Organizational Culture and Organizational Performance: A Narrative Review of Concepts, Measures, and Evidence

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Abstract

Organizational culture has been widely recognized as an important factor influencing organizational performance. It shapes how organizational members understand their roles, interact with others, make decisions, and respond to change. However, existing research does not provide a uniform explanation of how organizational culture affects organizational performance. Differences in cultural dimensions, performance measures, research methods, and organizational contexts have produced varied findings. These issues are particularly relevant to higher education institutions (HEIs), where organizational performance involves multiple outcomes, including teaching, research, administration, employee development, and institutional sustainability. This study adopts a narrative review approach to synthesize existing research on the relationship between organizational culture and organizational performance. The review draws primarily on recent studies published between 2016 and 2026, while also incorporating established theoretical and empirical works. The literature was identified through searches of Web of Science Core Collection, Scopus, and Google Scholar and was synthesized thematically. The review indicates that organizational culture is generally associated with organizational performance, but the relationship is neither uniform nor necessarily direct. Different cultural characteristics may influence performance through different organizational processes and under different contextual conditions. The review also identifies considerable variation in the conceptualization and measurement of both organizational culture and organizational performance. These limitations make it difficult to compare findings and develop cumulative knowledge. The review highlights the value of examining specific cultural dimensions, organizational mechanisms, and contextual conditions when studying the culture-performance relationship. Particular attention is given to the implications of these findings for higher education institutions and to directions for future research.

Keywords: *Organizational culture; organizational performance; higher education institutions; narrative review*

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1. Introduction

Organizational culture is widely regarded as a central feature of organizational life, shaping how members understand their roles, coordinate activities, and respond to change (Schein, 2010). However, despite decades of research, the relationship between organizational culture and organizational performance remains inconclusive. Empirical findings have varied in the strength and significance of this relationship, while meta-analytic evidence generally supports an association between organizational culture and organizational effectiveness but also indicates variation across outcomes and organizational contexts (Hartnell et al., 2011). Recent empirical research continues to report a relationship between organizational culture and organizational performance, while also examining the conditions under which this relationship may vary (Abawa & Obse, 2024). This variation suggests that the culture-performance relationship should not be examined only at the aggregate level of organizational culture. Greater attention is therefore needed to how specific cultural characteristics relate to different dimensions of organizational performance. Accordingly, this narrative review examines the relationship between organizational culture and organizational performance from a dimension-specific perspective, with particular attention to higher education institutions (HEIs).

Existing research has used several theoretical frameworks to conceptualise organizational culture and examine its relationship with organizational performance. The Denison framework identifies four cultural traits, involvement, adaptability, consistency, and mission, as key dimensions of organizational culture linked to organizational effectiveness (Denison & Mishra, 1995). Other frameworks, such as the Competing Values Framework (CVF), classify organizational cultures into clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy orientations and relate these orientations to different effectiveness criteria (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). For the purposes of this review, the Denison framework provides the primary dimensional lens because its four traits offer a clear basis for examining specific cultural characteristics across organizational contexts. Evidence from recent studies further suggests that different cultural dimensions may be associated with different employee and organizational outcomes (Aggarwal, 2024). At the same time, substantial variation remains in how organizational culture and its dimensions are conceptualised and measured across studies (Bogale & Debela, 2024). A dimensional approach is therefore necessary to clarify how specific cultural characteristics are associated with particular organizational performance outcomes.

The multidimensional nature of organizational culture is also reflected in organizational performance. Performance is not a single outcome but a multidimensional construct whose meaning and measurement vary across organizational contexts. In business organisations,

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performance is commonly assessed through financial results, productivity, efficiency, and market outcomes, whereas performance in HEIs may encompass teaching quality, research productivity, administrative effectiveness, student outcomes, institutional development, reputation, and financial sustainability (Roos et al., 2020; Suyitno, 2026). The Balanced Scorecard provides an influential example of a multidimensional approach to organizational performance by combining financial and non-financial perspectives (Kaplan & Norton, 1992). However, the specific dimensions considered relevant may differ across organizational settings. Consequently, the same cultural characteristic may not have identical associations with different dimensions of organizational performance. The relationship may also vary according to organizational and environmental conditions, including employee attitudes, leadership, governance, and external policy pressures. These conditions provide important context for interpreting the culture-performance relationship, although their systematic examination is beyond the primary scope of this review.

HEIs provide a particularly important context for examining the culture-performance relationship because their organizational goals, structures, and stakeholder demands differ from those of many business organisations. Unlike many business organisations, HEIs pursue multiple goals, including teaching, research, community engagement, and institutional sustainability. Their organizational processes also involve professional roles and varying degrees of academic and administrative autonomy, while they respond to the expectations of multiple internal and external stakeholders, including students, staff, governments, and employers. Recent research on organizational culture in HEIs highlights the importance of considering these institutional characteristics when examining employee and organizational outcomes (Abdullah et al., 2025; Al-Ansi et al., 2023). These characteristics make organizational performance difficult to capture through a single indicator and may shape how organizational culture is associated with institutional outcomes. HEIs also operate within changing policy, regulatory, and competitive environments, which may further shape the culture-performance relationship.

Recent reviews have contributed to a broader understanding of organizational culture and its role in higher education. Bogale and Debela (2024) highlighted substantial variation in how organizational culture has been conceptualised and examined across the literature, while Abdullah et al. (2025) identified important links between organizational culture, employee outcomes, leadership, and institutional performance in HEIs. However, the existing literature remains fragmented across cultural dimensions, performance outcomes, and organizational contexts. Existing reviews provide limited synthesis of how specific cultural characteristics relate to specific dimensions of organizational performance across different contexts and what these patterns imply for HEIs. The resulting gap is therefore not a lack of research, but a lack of integrated, dimension-specific understanding of the culture-performance relationship. A clearer synthesis is needed to identify which cultural characteristics are associated with particular performance outcomes and how these relationships may vary across organizational settings.

Accordingly, this narrative review has three objectives. First, it examines how

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organizational culture and organizational performance have been conceptualised and measured across existing studies. Second, it synthesises evidence on the associations between the four Denison cultural traits, involvement, adaptability, consistency, and mission, and different dimensions of organizational performance. Third, it considers the implications of the synthesised evidence for understanding organizational performance in HEIs and for future research. The review is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What conceptual and measurement differences characterise existing research on organizational culture and organizational performance, and what implications do these differences have for comparing findings across studies?

RQ2: How do involvement, adaptability, consistency, and mission relate to different dimensions of organizational performance across organizational contexts?

RQ3: What are the implications of the culture-performance literature for understanding organizational performance in higher education institutions, and what directions does it suggest for future research?

2. Methodology

2.1 Review Approach

This study adopts a focused narrative review approach to synthesise research on the relationship between organizational culture and organizational performance. A narrative review is appropriate when concepts, theoretical perspectives, measures, and empirical findings vary across studies, making direct statistical comparison difficult (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Grant & Booth, 2009; Snyder, 2019). This consideration is particularly relevant to organizational culture research because the concept has been defined and operationalised in different ways across theoretical and empirical studies (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985; Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024).

Unlike meta-analysis, which estimates an overall effect from comparable studies, narrative review enables critical comparison and interpretation of findings across different concepts, measures, and organizational contexts (Grant & Booth, 2009; Popay et al., 2006). Recent reviews also demonstrate that organizational research may involve substantial variation in constructs, outcomes, contexts, and explanatory mechanisms, making synthesis and interpretation important alongside statistical aggregation (Brown et al., 2025; Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024). The present review therefore does not seek to calculate a single overall effect.

Instead, it examines how organizational culture and organizational performance have been conceptualised and measured, how specific cultural dimensions relate to performance outcomes, and what these relationships imply for higher education institutions (HEIs). Particular attention is given to the four Denison cultural traits, involvement, adaptability, consistency, and mission, because these dimensions provide the central analytical structure for examining the culture-performance relationship in this review. The review also recognises that organizational performance may be assessed through different indicators and that the meaning of performance may vary across organizational contexts. This issue

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is particularly important in HEIs, where institutional performance may extend beyond conventional financial and commercial indicators (Roos et al., 2020).

2.2 Literature Search and Scope

The literature search was conducted using Web of Science Core Collection and Scopus as the primary academic databases, with Google Scholar used as a supplementary search source. The search focused mainly on studies published between 2016 and 2026, while earlier seminal works were retained when they provided important theoretical foundations or established measurement frameworks. These included Denison (1990), Denison and Mishra (1995), Schein (2010), and Hartnell et al. (2011). Recent literature was prioritised to capture contemporary developments in organizational culture and organizational performance research, while seminal works were retained to preserve the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the field (Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024).

Search terms covered three main areas: organizational culture, organizational performance, and higher education. Keywords included "organizational culture," "organizational culture," "organizational performance," "organizational performance," "organizational effectiveness," "higher education," "higher education institution," and "university." Boolean operators AND and OR were used to combine and refine the searches. Relevant titles and abstracts were screened, followed by examination of full texts where necessary. Reference lists of key studies and citation links were also examined to identify additional relevant literature. This process was intended to provide sufficiently broad coverage of the literature while maintaining a clear focus on the central relationship examined in the review.

The review focused on peer-reviewed, English-language journal articles addressing organizational culture, organizational performance, or their relationship. Conceptual studies, theoretical works, empirical studies, meta-analyses, and relevant review studies were considered. Review studies were included because they provide important evidence of how particular areas of organizational research have already been synthesised and where further synthesis may be required (Brown et al., 2025; Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024). Studies were excluded when they were unrelated to the research questions or provided no meaningful evidence for understanding the culture-performance relationship. Conference abstracts, book reviews, editorials, and other non-academic materials were also excluded.

Literature from different organizational settings was retained to provide broader evidence before considering its relevance to HEIs. This was necessary because research on organizational culture and performance has been conducted across a wide range of sectors and organizational contexts. At the same time, studies conducted specifically in higher education were given particular attention because the nature and measurement of organizational performance may differ from those used in commercial organisations. For example, research on higher education institutions has considered environmental management performance as an aspect of institutional performance, while research in higher education has also examined organizational culture in relation to employee performance and job satisfaction (Roos et al., 2020; Al-Ansi et al., 2023).

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2.3 Analytical Procedure

The selected literature was analysed thematically in line with the three analytical questions. First, the review examined how organizational culture and organizational performance have been conceptualised and measured, with attention to differences that may affect comparison across studies. This was necessary because organizational culture has been conceptualised through different dimensions and measurement approaches, while organizational performance has been assessed using a range of indicators. Recent research continues to examine and adapt organizational culture measurement instruments for different organizational and professional contexts, further demonstrating the importance of measurement differences in interpreting the literature (Baser et al., 2025; Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024).

Second, the review synthesised evidence concerning the relationships between the four Denison cultural traits, involvement, adaptability, consistency, and mission, and different dimensions of organizational performance. Particular attention was given to differences across performance indicators and organizational contexts. The literature includes studies examining organizational culture in relation to broader organizational performance, employee performance, innovation performance, and sustainable performance, illustrating the diversity of outcomes associated with organizational culture (Wang & Huang, 2022; Truong et al., 2025; Vasumathi et al., 2025). These studies were therefore considered in relation to their specific cultural dimensions, performance measures, and organizational settings rather than being treated as directly equivalent evidence.

Third, the review considered the relevance of these findings to HEIs, focusing on their multiple goals, professional autonomy, complex governance, and diverse stakeholders. The higher education context was considered separately because organizational performance in HEIs may encompass institutional, academic, administrative, environmental, and stakeholder-related outcomes that are not fully captured by conventional business performance measures (Roos et al., 2020). Evidence from higher education research was therefore used to assess whether patterns identified in broader organizational settings could reasonably be applied to HEIs (Al-Ansi et al., 2023).

The synthesis compared areas of agreement, differences, and unresolved issues across the literature rather than treating all findings as equivalent. Studies were considered in relation to differences in cultural dimensions, performance indicators, organizational contexts, and research approaches. Employee-related mechanisms and external environmental conditions were noted when relevant but were not treated as primary analytical themes. This distinction helped maintain the focus of the review on the central culture-performance relationship while recognising factors that may help explain differences in findings across studies. The synthesis therefore aimed to identify the main patterns and limitations in existing research and to develop a clearer, dimension-specific understanding of the culture-performance relationship and its implications for HEIs.

3. Results

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The thematic synthesis identified three main findings that address the research questions. First, organizational culture and organizational performance are multidimensional constructs, and differences in their conceptualisation and measurement partly explain variation across studies (Hartnell et al., 2011; Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024). Second, different cultural dimensions are associated with different performance outcomes, supporting a dimensional rather than aggregate view of organizational culture (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Hartnell et al., 2011). Third, the relevance of these relationships becomes particularly clear in higher education institutions (HEIs), where organizational goals, governance structures, professional autonomy, and performance expectations differ from those of conventional business organisations (Roos et al., 2020; Al-Ansi et al., 2023).

3.1 Conceptual and Measurement Diversity

The reviewed literature shows substantial variation in how organizational culture and organizational performance are defined and measured. organizational culture is generally understood as a system of shared assumptions, values, beliefs, norms, and practices that influences how organizational members interpret situations and behave (Schein, 2010). However, studies differ in whether culture is examined as an overall organizational characteristic, a set of cultural types, or a group of specific dimensions (Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024). The Competing Values Framework (CVF), for example, distinguishes clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy cultures (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983), whereas the Denison framework identifies four cultural traits: involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission (Denison, 1990; Denison & Mishra, 1995). These different approaches emphasise different aspects of organizational functioning and therefore do not necessarily produce directly comparable findings (Hartnell et al., 2011; Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024).

Recent evidence confirms that this conceptual diversity remains important. O'Reilly et al. (2024), for example, identified different cultural archetypes among large firms and found that these archetypes had different associations with objective performance outcomes. Such findings indicate that culture cannot always be treated as a single, homogeneous variable (Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024).

organizational performance is similarly multidimensional. Earlier studies often emphasised financial indicators such as profitability and growth, whereas later research has included operational effectiveness, innovation, employee outcomes, and broader measures of organizational effectiveness (Hartnell et al., 2011; Wang & Huang, 2022). Hartnell et al. (2011), in a meta-analysis of 84 studies, grouped performance outcomes into employee attitudes, operational performance, and financial performance and found that different culture types were differently related to these outcomes. More recent research also indicates that organizational culture may be associated with different performance outcomes, including employee performance, innovation, and sustainable organizational performance (Wang & Huang, 2022; Vasumathi et al., 2025; Wang & Zhang, 2025).

The issue is particularly important in HEIs, where performance cannot be adequately

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represented by financial indicators alone. Institutional performance may include teaching quality, research productivity, student outcomes, administrative effectiveness, staff development, institutional reputation, and stakeholder satisfaction (Suyitno, 2026). Research on HEIs also demonstrates that institutional performance may include environmental management performance and other non-financial dimensions (Roos et al., 2020). Thus, differences in performance measures may produce different conclusions even when studies examine similar cultural characteristics.

Overall, the evidence suggests that apparent inconsistency in the culture-performance literature may partly result from differences in what researchers define and measure as culture and performance (Hartnell et al., 2011; Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024). Meaningful synthesis therefore requires attention to both the cultural dimension examined and the performance outcome assessed.

3.2 Dimension-Specific Culture-Performance Relationships

The reviewed studies show that organizational culture is generally associated with organizational performance, but the strength and direction of this relationship vary across cultural dimensions and performance outcomes (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Abawa & Obse, 2024). The evidence therefore supports examining culture at the dimensional level rather than relying only on an overall culture score.

3.2.1 Involvement

The literature generally associates involvement with employee-related and operational outcomes. Involvement includes participation, teamwork, collaboration, communication, and employee engagement in organizational activities and decisions. These characteristics can support coordination and strengthen employees' connection with organizational goals (Denison, 1990; Denison & Mishra, 1995).

Hartnell et al. (2011) found that clan-oriented cultures, which emphasise participation, cohesion, and supportive relationships, were positively associated with employee attitudes and operational performance. However, their relationship with financial performance was less consistent. This suggests that participative cultural characteristics may have stronger links with internal organizational functioning than with immediate financial outcomes. Recent empirical evidence also indicates that involvement can be directly associated with organizational performance (Abawa & Obse, 2024).

Evidence from higher education also supports the relevance of participation and collaboration. Riza et al. (2025), for example, reported significant relationships involving organizational culture, participative leadership, innovation, and organizational performance in Indonesian state universities. Taken together, the evidence suggests that involvement is particularly relevant to performance outcomes that depend on cooperation, employee engagement, and effective internal coordination.

3.2.2 Adaptability

Adaptability is most consistently associated with innovation, responsiveness, learning, and

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the capacity to respond to environmental change. Adaptive cultures encourage experimentation, knowledge sharing, continuous learning, and openness to new practices. These characteristics are particularly important when organisations face changing technologies, stakeholder expectations, or competitive conditions (Denison & Mishra, 1995).

Evidence from the CVF literature supports this pattern. Hartnell et al. (2011) found that adhocracy cultures, characterised by flexibility, creativity, and entrepreneurship, were positively related to operational outcomes, particularly innovation and quality. More recent evidence also indicates that adaptability is associated with organizational performance. Abawa and Obse (2024), for example, found that adaptability had a significant effect on organizational performance. Research on organizational learning further suggests that a learning-oriented culture can contribute to firm performance through learning agility (Tripathi, 2024).

Adaptability is especially relevant to HEIs because universities operate in environments shaped by technological development, changing student expectations, policy reforms, and increasing institutional competition. The evidence therefore suggests that adaptive cultural characteristics can support institutional responsiveness and innovation, although their effects may depend on the specific performance outcomes and organizational conditions examined.

3.2.3 Consistency

Consistency is associated with shared values, agreement, coordination, and organizational integration. Within the Denison framework, consistency does not simply represent bureaucratic control or hierarchy. Rather, it concerns the extent to which organizational members share core values and are able to coordinate their activities effectively (Denison & Mishra, 1995).

The literature indicates that consistency can support reliability, coordination, stability, and administrative effectiveness. Denison and Mishra (1995) found that consistency and mission were particularly strong predictors of profitability, although all four Denison traits were related to different effectiveness indicators. Kotrba et al. (2012) further showed that the performance implications of consistency could vary according to its interaction with other cultural characteristics. These findings indicate that consistency is not universally beneficial or harmful; its effects depend partly on how integration and coordination are balanced with other organizational needs.

This distinction is important in HEIs. Shared procedures, institutional values, and coordination can support quality assurance and administrative effectiveness. At the same time, excessive standardisation may constrain professional discretion and academic autonomy. The evidence therefore suggests that consistency is most useful when it creates organizational coherence without unnecessarily limiting flexibility.

3.2.4 Mission

Mission-oriented culture is primarily associated with direction, goal clarity, strategic

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alignment, and a shared sense of organizational purpose. A clear mission can help organizational members understand priorities and connect daily activities with longer-term objectives (Denison & Mishra, 1995).

Denison and Mishra (1995) found that mission and consistency were stronger predictors of profitability than involvement and adaptability, while all four traits were associated with other indicators of organizational effectiveness. This finding is important because it demonstrates that cultural dimensions may contribute differently to different performance outcomes. Mission may be particularly relevant where organisations must coordinate diverse activities around common strategic objectives.

The relevance of mission is also evident in HEIs. Universities must coordinate teaching, research, community engagement, and administrative activities while maintaining a coherent institutional direction. A shared mission can therefore provide a basis for aligning different professional and organizational activities. Recent higher education research also identifies cultural alignment and shared organizational direction as important features of institutional functioning (Abdullah et al., 2025; Subha & Ramnath Babu, 2024).

3.2.5 Cross-Dimensional Synthesis

Across the four dimensions, the evidence does not indicate that one cultural characteristic is universally superior. Instead, different characteristics appear to support different aspects of organizational performance. Involvement is more closely associated with employee-related and operational outcomes; adaptability is particularly relevant to innovation and responsiveness; consistency supports integration, coordination, and stability; and mission provides direction and strategic alignment (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Hartnell et al., 2011). This pattern supports the central argument of the review: organizational culture should not be treated as a single, homogeneous construct. The performance implications of culture depend partly on which cultural characteristics are present and which outcomes are being assessed (Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024). The Denison framework is particularly useful in this respect because its four traits capture complementary aspects of organizational functioning and allow culture to be examined dimension by dimension (Denison & Mishra, 1995). The evidence from both established and recent studies further suggests that cultural characteristics can coexist and contribute to different performance requirements rather than functioning as mutually exclusive organizational types (Hartnell et al., 2011; O'Reilly et al., 2024).

3.3 Relevance to Higher Education Institutions

The evidence from general organizational settings provides an important basis for understanding the culture-performance relationship, but its application to HEIs requires contextual consideration. HEIs pursue multiple objectives, including teaching, research, community engagement, and institutional sustainability. They also rely heavily on professional expertise and academic autonomy and operate through complex governance structures involving academic and administrative units. In addition, they are accountable to diverse stakeholders, including students, staff, governments, employers, and the wider

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community. These characteristics distinguish HEIs from conventional firms and influence how both culture and performance are understood (Roos et al., 2020; Al-Ansi et al., 2023). The reviewed higher education literature generally supports a positive relationship between organizational culture and institutional outcomes, but the evidence remains diverse. Riza et al. (2025) reported significant relationships involving organizational culture, participative leadership, innovation, and organizational performance in Indonesian state universities. Subha and Ramnath Babu (2024) also found a significant relationship between organizational culture and organizational effectiveness in Indian HEIs, with institutional ownership influencing the relationship. Ababora et al. (2026) further applied the Denison framework to public research universities in Ethiopia, extending the use of the framework beyond conventional business settings.

The evidence also confirms that HEI performance is multidimensional. Teaching quality, research productivity, student outcomes, administrative effectiveness, staff development, and institutional reputation may all be relevant indicators (Suyitno, 2026). Research on HEIs further indicates that institutional performance can include non-financial and sustainability-related outcomes, such as environmental management performance (Roos et al., 2020). This multidimensional performance structure strengthens the case for examining cultural dimensions separately. For example, involvement may be particularly relevant to collegial participation and staff-related outcomes, adaptability to innovation and institutional responsiveness, consistency to coordination and quality assurance, and mission to strategic alignment.

However, the HEI literature remains fragmented across cultural frameworks, performance indicators, institutional types, and national contexts. Many studies examine organizational culture as an overall construct, while others focus on selected cultural characteristics without integrating them into a common multidimensional framework (Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024). Consequently, the existing evidence provides limited comparative understanding of how specific cultural dimensions relate to specific dimensions of institutional performance across different HEI contexts. Overall, the findings indicate that the culture-performance relationship in higher education should be examined as a multidimensional and context-dependent relationship rather than assumed to operate uniformly across institutions.

This section synthesises the main findings from the reviewed literature on the relationship between organizational culture and organizational performance. The findings indicate that organizational culture is meaningfully associated with organizational performance, but the nature and strength of this relationship vary across cultural characteristics, performance outcomes, and organizational contexts. Four main findings emerge from the literature. First, both organizational culture and organizational performance are multidimensional concepts, and differences in their conceptualisation and measurement affect the comparability of empirical findings. Second, different cultural characteristics are associated with different performance outcomes, indicating the value of examining organizational culture at the dimensional rather than purely aggregate level. Third, the Denison framework provides a

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useful multidimensional approach because it directly connects four cultural traits, involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission, with organizational effectiveness. Fourth, although much of the evidence has been developed in general business and organizational settings, the culture-performance relationship deserves particular attention in higher education institutions (HEIs), where organizational structures, goals, stakeholders, and performance requirements differ from those of conventional firms.

4. Discussion

The findings indicate that the relationship between organizational culture and organizational performance is meaningful but neither uniform nor independent of context. Rather than treating culture as a single organizational attribute with a fixed effect on performance, the evidence suggests that different cultural dimensions support different organizational functions and may therefore contribute to different performance outcomes (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Hartnell et al., 2011; Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024). This interpretation is particularly relevant to higher education institutions (HEIs), where organizational goals, performance indicators, governance arrangements, and professional expectations differ from those of conventional business organisations (Roos et al., 2020; Al-Ansi et al., 2023).

4.1 Rethinking the Culture-Performance Relationship

The central implication of this review is that the culture-performance relationship is better understood as dimension-specific rather than aggregate. organizational culture is a complex system of shared assumptions, values, and practices that shapes how organizational members understand and respond to their organizational environment (Schein, 2010; Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024). Treating culture as a single overall variable may therefore conceal important differences among cultural characteristics.

The findings show that involvement, adaptability, consistency, and mission are associated with different aspects of organizational functioning. Involvement is more closely related to participation, collaboration, employee-related outcomes, and internal operations. Adaptability is particularly relevant to innovation, learning, and responsiveness to change. Consistency supports coordination, integration, and stability, whereas mission provides direction, goal clarity, and strategic alignment (Denison, 1990; Denison & Mishra, 1995). This pattern is consistent with the original Denison model, which proposed that specific cultural traits are associated with different aspects of organizational effectiveness (Denison & Mishra, 1995).

Recent evidence further supports the need for a differentiated interpretation. O'Reilly et al. (2024) found that different organizational culture archetypes were associated with different objective performance outcomes, suggesting that no single cultural configuration is universally optimal. Similarly, Wang and Li (2023) reported that different culture types had different effects at organizational and individual levels. These findings reinforce the earlier meta-analytic evidence that culture-performance relationships vary according to both

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cultural characteristics and performance criteria (Hartnell et al., 2011). More recent empirical research also shows that organizational culture may be associated with organizational performance through different organizational mechanisms and outcomes (Abawa & Obse, 2024; Vasumathi et al., 2025).

Importantly, recent higher education evidence also challenges a simple direct-effect interpretation. Riza et al. (2025), for example, found that organizational culture significantly enhanced innovation and organizational commitment in Indonesian state universities but did not have a significant direct effect on organizational performance. Innovation and organizational commitment, however, were positively related to performance. This finding suggests that the effect of culture may sometimes operate through organizational processes rather than appearing as a direct relationship. It therefore provides further support for interpreting the culture-performance relationship as complex and context-dependent. Similar evidence from other organizational settings indicates that employee-related mechanisms, such as job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviour, and organizational support, may help explain how organizational culture is translated into performance outcomes (Abawa & Obse, 2024; Widarko & Anwarodin, 2022; Vasumathi et al., 2025).

The findings suggest a more useful analytical sequence: cultural dimensions may support particular organizational capabilities, which in turn contribute to particular performance outcomes. Involvement may strengthen participation and collaboration, adaptability may support learning and innovation, consistency may facilitate coordination and integration, and mission may strengthen strategic direction (Denison & Mishra, 1995). These relationships should not be interpreted as completely independent because the four dimensions may operate together within the same organisation (Kotrba et al., 2012; Hartnell et al., 2011).

4.2 The Value of the Denison Framework

The findings support the Denison framework as a useful analytical approach for examining the culture-performance relationship. Unlike typological approaches that classify organisations into broad culture categories, the Denison framework identifies four traits that can coexist within the same organisation: involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission (Denison, 1990; Denison & Mishra, 1995). This feature is particularly suitable for a dimension-specific analysis of culture and performance.

The value of the framework does not mean that one cultural dimension is universally superior. Instead, the four traits represent complementary organizational functions. Effective organisations may need employee participation, internal integration, responsiveness to change, and strategic direction at the same time. Kotrba et al. (2012) provided empirical support for this interpretation by showing that the performance effects of consistency varied according to its interaction with other cultural characteristics. Culture should therefore not always be understood through isolated dimensions. This interpretation is also consistent with Hartnell et al. (2011), whose meta-analysis showed that different

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culture characteristics were associated with different performance outcomes rather than producing a uniform effect across all criteria.

The framework also helps clarify the meaning of consistency. Within the Denison model, consistency refers to shared values, agreement, coordination, and integration rather than simply hierarchy or bureaucratic control (Denison & Mishra, 1995). Consistency can therefore strengthen organizational coherence without necessarily requiring rigid standardisation. Its contribution to performance may depend on whether coordination is achieved while sufficient flexibility is maintained. Recent research on organizational culture similarly suggests that cultural characteristics need to be considered in relation to broader organizational processes and conditions rather than interpreted as isolated factors (Einhorn et al., 2023; Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024).

Recent research also continues to support the relevance of the four-dimensional Denison approach. A 2024 systematic review identified involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission as central dimensions in research on organizational culture and organizational effectiveness, while also highlighting continuing diversity in cultural measurement and theoretical approaches (Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024). A recent review focused specifically on HEIs likewise found that organizational culture research in higher education covers multiple dimensions and is linked to employee outcomes, leadership, institutional performance, and broader institutional development (Abdullah et al., 2025).

Taken together, these findings suggest that the main value of the Denison framework lies in its ability to examine culture as a set of complementary organizational characteristics rather than as a single cultural type. This provides a useful basis for explaining why different cultural characteristics may contribute to different forms of organizational performance (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Hartnell et al., 2011; Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024).

4.3 The Culture-Performance Relationship in Higher Education

The implications of these findings are particularly important for HEIs. Universities pursue multiple objectives, including teaching, research, community engagement, and institutional sustainability. They also rely heavily on professional expertise and academic autonomy and operate through complex governance structures. In addition, HEIs are accountable to diverse stakeholders, including students, academic and administrative staff, governments, employers, and wider society. These characteristics influence both the meaning of organizational culture and the assessment of institutional performance (Roos et al., 2020; Al-Ansi et al., 2023).

The findings indicate that evidence from conventional business organisations cannot simply be transferred to HEIs without considering institutional context. The meaning of performance itself differs. In business organisations, financial outcomes may be central, whereas HEI performance may include teaching quality, research productivity, student outcomes, administrative effectiveness, staff development, reputation, and stakeholder satisfaction (Roos et al., 2020). The multidimensional nature of HEI performance therefore

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requires broader performance criteria than those commonly used in conventional business research.

Recent evidence demonstrates this complexity. In Indonesian state universities, organizational culture was associated with innovation and organizational commitment, but its direct relationship with organizational performance was not significant (Riza et al., 2025). In Pakistan, research on public universities found that a knowledge-centred culture could enhance organizational performance by supporting knowledge sharing and collaboration, while knowledge-creation processes played an important role in the relationship between organizational capabilities and performance. These findings indicate that cultural effects in HEIs may depend not only on the cultural characteristics themselves but also on the organizational processes through which those characteristics are translated into institutional outcomes (Riza et al., 2025; Al-Ansi et al., 2023).

The relevance of involvement is also supported by recent evidence from Malaysian public higher education. Mohamed Yahya et al. (2025) found a substantial association between organizational culture and employee performance, with employee involvement showing the strongest relationship among the cultural factors examined. Similarly, a 2025 study of HEIs in the Philippines found that empowerment, team orientation, and core values were significant predictors of institutional performance, although capability development did not show a significant effect. These findings support the broader conclusion that different cultural characteristics may have different relationships with different performance outcomes. This interpretation is also consistent with recent evidence from other organizational settings showing that specific organizational culture dimensions can have different effects on employee performance (Aggarwal, 2024; Vasumathi et al., 2025).

The HEI context therefore does not necessarily require a completely different theory of organizational culture. Rather, it requires established cultural frameworks to be interpreted in relation to the distinctive purposes and structures of higher education. Culture may contribute to performance through different pathways depending on whether an institution prioritises teaching quality, research, innovation, student outcomes, administrative effectiveness, or institutional development (Roos et al., 2020; Al-Ansi et al., 2023).

4.4 Theoretical and Research Implications

This review contributes to the literature in three main ways. First, it supports a shift from an aggregate view of organizational culture towards a dimension-specific approach. Examining culture as a single construct may conceal meaningful differences in how particular cultural characteristics relate to particular performance outcomes (Hartnell et al., 2011; Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024).

Second, the findings suggest that the culture-performance relationship is multidimensional and potentially complementary. Different cultural traits may support different organizational capabilities and therefore different forms of performance. This interpretation provides a possible explanation for heterogeneous findings in previous research and is consistent with both established meta-analytic evidence and recent

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empirical research (Hartnell et al., 2011; O'Reilly et al., 2024; Wang & Li, 2023; Abawa & Obse, 2024).

Third, the review highlights the importance of context-sensitive research in HEIs. Future studies should examine specific cultural dimensions alongside clearly defined dimensions of institutional performance. Rather than relying only on broad measures of organizational effectiveness, HEI research should consider the multiple outcomes through which institutional performance is expressed (Roos et al., 2020). Future research could also examine whether employee-related mechanisms, knowledge processes, leadership, and external environmental conditions influence when and how specific cultural dimensions are translated into performance. Recent research provides preliminary evidence that employee-related mechanisms and organizational processes may be important in explaining these relationships (Widarko & Anwarodin, 2022; Xiong et al., 2022; Vasumathi et al., 2025), but they remain beyond the primary scope of this review.

Overall, the review suggests that the central question is not simply whether organizational culture affects organizational performance, but how different cultural characteristics contribute to different forms of performance under different organizational conditions. The Denison framework provides a useful structure for examining this relationship, while the HEI context demonstrates why cultural effects should be interpreted in relation to institutional goals, professional structures, governance arrangements, and multidimensional performance requirements (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Roos et al., 2020; Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024).

5. Conclusion

This narrative review examined the relationship between organizational culture and organizational performance, with particular attention to specific cultural dimensions and their relevance to higher education institutions (HEIs). Overall, the review shows that organizational culture is meaningfully related to organizational performance, but the relationship is neither uniform nor universal. The central issue is therefore not simply whether culture matters, but which cultural dimensions are related to which performance outcomes and in which organizational contexts. This conclusion is consistent with both established research and recent evidence showing that differences in cultural definitions, dimensions, and performance measures contribute to variation in reported findings (Hartnell et al., 2011; Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024; O'Reilly et al., 2024).

The review supports a dimensional understanding of organizational culture. Involvement, adaptability, consistency, and mission represent different but complementary organizational capabilities. Involvement can support participation and collaboration, adaptability can strengthen learning, innovation, and responsiveness, consistency can promote coordination and integration, and mission can provide strategic direction and alignment (Denison, 1990; Denison & Mishra, 1995). Denison and Mishra (1995) demonstrated that these four traits were associated with different indicators of organizational effectiveness, providing an important theoretical basis for examining culture

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at the dimensional level. More recent evidence also indicates that different cultural configurations can have different relationships with objective performance outcomes (O'Reilly et al., 2024). Thus, treating organizational culture as a single aggregate construct may conceal meaningful differences among cultural characteristics and their performance implications (Hartnell et al., 2011; Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024).

The review further highlights the importance of organizational context, particularly in HEIs. Universities differ from conventional business organisations in their multiple goals, professional autonomy, governance structures, stakeholder relationships, and definitions of performance. Institutional performance may include teaching quality, research productivity, student outcomes, administrative effectiveness, staff development, and institutional reputation (Roos et al., 2020). Recent research confirms that organizational culture remains relevant to institutional functioning in higher education, while also showing variation across cultural dimensions and organizational processes (Abdullah et al., 2025). Importantly, Riza et al. (2025) found that organizational culture in Indonesian state universities significantly enhanced innovation and organizational commitment but did not have a significant direct effect on organizational performance. Innovation and commitment, however, were positively associated with performance. This finding suggests that cultural effects may sometimes operate through organizational processes rather than through a simple direct relationship.

Several practical implications follow. University leaders should not focus simply on creating a uniformly "strong" culture. Instead, they should identify cultural strengths and weaknesses in relation to institutional objectives and performance requirements. A dimension-specific approach can help institutions determine whether greater participation, adaptability, coordination, or strategic alignment is needed. The aim should therefore be to develop an appropriate combination of cultural capabilities rather than to maximise any single cultural dimension (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Kotrba et al., 2012).

This review has several limitations. As a narrative review, it involves interpretive judgement and does not provide statistical aggregation of effect sizes. The reviewed studies also differ in their conceptual definitions, measurement approaches, performance indicators, and organizational contexts, which limits direct comparison (Hartnell et al., 2011; Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024). In addition, although research on organizational culture in HEIs has increased, the evidence remains fragmented across institutional types and national contexts (Abdullah et al., 2025).

Future research should examine the four Denison dimensions systematically across different types of HEIs and national contexts. Longitudinal research could provide stronger evidence of how changes in organizational culture are associated with changes in performance. Future studies should also employ clearly defined and multidimensional performance indicators and examine potential mediating mechanisms and contextual conditions, including employee processes, leadership, governance, and external environments. Recent evidence from HEIs suggests that such mechanisms may be important, but their roles require further systematic investigation (Riza et al., 2025; Al-

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Ansi et al., 2023).

Overall, this review supports a shift from asking whether organizational culture matters to asking which cultural dimensions matter, for which performance outcomes, and under which organizational conditions. A dimensional and context-sensitive perspective provides a more precise basis for understanding organizational performance and offers a useful foundation for future research on organizational culture in higher education (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Hartnell et al., 2011; Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024).

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Generative AI Statement

Generative artificial intelligence was used to write language and drafting.

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