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MODERN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: RECONCEPTUALIZATION AND EMERGING TRENDS

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Abstract. Organizational culture is recognized as a critical driver of sustained competitive advantage. In contemporary scholarly discourse, it is progressively conceptualized as a strategic and adaptive system that supports innovation, organizational agility, and long-term employee engagement. Although academic interest in this domain has increased, relatively few studies have systematically integrated these dimensions to explain how the digitalization of work processes, communication, and decision-making is reshaping cultural patterns within organizations. The aim of this article is to identify the major transformations in the concept of organizational culture by examining its early historical foundations and tracing its evolution through to contemporary expressions characteristic of organizations in the digital era. The study is based on a systematic literature review and theoretical analysis of existing research. The major value of this paper is a comprehensive perspective on the temporal transformation of organizational culture. This paper contributes to the existing research by identifying several distinct and increasingly emerging forms of organizational culture. In particular, ethical culture, agile culture, digital culture, and learning culture have been identified as prominent directions in the recent literature reviewed. Nevertheless, contemporary conceptualizations of organizational culture include key elements of classical approaches, including shared values, beliefs, and attitudes.

Keywords: organizational culture, corporate culture, workforce culture.

JEL Classification: M14, M54, L22.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary business environment, organizations are undergoing profound transformations driven by digitalization, globalization, and evolving workforce expectations. These developments have challenged traditional conceptions of organizational culture, which were previously understood as a relatively stable configuration of norms and practices aimed at ensuring control and predictability (Cao et al., 2025). The purpose of this article is to analyze the historical development of organizational culture and its theoretical models, and, through comparative analysis, to evaluate these models and assess their relevance in contemporary conditions. A further objective is to identify emerging trends in modern organizational culture within the context of a dynamically changing business environment. To achieve these objectives, the research was conducted in three stages, each applying specific methods. The first stage was literature selection and data collection.

At this stage, a systematic literature review method was applied in order to identify relevant academic sources. Peer-reviewed articles were collected from the Scopus and Web of Science databases. The following inclusion criteria were employed: articles published between 2019 and 2025 in order to quarantine the most recent research in the field; publications written in English to maintain consistency in data interpretation; and studies containing the keywords "organizational culture," "corporate culture," or "workforce culture." Exclusion criteria included articles published before 2019 (with the exception of foundational/seminal theoretical works), studies not directly related to the research topic, and duplicate records across databases. In total, 478 articles were identified, of which 289 were indexed in Scopus and 189 in Web of Science. Applying content analysis as a filtering method, non-relevant studies were excluded, resulting at a final sample of 29 contemporary scientific sources. In addition, 16 foundational/seminal works were incorporated to support the theoretical grounding of the research. In total, 45 sources were used. The second stage is a historical analysis of organizational culture. In this stage, a comparative analysis method was applied

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to examine the evolution of organizational culture as a concept. Foundational theoretical works were systematically analyzed to reconstruct the historical context and to identify the key mechanisms through which early management theories contributed to the emergence and development of organizational culture. This stage enabled a structured understanding of how the concept has evolved over time. The third stage is analysis of contemporary trends and model evaluation. In the final stage, a comparative and systematic analysis was conducted to evaluate the main organizational culture models and identify emerging trends. This analysis focused on comparing the core elements, assumptions, and orientations of different models, as well as assessing their relevance in contemporary organizational settings. Through this approach, key trends such as ethical, learning and innovation-oriented, agile, and digital organizational cultures were identified and systematized. In this article modern organizational culture is vastly conceptualized as a flexible, dynamic, and continuously transforming phenomenon. Despite these substantial environmental changes affecting organizational culture, the classical models proposed by Schein (1980), Deal and Kennedy (1989), Cameron and Quinn (1982), and Denison (1990) have retained their relevance. The rationale underlying the sequencing of the models presented in this article is according to the concepts behind them. The discussion proceeds from the conceptualization of organizational culture (Schein, 1980), followed by cultural typologies (Deal & Kennedy, 1989), then the diagnostic framework for organizational culture (Cameron & Quinn, 1982), and concludes with an organizational model specifically oriented toward assessing organizational performance (Denison, 1990). While these models remain relevant to a certain extent, research shows that they have been continuously adapted and extended in specific directions. First, the growing demand for trust and accountability has emphasized ethical culture as a critical aspect of organizational culture (Treviño & Nelson, 2014). Second, accelerating business growth and the rapid obsolescence of knowledge, driven by innovation, have increased the importance of learning and innovation-oriented cultures (Odor, 2019). Third, the increasing frequency of uncertain and disruptive events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflicts, and economic downturns has contributed to the emergence of agile culture as a distinct orientation (Denning, 2018). Finally, the advancement of digitalization has led to the development and recognition of digital organizational culture as a key cultural form (Kiefer et al., 2021). Furthermore, organizational culture, like mechanistic and organic organization types, can be seen along the same spectrum. On one end, culture may be mainly oriented toward artifacts, formal rules, and standardized processes (Deal & Kennedy, 1989). On the other end, it may be more strongly values-based, emphasizing shared values, behaviours, and knowledge as primary organizing principles (Fernandes et al., 2023). The research indicates that, regardless of which contemporary conceptualization of organizational culture is adopted, digital culture should not be considered as an unimportant phenomenon. In contrast, it forms an integral dimension of organizational culture that spreads throughout and is built within all of the contemporary orientations in the study of organizational culture.

2. Conceptualization of organizational culture

2.1. Historical developments and the conceptualization of organizational culture

The concept of organizational culture finds its roots in the domain of organizational studies, a scholarly discipline that gained prominence approximately five to six decades ago. Two events in historical-economic contexts have played a critical role in shaping organizational culture, transitioning it from an anthropological framework to one fundamentally grounded in organizational psychology: 1) emergence of transnational enterprises and 2) globalization. The first event was the emergence of transnational enterprises, particularly in the aftermath of the Second World War. It became imperative to comprehend corporate culture, which is influenced by national culture, as it was essential for businesses (Hofstede, 2001). Contributions to the exploration of organizational culture were made by March and Simon (1958/1993). At early stages, Culture was seen as rigid rules, top-down decision making, hierarchical structures, which were suitable for mechanistic type of organizations (Burns & Stalker, 1968). Deal and Kennedy (1989) describe organizational culture as being concerned with materialistic elements such as office furniture, employee attire, and dominant colour schemes. A distinction is noted between the attire of high-ranking employees, who typically wear suits, and that of ordinary employees. Within such a corporate culture, it is suggested that one might conclude an individual's promotional status based on the furnishings of their workspace. At this early stage of organizational culture theory (Vasumathi et al., 2025), culture was perceived primarily as a collection of symbols, as previously mentioned. Subsequently, the conceptualization of organizational culture underwent a significant transformation, evolving from a focus solely on materialistic aspects to cover intrinsic elements as well.

The second event was the phenomenon of globalization. With globalization becoming increasing important during the 1970s and 1980s, there arose a necessity to adapt to global business dynamics, including mergers and acquisitions, as well as the exploration of new markets. By examining the impact of globalization on organizational culture Stefanovska and Tanushevski (2016) imply that corporations are required to adapt their organizational culture to fit a global approach. To be competitive in the global marketplace, organizations must show some consistency in values and behaviors. The study indicates that as globalization progresses, the influence of national culture on organizational culture decreases, giving rise to the concept of a "World culture". Morgan (2006) suggests

that, like a living organism, an organization must adapt to its external environment to ensure survival and requires resources, such as personnel and stability, for its growth. During the early 1980s, researchers started to highlight the significance of organizational culture as a part of organizations. For instance, Deal and Kennedy (1989) claimed that organizational culture is predominantly shaped by the industrywide, organizations within the same sector tend to demonstrate notably similar cultural characteristics. During the 1980s and 1990s, significant research on organizational culture was conducted by Alvesson and Spicer (2023), who critically examined the common ideas of culture, which at the time were often considered to be more superficial or surface-level rather than being phenomena intrinsically linked to individual understanding, behaviour, and emotional responses (Alvesson & Berg, 1992). Furthermore, he objected to the concept of a "Unified culture", proposing instead that multiple cultures could coexist within a single organization (Alvesson, 2002).

Nowadays, the most widely recognized definition of Organizational Culture is attributed to Schein (1980), who described it as a synthesis of values, assumptions, and artifacts. Nevertheless, there exist numerous alternative conceptualizations of organizational culture. Subsequently, Tichy (1983) referred to it as a "normative glue" that unites the organization, Schneider (1983) defined it as a pattern of principal systems that facilitate organizational productivity, Hofstede (2001) conceptualizes organizational culture as the set of attitudes among employees that distinguishes them from one another. Later, this definition has been expanded by stating that organizational culture comprises a set of beliefs, values, work styles, and relationships that differentiate one organization from another (Hofstede, 2001). Denison (1990) offered a definition of organizational culture as a shared system of values and practices that shapes how an organization functions and achieves its objectives. Fernandes et al. (2023) in their research give the recent definition of Organizational culture: "the set of values, norms, goals, and expectations shared by all members of an organization that aids in improving their commitment and performance".

A review of these definitions of culture indicates that both classical and contemporary academic research converge on several core dimensions of organizational culture. First, all definitions conceptualize organizational culture as fundamentally collectivistic, insofar as it is constituted by and dependent upon a social group rather than isolated individuals. Second, culture is consistently described as a normative and regulatory framework that guides and constrains the behaviour of organizational members. Third, culture is portrayed as an integrative mechanism that promotes cohesion and alignment among members in the pursuit of shared objectives.

Cultural characteristics are also related to the type of organization. According to Burns and Stalker (1968), organizations can be classified into mechanistic and organic types based on their organizational design. In mechanistic type of organizations, organizational culture is primarily oriented toward tangible, visible artifacts. This form of culture is often described as a "process culture," in which symbols such as office furnishings, employee attire, and dominant colour schemes constitute core cultural elements. By contrast, organizations with an organic design typically characterized as more flexible, decentralized, and adaptive, exhibit cultures that are less focused on material artifacts and more deeply rooted in underlying values, beliefs, assumptions, and behavioural norms (Table 1). On this basis, it is possible to distinguish between two principal cultural emphases: an artifact-focused (tangible) culture and a values-focused (intangible) culture.

Table 1. Organizational types and their dominant cultural orientations (source: created by authors)

Type of organization	Cultural orientation	Authors, year
Mechanistic	Observable structural and symbolic determinants that configure employee experience and govern normative behavioral patterns	Burns and Stalker (1968); Deal and Kennedy (1989)
Organic	Intangible cultural determinants that are embedded within organizational value structures, epistemic frameworks, and normative behavioral expectations	Tichy (1983); Shein (1980); Schneider (1983); Denison (1990); Hofstede (2001); Fernandes et al. (2023)

A review of the scholarly literature indicates that, in its initial stages of conceptual and empirical development, organizational culture was predominantly shaped by mechanistic organizational characteristics, with a pronounced emphasis on process orientation. As organizational culture evolved, it increasingly came to be influenced by attributes characteristic of organic organizational forms, in which values assume a central role. This developmental trajectory supports the conceptualization of organizational culture as a phenomenon that integrates diverse elements of both mechanistic and organic organizational types, encompassing aspects ranging from formal processes to underlying value systems.

2.2. Comparative analysis of organizational culture models

It is essential to acknowledge that the majority of the authors mentioned above have developed models or assessment tools related to Organizational Culture, which continue to demonstrate their usefulness within the business sector. Among the extensively used models of Organizational Culture, of them was developed by Schein (1980) in which he divides culture into three primary elements: artifacts, espoused values, and basic

assumptions. The significance of Schein's model lies in its reconceptualization of organizational culture as a three-layered construct. It also makes a distinction between the organization's supported identity and its fundamental reality. This theoretical development shifted the study of organizational culture from a focus on surface-level manifestations to deeper mental structures, showing that the very existence and functioning of an organization are closely connected from its cultural foundations. Schein's model of organizational culture is crucial for business leaders, potential employees, and organizational clients in understanding the culture at all three levels. This model still has its relevance today, although it may not fully deal with phenomena such as digitalization, artificial intelligence, hybrid work models, and engaging with younger generations.

Deal and Kennedy (1989) developed an organizational culture model consisting of four elements: values, heroes, rites and rituals, and the cultural network. The organizational culture framework proposed by Deal and Kennedy (1989), similar to the preceding model, makes an important contribution to the development of research on organizational culture. However, their model is considerably more practical and administrative in orientation, as it explains the mechanisms through which organizational culture directly affects organizational performance and describes how managers can intentionally shape, reinforce, and use culture as a strategic resource. Deal and Kennedy further through organizational heroes, narratives, practices, and informal communication networks made culture visible in practice by pointing out its examples. They shifted the organizational culture toward a framework based on real-world business contexts backed by evidence.

Subsequently, Cameron and Quinn (1982) developed a classification system for organizational culture based on four typologies: clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy cultures. Their research indicates that 80% of organizations display these organizational culture types, where one is crucial and other types serve as supplementary. Their model reduces complexity by categorizing organizational culture into four distinct and recognizable archetypes, thereby helping organizations to better understand and evaluate their cultural patterns and related behaviours. At the same time, the model provides various leadership approaches, linking clan culture with the role of mentor, adhocracy with innovator, market culture with competitor, and hierarchy with coordinator. The framework demonstrates its relevance across a variety of organizational contexts, including the public sector, start-ups, and large corporations. In comparison to more classical and earlier organizational models, this approach is significantly categorical, analytical, and application-oriented.

Denison (1990) split organizational culture into four key elements: involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission. Each of these elements consist of three indices. The element of involvement is about employees taking part in organizational tasks, the decision-making process, and their overall engagement. Consistency refers to being on the same frequency with the organizational values, assessing whether members align those values, decisions, and actions. Adaptability is the ability to adjust to external factors, such as political, economic, social, technological, legal, or environmental. According to Denison, the ability to adapt to external events is a substantial success factor. The final element, mission, is defined as the strategic directions and goals of the organization. This component of the model deals with fundamental issues such as the organization's purpose, its trajectory, and the metrics for measuring success. Denison (1990) does not measure the level of importance of any element, however he emphasizes the necessity for organizations to incorporate all these elements, regardless the significance of their impacts. Denison (1990) argues that understanding these four key elements of culture (involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission) assists an organization to maintain stability and enhance employee engagement. Unlike many other scholarly frameworks, Denison's model is both empirically measurable and intended to facilitate strategic goals, as it links organizational culture directly to business performance. All four of his cultural traits, namely involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission, are associated with organizational effectiveness. The model statistically demonstrates that specific cultural traits correlate with key performance indicators such as profitability, growth, and quality, thereby contributing to the reconceptualization of organizational culture from a "soft" construct to a critical strategic driver of performance. A comparative analysis of the four aforementioned organizational culture models is presented in Table 2.

Manekar (2024) posits that organizational culture is a dynamic phenomenon, constantly evolving and dependent on a multitude of factors such as leadership style, organizational strategy, and the resources available to the organization, including human resources. The construct of organizational culture continues to be extensively investigated in contemporary research across a wide range of contexts, including the digital era, and from multiple theoretical perspectives. Contemporary scholars conceptualize organizational culture in the digital era as an autonomous construct (Islam, 2025) and examine it in relation to multiple dimensions, including employee productivity and performance (Nzuva & Kimanzi, 2022; Almaamari & Alaswad, 2021; Trisninawati et al., 2025), as well as its temporal development and transformation (Sonawane, 2021).

The research advances an observation grounded in prior research on artifacts-focused (tangible) and values- focused (intangible) cultural focus depending on organizational type (Deal & Kennedy, 1989; Schein, 1980; Denison, 1990; Fernandes et al., 2023). Namely that both cultural focuses are contextually appropriate depending on the organization's stages of development. Even today, artifacts-based (tangible) cultural configurations can be

observed in smaller-scale and less corporately mature organizations, and such configurations may further vary across national contexts. Building upon prior research, this research reshapes organizational culture as a multifaceted phenomenon constituted by an ensemble of physical artefacts, formalized regulations, organizational systems, value structures, behavioural patterns, and the level of technological and digital sophistication, and applicable to organizations exhibiting varying stages of organizational development at a given point in time.

Table 2. Comparative examination of foundational organizational culture model (source: created by author)

Criteria	Schein (1980)	Deal and Kennedy (1989)	Cameron and Quinn (1982)	Denison (1990)
Core conceptual focus	Culture conceptualized as a multi-level system of shared fundamental assumptions	Organizational culture can be conceptualized as a performance-driving system of norms that is continuously shaped and conditioned by the external business environment	Organizational culture conceptualized as a structured configuration of competing value dimensions that collectively determine and constrain organizational effectiveness	Culture conceptualized as a constellation of empirically derived attributes linked to organizational effectiveness
Key theoretical contribution	Proposed a multi-layered conceptual framework that systematically differentiates between observable, manifest cultural expressions and deeper, tacit assumptions that operate predominantly at a preconscious or unconscious level	Conceptualized organizational culture as an adaptive regulatory mechanism that develops in response to industry-specific risk conditions and iterative, performance-based feedback processes	Advanced and systematically elaborated the Competing Values Framework, with a particular focus on organizational paradoxes and the structural tensions among competing value orientations	Empirically demonstrated associations between specific cultural attributes and quantifiable organizational performance indicators
Link to organizational performance	Culture exerts an indirect causal influence on outcomes by shaping individual and collective behavioral repertoires, which, in turn, organize the emergence of patterned dynamics and determine the configuration of terminal system states	Contextual, the effectiveness is contingent upon the degree of congruence between the prevailing organizational culture type and the specific structural, competitive, and regulatory conditions of the industry	Indirectly, efficacy is conditioned by the equilibrium established among competing value domains	Direct, statistically validated associations with key performance dimensions, including profitability, growth, quality, and stakeholder engagement
Strengths	Exhibits substantial theoretical rigor; explains mechanisms of cultural stability and resistance to change; serves as a foundational framework for the development of subsequent models	It prioritizes theoretical simplicity, foregrounds the critical role of environmental contingency, and enables a systematic and analytically tractable typological taxonomy of organizational environments	Exhibits high conceptual clarity, possesses substantial heuristic value, is characterized by operational simplicity, and facilitates the integration of leadership and effectiveness theories	Integrates organizational culture with strategic orientation and performance outcomes; grounded in empirical evidence; validated across multiple industries
Limitations	Difficult to operationalize through standardized quantitative indicators; diagnostic procedures are highly resource-intensive; exhibits limited predictive specificity	Demonstrates limited empirical robustness, is characterized by insufficient psychometric validation, and exhibits reduced explanatory power	Propensity for reductionism through the classification of phenomena into four discrete categories, accompanied by insufficient consideration of more profound and latent cultural strata	A potential form of methodological reductionism arising from an exclusive reliance on trait-based, quantitative assessment procedures, which may insufficiently capture or systematically underrepresent latent, structurally embedded, and unconscious psychodynamic processes

3. Emerging trends

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for the global transition toward remote and hybrid work models, challenging the conventional views of workplace culture. At the same time, growing emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), along with generational shifts in employee values and expectations, demands a restructuring of culture strategies. Furthermore, digital tools, analytics, and artificial intelligence are changing how employees experience leadership, collaboration, and trust. In this context, it becomes important to investigate how organizations change and sustain culture in a digital world. The business environment redefines modern organizational culture into certain developmental trajectories. The current crisis of trust and increasing pressures for transparency have led to a clear need for the development of an ethical organizational culture. The fast growth of knowledge and the accelerated pace at which existing knowledge becomes outdated have encouraged the emergence of a learning- and innovation-oriented culture. Furthermore, external shocks such as pandemics, armed conflicts, and the resulting uncertainty have increased the demand for organizational agility, thereby contributing to the formation of adaptive and agile cultural paradigms. Finally, ongoing digital transformation processes have directly facilitated the emergence and consolidation of a distinct digital organizational culture. In this article, the following specific manifestations of organizational culture have been examined in greater depth: (1) ethical organizational culture, (2) learning and innovation-oriented culture, (3) adaptive or agile (change-oriented) culture, and (4) digital organizational culture.

Ethical corporate culture constitutes a specific subset of the broader organizational culture and is sustained through the complex interplay and alignment of formal policies, structural arrangements, leadership authority, and informal organizational systems, including employees' behaviors and shared norms. Treviño and Nelson (2014) conceptualized the construct of ethical organizational culture and subsequently developed an ethical culture questionnaire that integrates key components such as the role of top management, organizational incentives for ethical behaviour, and sanctions for ethical violations. The series of global events, including the 2007–2009 financial crisis, escalating environmental challenges, growing economic inequality, and the COVID-19 pandemic intensified the interest in ethical culture and business ethics. Moreover, Martínez-Caro et al. (2020) argue that one of the principal drivers of financial crises has been a lack of ethical conduct in management. This period formed a turning point, as corporate governance began to include ethical considerations alongside legal compliance. In particular, the 2017 report of the NACD Blue Ribbon Commission recommended that boards of directors enhance their monitoring of organizational culture (Martínez-Caro et al., 2020). The newness of the concept of organizational culture is not due to the introduction of ethics into the business environment; ethical considerations have existed for a long time, although largely at an individual level. Historically, the personal ethical values and norms of managers played a central role. The contemporary shift consists in the transition from individually based ethics to a comprehensive organizational ethical system, which is institutionalized through formal policies, codes of conduct, reporting mechanisms, and related structures. Ethical leadership plays an important role in organizational development, as leaders function as primary ethical referents and role models for employees (Alblooshi & Nojumddin, 2025; Le & Nguyen, 2023). Moreover, an ethical organizational culture is closely and systematically linked to organizational management, decision-making processes, sustainability practices, and the implementation of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles (Metwally et al., 2019; Yun et al., 2023). Empirical evidence further indicates that the sustained efficiency of an organization requires the systematic integration of an ethical culture into its structures and practices (Zahari et al., 2024). Ethics is no longer regarded as a mere "nice-to-have" attribute, but rather as an integral component of organizational strategy and a critical determinant of sustainable organizational performance. The concept of ethical culture guides employees in resolving ethical dilemmas in their everyday activities and routine operations while promoting fairness in decision-making through internal rules, regulations, and codes of conduct, and brings an ethical perspective to organizational management. Ethical organizational culture is often interpreted as a distinct subset of organizational culture which reflected shared values, norms, and beliefs about ethical behaviour and how ethical issues are detected and resolved within the organization. These shared cognitive and normative frameworks shape employees' ethical reasoning, decision-making processes, and behavioural choices (Roy et al., 2024). At the structural level, ethical culture is put into practice through formal organizational systems, particularly codes of ethical conduct, incentive and reward mechanisms, and disciplinary or sanctioning procedures (Cabana & Kaptein, 2026). The effective prevention of illegal and unethical conduct in organizations necessitates the concurrent presence of the following components: codes, officer roles, training, and helplines (Cabana & Kaptein, 2026). Taking on a behavioural and cultural systems perspective, Treviño and Nelson (2014) conceptualized ethical culture resulting from the combined effect of formal and informal organizational systems that shape ethical and unethical behaviour. Their Ethical Culture Questionnaire (ECQ) represents the major innovation introduced by the concept of ethical culture: previously, ethical culture was not measurable and lacked any systematic mechanism for its assessment. The introduction of the ECQ tool allowed its formal measurement, thereby transforming ethical culture into an evidence-based construct rather than a purely philosophical notion. In the contemporary world, ethics is now viewed less as just obedience and

more as a culture-oriented paradigm. Organizations increasingly emphasize shared norms, ethical reasoning, and the alignment between values and behaviour, rather than relying solely on adherence to legal regulations (Roy et al., 2024).

As noted above, knowledge becoming rapidly obsolete due to accelerated technological advancement has created a growing demand for learning-oriented organizational cultures. A learning-oriented organizational culture plays a central role in fostering innovation, as it is one of the main predictors of innovative capacity, which, in turn, underpins organizational sustainability (Achdiat et al., 2023). The authors conceptually distinguish among an organizational learning culture, the learning organization, and an innovation culture. The notion of the learning organization, often referred to as the "fifth discipline," represents a larger system in which structures and processes are purposely designed to support organizational learning. The learning organization, first systematically articulated by Senge (1990), has subsequently been recognized as a novel paradigm in the study of organizational culture. In this perspective, the learning organization is viewed as the outcome or manifestation of a well-established organizational learning culture (Odor, 2019). A learning-oriented culture innovates through the reorientation of learning from a primarily transactional activity to a strategic organizational function, changing its emphasis from isolated training programs to a fundamental principle embedded throughout the organization. Innovation culture is typically defined through the characteristics and behavioural tendencies of its members (employees), such as open-mindedness, openness to change, collaborative orientation, and the capacity to learn from failure (OECD & Eurostat, 2018). Empirical evidence indicates that an organizational learning culture is positively and directly associated with organizational innovation (Amoa-Gyarteng & Dhliwayo, 2024). According to a substantial body of empirical and theoretical research, in order to maintain competitiveness in increasingly dynamic and complex environments, organizations must set up effective organizational learning processes and transform themselves into learning organizations, which systematically identifies learning needs, the structured acquisition and dissemination of knowledge while enabling environment that supports continuous learning (Odor, 2019). In a widely cited and conceptually influential definition, Senge (1990) describes learning organizations as "…organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together." Taken together, these concepts delineate an emergent direction in contemporary organizational culture, one that is dynamic, adaptive, and future-oriented, and that explicitly positions learning and innovation as core mechanisms of long-term organizational viability.

Globalization, digitalization, and various forms of crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have contributed to the emergence and diffusion of adaptive, agile, or change-oriented organizational culture. Consequently, different scholars employ distinct labels for this type of culture, while largely referring to the same foundational construct (Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Denning, 2018; Magistretti & Trabucchi, 2025). Kotter and Heskett (1992) introduce the concept of an "adaptive culture" characterized as one that embraces change and innovation, and that facilitates continuous adjustment to evolving business environmental conditions. Other scholars refer to a similar phenomenon as "agile-as-a-tool and agile-as-a-culture" (Magistretti & Trabucchi, 2025). Authors contend that an agile-oriented culture enhances an organization's capacity for strategic adaptation to shifts in the business environment. They conceptualize such a culture as one that prioritizes speed, creativity, flexibility, and innovation (Magistretti & Trabucchi, 2025). Denning (2018) describes a similar cultural pattern as an "agile culture," focusing on cross-functional collaboration and systematic experimentation as its core features. Despite the diversity in terminology across these authors, they specifically come together on one idea: a culture that prioritizes openness to change, rapid responsiveness, adaptability, and creativity within a constantly evolving business environment. The conducted research shows that an agile organizational culture introduces a new paradigm regarding how change is perceived within organizations. Whereas change was previously regarded as an episodic phenomenon, in the contemporary context it is increasingly understood as continuous. Consequently, an agile organizational culture is not designed for a stable environment preserved with minimal alteration, but rather for an environment dealing with continuous instability and change.

Rapidly advancing digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, and the Internet of Things (IoT), have profoundly transformed contemporary business practices (Reisberger et al., 2024). The epidemic of these technologies has facilitated the emergence of digital organizational cultures and novel work practices (Baojing et al., 2024). In recent years, the global COVID-19 pandemic has played a crucial role on organizational culture (Spicer, 2020). COVID-19 has reshaped work-related requirements and served as a catalyst for technological innovations that support remote and hybrid work arrangements (Reisberger et al., 2024). These developments have, in turn, contributed to increased employee satisfaction associated with "working from home" arrangements (Orešković et al., 2023). So-called digital culture influences leadership styles, employee well-being, and the dynamics of employee employer relationships (Klein, 2020). It is important to acknowledge that digital culture makes up one of the key contemporary directions in the evolution of organizational culture. Kiefer et al. (2021) conceptualize the construct of "Digital Innovation Culture" and specify it as consisting of the following dimensions: corporate entrepreneurship, employee

participation, organizational agility, and structural configuration, error tolerance and risk propensity, open-mindedness and learning orientation, customer and market orientation, ecosystem orientation, digital orientation and perceived necessity of innovation, digital competencies and resources, and internal knowledge sharing and collaboration. The authors stress that the interplay and potential synergistic effects of these need to be studied more empirically in-depth.

All the fore contemporary cultures mentioned above can be understood as adaptive responses to macro-level forces that shape modern organizations. Ethical culture showcases an organizational reaction to crises of trust; learning and innovation-oriented culture serves as a response to the rapid obsolescence of knowledge; agile culture develops to cope with environmental dynamism; and digital culture arises in response to technological disruptions. These forms of organizational culture have evolved genuinely, shaped by context-driven developments rather than as products of artificial or purely superficial initiatives

4. Discussion

This study explores how organizational culture has changed in contemporary business environments, redefining traditional definitions (Shein, 1980; Deal & Kennedy, 1989; Denison, 1990; Hofstede, 2001) and connecting them to new cultural trends emerging under the influences of digitalization, globalization, and changing workforce expectations. Building on the classical distinction between mechanistic and organic organizational types, the findings suggest that organizational culture remains structured by two fundamentally distinct yet co-existing orientations. Mechanistic type (Burn & Stalker, 1968) primarily foregrounds tangible, structurally realized cultural attributes, including formalized rules, standardized procedures, physical work environments, and visible artefacts. In contrast, organic type (Tichy, 1983) prioritizes intangible cultural dimensions, such as shared values, systems of meaning, behavioural norms, collective rituals, and employee sense-making processes. First, the findings indicate that these orientations should not be viewed as stages that follow one another. Instead, organizations can simultaneously take on different levels of corporate and organizational maturity, which as a result determine whether tangible or intangible cultural mechanisms take priority. In return, contemporary organizations may manifest predominantly artefact-centered cultures or strong, values-based culture, independent of the historical context in which they operate in. Second, this duality becomes particularly salient when considering the four identified cultural paths. Ethical culture (Cabana & Kaptein, 2026), for instance, combines mechanistic components (e.g., formal codes of conduct, compliance infrastructures, and sanctioning mechanisms) with organic components (e.g., shared moral norms and internalized value commitments). Similarly, a learning-oriented culture (Roy et al., 2024) assumes formal knowledge-management processes while concurrently relying on informal knowledge exchange, conversation, and psychological safety. Accordingly, contemporary cultural evolution is better conceptualized not as a linear transition from mechanistic to organic forms, but as an ongoing, dynamic recombination and mutual articulation of both orientations. The findings suggest that contemporary organizational culture constitutes a multidimensional phenomenon, described by a dynamic equilibrium between stable and flexible structural and behavioral elements. The results of the systematic review revealed a clear tendency toward the combination of these four cultural trajectories as the main way organizations respond to modern environmental and strategic challenges. Furthermore, these findings align with the research of Cao et al. (2025) that indicates that digital organizational culture is likely to intensify, driven by the rapid adoption of digital technologies and artificial intelligence and their expanding impact how organizations are structured, operate, and employee behaves. Although the four trajectories manifest as analytically distinct patterns, digital organizational culture may function as an integrative, amplifying mechanism for the other three. Digital infrastructures increase organizational transparency (thereby reinforcing ethical oversight), accelerate knowledge dissemination (thereby strengthening a learning-oriented culture), and shorten feedback cycles (thereby enhancing organizational agility). Accordingly, digital culture should not be understood as a merely additional trajectory; rather, it changes the structural and procedural conditions under which ethical, learning, and adaptive cultures start and are maintained. This integrative mechanism may explain the apparent tendency of digital organizational culture to assume an increasingly central and amplified role in emergent organizational forms. The findings suggest that organizational effectiveness relies on the joint use of ethical, learning-oriented, adaptive, and digital cultures. Consequently, leaders should formalize ethical norms and associated governance systems (Alblooshi & Nojumddin, 2025), cultivate a learning-conducive environment (Odor, 2019), and develop an agile mindset that helps adapt to ongoing change (Denning, 2018). At the same time, they must ensure fast and effective responses to digital transformation. Overall, instead of these trajectories being treated as a discrete phenomenon, they should be incorporated into a coherent organizational culture. Organizations should pay greater attention to the development and adaptation of contemporary organizational culture orientations in order to remain competitive in a rapidly changing environment. The findings of this study highlight the importance of integrating elements of learning, agile, ethical, and digital organizational cultures into organizational practices. This study is limited to a theoretical analysis based on two databases (Scopus and Web of Science) and 16 foundational/seminal works, which provided a structured basis for understanding the evolution of

organizational culture and identifying emerging trends. However, this selection does not encompass the full range of existing theoretical perspectives. Other relevant foundational models and more recent empirical studies may not have been included due to the defined selection criteria. Therefore, while the study contributes to a conceptual understanding of developing trends, it does not aim to fully reconceptualize organizational culture. Future research could build on these findings by conducting empirical investigations to examine how emerging cultural orientations are applied in practice and to validate the theoretical insights presented in this study.

5. Conclusions

This study facilitated a reconceptualization of modern organizational culture by combing a systematic literature review with a comparative theoretical analysis grounded in mechanistic and organic organizational types. In parallel, the synthesis of the reviewed literature demonstrated that global environmental dynamics, most notably globalization, large-scale societal disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic, intergenerational shifts in the workforce, and the rapid transformation of work practices are actively altering key patterns of organizational culture. Across the analysed studies, four increasingly prominent cultural trajectories become significantly important: ethical organizational culture, learning and innovation-oriented culture, adaptive or agile (change-oriented) culture, and digital organizational culture. Practitioners should foster an ethical culture to ensure team safety and increase trust and transparency. Also, to promote innovation, practitioners should invest more in learning opportunities by fostering a learning organizational culture. To increase organizational efficiency, organizations should invest more in digitalization and enhance their team members' digital competency. The study conceptualizes organizational culture and extends organizational culture theories by conceptually identifying the main developing trends. While the study is chiefly concerned with theoretical analysis, it lacks empirical research. Future research could examine emerging trends in organizational culture and their effects on overall organizational performance more in-depth. In summary, to maintain organizational competitiveness in a rapidly growing business environment, it's vital to revisit organizational culture and adapt it to new trend.

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