CZU: 378.011.3-051:378.4:005.73 **https://doi.org/10.59295/sum5(195)2026_12**

DOMAINS OF ACADEMIC STAFF ENGAGEMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSITY ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

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The present article investigates the main domains through which academic staff participate in the formation and consolidation of university organizational culture, departing from the view that faculty shape, carry, and renew institutional norms through their daily professional conduct. Based on interpretivist organizational theory and a thematic synthesis of foundational and contemporary scholarship, the study traces the specific mechanisms through which shared assumptions and values are internalized by academic staff and expressed in their professional conduct, identifying the distinctive roles they assume as guardians and transformers of institutional identity. Particular attention is given to the conditions that facilitate the transition from professional disengagement to meaningful institutional involvement, with emphasis on knowledge management, pro-innovation academic climates, and the alignment of individual professional trajectories with the broader mission and values of the institution. The analysis argues that staff engagement is what makes organizational resilience possible, and concludes that building cultures of genuine collaboration and reflection, supported by action research methodologies and participatory forms of academic leadership, offers a workable basis for institutional development and adaptability under contemporary pressures of educational change.

Keywords: *organizational culture, academic staff, higher education institutions, pro-innovation environments.*

ARII DE IMPLICARE A PERSONALULUI ACADEMIC ÎN MODELAREA CULTURII ORGANIZAȚIONALE UNIVERSITARE

Prezentul articol analizează dimensiunile implicării personalului didactic universitar în dezvoltarea culturii organizaționale a instituțiilor de învățământ superior. Demersul investigativ urmărește modul în care premisele fundamentale și valorile împărtășite sunt internalizate și transpuse în practică de către cadrele didactice, delimitând rolurile specifice pe care acestea le exercită în calitate de vectori de transmitere și participanți activi la configurarea identității instituționale. Studiul examinează strategii validate în literatura de specialitate pentru facilitarea tranziției de la lipsa de implicare la un nivel ridicat de angajament, cu accent pe managementul cunoașterii și climatul favorabil inovării. Rezultatele evidențiază faptul că participarea personalului didactic constituie un determinant al rezilienței organizaționale, realizată prin corelarea sistematică a obiectivelor profesionale individuale cu misiunea și valorile universității. Concluziile relevă că promovarea unei culturi a colaborării și a practicii reflexive, în special prin valorificarea cercetării acționale și a leadership-ului participativ de tip orizontal, contribuie la creșterea performanței instituționale și la consolidarea capacității de adaptare în contextul globalizării educaționale.

Cuvinte-cheie: *cultură organizațională, cadre didactice universitare, instituții de învățământ superior, climat favorabil inovării.*

Introduction

In his 1988 treatise, Edgar H. Schein conceptualized organizational culture as the deep, unspoken assumptions a group develops while learning to survive externally and function internally and subsequently transmitted to new members as the normatively and cognitively appropriate model through which organizational reality is to be perceived, interpreted, and acted upon [16]. What makes this conceptualization useful is its insistence on depth: cultural assumptions work quietly, below conscious awareness, giving members a common reference point when institutional signals seem contradictory or unclear [16]. Because organizational culture operates at this foundational level, it reaches into management styles, institutional priorities, and the everyday conduct of organizational life [14].

Research in educational management shows that universities with coherent organizational cultures are better positioned to pursue collective goals, embed their mission in practice, and hold together under

external pressure [8]. At a broader level, organizational culture is how a university marks out its identity and holds onto it as global pressures push institutions toward uniformity [1].

Methodological scholarship introduces two distinct models (see Figure 1) for analyzing these dynamics at different institutional strata, as elaborated by Tomàs Folch and Ion (2009).

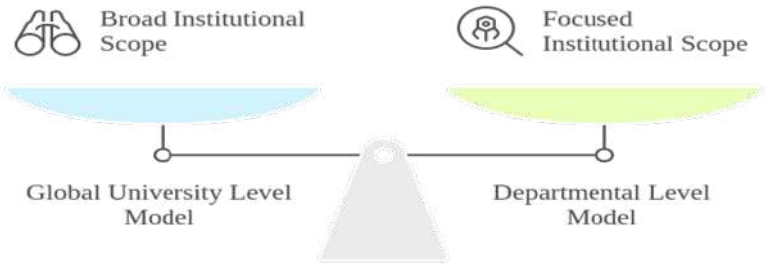


Figure 1. Methodological Models of Cultural Analysis

The first model situates its analysis at the level of the institution as a whole, examining functional domains such as governance structures, resource allocation, and the use of technology in order to identify those areas of institutional life most open to cultural change. The second model adopts an ethnographic orientation at the departmental level, employing participatory observation to diagnose the prevailing internal climate from within the lived experience of its members. Read together, the two models reveal a persistent and troubling tension between officially proclaimed norms of collegiality and the structural conditions that universities actually reproduce: despite abundant documentary commitments to collaborative values, the professional architecture of higher education institutions frequently reinforces what Folch and Ion (2009) describe as a culture of balkanization, in which research productivity is consistently valued more than teaching within existing reward systems.

Aside from theoretical assumptions, survey-based research into institutional culture provides empirical evidence regarding the degree to which formal organizational values are actually integrated into the daily professional lives of faculty. By examining these dynamics, researchers can better understand the tension between a university’s commitment to academic excellence and the lived reality of the workplace, where factors such as interpersonal trust and openness to change are paramount. This investigative approach utilizes several distinct lenses. For instance, Hofstede’s concept of uncertainty avoidance helps explain cultural resistance to institutional shifts, whereas Cameron and Quinn’s model identifies the underlying competitive or relational orientations of the climate. The spread of pedagogical innovation across these academic communities is often best understood through Rogers’ diffusion theory, which highlights the social mechanisms that either facilitate or hinder organizational growth [14].

In this context, *the primary objective of this article is to delineate and analyze the dimensions, forms, and strategies governing the engagement of academic staff in the development of organizational culture within the higher education sector.*

Scholarly discussions of higher education emphasize that organizational culture lies at the core of university life, influencing how institutions define themselves, sustain their traditions, and transmit shared values across successive generations of faculty, staff, and students. Within a well-developed institutional culture, faculty operate in an environment where professional expectations, academic standards, and institutional priorities are clearly recognized, enabling consistent professional judgment, stronger accountability, and greater organizational coherence. Where such a culture is genuinely shared, it deepens organizational commitment, generates a willingness to invest in the institution past the strict requirements of contractual obligation, and produces measurable gains in institutional productivity [5]. Where it is absent or fragmented, even technically sophisticated management strategies tend to fall short of their potential.

Methodology

The present study adopts a conceptual synthesis design grounded in interpretivist organizational theory, integrating foundational and recent scholarship on university organizational culture and academic staff

engagement through systematic thematic analysis, with the aim of comparatively mapping the principal constructs under investigation, including fundamental assumptions, value alignment, innovation diffusion, collegial trust, goal congruence, and knowledge management, across macro-institutional and micro-departmental levels of analysis. The analysis systematizes *domains of faculty engagement,* clarifying the processes through which academic staff internalize, enact, and progressively reshape university culture within contemporary higher education environments.

The Role of Academic Staff in Organizational Culture

Academic staff occupy a consequential position in relation to organizational culture, functioning as its transmitters, interpreters, and shapers across multiple registers of institutional life. Their influence on the university culture **exceed** their formally designated responsibilities in teaching and research, as culture lives in daily habits and unwritten norms including in how scholars talk to each other, collaborate, and quietly agree on what counts as serious academic work.

At its deepest structural level, organizational culture operates through the basic assumptions that Schein identifies as the bedrock of institutional life, providing a relatively stable cognitive and normative basis through which policies, decisions, and events are interpreted and assigned meaning within the organization [16]. Academic staff are the principal agents through whom these assumptions are given practical form, translating the formal statements contained in institutional mission documents into the living orientations that actually govern departmental behavior, pedagogical choices, and professional relationships, thereby mediating in a continuous and consequential way between the institution's official self-representation and the realities of its daily functioning [10].

Academic staff engagement transforms the university's mission and professional culture in ways that formal governance structures alone cannot fully achieve. The expectations faculty members maintain regarding research excellence, professional development, and pedagogical quality gradually influence what the institution truly values in practice, ouside what is formally stated in official policies or documents [7], [9]. Through peer review, collegial interaction, teaching practice, and research activity, faculty members establish the academic and professional standards that new staff and students come to recognize as part of the institution's culture and expectations.

The relational dimension of academic staff engagement is an important aspect of institutional culture. Communication among colleagues, openness to intellectual exchange, and cooperation within departments strongly influence the level of mutual respect and professional responsibility within the academic environment. These interactions guide the everyday working climate of the institution and affect how faculty members collaborate and support one another. Research shows that strong collegial relationships and active social engagement are closely connected to a healthier and more productive academic workplace [14].

Academic staff also function as the primary agents through whom institutional innovation is either realized or frustrated. The adoption of new teaching methodologies, the pursuit of experimental research agendas, and the willingness to challenge established professional routines are all contingent upon a faculty culture that is receptive to change, and it is through the accumulated professional choices of individual academics that institutional aspirations toward innovation are either translated into operational norms or remain confined to the level of rhetorical commitment, as Rogers (2003) demonstrates in his foundational study of how innovations diffuse through social systems. In navigating this dynamic, academic staff perform the delicate and demanding task of balancing continuity with adaptation, distributing their energies across teaching, research, and service activities in ways that reflect and reinforce prevailing institutional priorities [19].

The maintenance and adaptive transmission of historical and pedagogical traditions represents a further dimension of academic staff engagement with institutional culture. In integrating altruistic and community-oriented values into contemporary professional practice, faculty negotiate the tension between inherited academic ideals and the managerial expectations that characterize contemporary higher education governance, a tension that Bayanova et al. (2019) address from a philosophical standpoint in their analysis of organizational culture policy in contemporary universities. This negotiation is a form of cultural work through which the institution's identity is continuously reconstructed in relation to changing external

demands. Apart from this, academic staff serve as moral and professional models within their institutions, mentoring students and newer colleagues and modeling the relational norms and ethical standards that define the academic vocation [1].

The coherence and effectiveness of institutional culture depend largely on the active involvement of academic staff in bringing the university's mission, vision, and values into everyday academic practice. Faculty engagement helps maintain and strengthen institutional goals over time, influences the organizational climate, and contributes to academic performance, as demonstrated by Lubis and Hanum in their study of organizational culture in higher education settings [8]. Through their teaching, research, communication, and professional behavior, academic staff help preserve institutional identity and condition how new members of the university community understand the organization's academic standards and professional values.

Academic staff, in sum, exercise influence over organizational culture through a wide and interlocking range of processes: the internalization and enactment of shared assumptions, the establishment and perpetuation of scholarly norms, the cultivation or erosion of collegial trust, the adoption or resistance of institutional innovations, the preservation and reinterpretation of pedagogical traditions, and the ongoing mediation of the institution's identity in relation to its internal membership and its external environment.

Strategies for Academic Staff Engagement in Organizational Culture

The engagement of academic staff in organizational culture requires consistent and intentional institutional effort, and the quality of that effort determines whether the university develops a genuine culture of participation. Figure 2 maps the principal dimensions and pathways through which engagement develops within the institution, drawing attention to the complexity and interconnectedness of the processes involved.

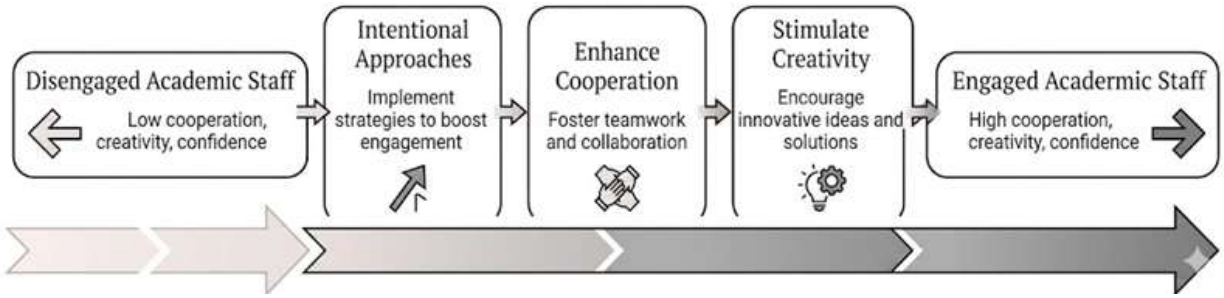


Figure 2. Enhancing Academic Staff Engagement in Organizational Culture

Moving faculty from disengagement, where cooperation drops and confidence shrinks, to genuine, lasting involvement doesn't happen on its own it requires **focused institutional intervention**. The following strategies, represented schematically in Figure 3, reflect the most productive approaches identified in the scholarly literature for supporting this transition and fostering a genuinely cohesive organizational culture.



Figure 3. Strategies for Academic Staff Involvement in Organizational Culture

A precondition for any form of meaningful staff engagement is the effective socialization and integration of academic staff into the life of the institution. As Tierney (1988) observes, organizational culture fulfils one of its most indispensable functions by providing newcomers with the social and normative understanding required to navigate the institution's landscape with genuine competence, to develop a sense of collective identity, and to sustain the organizational commitment that institutional continuity depends upon [18]. When this socialization is substantive, it counteracts the centrifugal tendencies toward departmental fragmentation that represent one of the most persistent threats to institutional coherence [8]. The deeper dimension of this process is the cultivation of goal congruence, understood as the deliberate and sustained alignment of individual professional aspirations with the university's mission to help faculty see their own goals reflected in the university's mission [2]. Institutional solidarity is most effectively consolidated, however, when universities invest in a genuine collaborative articulation of the values shared between faculty and administration, working to reconcile the altruistic professional ideals that motivate academic vocations with the student-centered objectives that define institutional purpose. Treating academic staff as genuine participants in the synthesis of organizational and scholarly values, cultivates the relational authenticity from which deep and durable institutional commitment grows [1].

Among the most productive pathways for deepening faculty engagement is the systematic organization of knowledge transfer and knowledge management within the institution. According to Sadovei and Borozan (2026) universities that develop coherent systems for the collection, preservation, and circulation of institutional knowledge create the structural conditions for sustained faculty engagement and enhanced collective effectiveness, since when faculty expertise, accumulated institutional memory, and the lessons of professional experience are organized for accessibility and actively shared across departmental boundaries, the retention and living transmission of organizational norms becomes a shared responsibility. This ties directly to the distinctive position of teachers as reflective practitioners and primary knowledge producers within the institution, a role elaborated by Bushnaq and Borozan (2022), who argue that faculty continuously construct and refine understanding of learners, curricula, and pedagogical processes through the disciplined examination of their own professional experience. This reflective and generative capacity positions academic staff as the institution's most direct source of pedagogical innovation, enabling them to transform individual professional insights into shared institutional norms while simultaneously reinforcing the professional culture, ethical standards, and sense of collective mission that give a university its intellectual character.

Along the same lines as knowledge creators is the imperative to cultivate academic environments that actively encourage pedagogical experimentation, methodological innovation in research, and creative approaches to institutional administration, thereby enabling faculty to become agents in the genuine transformation of institutional culture. When universities foster climates of this kind, they create the conditions under which aspirational cultural goals are converted into operational professional norms, and engagement becomes a form of genuine co-authorship of the institution's evolving identity, precisely in the manner Rogers (2003) describes when he argues that innovations are adopted through the relational networks and shared orientations that develop within communities of practice. The most methodologically **precise** approach to translating this insight into institutional practice is the incorporation of the Action Research Model, which represents one of the most productive models available for engaging academic staff in the active formation of organizational culture, precisely because it dissolves the boundary between those who analyze an institution and those who inhabit it. Zentis (2023) demonstrates that the participatory character of this approach, which involves academic staff at every stage of the inquiry and intervention process, proves particularly effective in dismantling the professional silos that reinforce departmental isolation and in building the cross-functional trust that collegial culture requires. This participatory **approach** provides faculty with the opportunity to co-design, implement, and evaluate interventions across teaching, research, and broader institutional processes, generating a form of professional ownership over the cultural values being enacted [3]. Such involvement is epistemically productive, in that staff who participate in **structuring** institutional norms develop a more nuanced, contextually grounded understanding of those norms and are therefore better positioned to transmit and sustain them, while the model's emphasis on systematic reflection and continuous professional learning ensures that innovation and cultural development are

treated as constitutive features of ongoing institutional life [20; 15]. A concrete illustration of these principles in action is provided by the Research and Pedagogical Innovation Laboratory (CIP) at Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University of Chisinau, which brings academic staff directly into action research projects, pedagogical innovation initiatives, and structured professional development activities, thereby creating substantive opportunities for faculty to contribute to the university's organizational culture. Through participation in pedagogical action research, professional growth programmes, and the wider dissemination of innovative academic practices, the laboratory supports the integration of institutional vision and mission into the texture of daily academic activity, while its seminars, workshops, and international conferences generate spaces of genuine knowledge exchange and serve to deepen the collegial bonds, mutual trust, and shared professional values among faculty that are the prerequisite of a coherent organizational culture.

The relational and communicative dimensions of the institution represents another domain for staff engagement. As Sadovei (2022) notes, the quality of organizational communication within a university is among the most consequential determinants of institutional culture, insofar as communication is the medium through which the university's values, priorities, and commitments are continuously enacted and renegotiated. Communication structures must accommodate the full range of organizational information flows, from the downward dissemination of institutional directives and orientations, through the upward transmission of faculty perspectives and professional concerns, to the horizontal exchange of knowledge and experience across departmental boundaries, if they are to support the participatory culture that genuine engagement requires. The degree of openness, transparency, and responsiveness that characterizes the institutional communication climate is a powerful signal of the regard in which faculty are held as professional contributors to the life of the organization, and it is precisely this signal that determines whether institutional initiatives generate authentic engagement [17]. Sadovei and Borozan (2026) demonstrate that in culturally and linguistically diverse higher education contexts, an intercultural orientation to organizational communication acquires particular importance, as the productive management of differences in communicative norms, professional values, and institutional expectations requires its conscious recognition as a source of organizational learning and adaptive capacity; academic mobility deepens this capacity further, as faculty who have engaged professionally across varied institutional and national contexts bring heightened reflexivity regarding the cultural assumptions that direct academic practice. Reinforcing and sustaining all of these communicative gains requires a deliberate institutional movement toward horizontal and democratically constituted leadership structures, since, as Folch and Ion (2009) argue, the cultivation of interpersonal trust through sustained peer collaboration and structured mentoring relationships produces measurable gains in faculty engagement by counteracting the professional isolation that hierarchical academic environments tend to reinforce and by generating a genuinely shared sense of responsibility for the institution's cultural and intellectual development [6].

At the level of the individual academic, two conditions emerge from the literature as particularly decisive for sustained engagement: intellectual autonomy and structured professional development. Bayanova et al. (2019) argue that the provision of genuine academic freedom is a functional precondition of deep institutional engagement, since faculty who experience their professional environment as genuinely empowering are substantially more likely to invest their intellectual energies in ways that advance the institution's cultural and academic goals [1]. This observation is complemented by the recognition that institutional engagement is substantially reinforced by the provision of clearly structured pathways for career development and professional advancement, which communicate to academic staff that their contributions are recognized as valuable and their growth as professionals is a matter of genuine institutional concern. Non-material incentives, including public recognition, academic awards, the conferral of positions of collegial responsibility, and the elevation of professional status, serve a cultural function that material compensation alone cannot replicate, as they cultivate a psychological climate of genuine institutional belonging and affirm the individual's worth within the shared professional community.

Two further dimensions complete this account of the institutional strategies that sustain academic staff engagement: the active promotion of internationalization and the careful design of institutional policy.

Whitsed et al. (2023) demonstrate that the substantive involvement of academic staff in internationalization processes strengthens institutional adaptability, broadens the intellectual horizons of the academic community, and cultivates a form of professional resilience that positions the university to respond effectively to the continuous transformations characterizing the contemporary global higher education environment. The realization of all these strategies depends, however, on the quality of the institutional policy environment within which academic staff work, a point underscored by Bayanova et al. (2019), who argue that engagement is most reliably supported when institutional policies are designed with genuine care for the balance between economic imperatives and the continuity of human capital, ensuring that long-term professional commitment is cultivated and that alignment between the conditions of academic employment and the university's declared mission is treated as a substantive policy objective [1].

Conclusion

The findings of the present study show that academic staff engagement is essential to the development of a strong university organizational culture, because institutional vision and mission become meaningful only when they are reflected in the daily work and professional conduct of faculty members. Through their decisions, interactions, and academic practices, faculty influence and reinforce the existing culture. The analysis also suggests that meaningful engagement cannot be achieved through formal policies alone. It depends on institutional efforts to create conditions in which faculty experience professional respect, intellectual independence, mutual trust, and genuine involvement in university life.

More specifically, adopting an Action Research Model alongside a conscious effort to unify institutional goals allows for a meaningful integration between individual professional values and the wider institutional agenda. At the same time, reducing departmental fragmentation and professional isolation through horizontal leadership arrangements and effective communication channels helps strengthen a cultural structure that can remain stable even under external pressures and internal transformation. The systematic involvement of academic staff in knowledge creation, pedagogical innovation, and the reflective examination of institutional practice is the most reliable means by which a university secures its distinctive identity and maintains the quality of its scholarly community over time.

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Presented: 27.02.2026
Reviewed: 30.04.2026
Accepted for publication: 20.05.2026