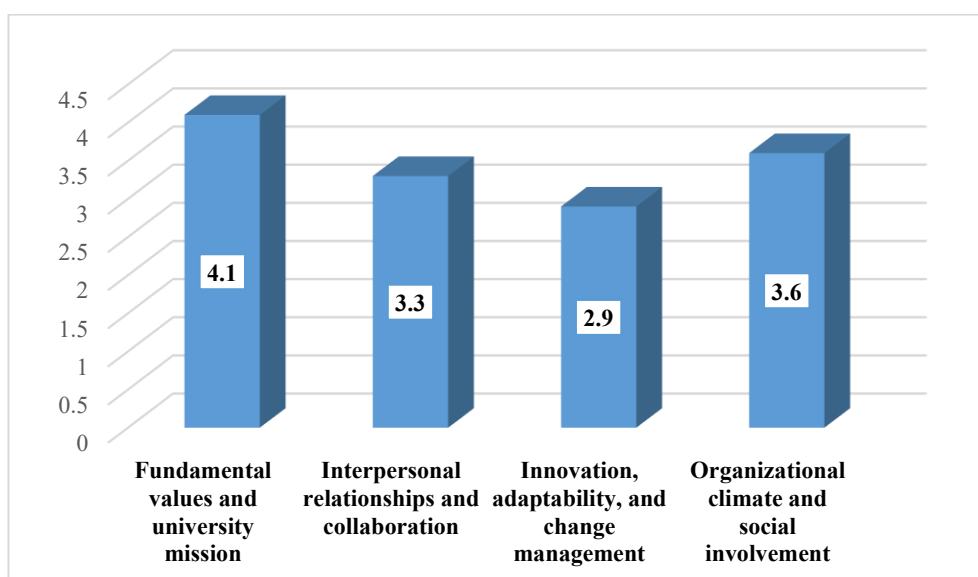
#### 4. Research Methodology

To analyze the data collected through the questionnaire on university organizational culture values, an interpretation grid was developed to assess the level of manifestation of each value investigated. Each item in the questionnaire was evaluated on a five-point Likert scale (1 – total disagreement, 5 – total agreement), calculating for each of the four fundamental values the arithmetic mean of the responses to the corresponding items.

Thirty-five university teachers (N = 35) participated in the research, providing a relevant sample for identifying trends. For each item, the score was calculated as the arithmetic mean of the responses of all respondents, and for each fundamental value (e.g., interpersonal relationships), which includes several items, the arithmetic mean of the associated item scores was calculated.

In highlighting the degree of acceptance and manifestation of cultural values, the following ranges for interpreting the scores obtained were established:

- **1.00 – 2.49: Low level – the value is not perceived or is not significantly reflected in institutional practices;**
- **2.50 – 3.49: Medium level – the value is only partially present and manifests itself inconsistently;**
- **3.50 – 5.00: High level – the value is strongly assumed, integrated into behaviors, and visible in organizational practices.**



**Figure 1. Results Regarding the Values of University Organizational Culture**

The analysis of the data obtained from the 35 university teachers reveals a nuanced picture of how the fundamental values of organizational culture are perceived and assumed within the institution.

Firstly, *the fundamental values and university mission* received a high score ( $M = 4.1$ ), confirming that the institution's strategic direction is well defined and internalized by the teaching staff. The mission is perceived as being clearly communicated and oriented towards academic excellence, reflecting the existence of a solid core of values and an organizational culture anchored in clear principles.

In contrast, the dimension of interpersonal relationships and collaboration scores an average level ( $M = 3.3$ ). This result suggests that, although there is communication



and a certain openness to collaboration, these do not reach a consistent and uniform level. The lack of consolidated interdepartmental cooperation may limit institutional synergy and reduce the efficiency of educational processes.

A similar situation can be observed in *the innovation, adaptability, and change management indicator*, which also obtained an average score ( $M = 2.9$ ). The result shows that the university values innovation and accepts change, but these processes are not fully consolidated at the organizational level. There are isolated and fragmented initiatives, but no institutional culture of innovation, which confirms the difficulties highlighted in the literature regarding the transformation of educational change into a coherent and sustainable process.

In terms of *organizational climate and social engagement*, the score is high ( $M = 3.6$ ), reflecting the existence of a work environment that is perceived as positive and motivating. Teachers feel supported and are actively involved in university life, but these aspects are described as “fluctuating,” suggesting that they are not uniformly manifested in all organizational structures. However, the high level indicates an important resource for community development and institutional cohesion.

Overall, the results paint a picture of a university that is supported by a clear mission and a favorable organizational climate, but which faces difficulties in strengthening interpersonal collaboration and, above all, in integrating innovation and change as core values. This cultural profile highlights both strengths (focus on excellence, supportive climate) and vulnerabilities (collaboration and adaptability), thus providing clear directions for strategic interventions to optimize the university's organizational culture.

## 5. Conclusion

The analysis of the fundamental values of organizational culture in higher education confirms their importance as determinants of institutional identity and efficiency. According to Schein (1985, 2017), the core of organizational culture consists of shared and internalized assumptions that guide both institutional strategies and everyday behaviors. The results obtained from the questionnaire administered to 35 university teachers validate this perspective, highlighting that the *university mission* ( $M = 4.1$ ) is perceived at a high level as an expression of a solid core of values.

At the same time, the literature (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010; Cameron & Quinn, 2011) emphasizes the role of interpersonal relationships and collaboration in

strengthening a cohesive organizational culture. In the research conducted, this value recorded a *medium level* ( $M = 3.3$ ), which confirms the existence of active institutional communication, but also the potential for improvement in terms of interdepartmental cooperation and community cohesion.

Regarding the dimension of *innovation and change management*, the theory of diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 2003) and studies on educational change (Fullan, 2007, 2011) show that the adoption of new practices depends on organizational culture and transformative leadership. The research data ( $M = 2.9$ ) confirm that innovation remains insufficiently consolidated and that there is a risk that change processes will be fragmented, which calls for institutional strategies to stimulate adaptability.

In contrast, *the organizational climate and social engagement* were evaluated positively ( $M = 3.6$ ), reflecting mutual support and active participation, consistent with the observations of Warter (2019) and Bess and Dee (2008) regarding the importance of a supportive climate for teacher motivation and student involvement. Even if these aspects are not uniformly distributed, the high level indicates the existence of an important resource for strengthening the academic community.

Overall, the results confirm the statements made by Manning (2000) and Kuh and Whitt (1988) regarding the role of fundamental values in defining “institutional culture.” The university analyzed is based on a clear mission and a favorable organizational climate, but faces challenges related to collaboration and innovation.

This cultural profile outlines *both strengths* (focus on excellence and supportive climate) *and vulnerabilities* (collaboration and adaptability), which requires managerial interventions aimed at *strengthening interdepartmental collaboration* and mutual trust; stimulating *pedagogical innovation* and the adoption of change as a sustainable institutional process and developing policies that leverage the positive climate and community involvement as strategic resources.

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