

SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CORPORATE CULTURE IN UKRAINIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract. This study explores the organizational culture of Ukrainian universities amid ongoing structural and societal transformations. In the face of challenges such as digitalization, European integration, and war-related disruptions, higher education institutions are expected to become more flexible, resilient, and community-driven. However, a considerable gap persists between the existing hierarchical and bureaucratic culture and the aspirational model based on openness, trust, and shared values. The aim of this research is to identify the social and psychological features of university culture and assess the contrast between the current state and the desired cultural profile envisioned by academic and administrative staff. The study applies a mixed-methods approach that includes surveys using a modified version of the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI), in-depth interviews with institutional leaders, and an analysis of strategic documents. Results show a dominant reliance on formal control, performance metrics, and top-down decision-making. Yet respondents express a strong preference for participatory leadership, emotional intelligence, creative collaboration, and horizontal communication. The study also reveals key cultural challenges, such as weak internal trust, rigid structure, resistance to change, and lack of strategic communication. These issues hinder inclusive engagement and slow organizational adaptation. The research highlights the need for cultural transformation guided by leadership renewal, internal dialogue, and value-based practices. Strengthening organizational culture is essential for long-term institutional development and crisis resilience.

Keywords: corporate culture; higher education; Ukraine; trust; organizational identity; leadership style; communication patterns; academic values.

JEL Classification: I 23, I 24, M54

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Introduction. The transformation of Ukrainian universities amidst broader educational reforms underscores the critical role of corporate culture in shaping institutional success. Corporate culture encompasses shared values, norms, and practices that influence all aspects of academic life. In an environment characterized by rapid change and increasing demands for quality and accountability, understanding the social and psychological dimensions of corporate culture is essential for sustaining institutional competitiveness and resilience.

Literature Review. The study of corporate culture in higher education has gained increasing attention in post-Soviet societies, particularly in Ukraine, where systemic transformation in the university sector intersects with broader political, economic, and social change. Corporate culture is understood not merely as a set of formalized values or strategic rhetoric but as a multidimensional construct encompassing psychological climate, interpersonal relationships, leadership dynamics, and shared identity within an academic institution (Schein, 2010; Cameron & Quinn, 2011). In the Ukrainian context, understanding the social-psychological features of university culture is critical for navigating challenges such as governance reform, internationalization, digitalization, and resilience under external shocks.

The classical conceptualization of organizational culture by Edgar Schein (2010) defines it as a system of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs that governs how people behave in organizations. He emphasizes the centrality of leadership in embedding and transmitting culture, especially during times of change. Complementing Schein's view, the Competing Values Framework by Cameron and Quinn (2011) offers a diagnostic tool for analyzing university cultures, identifying four ideal types—clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy—that help explain institutional behavior and internal dynamics.

In Ukrainian higher education, these models have been adapted to explore hybrid cultural forms that combine bureaucratic legacies with emerging democratic and participative elements (Sydorchuk, 2021). Ukrainian universities often exhibit dual tendencies: formal structures and vertical governance coexist with informal relationships and horizontal communication networks shaped by interpersonal trust and local autonomy (Petrenko & Kvitka, 2020).

Trust is a foundational psychological element in any corporate culture. In Ukrainian universities, where formal rules may be inconsistently applied or interpreted, interpersonal trust often serves as a stabilizing force and informal mechanism for organizational functioning (Denysenko, 2019). This trust manifests in peer collaboration, mentoring networks, and collective problem-solving but may also reinforce non-transparent practices if not guided by shared ethical standards.

The social-psychological climate, defined as the perceived emotional tone and relational quality of an institution, plays a key role in staff motivation, student engagement, and innovation capacity. Studies by Zhuravska and Mykytenko (2020) show that a positive climate correlates with academic productivity, satisfaction with leadership, and staff retention. In contrast, climates marked by fear, competition, or disengagement impede internal communication and reduce organizational effectiveness.

Leadership has a central role in shaping and evolving university culture. Ukrainian research emphasizes the distinction between authoritarian-administrative styles, inherited from Soviet organizational traditions, and transformational leadership, which fosters participation, inclusion, and adaptability (Ivaniuk & Skurativskyi, 2018). Transformational leaders are perceived as key agents of cultural modernization, enabling universities to respond to challenges such as digital transformation and international quality standards.

According to Mazurenko (2021), effective university leaders in Ukraine demonstrate emotional intelligence, promote collegial governance, and cultivate a shared sense of mission. However, resistance to participatory governance remains a barrier in many institutions, especially where leadership turnover is high or strategic vision is weak.

The alignment between declared institutional values (e.g., academic freedom, inclusion, integrity) and practiced behaviors is a recurring theme in the literature. Ukrainian universities often adopt Western-style mission statements, yet the internalization of these values across the academic community remains uneven (Sydorchuk, 2021). This dissonance undermines efforts to build cohesive organizational identities and sustainable reforms.

The development of a strong organizational identity, rooted in shared academic values and cultural heritage, is essential for strategic positioning in global education markets. As Tkachuk (2019) notes, identity construction in Ukrainian universities is challenged by external pressures (e.g., state funding volatility, demographic decline) and internal tensions (e.g., generational divides, unclear governance boundaries).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has had a profound effect on all aspects of society, including higher education. Universities have been forced to adapt rapidly to crisis conditions, highlighting the resilience capacity of their internal cultures. Preliminary findings (Fedorenko & Karmazina, 2023) suggest that institutions with stronger internal cohesion, flexible leadership, and open communication structures have been more effective in maintaining operations, staff morale, and student support during wartime.

This recent context underscores the role of psychological safety, solidarity, and ethical leadership in organizational survival and post-crisis recovery. Cultural strength is thus not only a matter of routine functioning but a determinant of institutional resilience and societal contribution.

Aims. This study aims to identify and analyze the social and psychological characteristics of organizational culture in Ukrainian universities, with particular attention to the gap between existing cultural patterns and the aspirational models desired by staff. It further seeks to diagnose key cultural challenges and provide evidence-based recommendations for fostering inclusive, dynamic, and sustainable academic environments.

Methodology. A mixed-methods design was applied. The quantitative phase involved a survey of 150 academic and administrative staff across Ukrainian university using a modified version of the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI). The qualitative phase included 30 in-depth interviews with university leaders

and department heads. Institutional documents such as strategic plans and codes of ethics were analyzed to assess the congruence between declared and practiced values. Data analysis combined descriptive statistics, thematic coding, and triangulation techniques.

Results. The results of the survey conducted among university staff using the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) revealed a significant gap between the existing organizational environment and the value orientations desired by the employees. The prevailing organizational culture is characterized by a formalized, hierarchical management system dominated by structured procedures, control, stability, and performance measured through quantitative indicators. At the same time, respondents expressed a strong aspiration to see their institution evolve into a more open, flexible, innovative, and human-centered organization.

At the level of **dominant organizational characteristics**, the current state is dominated by hierarchical (40 points) and market-oriented cultures (30 points), whereas the desired state shows a clear shift toward adhocracy (30) and clan culture (20). This indicates a strong preference for transitioning from bureaucratic systems toward a community-based environment focused on trust, teamwork, and innovation.

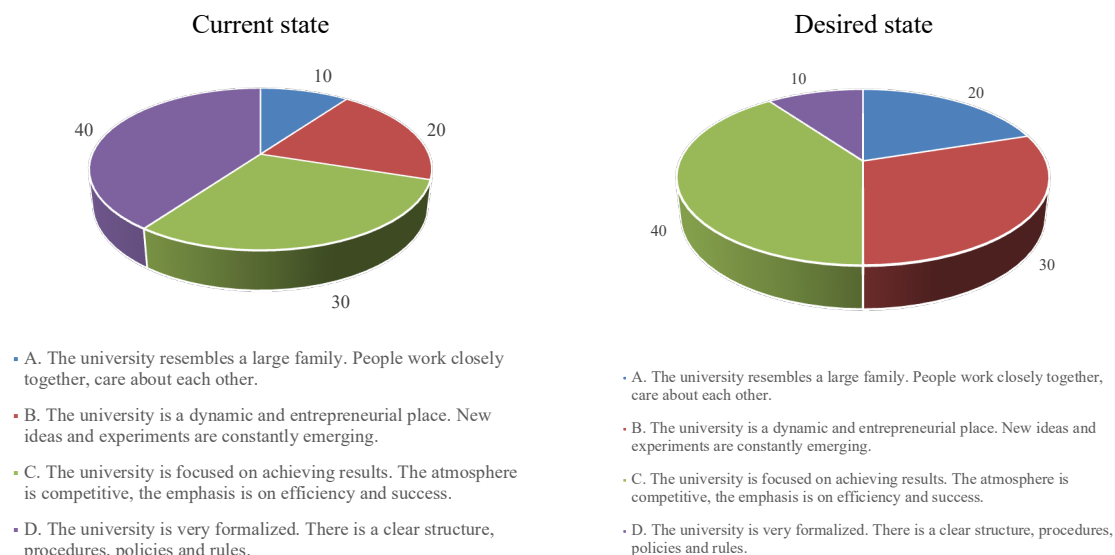


Figure 1. Dominant characteristics of the University

Sources: developed by authors

The analysis of **leadership style** confirms this tendency. Currently, management is characterized by rigid hierarchy and administrative control (60 points). In contrast, the ideal vision includes transformational leadership grounded in inspiration, support, and the encouragement of innovation (a combined 50 points in favor of transformational and clan-style leadership).

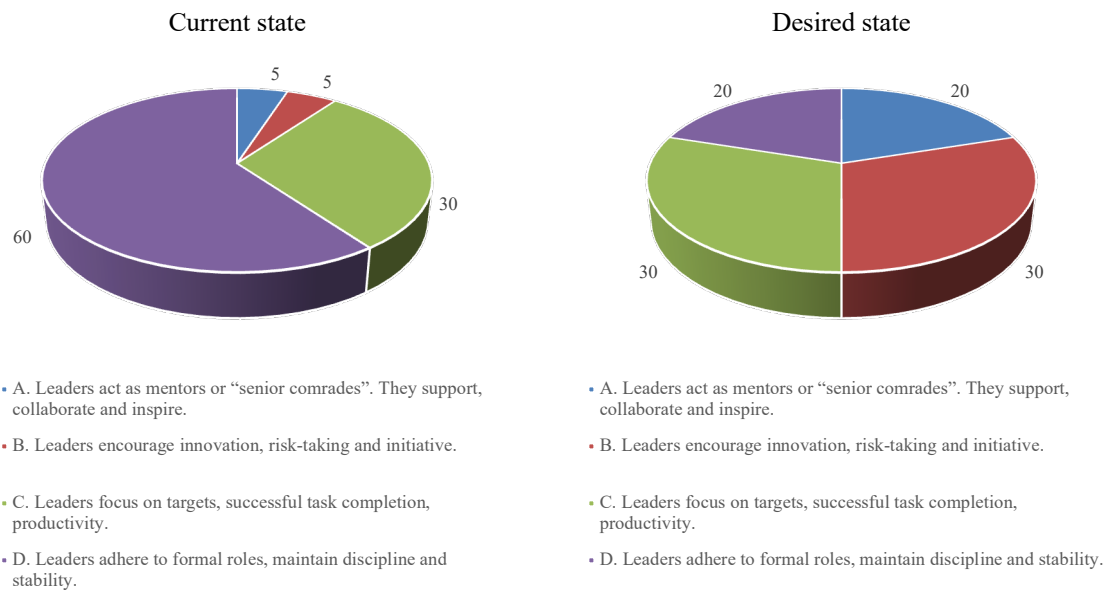


Figure 2. Leadership style of the University

Sources: developed by authors

In the area of **personnel management**, the current focus lies on performance (40) and adherence to procedures (35), while staff express a desire for greater autonomy, creativity (30), and team-based trust and development (25).

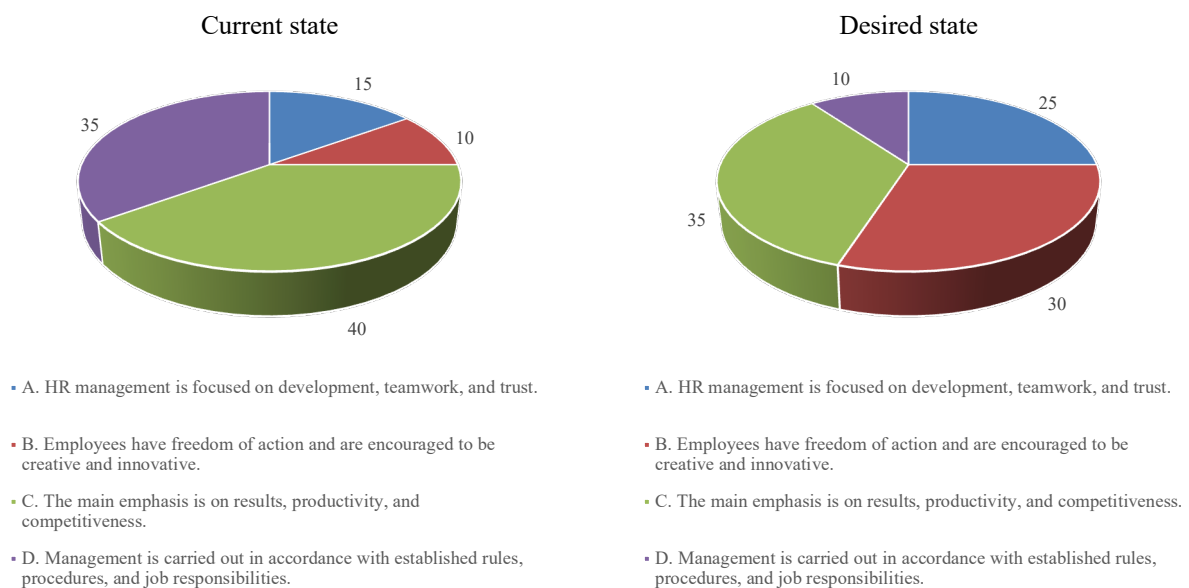


Figure 3. HR management style of the University

Sources: developed by authors

The university's **organizational glue** currently relies on formal rules, policies, and control mechanisms (40). However, the preferred culture is one rooted in values such as commitment to development, mutual respect, and loyalty (a combined 70 points across clan and adhocracy).

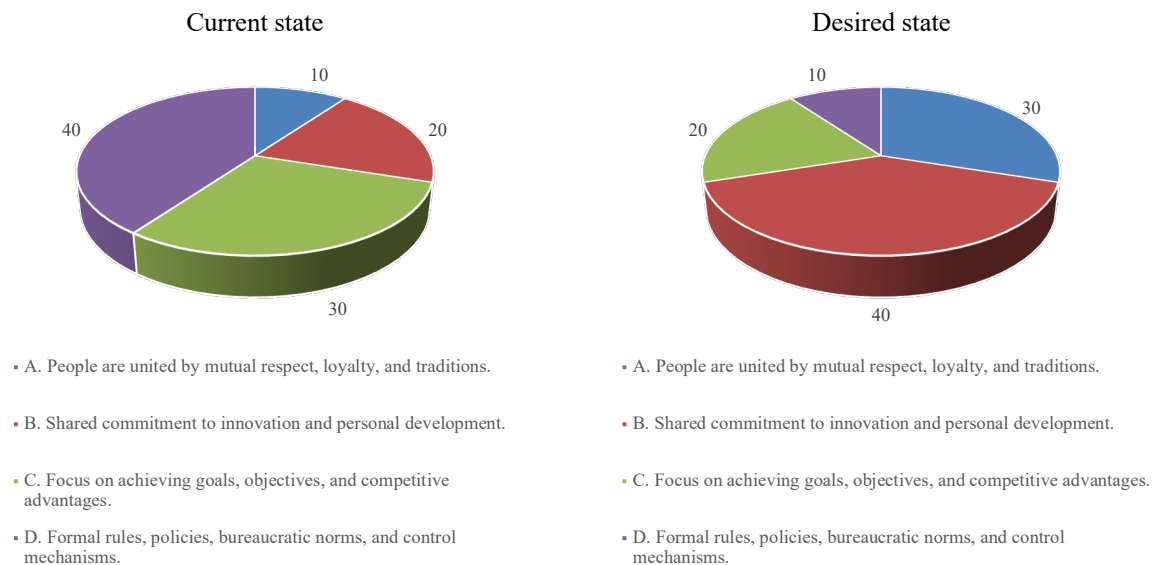


Figure 4. Leadership style of the University

Sources: developed by authors

At the level of **strategic priorities**, the current emphasis on stability (45) contrasts with respondents' preferences for human capital development (50) and innovation (25), reflecting readiness for strategic and structural transformation.

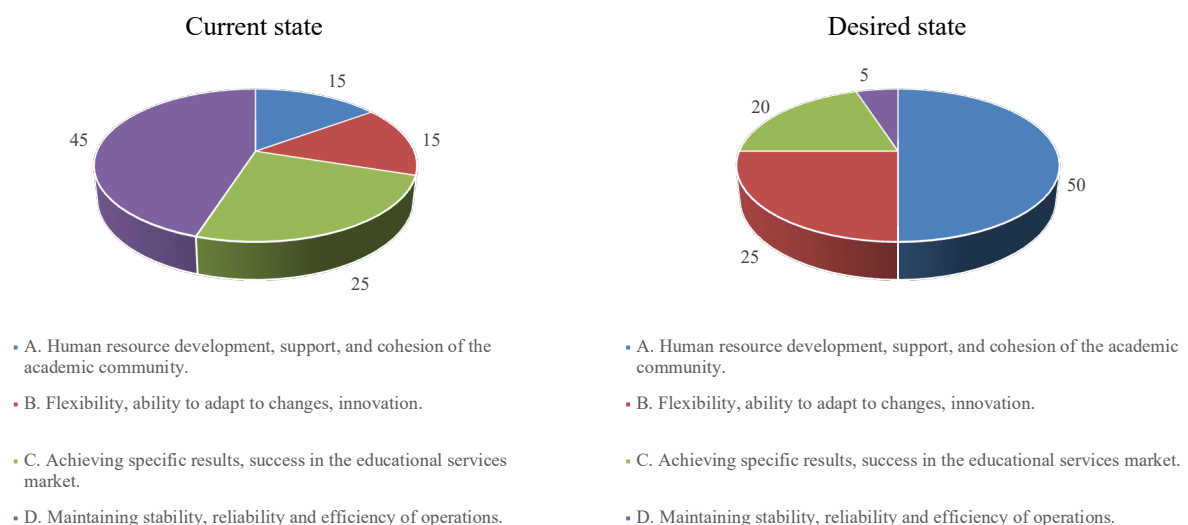


Figure 5. University strategic priorities of the University

Sources: developed by authors

Finally, the **criteria for success** reveal a clear shift in understanding success: from quantitative performance and rankings (50) to qualitative aspects such as employee and student engagement (25) and innovation (40).

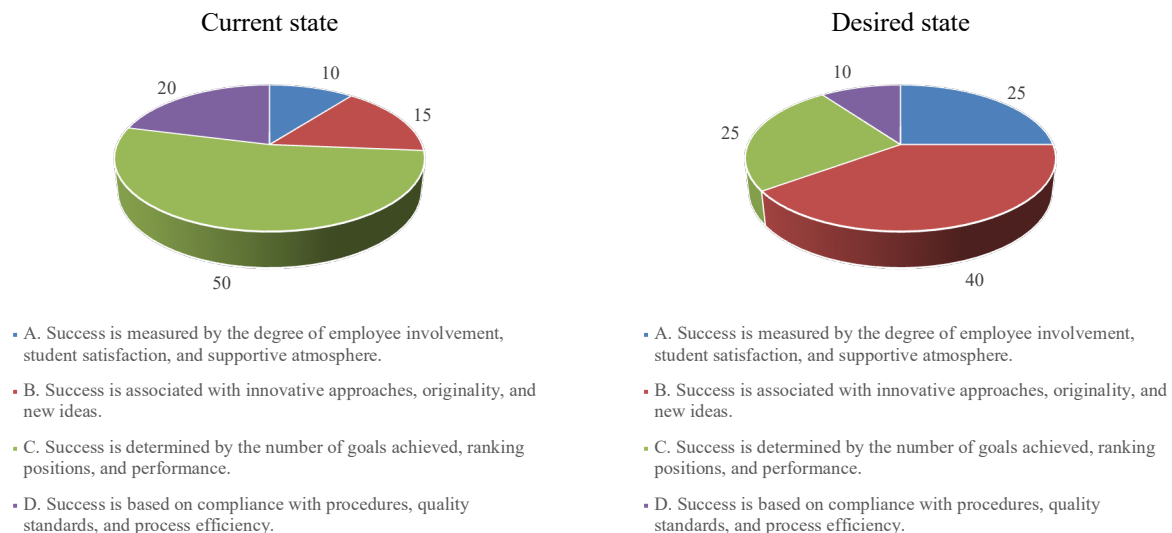


Figure 6. Leadership style of the University

Sources: developed by authors

In summary, the university shows a pronounced cultural gap between the current state (control- and procedure-oriented) and the desired state (trust-based, developmental, open, and participatory). This gap offers significant potential for initiating deep organizational transformation through:

- the adoption of transformational leadership models;
- decentralization and the development of horizontal collaboration;
- revision of internal communication to support dialogue and inclusion;
- redefinition of strategic and operational priorities around human-centered values.

Therefore, the OCAI results can serve as a foundational tool for planning cultural shifts, advancing human capital development, and building a cohesive, high-performing university community.

The survey results systematized the main challenges that Ukrainian universities face in their development (Table 1).

The table presents ten key cultural problems that undermine organizational cohesion, adaptability, and effectiveness in universities. These problems range from inherited bureaucratic structures and low internal trust to resistance to participatory leadership and the lack of strategic cultural management.

Addressing cultural problems is important for modern universities that strive to remain competitive, inclusive, and innovative. Recognizing these problems is the first step towards developing a responsive and valuable academic environment. Through purposeful leadership, strategic communication, and cultural diagnostics, universities can build a cohesive culture that supports both academic excellence and organizational sustainability.

Table 1. Key Challenges of Organizational Culture in the University

№	Challenge	Description
1	Legacy of Bureaucratic Structures	Persistence of hierarchical, rule-driven systems that inhibit flexibility, innovation, and bottom-up input.
2	Misalignment Between Declared and Practiced Values	Gap between official mission statements and actual institutional behavior undermines trust and credibility.
3	Low Internal Trust and Psychological Safety	Fear of criticism or reprisal discourages dialogue, openness, and innovation.
4	Fragmentation Between Academic and Administrative Units	Differing goals and communication styles lead to internal silos and inefficient coordination.
5	Generational and Value Gaps	Tensions between traditional and progressive views hinder cohesion and adaptability.
6	Resistance to Participatory Leadership	Continued reliance on top-down leadership limits staff empowerment and engagement.
7	Lack of Strategic Focus on Organizational Culture	Culture is often overlooked in strategic planning and performance measurement.
8	Insufficient Support for Innovation and Risk-Taking	Overemphasis on control and stability discourages experimentation and creativity.
9	Weak Internal Communication Systems	Poor communication channels lead to misinformation, disengagement, and lack of shared vision.
10	Inconsistent Implementation of Cultural Change	Change efforts lack continuity, support systems, and integration into institutional practice.

Sources: developed by authors

Discussion. The results indicate that Ukrainian universities are undergoing a cultural transition – from administrative rigidity to a more participatory and value-driven academic environment. Currently, most institutions are dominated by hierarchical and market-oriented cultural features, emphasizing structure, discipline, and output control. However, survey respondents and interview participants express a clear preference for a shift toward adhocracy and clan cultures, which promote trust, innovation, autonomy, and shared leadership.

This shift is evident across several dimensions: leadership style, personnel management, organizational identity, and definitions of success. The prevailing leadership approach is still authoritarian and procedural, but the desired model highlights transformational and emotionally intelligent leadership that inspires and empowers. Similarly, while performance and compliance dominate current personnel management practices, staff indicate a desire for more team-oriented, developmentally focused systems.

A major finding is the misalignment between formally declared institutional values (such as academic freedom and inclusion) and actual operational behavior. This dissonance undermines trust, weakens organizational identity, and complicates reform efforts. The analysis also reveals systemic challenges such as weak communication channels, resistance to shared governance, and insufficient strategic focus on culture as a performance factor.

These challenges are intensified by external stressors, especially the wartime context, which has tested the adaptability and psychological resilience of academic institutions. Universities with stronger internal cohesion, clear values, and flexible leadership structures have responded more effectively, underscoring the role of organizational culture in institutional survival.

Conclusion. Corporate culture is not merely a backdrop to organizational activity; it is a strategic asset that directly influences a university's capacity to change, lead, and serve. For Ukrainian universities, cultivating a participatory, trust-based, and value-aligned culture is essential for achieving both academic excellence and institutional sustainability. This transformation requires intentional investment in leadership development, the integration of cultural diagnostics into strategic planning, and sustained dialogue across all organizational levels. By confronting inherited bureaucratic norms and embracing collaborative cultural practices, universities can build the resilient foundations needed for long-term development—even in times of crisis.

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