ACROSS
Journal of Interdisciplinary Cross-Border Studies
Vol 10, No.2, 2026

Pedagogies and Languages

Current trends in developing organizational culture through research in higher education

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Abstract

This article examines contemporary trends in the development of organizational culture in higher education institutions by positioning research activities as the main domain through which institutional transformation is initiated, interpreted, and regulated. Universities operate as complex settings in which cultural norms, values, and practices arise from research-driven dynamics that influence academic performance, collaborative patterns, and innovative capacity. Informed by empirical studies and policy frameworks, the study delineates how leadership arrangements, participative governance, funding systems, interdisciplinary research practices, open-science orientations, and integrity frameworks function as interconnected mechanisms through which research generates and reshapes institutional culture. Evidence shows that cultures characterized by technological fluency, openness, risk tolerance, and sustained collaboration demonstrate an enhanced ability to support innovation and adaptive change, whereas environments governed by hierarchical or market-centered research logics tend to restrict transformative development. Strategic consistency between research priorities and institutional objectives emerges as a fundamental condition for embedding desired cultural norms and maintaining long-term organizational evolution. By integrating theoretical models with documented university practices, the article provides a comprehensive account of the ways in which research structures, expresses, and accelerates cultural development in higher education. The findings highlight the decisive importance of coordinated leadership, participatory structures, and coherent policy environments in cultivating cultures adapted to contemporary knowledge environments and societal expectations.

Keywords: organizational culture; higher education; research-driven transformation; open science; leadership and strategy.

Introduction

Current trends in developing organizational culture in higher education emphasize the central role of research in shaping institutional identity and guiding strategic transformation. Institutional culture comprises interconnected components that define a university's character, including leadership approaches, communication patterns, core values and norms, rituals and symbolic practices, organizational structures and processes, and the behaviors

and attitudes of members within the university community (Turgut & Samur, 2025). These elements interact dynamically, influencing both formal and informal practices and shaping the environment in which teaching, research, and administrative activities are conducted. Universities operate as complex social systems where societal and institutional values are continuously negotiated and reproduced. Institutional culture impacts academic performance, staff and student satisfaction, and overall organizational effectiveness, providing the framework through which a university's mission, vision, and strategic objectives are realized (Turgut & Samur, 2025).

Recent studies demonstrate that research-intensive institutions with digitally oriented and innovation-driven cultures are better equipped to respond to emerging challenges. Orero-Blat, Rodríguez, and Palacios-Marqués (2025) show that research-led digital transformation, particularly in data analytics and technological infrastructure, depends heavily on an institution's cultural orientation toward openness, experimentation, technological literacy, agility, and interdisciplinary collaboration. *The aim of this research* is to examine how contemporary research activities function as interdependent mechanisms through which universities generate, configure, and transform organizational culture, by analyzing the ways leadership arrangements, participatory governance structures, interdisciplinary and cross-sector collaboration, open-science practices, funding systems, technological and data-driven infrastructures, and integrity frameworks shape institutional identity, strategic adaptability, and innovation-oriented development within higher education. To conceptualize these relationships, Figure 1 presents research-driven organizational transformation as a dynamic process in which leadership shapes research culture, research culture enables collaboration, collaboration fuels innovation, and innovation drives sustained organizational transformation.

Figure 1. Core components of research-driven organizational transformation in higher education

Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative document analysis of peer-reviewed research, policy guidelines, institutional strategic plans, and research governance frameworks. International and national directives on open science, research integrity, and research funding were examined to identify global patterns influencing research-driven cultural development in

higher education. All sources were analyzed thematically, with particular attention to leadership configurations, participative governance models, funding, interdisciplinary research practices, and integrity frameworks. Cross-regional comparisons enabled a theoretically grounded synthesis of how research practices both shape and reflect organizational culture in higher education institutions.

Results and discussion

Organizational culture serves as a framework through which universities navigate external and internal environmental factors, shaping management practices, operational processes, and strategic development (Makaryan, 2023). It is commonly categorized into four principal types: *clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy.* Each type is defined by specific configurations of shared values, beliefs, and behaviors that influence institutional functioning and capacity for innovation, with *adhocracy* showing the strongest orientation toward adaptability and creativity (Gorzelany et al., 2021).

Research by Turgut and Samur (2025) on a faculty of sports sciences in Turkey illustrates how deliberate cultural transformation can bring organizational culture into congruence with institutional goals. Their mixed-methods study, based on the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument, shows a predominance of hierarchical and competitive patterns although staff prefer more collaborative and innovation-oriented cultural orientations that reflect the university's emphasis on openness, learning, cooperation, and strategic management. Strategies identified to support such cultural transition include *cultural awareness initiatives, participative leadership, flexible work environments that facilitate experimentation, revised performance and reward systems, and improved communication channels*, strategies that enhance employee satisfaction and institutional effectiveness.

Laufer, Deacon, Mende, and Schäfer (2025) highlight the role of leadership in cultivating organizational trust to advance innovation with educational technologies in higher education. Leaders who decentralize authority, provide conditions for experimentation, acknowledge staff expertise, and secure adequate resources strengthen autonomy and creative digital integration, whereas rhetorical commitments to trust without concrete support undermine motivation and inhibit innovation.

Tahiraj and Krek (2022) demonstrate that entrenched hierarchical and market-oriented cultural configurations obstruct transformational initiatives. In their study of a public university in Kosovo, these orientations, emphasizing stability, control, competition, and short-term outcomes, conflicted with participatory and adaptive strategies and consequently limited efforts to advance innovative teaching practices and research capacity. Their findings reaffirm the need to reassess and, when necessary, reshape cultural patterns to support meaningful reform.

Makaryan (2023) argues that cultural configurations reflect underlying values that shape inclusion and participation. Clan orientations, privileging cohesion, teamwork, shared traditions, and participatory decision-making, foster environments in which members feel valued and collectively responsible for institutional objectives. Hierarchical and market orientations, by contrast, prioritize either order or individual achievement and provide weaker conditions for collective engagement. This suggests that cultures grounded in connectedness and shared purpose are more conducive to strengthening inclusivity and collective commitment within higher education institutions.

Given the scope of deep and transformational changes in higher education, coupled with the historical and structural characteristics of universities, it is imperative for academic leaders to develop a nuanced understanding of organizational culture to identify strategies that effectively initiate, shape, and implement change (Kezar, 2014 cited in Tahiraj & Krek, 2022). Such understanding is particularly significant because organizational culture reflects current practices as well as shapes how stakeholders perceive, interpret, and respond to proposed reforms. Schein (1985) conceptualizes organizational culture through three interrelated elements, *assumptions, values, and artifacts*, observing that while norms represent visible manifestations of shared assumptions, the deeper assumptions that underlie organizational behavior remain largely unexamined by members. Therefore, successful change initiatives necessitate that leaders address both explicit and implicit dimensions of culture, as individuals often remain unaware of their own cultural frameworks until they encounter differing organizational contexts (Schein, 1999, p. 236 cited in Tahiraj & Krek, 2022).

The distinctiveness of university organizational culture can be traced to its historical evolution, beginning with institutions such as the Platonic Academy and continuing through medieval student and professor corporations, which were guided by values including truth, knowledge, autonomy, independence, freedom, universality, and community, shaping master-pupil relationships and structuring institutional practices. Accordingly, the emergence of the university as an enduring organizational form reflects the institutionalization of a culture grounded in classical academic principles and traditional scholarly values (Gorzelany et al., 2021). Contemporary research, however, suggests that traditional organizational cultures emphasizing cohesion, participation, stability, or competitiveness, such as clan or market cultures, may be insufficient to support digital transformation and the advancement of big data analytics capabilities, whereas cultures that cultivate risk-taking, continuous learning, and sustained technological orientation provide conditions conducive to innovation-driven evolution, enabling institutions to consolidate strategic advantages within increasingly dynamic and technology-intensive educational environments (Orero-Blat, Rodríguez, & Palacios-Marqués, 2025). This connection between historical cultural foundations and contemporary innovation imperatives highlights the necessity for leaders to foster adaptive, innovation-oriented cultures while remaining attuned to the deeper assumptions that shape institutional behavior.

In practice, contemporary cultural transformation in higher education involves seven interdependent elements that underpin institutional effectiveness: *prioritizing students through integrated end-to-end support processes; adopting a digital-first approach to design flexible, future-ready systems; embracing calculated risk-taking to counteract traditional sectoral risk aversion and enable innovative practices; strengthening agility to respond rapidly to evolving digital and organizational demands; fostering open innovation by engaging with external knowledge ecosystems beyond the academic sector; dismantling boundaries to enable cross-functional collaboration and genuinely student-centered services; and embedding data at the core to support consistent, holistic, and evidence-based decision making across all institutional levels* (Kähkipuro, 2020), a process that can be substantially strengthened through research activities that diagnose needs, evaluate interventions, and guide continuous organizational cultural development.

Grounded in Complexity Leadership Theory, Laufer, Deacon, Mende, and Schäfer (2025) emphasize that effective leadership emerges from the intricate interrelation of operational,

entrepreneurial, and enabling roles that are shaped by institutional culture and broader societal norms. They contend that leadership practices that actively cultivate trust, autonomy, and sustained support are essential for generating organizational environments capable of fostering meaningful and enduring innovation in educational technologies, thereby translating institutional vision into practical strategies that empower faculty and staff to adopt and adapt digital tools creatively.

Extending the analysis of organizational and research culture, Corbo, Reinholz, Dancy, Deetz, and Finkelstein (2016) argue that systemic change in higher education necessitates coordinated, multi-level interventions across faculty, departments, and administrative units. Their framework integrates six complementary perspectives, *scientific management, evolutionary theory, social cognition, cultural analysis, political negotiation, and institutional logics*, each elucidating the structural, cognitive, and cultural forces that shape academic environments. They demonstrate that initiatives such as *Departmental Action Teams, departmental visioning processes, and administrative evaluation frameworks* achieve greater impact when coordinated across these levels and perspectives, illustrating that sustainable institutional transformation depends on holistic strategies capable of addressing complex, interdependent barriers to change.

Research culture in higher education constitutes a multilayered constellation of values, norms, and epistemic practices through which institutions structure the pursuit, validation, and dissemination of knowledge. UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) describes it as the behaviors, expectations, attitudes, and shared commitments that shape how research communities generate and circulate knowledge (UK Research and Innovation, 2024). Science Europe likewise emphasizes openness, transparency, care, collegiality, integrity, diversity, and collaboration as foundational principles of research culture (Marangoni et al., 2025; Science Europe, 2025). This constellation of principles is increasingly reflected in comprehensive models that map how foundational research values translate into structures, processes, and outcomes across the academic system (see Figure 2).

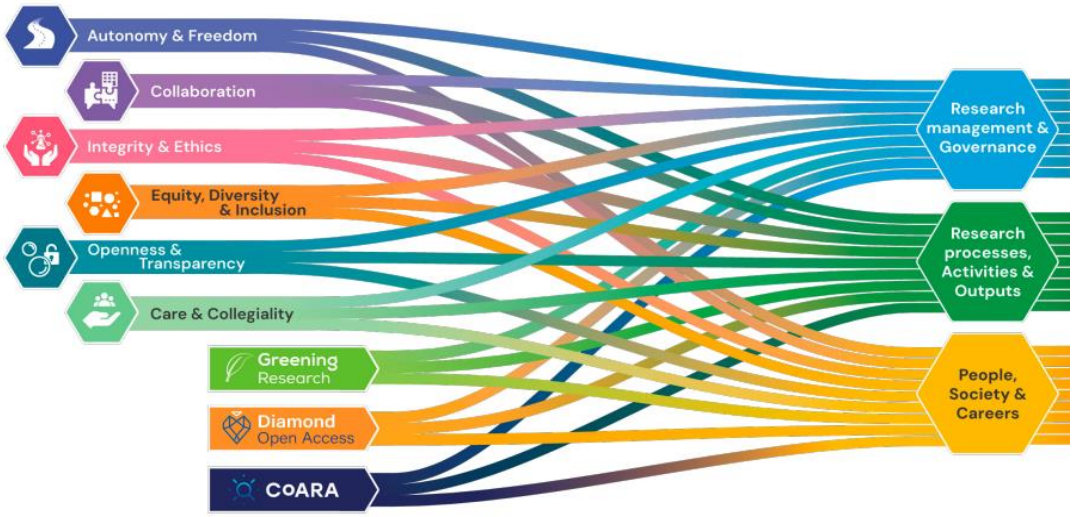

Figure 2. An overview of the levels, components, and actions that shape research systems (*Source: Science Europe, 2025*).

In their 2025 "Vision & Framework for Research Cultures," Science Europe highlights the necessity to incorporate the research culture perspectives into organisation-wide mission and vision statements, transparently communicating specific areas of competency and responsibility.

These perspectives indicate that research culture functions as a set of practical orientations that shape the production, dissemination, and evaluation of knowledge, and its systematic understanding and cultivation has become a strategic priority for universities aiming to strengthen research quality, innovation, and societal impact.

Global trends demonstrate that university leadership and research strategy function as essential levers for structuring research culture. Strategic plans increasingly connect research priorities with organizational values, embedding cultural expectations such as openness, collaboration, innovation, and societal impact into institutional frameworks. For example, the University of Aberdeen's *Research Cultures Strategy 2025* asserts that positive research cultures form the foundation of excellent research, promoting interdisciplinary, international, and inclusive research as central institutional strengths (University of Aberdeen, 2025). In addition, research funders have developed guidance to support academic leaders in fostering conducive research environments. For instance, UKRI's 2024 framework identifies four interrelated domains, *governance and integrity, open research practices, career development, and collegial leadership*, that must align with an institution's research vision to effect lasting cultural change (UK Research and Innovation, 2024). Evidence from senior administrators globally indicates comparable priorities, with leaders in US and Canadian universities emphasizing STEM research acceleration, regional alignment, equity objectives, and maintaining the residential campus experience (Cooper, Hill, & Schonfeld, 2022).

Participative and supportive leadership is instrumental in embedding values that support positive research and organizational cultures. In Indonesian public universities (PTNBH), fostering a supportive organizational culture alongside participative leadership enhanced both innovation and employee commitment, demonstrating that empowering faculty through shared governance and open communication cultivates creativity and strengthens institutional performance (Riza, Hutahayan, & Chong, 2025). Similarly, U.S. case studies show that cross-functional teams of faculty, staff, and administrators act as "change agents," disseminating norms of collaboration, inclusivity, and equity across campuses (Kezar, Hallett, Corwin, & Hypolite, 2025). Leadership that emphasizes participatory decision-making, transparency, and inclusivity interacts with mechanisms such as resource allocation, professional development, and interdisciplinary collaboration, creating conditions for innovative pedagogical and research practices and cross-disciplinary knowledge production.

Interdisciplinary collaboration is a central cultural driver, as universities increasingly dismantle disciplinary boundaries to address complex societal challenges. The University of Aberdeen's strategy promotes breaking barriers to foster cross-disciplinary connections (University of Aberdeen, 2025), a focus reinforced by European and Asian policy initiatives that incentivize transnational projects, while national strategies in STEM-intensive fields often require interfaculty or industry partnerships. Research on open science highlights the significance of collaborative norms, emphasizing transparency, inclusivity, and cooperative knowledge production (Marangoni et al., 2025). Despite these trends, traditional reward systems continue to privilege narrow specialization, discouraging cross-departmental

collaboration, as scholars note that "organizational cultures and structures often prevent researchers from collaborating" (James Jacob, 2015). In response, institutions have established research institutes or joint appointments to facilitate interdisciplinary teams, while consortia such as the Indonesian PTNBH have restructured research governance through cross-campus councils and innovation hubs to promote shared projects and an innovation-oriented culture (Riza, Hutahayan, & Chong, 2025). Science funders reinforce these expectations by allocating grants to multidisciplinary teams, signaling that collaborative research is now a core expectation within research culture.

For instance, the Research and Pedagogical Innovation Laboratory (CIP) at the Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University in Chișinău operationalizes these principles by fostering interdisciplinary pedagogical research, coordinating national and international partnerships, and supporting professional development through action-oriented research initiatives. Through structured activities including seminars, workshops, and collaborative projects, CIP exemplifies how institutional mechanisms instill collaborative norms and cultivate innovation-oriented practices within higher education organizational culture.

In this context, research funding strategies shape organizational culture by establishing incentives that prioritize technological innovation, equity, and responsiveness to global challenges. North American university leaders report strategic priorities for STEM research expansion, reflecting goals for rankings, economic impact, and societal contribution (Cooper, Hill, & Schonfeld, 2022). Libraries and research support units are directing resources toward computational infrastructure, big data, and machine learning, while pandemic recovery plans and emerging assessment metrics emphasize inclusive growth. Equity, diversity, and inclusion targets are increasingly embedded in grant frameworks, as exemplified by UKRI's *People and Culture Strategy* (2021), which rewards open practices and broadens researcher demographics (UK Research and Innovation, 2024).

National and international policies continue to structure research culture by synchronizing institutional practices with broader strategic objectives. UNESCO's 2021 Recommendation on Open Science, South Africa's Open Science Framework, and Science Europe's open science reforms illustrate how policy fosters transparent, accountable, and collaborative research environments (Department of Science and Innovation, 2023; Marangoni et al., 2025; Science Europe, 2025). Research integrity frameworks, including ethics training, codes of conduct, integrity offices, and oversight mechanisms, ensure that responsible and reproducible research becomes an embedded cultural norm (Wang, Hou, & Zhang, 2025).

Universities' growing orientation toward innovation networks links institutional research culture with regional economic development and technological advancement. Innovation hubs, laboratories, technology transfer offices, and faculty engagement in industry and translational research embed applied problem-solving, impact-driven research, and cross-sector collaboration as cultural norms, aligning institutional priorities with societal needs (European University Association, 2020). Values-driven strategies guide institutional planning, embedding principles such as openness, collaboration, diversity, and integrity into research strategy. Leadership engagement, interdisciplinary initiatives, ethical oversight, and diversity and inclusivity programs act as mechanisms that reinforce these principles.

Well-established research culture materialises when strategic priorities, leadership practices, interdisciplinary collaboration, integrity frameworks, and innovation-oriented mechanisms are deliberately integrated. By embedding openness, collaboration, integrity, and inclusivity

into everyday research practices, universities transform their organizational cultures to respond effectively to evolving societal knowledge needs.

The preceding analysis highlights how contemporary organizational culture in higher education is determined by a complex interconnection of research activities, leadership practices, and institutional norms, with research functioning as a generator of knowledge as well as a central influence on values, expectations, and strategic orientations. Within this framework, *participatory governance, cross-disciplinary collaboration, innovation-oriented initiatives, and adherence to principles of openness and integrity* serve as mechanisms through which research informs and transforms both formal structures and everyday practices. Evidence drawn from institutional reports, policy frameworks, and international case studies indicates that systematically embedding research-driven approaches into *strategic planning, resource allocation, faculty development, and interdisciplinary projects* fosters conditions that support adaptability, creativity, and ethically responsible scholarship. To synthesize these interrelated dynamics, Table 1 presents the primary trends currently shaping organizational culture in higher education, alongside the research-driven mechanisms through which these trends are enacted, offering a structured perspective on how leadership, strategy, collaboration, innovation, and ethical practices interconnect to sustain and develop a research-oriented institutional culture.

Table 1. Current Trends Shaping Organizational Culture in Higher Education through Research

Trend	Research-Driven Mechanisms
Research-Driven Cultural Transformation	• Research functions as both an engine and a reflection of organizational culture, shaping institutional identity and norms; • Universities embed cultural values such as openness, collaboration, innovation, and adaptability into structures and processes through research activities; • Research informs leadership practices, strategic planning, and operational transformation, sustaining adaptive and innovation-oriented cultures.
Leadership and Participative Governance	• Participative, trust-based, and research-informed leadership reinforces a positive organizational culture; • Leaders empower faculty and staff via shared decision-making, open communication, and autonomy, integrating research insights into governance; • Application of Complexity Leadership Theory highlights operational, entrepreneurial, and enabling roles that foster adaptive, innovative environments.
Interdisciplinary and Cross-Functional Collaboration	• Research initiatives break disciplinary boundaries, promote interdisciplinary projects, and encourage knowledge integration;

	• Institutions support collaboration through joint appointments, research institutes, innovation hubs, and collaborative grants; • Collaborative research practices, including open science initiatives, reinforce transparency, cooperation, and shared knowledge production.
Innovation-Oriented and Adaptive Cultures	• Research programs that prioritize risk-taking, technological fluency, agility, and continuous learning foster innovation and adaptability; • Adhocracy and clan cultures, reinforced by research-driven practices, enhance creativity, collaboration, and inclusion, while hierarchical and market-oriented cultures may constrain transformative change.
Strategic Alignment of Research and Organizational Goals	• Research strategy is integrated with institutional mission, vision, and cultural objectives; • Policies, funding mechanisms, and performance incentives align research priorities with institutional values, reinforcing a research-driven culture.
Open Science and Research Integrity	• Open science initiatives embed transparency, inclusivity, and collaborative norms; • Research integrity frameworks, ethics training, oversight mechanisms, and reproducibility checks, promote responsible, credible, and culturally embedded research practices.
Integration into Broader Innovation Systems	• Research outputs are connected to societal, economic, and technological priorities, contributing to regional development and industry collaboration; • Structures such as technology transfer offices, laboratories, and innovation hubs promote applied problem-solving and impact-oriented research.
Data-Driven and Evidence-Based Decision-Making	• Digital transformation and big data analytics inform research practices and organizational decision-making; • Institutions leverage data-driven approaches to monitor performance, guide strategy, and reinforce adaptive, research-oriented cultural norms.

Current trends emphasize the cultivation of *research-driven, innovation-oriented, collaborative, and ethically grounded organizational cultures.* Leadership, strategic alignment, participative governance, interdisciplinary collaboration, open science, and integration with broader societal and technological networks are essential mechanisms

through which research shapes and reflects cultural transformation in higher education institutions.

Conclusion

The contemporary evolution of organizational culture in higher education demonstrates that research operates as an instrument, a mechanism, and an indicator of institutional transformation. Empirical and theoretical accounts converge in revealing that organizational culture, understood as a dynamic set of values, norms, assumptions, and symbolic practices, both conditions and is continuously reconstituted by the organization of research activities, the types of leadership, and the orientation of institutional strategies (Schein, 1985; Turgut and Samur, 2025). Current developments point toward cultural configurations that privilege collaboration, openness, and reflexivity, sustained through interdisciplinary infrastructures, participatory modes of governance, and substantive investments in technological and analytical skills.

Open science and research integrity initiatives exemplify the systematic institutionalization of ethical, transparent, and cooperative norms, foregrounding the interdependence between policy frameworks, incentive schemes, and organizational practice (Marangoni et al., 2025; Pienaar, 2023). Similarly, the incorporation of universities into wider innovation systems illustrates how external imperatives, including regional development agendas and knowledge-intensive economic priorities, reconfigure internal cultural logics and encourage entrepreneurial orientations, translational research trajectories, and evidence-informed decision-making (European University Association, 2020; Laufer et al., 2025).

Theoretical and practical evidence indicates that cultures characterized by adaptability, risk-embracing dispositions, technological fluency, and collegial trust create enabling conditions for innovation and high-quality knowledge production, whereas rigid hierarchical or narrowly market-driven cultures constrain institutional learning and transformation (Gorzelany et al., 2021; Tahiraj and Krek, 2022). Consequently, intentional and reflexive leadership, coherent incentive structures, and embedded participatory mechanisms emerge as indispensable for cultivating cultural formations capable of advancing both academic excellence and societal relevance.

Therefore, the trajectory of organizational culture in higher education is increasingly shaped by the complex interdependence of research practices, leadership engagement, policy interventions, and institutional strategy. Sustaining cultures that are open, collaborative, and ethically anchored requires consistent attention to the tacit assumptions and cognitive schemas that organize institutional behaviour. In this sense, the development of research-driven organizational culture constitutes a central, theoretically grounded, and strategically consequential dimension of ongoing higher education reform.

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