Study on the Impact of Organizational Culture and Leadership on Competitive Advantage in Universities. Case in Vietnam

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Abstract

In the flow of integration and globalization, domestic universities need to create their own innovations and characteristics to adapt and develop. These requirements have led to major changes in the mechanism and organization of the operation of universities in the country. Therefore, universities need to have a clear and effective vision in strategic planning in development, building organizational culture and managing change, keeping up with the development and modern trends in higher education today. The paper offers three research hypotheses to assess the influence of organizational culture and transformational leadership on universities' competitive advantage in the current context. Using a quantitative descriptive approach with a causal approach, the authors developed a 5-point Likert scale and conducted a Google form survey on a sample of 281 managers and employees in universities in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The results of the study show that there is a positive impact from organizational culture and transformational leadership on the university's competitive advantage. From the conclusions obtained, the paper makes appropriate recommendations for universities in building and developing organizational culture and transformational leadership.

Keywords: *Organizational Culture, Transformational Leadership, Competitive Advantage*

INTRODUCTION

In the flow of integration and globalization, every organization that wants to survive and develop needs to create and promote competitive advantages. With the Party's guidelines, guidelines and strategic orientations on reform, development of education and training, higher education has made positive changes in both quantity and quality (Nguyen Huy Phong, 2023). This has been contributing to helping domestic universities gradually approach and integrate into the quality of higher education in the region. However, in the face of increasing competitive pressures in the field of education, universities as well as all other social organizations need to create their own innovations and characteristics to adapt and develop, based on the promotion of endogenous resources, combined with exogenous resources (Nguyen Viet Loc, 2009). Previous studies have shown that the human factor has always been considered the most important resource in the operation and development of every organization (Purwanto et al., 2021). Running any organization's business requires changes and innovations, so the actions of every individual in the organization have implications for success and position in the market (Rahmatullah et al., 2022). This requires managers to review, monitor, encourage and motivate members of the organization by developing a strong organizational culture and effective transformational leadership.

These requirements have led to major changes in the mechanism and organization of the operation of universities in the country. It is easy to see the increasing complexity of all aspects of university management such as the need for change at all levels of work, the relationship between leaders and subordinates, the alignment within the staff, the atmosphere and the cultural environment. Therefore, universities need to have a clear and effective vision in strategic planning in development, building organizational culture and managing change, keeping up with the development and modern trends in higher education today (Islam et al., 2021). This enables universities to protect and develop their competitive advantage in today's landscape. A number of recent studies have made significant findings about the influence of culture and leadership on improving organizational performance such as: Nguyen Viet Loc (2009), Le Van Hao (2018), Zeb et al. (2021). However, there is little interest in the influence of culture and transformational leadership on universities' competitive

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advantage. Thus, the search for empirical outcomes for the influence of organizational culture and transformational leadership on the competitive advantage of universities makes sense in both research and practice. Accordingly, the paper was conducted to assess the influence of organizational culture and transformational leadership on the competitive advantage of universities in the current context.

Theoretical framework

Competitive advantage

In modern business, competitive advantage is considered the key factor that creates success in business activities and creates value of each organization (Sigalas, 2015). Follow Hill et al. (2014), competitive advantage is defined as "*A company has a competitive advantage over competitors when its profits are greater than the average profits of all companies in the industry*". The foundation of competitive advantage is based on creating and developing the unique, superior strengths of an organization compared to other competitors in the market (Hossain et al., 2021). In all areas of business today, every organization faces competition, and so they must find ways to manage and innovate the quality of their products/services continuously in order to maintain their competitive advantage. This shows that creativity and innovation are necessary requirements for modern businesses to help them get perfect products and services in dealing with competitive pressures (Azeem et al., 2021). There are many different ways to gain a competitive advantage in the market (Porter, 1998), in which management support solutions are key in developing supportive work environments and learning, enabling the sharing of knowledge and innovative activities. Knowledge and innovation in the company environment can be seen as the driving force behind modern companies to gain a competitive advantage (Gil-Gomez et al, 2020).

Organizational culture

Follow Woods (1997), culture is "*set of beliefs, values, attitudes, institutions, rules of behavior that help describe members of a community or organization*". Culture acts as a glue for members of a community or organization, as well as participates in shaping the activities of those members of that community or organization. In management science, the term culture refers to the impact of behaviors within an organization on the operation and effectiveness of activities within an organization (Tharp, 2009). An organization will function more effectively if it has a good culture (Peters and Waterman Jr., 2006). Follow Schein (2004), "*Organizational culture is a set of principles shared among members of a collective, formed in the process of solving problems to adapt to the external environment as well as problems related to internal connection. These are principles that have worked well so that everyone recognizes their value, and as such, they are communicated to new members to help them develop a way of understanding, thinking and feeling in the face of collective problems*". The process of beliefs, habits, values, and behaviors that shape the behavior of individuals in an organization is considered organizational culture (Cameron and Quinn, 2011). Every organization has something unique about the culture, which sets each organization apart from the others (Azeem & ctg., 2021).

Today, each university is considered an administrative-pedagogical institution, so the organizational culture of a university is "*The belief system, values, norms, habits and traditions created in the course of history, are recognized, followed and imprinted by the members of the school in material and spiritual forms, thereby creating a unique identity for each pedagogical institution*" (Nguyen Viet Loc, 2009). Culture in schools consists of three main components: material culture, management culture and spiritual culture, in which spiritual culture plays a core role (Shen and Tian, 2012).

Organizational culture is seen as an important resource of the organization (Barney, 1986) and is a core competency that develops compatibility between the values of the organization and its employees, associated with "*Results of the organization's activities*" (Tan, 2019). Organizational culture is an essential input to an organization's effective operation because culture defines values, beliefs, and work systems that can guide and provide the right environment for competitive sustainability (Jam et al., 2018). Organizational culture allows new learning to streamline work and it can help employees understand the fundamental values of the organization and develop a common understanding of the organization's processes and goals, to become more involved in the organization (Azeem & ctg., 2021). Accordingly, the hypothesis is posed:

H1. Organizational culture positively impacts the university's competitive advantage

Transformational leadership

According to Bass (1985), transformational leadership is "*Leadership method in which the leader transforms his followers, inspires them, builds trust, encourages them, admires their innovative ideas and develops them.*"In the context of management, transformational leadership is a leader's ability to achieve employee performance that exceeds expectations, which can be more helpful and beneficial in enhancing the ability to motivate them in nature. It can also improve psychological empowerment (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). Transformational leadership refers to four interconnected behavioral dimensions: (i) idealized influence, (ii) inspirational motivation to enhance self-confidence, (iii) intellectual stimulation, and (iv) personal consideration (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Follow Bass and Riggio (2006), the idealized influence implies that the leader delivers and disseminates the vision and mission effectively. Inspirational motivation can be defined as a leadership attitude related to the emotional characteristics of employees, building trust and communicating with employees (Rafferty and Griffin, 2004). Intellectual stimulation refers to a leader's efforts to motivate and encourage his employees to adapt and follow new technical methods in different organizational contexts (Bednall et al., 2018). Personal consideration refers to a leader's support for subordinate personnel, such as training, coaching, placement, utilization, and performance supervision (Yukl, 1999). This allows transformational leadership to form the foundations for long-term organizational change, thereby achieving big goals (Jain et al., 2019). When leaders encourage subordinates to improve their cognition and behavior, enthusiastic support and accompany them for common goals, it will increase job satisfaction, foster unique ideas, thereby improving productivity and work results. Accordingly, it can be hypothesized that:

H2. Transformational leadership has an impact on a university's competitive advantage.

Follow Nguyen Viet Loc (2009), organizational culture creates stability thanks to the framework of guiding standards, demonstrating the goals of the organization, prescribing mutual behaviors among members of the organization. Culture can also be a hindrance to the desire for change in the course of an organization. This is due to the characteristic latency of culture during development (Nguyen Viet Loc, 2009). To minimize the impact of culture on the work environment, leaders need to focus on building an organizational culture with appropriate value systems to reconcile differences in perceptions of employees (McLaurin, 2006). Follow Valentino and Brunelle (2004), the fit between organizational culture and leadership style will improve the performance of the organization, improve employee satisfaction. This shows that the organizational culture with value systems builds commitment to the organization of the staff, adapting faster to changing requirements (Sari et al, 2021), support for transformational leadership within the organization (Le Duc Ngoc, 2008). Accordingly, the hypothesis put forward is:

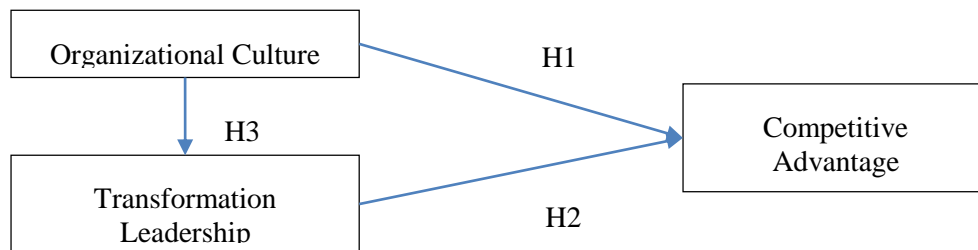H3. Organizational culture has an impact on the university's transformational leadership.

Figure 1. Research models and hypotheses

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research scale

This study is conducted in the context that Vietnam's higher education sector is in the process of promoting innovation and deeper integration with international education. Accordingly, the paper uses a quantitative descriptive approach with a causal approach, namely information presented in the form of values or numbers,

which is used to explain various reflections that involve considering the effects between variables independent of the dependent variable.

The scales of variables in the research model inherit and adjust some of the changes from previous studies related to the research topic, to best match research practices in Vietnam. In particular, the scale of "organizational culture" is referenced and adjusted from Azeem &; ctg. (2021) and Anning-Dorson (2021), consists of 7 variables; The "transformational leadership" scale is referenced and adapted from Alhshedi et al. (2020), Alessa (2021) consists of four 4 variables; a revised scale of competitive advantage from Azeem & ctg. (2021) and Wang (2019), which consists of three items. All criteria are measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with (1) being strongly disagreeable, to (5) being strongly agreeing.

To increase the relevance and reliability of the scale, a preliminary study was conducted on a small sample, which also received comments from a number of scientists in the field of higher education. From sincere suggestions, the scale has been adjusted to best suit.

Table 1. The research measure items

Variable	Measure items	Source
Organizational Culture	**OC1. We have informal norms and rules that everyone must follow.**	**Azeem et al. (2021), Anning-Dorson (2021)**
	OC2. There should be guidelines and regulations to manage all work processes.	
	OC3. Learner interests should never be overlooked in organizational decision making.	
	OC4. We constantly improve our working methods to gain an advantage over other universities.	
	OC5. Consensus can be easily achieved even when it comes to complex issues within the school	
	OC6. In departments and units, everyone makes maximum efforts to achieve common goals.	
	OC7. New information and ideas are widely shared and applied immediately.	
Transformation Leadership	TL1. Leaders are looking to develop the skills and performance of their people to ensure organizational success.	Alhshedi et al. (2020), Alessa (2021)
	TL2. Leaders inspire employees with their future plans and actions.	
	TL3. Leaders demonstrate respect and reasonable expectations for their staff.	
	TL4. Leaders give employees proper praise when they do excellent work.	
Competitive Advantage	CA1. The school's service quality is better than other universities.	Azeem et al. (2021), Wang (2019)
	CA2. The school has better administrative capacity compared to other schools	
	CA3. The school's profits are better than other schools	

Research sample

Those who are oriented in HR include both managers and staff in universities in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. These are two cities with a large number of universities, with leading reputation and scale in the country. This ensures the representativeness of the studied sample. To ensure the reliability of the article, the authors performed random sampling with two groups of participants, one is the group of managers and the other is the group of employees who do not hold management positions. Based on the sampling technique of Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a sample size of 490 people (200 in the management group and 290 in the non-management group) was considered for this study. This sample size is consistent with the judgment of Sekaran and Bougie (2016), and ensure the reliability of analysis results Hoyle (1995). The results of the sample statistics are shown in Table 2.

The paper will collect data by transferring structured questionnaires to participants via an online link (Google Form) in December 2023. All 450 questionnaires were sent out and responses sent back over a three-month period. The authors received 412 responses from participants, of which 131 were incomplete or the filled data did not meet reliability, excluded from subsequent scrutiny, and 281 fully completed questionnaires were reviewed for final analysis. Therefore, the response rate is 62.4%.

Table 2. Statistic of sample research

	Criteria	Frequency	Ratio
1	**Gender**	281	**100%**
	Male	174	6192%
	Female	107	38.08%
2	**Age**	281	**100%**
	Under 25	68	24.20%
	From 26 - 35	121	43.06%

	Over 35 years old	92	32.74%
3	**Job Position**	**281**	**100%**
	Management of faculties, institutes and schools	38	13.52%
	Department level management	64	22.78%
	Personnel does not manage	179	63.70%
4	**Worked years**	**281**	**100%**
	Under 5 years	43	15.30%
	From 5 to under 10 years	137	48.75%
	Over 10 years	101	35.94%

As Table 2 indicates, of the 281 respondents, 61.92% were men and 38.08% were women, indicating that men had a greater level of sharing and active participation in the research survey. In terms of age, 43.6% of respondents are aged 26-35 years, accounting for 43.6%, this is currently the main age group currently participating in teaching and working at universities. The group of people under the age of 25 accounted for 24.2%, reflecting the current postgraduate qualification requirements of the schools. In terms of working positions, the number of respondents who did not hold management positions accounted for 63.7%, followed by the group of personnel holding departmental management positions, and higher levels at 22.78% and 13.52%. The majority of respondents had worked for 5 years or more, accounting for 84.7%, and the rest less than 5 years were 13.3%. This shows that respondents have a complete and comprehensive view of organizational culture and transformational leadership in schools.

Data Processing

To analyze the data, this study used SEM techniques based on partial minimum squares (PLS) (Hair Jr et al, 2021). Accordingly, the data will be analyzed in two stages: First, the measurement model analysis is evaluated to consider the relationship between the underlying variables and determine the reliability of the scale, calculating the value as well as the distinction of the variables (Hair Jr & ctg., 2021). Second, analyze the structural model to examine the relationship between variables and test the hypotheses in the research model

RESEARCH RESULTS

Evaluation Of the Measurement Model

To evaluate the article measurement model conduct tests for convergence, differentiation and aggregate reliability. The convergence validity test is tested by looking at the load factor number of each scale in the study model. For confirmatory research, the load factor limit used is 0.70, on the other hand, for exploratory research, the load factor limit used is 0.60. Therefore, this study is a confirmation study, so the load factor limit used to test the convergence validity of each scale is 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019).
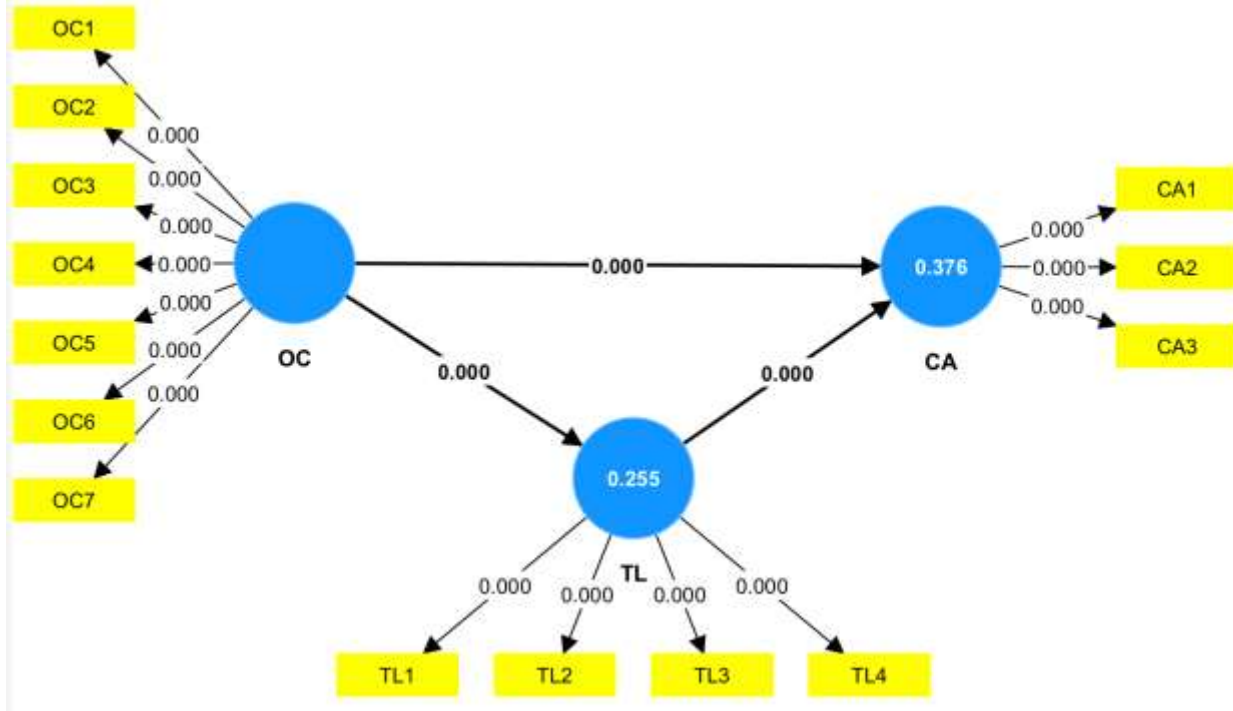
Figure 2. Results of reliability and convergence of the scale.

The results from Table 3 show that the external load factor of the scales is evenly > 0.7. Besides the load factor of each scale, the convergence validity test is also performed by looking at the AVE value for each scale, indicating that it has met the required convergence effect if each scale has an AVE > 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker (1981). The test results show that the scales have AVE values in the range of 0.549 – 0.710, thus, all scales ensure convergence.

The reliability of the scale is verified using Cronbach's Alpha calculation. The scale is considered highly reliable if the Alpha value is greater than 0.7. The data results show that the Cronbach alpha of the variables is in the range of 0.796 – 0.863; The CR coefficient of the concepts in the model reaches values in the range of 0.868 – 0.895, which is greater than the reference level of 0.7. Thus, the scales in the model ensure high convergence and reliability. (Hair & ctg., 2019)

Table 3. Result of outer loadings, cronbach alpha, CR, AVE

Variable	Outer loadings	Cronbach alpha	CR	AVE
Organization Culture		**0.863**	**0.895**	**0.549**
OC1	0.734			
OC2	0.735			
OC3	0.734			
OC4	0.737			
OC5	0.748			
OC6	0.776			
OC7	0.720			
Transformation Leadership		**0.797**	**0.868**	**0.623**
TL1	0.846			
TL2	0.769			
TL3	0.793			
TL4	0.743			
Competitive Advantage		**0.796**	**0.880**	**0.710**
CA1	0.847			
CA2	0.845			
CA3	0.836			

According to Henseler et al. (2015), the HTMT index is used to verify the distinguishing value of variables in the study model. The distinguishing value is established between structures when the HTMT index is lower than 0.9 (Henseler et al., 2015) or less than 0.85 as recommended by (Kline, 2015). The results from Table 4 show that the scales in the study model are all < 0.85, thus ensuring a differentiating value.

Table 4. HTMT index

	Tranformation Leadership	Competitive Advantage	Organizational Culture
Tranformation Leadership			
Competitive Advantage	0.615		
Organizational Culture	0.605	0.670	

Source: Processing results from SmartPLS 4.

Structural Model Evaluation

Structural model evaluation is carried out through the Bootstrap technique with a magnification factor of 5000 samples and a significance level of 5%. Structural model evaluation steps include: linear multi-additive testing (VIF), coefficient of determinism (R2), and testing of research hypotheses (Hair Jr & ctg., 2021).
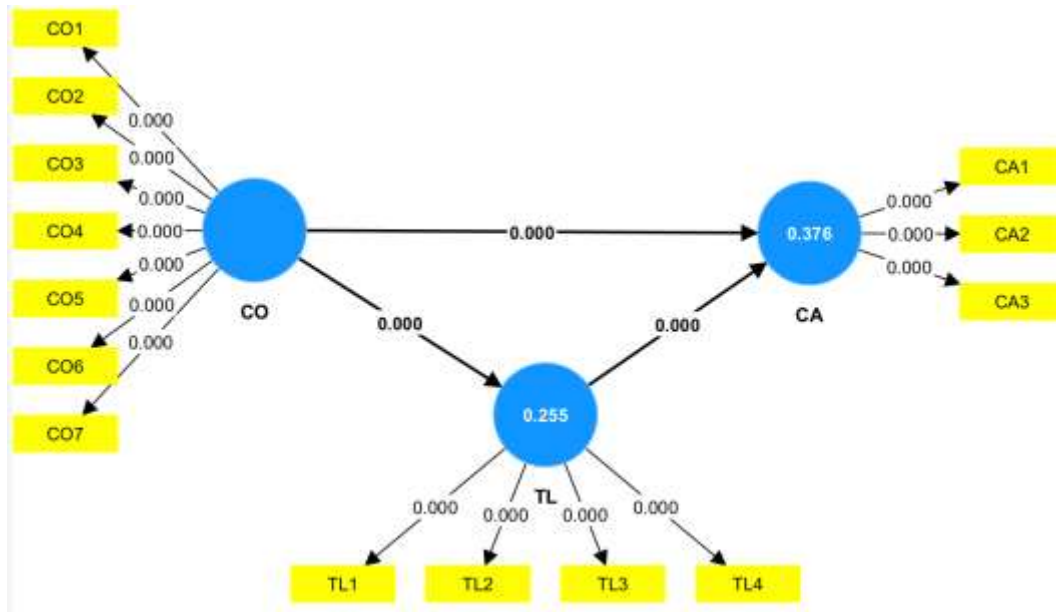

Figure 3. PLS model estimation results.

Source: Processing results from SmartPLS 4

* Linear multi-additive test and deterministic coefficient of model:

The scales in the model have VIF values ranging from 1.000 – 1.343, less than 5 as recommended by Hair Jr. et al. (2021). This demonstrates that the model is free from linear multi-additiveness.

Table 5. VIF and R² of research model.

	Tranformational Leadership	Competitive Advantage	Organizational Culture	R²	R² adjusted
Tranformational Leadership		1.343		0.255	0.253
Competitive Advantage				0.376	0.371
Organizational Culture	1.000	1.343			

Source: Processing results from SmartPLS 4

Coefficient R2 explains the degree of variance of the endogenous variable explained by the exogenous variable (Hair Jr & ctg., 2021). Follow Cohen (1988), R^2 above 0.4 is a large influence, between (0.25 – 0.4) is a medium influence, and less than 0.1 is a weak influence. Table 5 shows that the revised R2 coefficients of competitive advantage and transformational leadership variables reached values of 0.371 and 0.253, respectively,

corresponding to the moderate influence of two independent variables (organizational culture, and transformational leadership) on the competitive advantage variable (explaining 37.1% of the variability of competitive advantage variables); At the same time, organizational culture transformation explains 25.3% of the variability of transformational leadership transformation at universities.

* Research hypothesis testing:

As assumed in the theoretical framework, this study has 3 hypotheses about the direct effect. The first hypothesis of organizational culture has an influence on the competitive advantage of universities, research data show a positive influence of organizational culture on the competitive advantage of universities with ($\beta = 0.415$; P = 0.000), so the H1 hypothesis is accepted. The more popular the staff in universities understand, instill and apply organizational cultural values, the level of cohesion and cooperation in work will be improved, making a difference in the process of providing training services, thereby improving the school's competitive advantage. The second hypothesis of transformational leadership has an effect on the competitive advantage of universities, the accreditation results show that there is a positive influence here when the value $\beta = 0.288$ and P = 0.000, hence the H2 hypothesis is accepted. When senior staff in universities perform well in leadership styles, have directions, recommendations and promote beneficial changes in the school, the junior staff will feel greater clarity, motivation and engagement at work. This helps schools to improve efficiency in implementing tasks, improve operational productivity, and thereby increase competitive advantage. The third hypothesis about organizational culture influencing transformational leadership is also supported with the data studied, with values $\beta = 0.505$, P = 0.000, so the H3 hypothesis is accepted. Organizational culture shapes shared beliefs and values, so as school members perceive and implement cultural values, acceptance of transformational leadership decisions also becomes more convenient.

Table 6. Result of hypothesis analysed

Hypothesis	(β)	Std. dev	t	P	CI LL	UL	Result
H1: OC -> CA	0.415	0.046	9.101	0.000	0.323	0.502	Accepted
H2: TL -> CA	0.288	0.048	6.050	0.000	0.195	0.382	Accepted
H3: OC -> TL	0.505	0.045	11.288	0.000	0.417	0.595	Accepted

Source: Processing results from SmartPLS 4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The research results have provided reliable evidence about the relationship between organizational culture, transformational leadership and the competitive advantage of universities. The hypotheses put forward are confirmed from the survey data collected. Accordingly, there is a favorable impact between organizational culture, transformational leadership to competitive advantage, and organizational culture to transformational leadership of domestic universities. The results of this study are consistent with some previous studies such as Baumgartner (2009), Anning-Dorson (2021), Syakur et al. (2020), Lasrado and Kassem (2021), Arokiasamy and Tamah (2021), Tran (2023).

In the operation of universities, each worker has his own personality, perception and characteristics. The differences of each member can be harmonized thanks to the standards and values that guide the behavior of the organizational culture. Culture is also seen as a distinguishing factor between one institution and another, from one university to another. Building and developing organizational cultural elements has a great significance in connecting members in the organization, creating consistency in the vision and mission of the university, thereby creating individuality as well as contributing to improving the competitive advantage of each university. However, in this process, it is necessary to have application guidelines suitable to the environmental context, actual conditions and time of each school.

The quantitative results show that transformational leadership is significant in developing the competitive advantage of universities. Transformational leadership enables the organization to adapt quickly to changes in

its evolution from the demands of the modern environment while providing the basis for long-term adjustments. With sound transformational leadership, university executives can empower and motivate their bottom staff by being role models, sharing visions and goals, inspiring, knowledgeable and experiential.

In the practice of transformational leadership, organizational culture is of great significance in supporting change, ensuring consensus in implementing the requirements of universities. Shared values and standards in organizational culture shape how university communicates and connects, which in turn influences the leadership style of managers. In implementing transformational leadership, organizational culture in universities helps create a positive working environment, reduce the gap between leaders and staff, thereby promoting resource efficiency, improving work results, and gaining competitive advantages compared to other universities.

Recommendations

From the research results in the article, some recommendations can be considered by universities about organizational culture, transformational leadership. The first is to focus on building and developing an organizational culture with the identity of each school. Accordingly, schools need to be creative and communicate meaningful values. Cultural values are seen as a guideline for everyone in the organization on how to act and interact with each other, with learners, external partners and the community. Schools should not give too many values but only focus on the core values, most important to them, so that the staff in the school remember and practice them in the most optimal way. At the same time, leaders must communicate not only values but also the expected behaviors associated with each value. This helps staff understand what is expected, which in turn reduces uncertainty and ensures everyone is on the same page about how things should be done in school. Leaders together need to further strengthen the empowerment of subordinates. Leaders must provide employees with the right information, the right tools, the right level of support, and control and decision-making power. Leaders must set expectations, give the underlings what they need to succeed, and then let the staff officers do their jobs without micromanaging every detail. It's important to empower employees and build trust.

Second, practice and develop transformational leadership skills in schools. One of the actions needed to not only improve transformational leadership skills but also build a better organizational culture is to communicate effectively with employees. Effective communication will allow managers to more easily understand and better motivate the personnel below. To improve the quality of communication, managers need to use simple and straight-to-the-point language, consider body language and tone, and ensure the right timing and context. Use multiple channels to get your message across and make sure it's properly reinforced. In addition, administrators should pay more attention to recognizing contributions and excellent work results from school members. Recognition is one of the best ways to make your HR team feel valued, reinforce positive habits, retain the best talent, and foster engagement. Transformational leadership is based on believing in others, that each team member makes a valuable contribution. Therefore, transformational leaders need to redefine and develop organizational culture.

Limitations and future research

Although the study has achieved some success, there are still some limitations in the article. First, the sample was taken through an online survey via a link, so a large percentage of respondents did not answer the questionnaire, or some respondents did not really have enough reliability. This is likely because their focus on the survey is not high. Second, the proposed model of the study only considers the impact of organizational culture on transformational leadership but has not examined the opposite impact of transformational leadership on organizational culture. Therefore, further studies may be directed towards examining this relationship in the future.

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