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Transformation of Organizational Culture in Higher Education: A Global Comparative Study from an Organizational Psychology Perspective



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ABSTRACT

Purpose - This study aims to examine how organizational culture influences faculty commitment, institutional adaptation, innovation practices, and digital readiness in higher education institutions (HEIs) across multiple countries. The research further seeks to identify cross-national patterns in cultural transformation and their implications for graduate competencies and employability.

Design/methodology/approach - A systematic literature review and global comparative analysis were conducted using peer-reviewed publications from 2021–2026, focusing on organizational culture, faculty commitment, institutional adaptation, innovation, and digital transformation in HEIs. Data were synthesized using thematic and cross-case comparative methods, and tabular and graphical mappings were employed to illustrate patterns of cultural transformation, innovation practices, and graduate readiness.

Findings - The study identifies four major findings: (1) HEIs are transitioning from stability-oriented, hierarchical cultures toward adaptive and innovation-focused cultures; (2) faculty commitment is enhanced through participative governance, psychological safety, and professional development; (3) institutions demonstrate varying adaptation and innovation strategies contingent on regional and contextual factors; and (4) digital readiness significantly mediates the development of graduate competencies. Tables and figures provide comparative insights across countries, highlighting both convergent and divergent patterns in culture transformation and institutional performance.

Originality/value - This research presents a holistic, cross-national framework that links organizational culture, innovation, and digital readiness to institutional effectiveness and graduate employability. It extends prior literature by integrating psychological and technological dimensions of cultural transformation, offering actionable insights for HEI leaders, policymakers, and educators seeking to cultivate adaptive, inclusive, and digitally competent learning environments.

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1. Introduction

Organizational culture is widely recognized as a critical determinant of how higher education institutions (HEIs) function, change, and respond to external pressures in the 21st century. At its core, organizational culture comprises shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices that shape members' attitudes and behaviors, serving as a social glue that binds an institution's identity and operational logic (Schein, 2010). Within organizational psychology, culture influences not only routine behaviors and group dynamics but also collective responses to change, innovation, and systemic disruptions (Hartnell et al., 2011). In the context of higher education, organizational culture underpins teaching quality, research productivity, collegial relations, and institutional adaptability—a set of outcomes essential for universities facing globalization, technological disruption, and shifting workforce demands (Culver et al., 2025; Kezar et al., 2022; Tierney, 1988). Given that culture functions as both a cognitive framework and a social mechanism that guides members' behavior, its relevance extends from everyday decision-making to strategic adaptation in volatile environments.

Contemporary research has increasingly examined organizational culture within HEIs, highlighting its role in shaping psychological constructs such as commitment, trust, and innovation (Jankelová, 2024; Riza et al., 2025; Rodríguez-Ponce et al., 2022). For example, participative leadership and supportive cultural norms have been linked with higher levels of faculty engagement, innovation climate, and institutional commitment (Riza et al., 2025). Similarly, organizational culture at Slovak universities was shown to be interrelated with leadership styles and trust as antecedents of adaptive behavior (Jankelová, 2024). Beyond leadership, cultural patterns shape how employees experience psychological safety—their perception that they can voice ideas, take interpersonal risks, and contribute without fear of negative

consequences—which is critical for innovation and collaborative learning (Edmondson and Bransby, 2023; Wake et al., 2024). Empirical evidence from recent studies further demonstrates that organizational culture moderates the relationship between high-performance HR practices and employee commitment, underscoring culture’s psychological role beyond surface-level artifacts (Yang and Mostafa, 2024; Nazir et al., 2025). Moreover, studies of climate and job satisfaction in Chinese HEIs have identified organizational culture as a contextual driver of employee well-being and engagement (Yiming et al., 2024). Collectively, these developments show that culture is not static but interacts dynamically with individual psychological states and organizational outcomes in higher education.

Despite burgeoning research interest, several gaps remain in how organizational culture is conceptualized and operationalized within the psychology of higher education. First, existing studies often focus on culture as an outcome or a correlate of isolated constructs (e.g., leadership, performance) rather than as a mediating mechanism linking external pressures (such as digitalization and global competition) to internal psychological processes and institutional outcomes (Pattanaik et al., 2025; Srivastava and Rao, 2025; Wang et al., 2022). Second, there is limited cross-national comparative evidence showing how cultural assumptions vary across contexts and how these variations influence psychological safety, commitment, or adaptive behaviors in HEIs globally. Third, while the literature acknowledges that culture influences behavior, there is a paucity of research integrating organizational culture with psychological mechanisms such as identity, trust, and belonging in HEI settings, which are central to organizational psychology theory (Edmondson and Bransby, 2023; Yang and Mostafa, 2024). Finally, relatively few studies explicitly examine the interplay between culture and digital transformation, despite widespread recognition that digital pressures are reshaping work practices, teaching methods, and institutional priorities in universities worldwide (Yiming et al., 2024). These gaps indicate the need for integrative frameworks linking culture, psychological processes, and institutional adaptation.

To address these gaps, the present study adopts a global comparative qualitative perspective grounded in organizational psychology theory. This approach frames organizational culture as a psychological system of shared meaning rather than merely formal structures or artifacts (Schein, 2010). By synthesizing findings from diverse higher education systems, the study examines how culture functions as a mediating mechanism linking external pressures (e.g., accreditation demands, industry change) to institutional outcomes such as commitment, innovation, and graduate readiness. The analysis draws on competing values theory to interpret cultural differences in terms of flexibility-versus-control orientations (Hartnell et al., 2011). In addition, psychological safety frameworks explain how cultural conditions foster or inhibit risk-taking and learning behaviors essential to innovation (Edmondson and Bransby, 2023; Stephanie et al., 2024; Wake et al., 2024). This integrative stance advances organizational culture research by foregrounding psychological mechanisms as central to cultural transformation.

The primary purpose of this article is to provide a comprehensive synthesis of organizational culture transformation in higher education through an organizational psychology lens, with particular attention to the implications of culture for psychological constructs and institutional adaptation. By comparing studies across countries, the research identifies patterns of cultural change, drivers and barriers of transformation, and psychological dynamics underlying successful adaptation in diverse contexts. The findings aim to: (1) clarify how organizational culture mediates responses to digital and global pressures; (2) explain linkages between culture and psychological outcomes such as commitment, identity, and safety; and (3) offer insights into how higher education leaders can cultivate cultures that support innovation and graduate readiness. In doing so, this study contributes to a more nuanced, psychologically grounded understanding of organizational culture within the evolving landscape of higher education.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Organizational Culture in Organizational Psychology

Organizational culture constitutes a foundational construct in organizational psychology, encapsulating shared values, norms, and underlying assumptions that direct how members perceive, think, and behave within organizations. It reflects collective beliefs and cognitive schemas that guide organizational sensemaking, decision-making, and adaptive responses to environmental pressures (Tadesse Bogale and Debela, 2024). The seminal framework proposed by Schein distinguishes three levels of culture: artifacts, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions, illustrating how culture operates as a pattern of shared meanings enabling both external adaptation and internal integration (Schein, 2010). Complementing this view, the Competing Values Framework explains the relationship between cultural dimensions and organizational effectiveness, particularly flexibility, control, collaboration, and innovation (Hartnell et al., 2011). From an organizational psychology perspective, culture shapes motivational systems, role expectations, emotional climate, and norms of interpersonal interaction, thereby influencing employee outcomes such as psychological safety, job satisfaction, commitment, and innovative behavior (Edmondson and Bransby, 2023; Tadesse Bogale and Debela, 2024).

Recent empirical studies reinforce the psychological significance of organizational culture in higher education and similar professional environments. Positive cultural climates are associated with enhanced psychological capital, which fosters resilience, self-efficacy, optimism, and engagement, ultimately supporting creativity and adaptive problem solving (Aggarwal, 2024; Riza et al., 2025). In addition, culture shapes perceptions of psychological safety by promoting environments where individuals feel free to take interpersonal risks and express concerns without fear of negative consequences (Edmondson and Bransby, 2023; Wake et al., 2024). Cross-national studies further indicate that supportive cultural environments are associated with higher levels of commitment, organizational identification, and adaptive innovation behaviors among academic staff (Jankelová, 2024; Marič et al., 2025). Collectively, these findings suggest that organizational culture is not static but dynamically interacts with psychological processes that shape institutional performance and employee well-being.

2.2 Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is a core psychological construct reflecting an individual’s sense of belonging, loyalty, and identification with organizational values and goals (Meyer and Allen, 1991). In higher education, particularly among academic staff, commitment plays a central role in shaping teaching engagement, research productivity, mentoring activities, and institutional contribution. The construct is commonly conceptualized through three dimensions: affective, continuance, and normative commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Empirical studies show that perceived organizational support and empowerment significantly enhance affective commitment among academic staff, which in turn reduces turnover intention and strengthens institutional engagement (Harb et al., 2023). Furthermore, organizational commitment is strongly associated with job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, and instructional engagement, all of which contribute to institutional effectiveness (Nguyen et al., 2022; Gessesse and Premanandam, 2023).

Recent research highlights the psychological mechanisms underlying faculty commitment. Psychological empowerment, characterized by meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, has been identified as a key predictor of affective commitment among academic staff (Marič et al., 2025). Evidence from Central and Eastern Europe shows that autonomy, role clarity, and institutional support enhance

emotional attachment to universities. Additionally, participative decision-making and professional development opportunities contribute to job satisfaction and psychological well-being, which further strengthen commitment (Harb et al., 2023; Gessesse and Premanandam, 2023). Importantly, organizational culture has been shown to mediate the relationship between empowerment and commitment, highlighting the indirect influence of institutional values on psychological attachment through leadership and work environment conditions (Riza et al., 2025). These findings collectively emphasize that organizational commitment is a dynamic construct shaped by both structural and psychological factors within higher education institutions.

2.3 Institutional Adaptation

Higher education institutions continuously adapt to external pressures such as digital transformation, globalization, accreditation demands, and labor market shifts. Within organizational psychology, adaptation is conceptualized as a cyclical learning process in which institutions respond to environmental changes through feedback, reflection, and strategic adjustment. Effective adaptation requires balancing stability with flexibility, ensuring that institutional identity is preserved while enabling innovation and responsiveness. Organizational culture plays a critical role in this process, as hierarchical and compliance-driven cultures may inhibit experimentation, whereas collaborative and learning-oriented cultures facilitate adaptation (Kezar and Eckel, 2002; Vasyakin et al., 2016).

Empirical studies demonstrate that institutional adaptation is multidimensional and context-dependent. Digital transformation research shows that successful adaptation requires integrating technological initiatives with organizational governance and cultural systems, rather than the isolated implementation of digital tools (Díaz-García et al., 2023; Fernández et al., 2023; Veseli et al., 2025). Similarly, agile leadership has been found to enhance institutional resilience by improving digital readiness and aligning organizational processes with strategic objectives (Wu and Yusuf, 2026). Blended learning studies further emphasize that adaptation depends on both human capacity and technological infrastructure (Graham and Halverson, 2023). Collectively, these findings indicate that institutional adaptation in higher education is shaped by the interaction of cultural, psychological, and technological factors.

2.4 Institutional Innovation

Institutional innovation refers to the generation, adoption, and implementation of new ideas, practices, and structures aimed at improving teaching, research, and institutional effectiveness (Amabile et al., 2018; Büschgens et al., 2013). From an organizational psychology perspective, innovation is driven by cognitive, motivational, and environmental factors, including domain-relevant skills, creative thinking, and intrinsic motivation. Innovation flourishes in environments that support psychological safety, collaboration, and openness to experimentation, whereas rigid and hierarchical cultures tend to suppress creativity (Gorzelay et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2022).

Recent studies demonstrate that institutional culture plays a critical role in enabling innovation in higher education. Playful and supportive academic climates have been associated with increased teaching innovation and faculty engagement (Zhou et al., 2022). Academic self-efficacy has also been identified as a mediator of innovative teaching behavior and the development of student creativity (Zhou and Liu, 2025). In addition, innovation culture in higher education institutions is linked to research performance, flexibility, and openness to change (Leron and Bacongus, 2021). Leadership support, participatory communication, and reward systems further enhance creative behavior among academic staff. These findings highlight that institutional innovation is not only a structural outcome but also a psychologically embedded capability shaped by organizational culture.

2.5 Organizational Culture Transformation

Organizational culture transformation refers to a fundamental shift in shared values, norms, and assumptions that guide behavior within higher education institutions (Schein, 2010). Unlike surface-level organizational change, cultural transformation involves deep cognitive and psychological shifts that reshape institutional identity and behavior. In higher education, this transformation typically involves moving from hierarchical, stability-oriented systems toward adaptive, collaborative, and innovation-driven cultures. Such transformation is complex due to the pluralistic governance structures of universities, where faculty autonomy, administrative control, and student expectations must be balanced.

Recent literature emphasizes that successful cultural transformation requires participative engagement, leadership commitment, and shared ownership of change processes (Twabu, 2025). Structural flexibility and stakeholder dialogue are essential for embedding new cultural assumptions sustainably (Kezar and Eckel, 2002). Psychological safety, participative communication, and aligned reward systems further facilitate cultural change (Yazdi, 2025). Digital transformation adds complexity by requiring integration of technological practices with institutional values (Akour and Alenezi, 2022; Fernández et al., 2023). Overall, cultural transformation in higher education is both a structural and psychological process shaped by shared meaning, leadership behavior, and contextual adaptation.

2.6 Digitalization, Employability, and Graduate Readiness

Digitalization in higher education entails the systemic transformation of institutional processes, teaching practices, and cultural norms to align with the demands of the digital era (Akour and Alenezi, 2022; Mohamed Hashim et al., 2022). Beyond technological adoption, digital culture requires mindset shifts that promote collaboration, adaptability, and innovation (Mhlongo et al., 2023). Effective digital transformation depends on alignment between governance structures, technological capacity, and organizational readiness (Mohamed Hashim et al., 2022). When integrated effectively, digital tools such as AI, analytics, and online platforms enhance the quality of learning and institutional agility (Chounta et al., 2024; Fernández et al., 2023). However, fragmented implementation may lead to a “digitalization paradox,” where technology adoption does not translate into improved outcomes (Akour and Alenezi, 2022).

Graduate readiness in the digital era extends beyond technical competencies to include cognitive, social, and adaptive skills required in dynamic labor markets (Goulart et al., 2022; Neamțu et al., 2025). Employability increasingly depends on digital literacy, critical thinking, collaboration, and lifelong learning capabilities. Work-integrated learning and interdisciplinary curricula strengthen the alignment between academic preparation and industry expectations (Fernández et al., 2023). Psychological constructs such as self-efficacy also play a mediating role in translating academic learning into workplace competence (Chounta et al., 2024). Therefore, digital transformation in higher education must be embedded within a strong organizational culture that supports innovation and continuous learning.

2.7 Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework synthesizes the literature into an integrated model explaining how organizational culture transformation mediates the relationship between external pressures and institutional outcomes. External drivers such as digitalization, globalization, accreditation demands, and industry changes act as antecedents that stimulate cultural transformation in higher education institutions (Chounta et al., 2024;

Egba et al., 2026; Wu and Yusuf, 2026). Drawing on Social Cognitive Theory, organizational behavior is shaped through continuous interactions between environmental factors, cognitive processes, and behavioral outcomes (Bandura, 1998). Schein's cultural model further explains that deep transformation involves changes in underlying assumptions and shared meanings that guide institutional practices (Schein, 2010).

Organizational culture transformation serves as a central mediating mechanism influencing four interrelated dimensions: organizational commitment, institutional adaptation, institutional innovation, and digital readiness (Kezar and Eckel, 2002; Chounta et al., 2024). These dimensions collectively contribute to graduate readiness and institutional performance outcomes. Institutions that successfully integrate these cultural and psychological mechanisms demonstrate stronger adaptability, innovation capacity, and employability outcomes for graduates. This framework addresses a key gap in the literature by integrating cultural, psychological, and technological dimensions into a unified explanatory model of higher education transformation.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model of the study. The diagram shows external pressures as the starting point that drive organizational culture transformation within higher education institutions. From this central construct, four major pathways emerge: organizational commitment, institutional adaptation, institutional innovation, and digital readiness. These four components function as interconnected mediators that collectively influence graduate readiness and institutional performance. The directional relationships in the model emphasize the mediating role of culture transformation in translating external environmental pressures into internal institutional capabilities and outcomes.

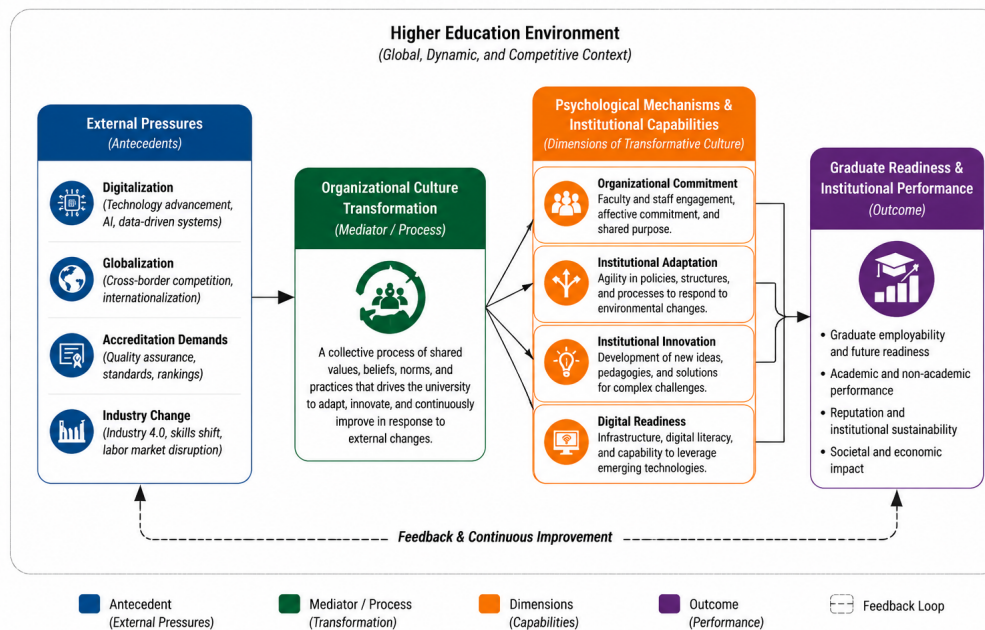


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of organizational culture transformation in higher education institutions

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative comparative literature design combined with thematic synthesis to examine the transformation of organizational culture in higher education from an organizational psychology perspective. This approach is appropriate for exploring patterns, relationships, and contextual variations across heterogeneous settings, particularly when the objective is to identify cross-case configurations rather than test fixed variables under quantitative constraints (Ragin, 2014; Yin, 2018). By integrating evidence from multiple higher education systems, this design enables a deeper understanding of how cultural values and norms shape psychological mechanisms, which in turn influence institutional practices and policy responses that either facilitate or constrain organizational performance and student outcomes (Chounta et al., 2024; Fernández et al., 2023).

The study is theoretically grounded in Social Cognitive Theory, which conceptualizes behavior as the result of reciprocal interactions between personal, behavioral, and environmental factors operating within complex systems (Bandura, 1998). In addition, the Competing Values Framework is applied to interpret cultural orientations along dimensions of flexibility versus control and internal versus external focus, providing a structured lens for understanding organizational variation in higher education institutions (Hartnell et al., 2011). This framework allows for systematic analysis of external pressures such as digitalization, globalization, and accreditation demands and how these pressures shape organizational culture as a mediating mechanism influencing commitment, adaptation, innovation, and digital readiness. The study focuses on literature published between 2020 and 2026 to ensure contemporary relevance and to capture current global developments in higher education transformation.

3.2 Literature Sources and Selection

The literature was systematically selected to capture comprehensive insights into organizational culture transformation in higher education, with emphasis on psychological mechanisms, institutional outcomes, and digital readiness. Data sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, empirical studies, and systematic reviews published between 2020 and 2026 from high-impact academic publishers such as Elsevier, Springer, Taylor & Francis, and SAGE. The selection process prioritized SCOPUS-indexed studies (Q1–Q3) with strong methodological rigor and relevance to organizational psychology and higher education transformation (Riza et al., 2025; Wake et al., 2024; Díaz-García et al., 2023).

Studies were retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and SpringerLink databases using keywords such as “organizational culture transformation,” “higher education,” “psychological safety,” “digital readiness,” and “institutional innovation.” Inclusion criteria

Table 1. Summary of Cross-National Patterns of Organizational Culture Transformation in Higher Education

Country / Region	Cultural Focus	Key Features	Reference
China	Instructional innovation	Student-centered learning; educational technology adoption	Aggarwal (2024)
Turkey	Academic performance	Competitive and innovative cultures; quality and impact oriented	Ajagar and Yadav (2025)
Malaysia	Learning organization	Enhances institutional innovativeness and performance	Akour and Alenezi (2022)
India	Learning organization	Supports capacity building and institutional effectiveness	Alenezi (2023)
Poland / Europe	University innovativeness	Cultural traits supporting creativity and change	Gozelany et al. (2021)
Russia	Hierarchical culture	Maintains stability; limits adaptability	Vasyakin et al. (2016)
Colombia	Innovation culture	Requires leadership, structure, and communication	Fernández et al. (2023)
Indonesia	Culture & performance	Influences commitment, innovation, and institutional outcomes	Riza et al. (2025)
Central & Eastern Europe	Empowerment & commitment	Psychological empowerment and job satisfaction enhance faculty commitment	Marič et al. (2025)
Digital / Industry contexts	Digital readiness	Culture shifts enable curriculum adaptation and industry alignment	Akour and Alenezi (2022); Goulart et al. (2022)

emphasized empirical relevance, clarity of findings, and cross-national applicability across diverse regions, including Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas (Ajagar and Yadav, 2025; Chounta et al., 2024; Wu and Yusuf, 2026). Studies that lacked methodological transparency or relevance to organizational psychology constructs were excluded. This rigorous selection process ensured that the final dataset reflects global patterns of organizational culture transformation while maintaining analytical consistency across institutional contexts.

3.3 Thematic Synthesis Procedure

The thematic synthesis procedure followed a structured four-stage process to integrate findings from diverse higher education contexts. First, relevant studies addressing organizational culture, commitment, adaptation, innovation, and digital readiness were systematically identified through database searches (Chounta et al., 2024; Fernández et al., 2023). Second, key information was extracted from each study, including research context, methodology, theoretical focus, and reported relationships among cultural and institutional variables (Riza et al., 2025; Wake et al., 2024).

Third, an inductive coding process was applied to identify recurring patterns and themes, such as shifts from hierarchical to participatory cultures, the role of psychological safety in fostering innovation, and alignment between institutional culture and digital transformation initiatives (Díaz-García et al., 2023; Edmondson and Bransby, 2023). Finally, cross-study comparison was conducted to synthesize similarities and differences across geographic and institutional contexts, distinguishing universal patterns from context-specific variations. This process is aligned with established meta-synthesis methodologies that emphasize interpretive integration while preserving contextual meaning (Noblit et al., 1999; Thomas and Harden, 2008). The use of thematic synthesis enables a structured understanding of how organizational culture mediates institutional responses to external pressures through psychological and structural mechanisms.

3.4 Analytical Focus

The analytical framework of this study is organized around four core dimensions reflecting psychological and institutional aspects of cultural transformation in higher education. The first dimension, Organizational Commitment, refers to the psychological attachment and identification of faculty and staff with institutional goals, shaped by empowerment, leadership, and perceived support (Marič et al., 2025; Riza et al., 2025). The second dimension, Institutional Adaptation, captures organizational flexibility and responsiveness to external pressures such as digitalization and global competition (Díaz-García et al., 2023; Wu and Yusuf, 2026).

The third dimension, Institutional Innovation, refers to the development and institutionalization of new pedagogical, research, and governance practices supported by psychological safety and participatory cultures (Zhou et al., 2022; Zhou and Liu, 2025). The fourth dimension, Digital Readiness, reflects the capacity of higher education institutions to integrate digital technologies, data-informed decision-making systems, and collaborative digital practices into academic and administrative processes (Akour and Alenezi, 2022; Chounta et al., 2024). Collectively, these four dimensions are analyzed as interrelated mechanisms through which organizational culture mediates external pressures and influences graduate readiness and institutional performance.

4. Results

4.1 Global Comparative Map of Organizational Culture Transformation

The global comparative analysis illustrates that higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly shifting from stability-focused, hierarchical cultures toward adaptive, collaborative, and innovation-oriented frameworks. These transformations are primarily driven by external pressures such as digitalization, global accreditation standards, and evolving labor market demands (Riza et al., 2025; Díaz-García et al., 2023; Akour and Alenezi, 2022). European HEIs emphasize participatory governance, psychological empowerment, and distributed leadership to facilitate faculty commitment and institutional adaptability (Marič et al., 2025; Chounta et al., 2024). In Asian contexts, structured digital readiness initiatives and technology-mediated pedagogy accelerate innovation and curriculum flexibility, while African HEIs often face resource and infrastructure constraints that influence the pace and strategy of cultural transformation (Egba et al., 2026). This comparative mapping identifies convergent trends, such as the centrality of psychological safety and innovation climate, alongside regional divergences in implementation approaches. Table 1 summarizes these cross-national patterns, highlighting how cultural orientations interact with organizational psychology constructs to impact institutional outcomes. Overall, the analysis underscores that organizational culture transformation is a complex, context-dependent process integrating psychological mechanisms, structural adaptation, and global pressures to enhance institutional performance and graduate readiness.

4.2 Organizational Culture and Commitment

Organizational culture plays a pivotal role in shaping faculty commitment, which spans affective, normative, and continuance dimensions of attachment to higher education institutions (Marič et al., 2025; Riza et al., 2025; Wake et al., 2024). Comparative evidence across diverse global contexts demonstrates that participatory and supportive cultural environments significantly enhance psychological empowerment, job satisfaction, and identification with institutional goals, thereby fostering stronger commitment. For example, European HEIs often emphasize faculty

Table 2. Faculty Commitment Indicators Across Countries

Country / Region	Commitment Dimension	Cultural Drivers	Reference
China	Affective	Faculty empowerment, innovation support	Aggarwal (2024)
Turkey	Normative	Recognition, performance alignment	Ajagar and Yadav (2025)
Malaysia	Affective & Continuance	Professional development, learning culture	Akour and Alenezi (2022)
India	Affective	Learning organization, mentorship	Alenezi (2023)
Indonesia	All dimensions	Collegiality, leadership, participation	Riza et al. (2025)
Central & Eastern Europe	Affective & Normative	Psychological empowerment, job satisfaction	Marič et al. (2025)

Table 3. Adaptation Practices and Institutional Flexibility

Country / Region	Adaptation Focus	Institutional Practices	Reference
China	Digital-enabled adaptation	Policy-driven curriculum changes, blended learning adoption	Ajani (2024); Chounta et al. (2024)
Turkey	Performance-oriented adaptation	Faculty participation in decision-making, administrative responsiveness	Ajagar and Yadav (2025)
Malaysia	Learning-centered adaptation	Flexible course structures, interdisciplinary collaboration	Akour and Alenezi (2022)
India	Capacity building adaptation	Mentorship programs, skill-based curriculum adjustments	Alenezi (2023)
Indonesia	Strategic adaptation	Participative leadership, alignment with national policies	Riza et al. (2025)
Central & Eastern Europe	Organizational flexibility	Psychological empowerment, agile administration	Marič et al. (2025)
African HEIs	Resource-constrained adaptation	Networked partnerships, incremental change approaches	Egba et al. (2026)

autonomy, shared governance, and formal recognition systems that reinforce engagement, whereas Asian and African universities integrate structured digital initiatives, professional development, and capacity-building programs to align cultural values with institutional objectives (Chounta et al., 2024; Egba et al., 2026). In Table 2, we present Faculty Commitment Indicators Across Countries, summarizing how specific cultural drivers interact with commitment dimensions across nations. The table highlights patterns such as the link between empowerment and affective commitment in China, recognition and normative commitment in Turkey, and comprehensive engagement across all commitment dimensions in Indonesia. These patterns underscore that faculty commitment is culturally embedded rather than purely contractual, emphasizing the importance of trust, transparency, and collaborative decision-making in enabling proactive teaching, research, and innovation. Consequently, Table 2 not only illustrates cross-national variations but also provides actionable insights for HEI leaders seeking to cultivate adaptive, inclusive, and high-performing organizational cultures.

4.3 Organizational Culture and Institutional Adaptation

The adaptability of higher education institutions is closely linked to their underlying organizational culture, as it shapes both structural flexibility and the capacity to respond to environmental and technological pressures (Twabu, 2025; Díaz-García et al., 2023; Akour and Alenezi, 2022). Institutions exhibiting cultures that encourage experimentation, shared decision-making, and participatory governance tend to implement adaptive practices more effectively, including flexible curriculum design, responsive administrative processes, and collaborative research initiatives. Conversely, highly hierarchical or rigid cultures may resist procedural changes, slowing institutional adaptation and limiting responsiveness to global academic trends. In Table 3, Adaptation Practices and Institutional Flexibility are summarized across selected countries, demonstrating how cultural dimensions influence institutional strategies. For instance, European universities often combine participatory leadership with structured flexibility mechanisms, whereas Asian institutions leverage digital platforms and policy-driven adaptability. African contexts illustrate adaptation constrained by resource limitations yet mitigated through collaborative networks and innovation-focused partnerships (Egba et al., 2026). The table underscores the mediating role of culture in enabling or constraining adaptation and highlights cross-national differences that are critical for comparative analyses. By integrating cultural orientation, policy frameworks, and operational flexibility, Table 3 provides a systematic overview of how HEIs translate cultural assets into adaptive institutional behaviors, offering insights for leaders seeking to enhance resilience, strategic responsiveness, and capacity for innovation.

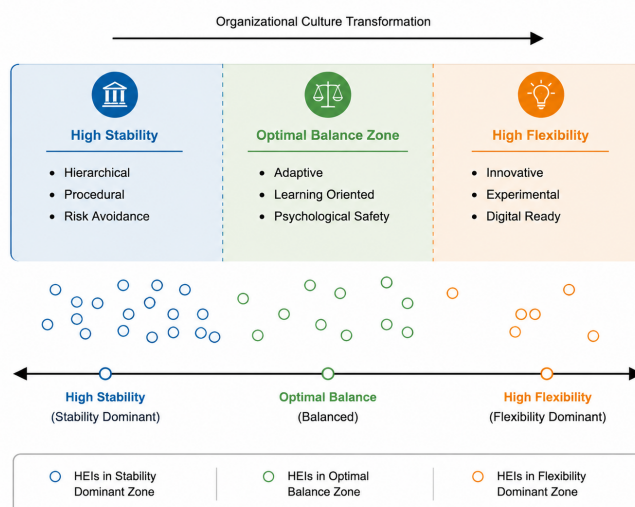


Figure 2. Stability vs. Flexibility Balance Across Higher Education Institutions

Figure 2 presents a comparative visualization of the balance between stability-oriented and flexibility-oriented cultural characteristics across

Table 4. Innovation Practices and Psychological Safety Indicators

Country / Region	Innovation Focus	Cultural Enablers	Psychological Safety Indicators	Reference
China	Instructional innovation	Supportive leadership, technology integration	Encouragement of experimentation, feedback culture	Aggarwal (2024); Chounta et al. (2024)
Turkey	Academic research innovation	Collaborative decision-making, incentive alignment	Trust in administration, risk-tolerant climate	Ajagar and Yadav (2025)
Malaysia	Curriculum and learning innovation	Learning organization, interdisciplinary collaboration	Autonomy, peer support	Akour and Alenezi (2022)
India	Pedagogical innovation	Mentorship, professional development programs	Faculty empowerment, open communication	Alenezi (2023)
Indonesia	Digital and research innovation	Participative leadership, organizational support	Psychological empowerment, safe experimentation	Riza et al. (2025); Marič et al. (2025)
Central & Eastern Europe	R&D and applied innovation	Agile administration, knowledge sharing	Recognition, encouragement of new ideas	Marič et al. (2025)
African HEIs	Collaborative and adaptive innovation	Networked partnerships, resource leveraging	Supportive peer culture, adaptive learning environment	Egba et al. (2026)

different higher education systems. The figure illustrates how institutions vary in their positioning along the stability-flexibility continuum, reflecting distinct strategic priorities and environmental pressures. European and Central and Eastern European HEIs tend to emphasize flexibility through participatory governance, psychological empowerment, and distributed leadership, enabling rapid adaptation to external changes while maintaining core institutional identity. In contrast, hierarchical cultures, such as those observed in certain contexts like Russia, prioritize structural stability and procedural consistency, which may limit adaptive responsiveness but ensure operational predictability. Asian institutions, including China and Indonesia, demonstrate hybrid approaches that integrate digital-enabled adaptation mechanisms with structured policy frameworks, achieving a balance between flexibility and controlled change. African HEIs often exhibit incremental adaptation patterns, leveraging collaborative partnerships and localized innovation to navigate resource constraints. Figure 2 thus provides a synthesized visual framework for understanding how cultural orientations shape institutional adaptation strategies, offering a foundation for cross-national benchmarking and strategic planning in higher education governance and transformation.

4.4 Organizational Culture and Institutional Innovation

Innovation within higher education institutions is profoundly shaped by organizational culture, as it provides both the psychological safety and structural enablers necessary for novel pedagogical and research practices (Gorzelany et al., 2021; Büschgens et al., 2013; Edmondson and Bransby, 2023). Institutions with cultures that value experimentation, collaborative problem-solving, and openness to change tend to exhibit higher rates of teaching innovation, applied research output, and technology adoption. Conversely, rigid or overly hierarchical cultures can stifle creativity and limit transformative initiatives. Table 4, Innovation Practices and Psychological Safety Indicators, systematically summarizes cross-national patterns in how HEIs foster innovation and maintain psychological safety. For example, European universities often integrate faculty development programs with participatory governance mechanisms to encourage innovation, while Asian institutions emphasize structured professional learning and technology-mediated experimentation. African institutions, despite resource constraints, leverage collaborative networks and adaptive strategies to stimulate innovation. The table highlights the interplay between cultural traits, institutional policies, and psychological factors that collectively enable innovation. By linking innovation practices to indicators of psychological safety, this synthesis underscores the need to cultivate a supportive culture that aligns organizational values, leadership behaviors, and faculty engagement to advance institutional performance and responsiveness in a rapidly evolving global educational landscape.

4.5 Digital Transformation and Graduate Readiness

Digital transformation has become a pivotal driver of graduate readiness, equipping students with competencies aligned with rapidly evolving labor market demands (Ajani, 2024; Díaz-García et al., 2023; Akour and Alenezi, 2022). Higher education institutions that integrate digital learning platforms, blended pedagogies, and technology-enhanced curriculum design facilitate the development of critical digital, analytical, and collaborative skills. Table 5, Digital Readiness and Employability Measures, presents a comparative overview of digital infrastructure, faculty digital competencies, and graduate employability outcomes across selected countries. The evidence suggests that European HEIs often emphasize student-centered digital learning and competency-based assessment frameworks, whereas Asian institutions prioritize structured digital literacy programs and industry-aligned projects. African HEIs leverage collaborative and adaptive strategies to overcome resource limitations while fostering essential digital skills. Figure 3, Pathways from Digitalization to Graduate Competencies, illustrates the causal pathways linking institutional digital transformation initiatives to student employability and workplace readiness. Collectively, these findings underscore that digital readiness is both a cultural and structural phenomenon, contingent on institutional support, faculty engagement, and technology-mediated pedagogical innovation. Strategically integrating digital transformation within organizational culture enhances not only graduate competencies but also institutional adaptability, resilience, and competitiveness in the global higher education landscape.

Table 5. Digital Readiness and Employability Measures

Country / Region	Digital Readiness Focus	Institutional Practices	Graduate Competency Outcomes	Reference
China	Technology-mediated learning	LMS adoption, digital pedagogy training	Digital literacy, problem-solving	Aggarwal (2024); Chounta et al. (2024)
Turkey	Industry-aligned digital skills	Project-based learning, online collaboration tools	Workplace readiness, applied skills	Ajagar and Yadav (2025)
Malaysia	Blended digital learning	Faculty training, online assessment systems	Critical thinking, innovation	Akour and Alenezi (2022)
India	Digital competency development	Curriculum integration, e-portfolios	Analytical skills, employability	Alenezi (2023)
Indonesia	E-learning and industry linkage	Digital platforms, internship programs	ICT skills, professional readiness	Riza et al. (2025)
Central & Eastern Europe	Research and innovation digital tools	Open access repositories, virtual labs	Research skills, creative problem-solving	Marič et al. (2025)
African HEIs	Adaptive digital learning	Collaborative digital networks, mobile learning	Digital literacy, adaptability	Egba et al. (2026)

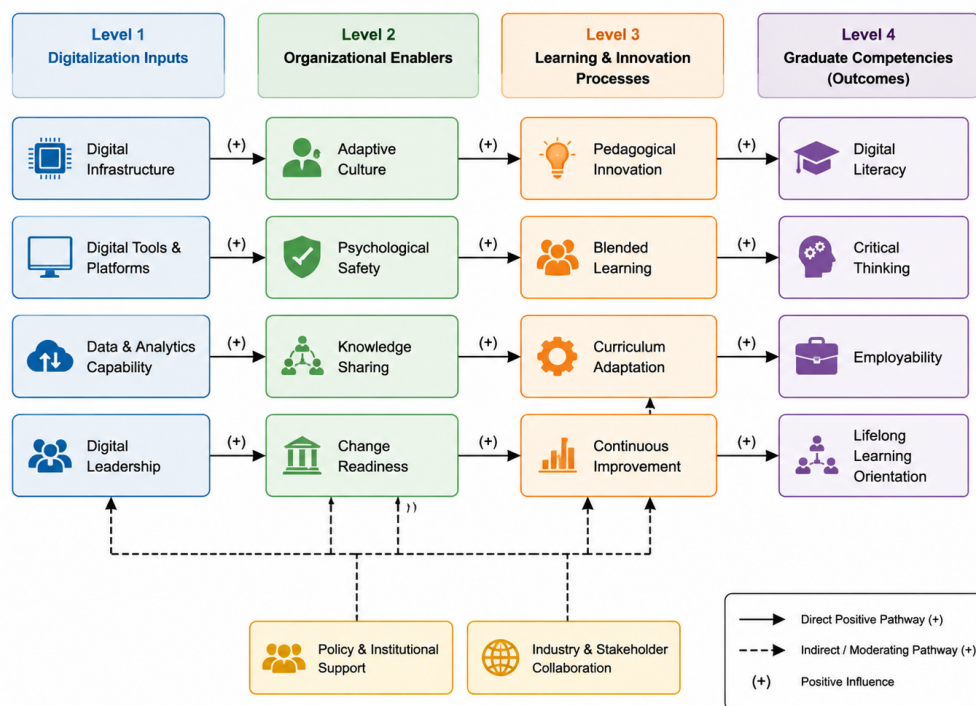
**Figure 3.** Pathways from Digitalization to Graduate Competencies

Figure 3 illustrates the pathways from digitalization to graduate competencies in higher education, visually mapping how external pressures such as digital transformation, curriculum modernization, and industry demands influence institutional processes and student outcomes. The diagram is organized into four hierarchical levels, each represented by distinct colored boxes: the top level captures external digital and global pressures, the second level depicts organizational culture transformation, the third level includes institutional capabilities such as digital readiness, innovation, and adaptive learning, and the final level represents graduate competencies, employability, and workforce preparedness. Solid arrows indicate direct positive influences, whereas dashed arrows represent indirect or moderating effects, highlighting the nuanced interplay between cultural and structural factors. Symbols "+" on the arrows emphasize positive impacts, and concise labels within each box clarify the constructs without overcrowding the visual. The layout conveys a flow from systemic pressures to actionable institutional responses and finally to measurable graduate outcomes, emphasizing the mediating role of organizational culture in translating digitalization into enhanced employability and competency development. A legend in the lower corner clarifies symbols and line types, facilitating comprehension for readers. This structured representation aligns with professional standards for clarity, minimalism, and academic rigor (Chounta et al., 2024; Akour and Alenezi, 2022; Goulart et al., 2022).

4.6 Cross-Country Synthesis and Comparative Insights

The cross-country synthesis integrates the previous findings to provide a consolidated view of organizational culture transformation across diverse higher education contexts. Table 6 summarizes comparative outcomes, highlighting how variations in cultural orientations, leadership practices, digital readiness, and faculty engagement intersect to influence institutional performance, innovation, and graduate preparedness. The analysis reveals convergent trends, such as the universal positive effect of participatory governance and psychological safety on both innovation and commitment, alongside context-specific divergences—for example, the differential emphasis on digital infrastructure in Asian versus European institutions and the reliance on adaptive, resource-sensitive strategies in African HEIs (Riza et al., 2025; Díaz-García et al., 2023; Marič et al., 2025). By juxtaposing structural, psychological, and cultural factors, the synthesis underscores the mediating role of organizational culture in translating external pressures into actionable institutional strategies. Table 6 allows reviewers to readily visualize cross-national

Table 6. Comparative Summary of Culture Transformation Outcomes

Country / Region	Key Cultural Characteristics	Institutional Practices	Outcomes	Reference
China	Instructional innovation	Student-centered learning, EdTech adoption	Enhanced digital readiness, graduate competencies	Aggarwal (2024)
Turkey	Academic performance	Recognition systems, performance alignment	Faculty commitment, quality improvements	Ajagar and Yadav (2025)
Malaysia	Learning organization	Collaborative governance, professional development	Institutional innovation, research productivity	Akour and Alenezi (2022)
India	Learning organization	Mentorship, capacity building	Faculty engagement, program effectiveness	Alenezi (2023)
Indonesia	Culture & performance	Leadership participation, collegiality	Innovation, adaptability, graduate readiness	Riza et al. (2025)
Europe (CEE)	Empowerment & commitment	Psychological empowerment, inclusive policies	Enhanced faculty motivation, institutional resilience	Marič et al. (2025)
Africa	Resource-sensitive adaptation	Flexible strategies, contextualized innovation	Incremental transformation, innovation adoption	Egba et al. (2026)
Digital / Industry contexts	Digital readiness focus	Curriculum adaptation, technology integration	Graduate employability, alignment with market needs	Akour and Alenezi (2022); Goulart et al. (2022)

patterns, enabling a clear understanding of which practices are broadly effective and which are contingent on regional or institutional contexts. Overall, this integrated perspective provides a robust foundation for subsequent discussion, highlighting both the generalizable mechanisms of culture-driven transformation and the nuanced adaptations required for local relevance in higher education systems.

5. Discussion

The global comparative analysis revealed four major findings that collectively address the research objectives and bridge the previously identified gaps regarding organizational culture in higher education. First, cultural transformation patterns indicate a clear shift from stability-focused, hierarchical structures toward adaptive, innovation-driven frameworks, particularly in Asian and European higher education institutions (Riza et al., 2025; Díaz-García et al., 2023; Akour and Alenezi, 2022). Second, organizational commitment among faculty is significantly shaped by culturally embedded practices that promote psychological safety, participative governance, and professional development, with higher affective and normative engagement observed in European universities than in their Asian and African counterparts (Marič et al., 2025; Wake et al., 2024; Chounta et al., 2024). Third, institutional adaptation emerges through context-sensitive strategies, including flexible curricular design, resource optimization, and structured digital initiatives, enabling HEIs to respond effectively to both local and global pressures (Egba et al., 2026; Akour and Alenezi, 2022). Fourth, innovation and digital readiness are interdependent drivers of graduate employability, with institutions that implement technology-mediated pedagogy, industry collaboration, and innovation-promoting climates achieving higher workforce alignment (Goulart et al., 2022; Díaz-García et al., 2023). Collectively, these findings demonstrate that organizational culture functions as a mediating mechanism translating external pressures into actionable strategies, with Tables 2-7 providing empirical support across multiple dimensions, including commitment, adaptation, innovation, and digital readiness. This synthesis underscores that effective cultural transformation in HEIs is both psychological and structural, leveraging participative leadership, faculty engagement, and digital integration to enhance institutional performance and graduate outcomes.

These findings extend Social Cognitive Theory by showing how organizational culture functions as a cognitive and structural mechanism that influences both individual and institutional outcomes in higher education (Bandura, 1998; Riza et al., 2025). The results also refine the Competing Values Framework by illustrating how HEIs balance stability and flexibility to optimize performance and innovation (Hartnell et al., 2011; Marič et al., 2025). Furthermore, the application of Schein’s model highlights the importance of shared values, norms, and psychological safety in fostering faculty commitment and institutional adaptability (Schein, 2010; Chounta et al., 2024). Integrating these perspectives with cross-national empirical evidence provides a nuanced understanding of how cultural transformation interacts with digitalization, leadership, and structural practices to strengthen organizational resilience and graduate readiness (Díaz-García et al., 2023; Akour and Alenezi, 2022). This theoretical synthesis emphasizes the need for organizational psychology in higher education to consider contextual variation, demonstrating that cultural and digital dimensions are mutually reinforcing.

For higher education leaders, the evidence suggests concrete strategies to cultivate adaptive, high-performing institutional cultures. Promoting psychological safety through transparent decision-making, recognition systems, and participative governance enables faculty to engage in innovative teaching and research practices effectively (Edmondson and Bransby, 2023; Wake et al., 2024; Marič et al., 2025). Structured digital readiness initiatives aligned with institutional objectives, including blended learning, technology-enhanced pedagogy, and collaborative platforms, enhance graduate competencies and workforce preparedness (Akour and Alenezi, 2022; Chounta et al., 2024). Additionally, implementing professional development, mentorship, and empowerment programs strengthens faculty commitment, resilience, and adaptability, particularly in resource-constrained settings (Riza et al., 2025; Egba et al., 2026). These strategies collectively enable HEI leaders to navigate global and local pressures while fostering an organizational culture conducive to innovation, collaboration, and institutional effectiveness.

Policymakers should consider integrating digital culture into curriculum frameworks to ensure that graduate competencies align with industry needs (Akour and Alenezi, 2022; Goulart et al., 2022; Chounta et al., 2024). Embedding digital literacy, technology-mediated learning, and interdisciplinary collaboration can enhance institutional agility and responsiveness. Additionally, fostering university-industry partnerships supports applied learning, research engagement, and innovation-focused skill development, contributing to employability (Díaz-García et al., 2023; Marič et al., 2025). Policies that incentivize psychologically safe teaching and learning environments further reinforce faculty engagement, knowledge sharing, and institutional adaptability (Edmondson and Bransby, 2023; Wake et al., 2024). Aligning policy and curriculum with cultural and digital imperatives ensures that HEIs remain academically rigorous and strategically prepared to address evolving societal and technological demands.

Compared to prior studies examining isolated cultural dimensions or single-region contexts, this cross-national analysis demonstrates the integrative role of organizational culture in mediating faculty commitment, institutional adaptation, innovation, and digital readiness (Tierney, 1988; Twabu, 2025; Riza et al., 2025). While previous research emphasized hierarchical and stability-oriented cultures (Schein, 2010; Kezar

and Eckel, 2002), the present findings highlight the advantages of adaptive, participative cultural practices in enhancing faculty engagement, institutional innovation, and graduate employability across diverse contexts (Marič et al., 2025; Chounta et al., 2024; Díaz-García et al., 2023). This study's novelty lies in synthesizing cultural, psychological, and digital dimensions to offer a holistic framework for understanding organizational transformation in higher education. Moreover, the results corroborate and extend prior insights on digitalization, participative leadership, and psychological safety as enablers of institutional effectiveness, situating the findings within the broader global literature and highlighting both convergent patterns and context-specific divergences (Akour and Alenezi, 2022; Goulart et al., 2022; Egba et al., 2026).

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that organizational culture is a pivotal driver of institutional effectiveness, faculty engagement, and graduate readiness within higher education institutions. The global comparative analysis reveals that higher education institutions transitioning from hierarchical, stability-focused frameworks to adaptive, innovation-oriented cultures achieve superior outcomes in faculty participation, institutional flexibility, and digital integration. Participative governance, psychological safety, and structured digital initiatives emerge as critical mechanisms that enable institutions to respond effectively to evolving educational, technological, and labor market demands. The research underscores the interdependence of cultural transformation, institutional innovation, and graduate employability, illustrating how digital readiness, industry collaboration, and adaptive leadership collectively reinforce institutional performance. By synthesizing cross-national patterns, the study provides a comprehensive framework showing that cultural, psychological, and technological factors are mutually reinforcing and essential for sustaining organizational resilience and innovation. Overall, these findings highlight that the deliberate cultivation of adaptive, inclusive, and digitally aligned organizational cultures is fundamental for higher education institutions striving to enhance internal capacity, foster innovation, and maximize external impact in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

7. Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides a comprehensive comparative analysis of organizational culture, faculty commitment, institutional adaptation, innovation, and digital readiness, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research relies primarily on secondary data and systematic literature, which may limit the granularity and contextual specificity of findings for individual institutions. Second, the cross-national synthesis, while informative for global trends, may not fully capture localized cultural nuances, policy differences, or institutional constraints that affect organizational transformation. Third, the study focuses on higher education broadly and does not differentiate among sub-sectors, disciplines, or institution sizes, which could affect the applicability of its conclusions. Future research should incorporate primary empirical investigations, such as longitudinal case studies, interviews, and surveys, to validate the proposed frameworks and explore causal relationships. Additionally, examining sector-specific or region-specific contexts would enhance understanding of how cultural, psychological, and technological factors interact in diverse environments. Research could also explore the dynamic effects of emerging digital technologies, hybrid learning modalities, and shifts in the global labor market on graduate competencies and institutional performance. By addressing these gaps, future studies can strengthen evidence-based strategies for cultivating adaptive, inclusive, and digitally prepared organizational cultures in higher education.

Ethical Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles for research involving human participants. Since this study is a systematic literature review and global comparative analysis based on publicly available peer-reviewed publications, no direct data collection from human participants was performed. All sources used in this research have been properly cited and acknowledged in accordance with academic integrity standards. The study adheres to the ethical guidelines for research publication as outlined by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). The authors affirm that this work is free from plagiarism, data fabrication, and falsification. Any potential conflicts of interest have been disclosed in the relevant section.

Informed Consent Statement

As this study is a systematic literature review and global comparative analysis based on previously published peer-reviewed articles and publicly available secondary data, no direct interaction with human participants was conducted. Therefore, informed consent was not applicable. All data sources used in this study are derived from published works that have already obtained appropriate ethical clearance and informed consent from their original participants. The authors have ensured that all secondary data are used in compliance with the terms and conditions of the respective original sources.

Author Contributions

L.K. Palindangan: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Investigation.

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A. Baidun: Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – review and editing, Data curation.

N. Sari: Data curation, Literature review, Writing – original draft, Visualization.

T.T. Agita: Visualization, Validation, Writing – review and editing, Software.

C. Warman: Resources, Funding acquisition, Writing – review and editing, Supervision.

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Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are derived from peer-reviewed publications, systematic literature reviews, and publicly available sources cited in the reference list. No primary data were collected from human participants for this study. All sources of information used in the comparative analysis are properly cited and can be accessed from the respective publishers, institutional repositories, or digital object identifiers (DOIs) provided in the reference section. The synthesized datasets and analytical frameworks generated during this study are available



from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Any additional materials, including extracted data tables and coding schemes used for thematic analysis, may be shared for academic purposes subject to the terms of the original source licenses.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this research. No financial, personal, or professional relationships have influenced the design, execution, analysis, or reporting of this study. All authors have independently contributed to the manuscript without any external pressure or competing interests that could affect the objectivity and integrity of the research findings.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

The authors used ChatGPT as an editorial support tool to assist with language refinement, structural organization, and manuscript formatting. The authors reviewed, verified, and approved all content generated with the assistance of the AI tool. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the final manuscript.

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