

## Identifying patterns of innovative organizational culture, transformational leadership style and quality of work life: a qualitative study

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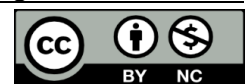
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### Abstract

**Background and Aim:** In today's business environment, the basis of competitive advantage has changed from quality to innovation, innovation allows companies to quickly adapt to changes and helps companies find new products and markets. In today's competitive world, the survival of organizations requires special attention to the category of innovative organizational culture. The purpose of this article is to identify patterns of innovative organizational culture, transformational leadership style, and quality of work life, and it is developmental in terms of its purpose. **Methodology:** The current research is qualitative and the statistical population includes professors of academic units and managers of Azad Universities of Mazandaran. The sampling method of this research was snowball. A semi-structured interview was used to collect information and 20 experts in this field were interviewed. In order to analyze the data in this research, the theme analysis strategy and six-step technique of Clark and Brown (2006) and MAXQDA software were used. **Results:** The results of the research showed that in the main theme of innovative culture, four organizing themes of the effects of innovation, organizational learning, individual development of employees and the desire and tendency to innovate were obtained; In the main theme of transformational leadership, two organizing themes of individual considerations, mental motivation, and in the main theme of the quality of working life, three organizing themes of job nature, security and job relations, and rights and benefits were obtained. **Conclusion:** As a result, paying attention to the extracted factors and making policies for the development and optimization of the use of financial and economic resources to increase the sustainability and competitiveness of the university and to improve and modify the service delivery methods and solutions and suggestions in line with their desirability It was recommended to managers and trustees.

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## **Introduction**

Today, organizations must adapt to environmental changes for survival and dynamism. Consider the accelerating speed of scientific, technical, social, and cultural changes and developments in the present era. Therefore, organizations are considered successful and efficient that, in addition to coordinating with the changes in society, can also predict the path of these transformations and can guide these changes in the desired direction to build a better future (Alofan et al., 2020). In today's business environment, the basis of competitive advantage has changed from quality to innovation; innovation allows companies to adapt to changes quickly and helps companies find new products and markets (Zuhir et al., 2012). Innovation is when capabilities must be renewed and strengthened, resource allocation changed, organization revised, and strategy reassessed. Achieving innovation is not a kind of luck, but the organization must pursue innovation as part of its strategy and for managers to accept it as a culture (Jenson et al., 2020). A culture that causes innovation in the organization is not only beneficial for the company structure. Having such a culture, both managers and employees of the company benefit from its advantages. In today's competitive world, the survival of organizations requires special attention to the category of innovative organizational culture. The problems of today's organizations cannot be solved with yesterday's solutions, and environmental conditions have become so complex, dynamic, and uncertain that organizations can no longer guarantee their long-term survival without creating a culture of innovation. Therefore, organizations must provide conditions to implement their innovative activities individually and in groups. Meanwhile, the effective role of leaders and managers in the fundamental transformation of the organization is inevitable (Jenson et al., 2020). Managers with key leadership skills can provide the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization (Wallapha et al., 2015). Considering that universities and higher education institutions are among the most important scientific institutions in the production of knowledge and technology and the training of students and scientists, these organizations must always take steps to empower employees and organizational excellence and move among the best organizations in the competitive environment. On the other hand, with the ever-increasing growth of the country's university population, including students, professors, and university employees, as well as the increase in the capacity of various university units, issues, and problems arise for the university. Therefore, it is inevitable to use the correct management method that is able to identify these problems and defects on the one hand and to eliminate them on the other hand. Therefore, transformational leaders can influence the behavior and perception of employees (Salem & Kattara, 2015). Transformational leadership is a complex and dynamic process in which leaders influence followers' values, beliefs, and goals. These leaders move the organization from the present to the future, identify environmental needs and facilitate changes. In addition, they create a vision of potential opportunities for

employees, and among them, they expand the commitment to change, culture improvement, and the need to design new strategies for the optimal use of energy and organizational resources (Ya Lia et al., 2020). Management and leadership in higher education have an inevitable relationship with ethics and moral behavior. The higher education system needs managers who, with ethical leadership and using the principles of servant leadership, provide fields for developing the educational performance of faculty members, staff, etc. For their dynamism and survival, organizations need to formulate and apply professional ethics standards so that managers and employees can create common professional values for the benefit of the stakeholders as much as possible. The formulation of professional ethical principles for sensitive jobs is increasing. One of the ways of professional societies to achieve professional ideals is to regulate the professional ethics system (Remisova et al., 2019). On the other hand, when the organization pays attention to its employees' working life, it has made an excellent approach to attracting and retaining its employees. This causes the formation of the idea that the organization is able to provide a suitable working environment to its employees and creates job satisfaction for them. When employees work in a fresh and appropriate work environment, this factor, in turn, leads to high productivity, low burnout, reduction of stress and conflict, emergence of innovation and creativity, and increase of professional ethics. Therefore, the current research question is, what patterns and components will be identified for innovative organizational culture, transformational leadership style, and quality of work life?

### **Methodology**

In terms of the type of data, the present research is qualitative research and the target population of the present research was professors of university units and managers of Azad universities in Mazandaran who had at least 5 years of work experience in this field. They are also interested in participating and expressing their views and experiences. In this research, 20 semi-structured interviews were used using the snowball sampling method. From the 17th interview onwards, no new concept was added to the previous concepts. However, the process continued until the 20th interview to ensure theoretical saturation. A semi-structured interview was used to collect information. The duration of each interview varied between 40 and 70 minutes, and the interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants using a tape recorder and then typed verbatim on paper and in MS WORD software. Participants were assured of confidentiality. In order to analyze the data in this research, the theme analysis strategy and the six-step technique of Clark and Brown (2006) and MAXQDA software were used.

In this research, to increase the research's reliability, the participants were consulted and their opinions were asked about the results obtained. In order to achieve the transferability of the research, the researcher has given a detailed description of the research process from

the sampling stage to the interpretation of information. In order to achieve reliability, the researcher has used the guidance and supervision of expert professors throughout the data collection process to confirm the researcher's interpretations. In order to increase the verifiability of the research, the researcher tried to obtain the interpretations and findings of this study through detailed reviews and revisions several times.

## **Results**

In this research, the work steps were as follows:

The first step - getting to know the data: The first step in any qualitative analysis is reading and re-reading the transcripts; In the current research, after the audio interviews were conducted and converted into writing, they were analyzed and re-read and transferred to the MAXQDA software in order to gain familiarity with the data. Learning the data was achieved by studying and writing the statements from the interviews.

The second stage - extraction of concepts: In this stage, the researcher started to organize the data with a meaningful and systematic method and with open coding. This means that there are no predetermined codes; Rather, as he worked through the coding process, he developed and modified the codes. Coding reduces a lot of data into small pieces of meaning. Coded each section of data that was relevant to the research question or of interest to the topic in question (not all pieces of text were coded). At this stage, 274 initial codes were obtained from the interviews.

The third stage - generation of primary codes: In this stage, the researcher decides which first-level codes to put in a category or theme so that they have a correct semantic relationship. In this step, the researcher removed the incomplete or unrelated and repetitive codes in order to specify selective codes. In the following, 142 selective codes were obtained by the researcher.

Step 4 - Searching for sub-themes: The selective codes identified in step 3 are reviewed, modified and developed. From 142 selective codes in the third stage, 65 basic themes were extracted in this stage. Also, in the current stage, the researcher reaches secondary and main themes by aggregating selective codes in wider semantic ranges. 12 sub-themes were also identified, and ideas related to naming the main themes crystallized in the researcher's mind. It should be noted that each sub-theme should have a lot of data to support and should be distinct from other themes. Existing base themes should not be related to a separate or different topic.

The fifth stage - formation of the main themes: This stage includes two stages of shaping and refining the main themes. The first stage includes a review at the level of coded summaries, and the sub-themes are categorized into the main themes. In the second stage, the validity of the main themes in relation to the data set is considered. The naming of the main themes is based on the theme's content and the researcher's discretion. At this stage,

after going back and forth among the sub-themes, three main themes were identified, which can be explained in the field of research.

**Table 1: main and sub-themes**

Main themes (overarching themes)	Sub-themes (organizing themes)
Innovative culture	Effects of innovation Organisational Learning  Individual development of employees  Desire and tendency to innovate
Transformational leadership	Individual considerations mental stimulation
Quality of working life	The nature of the job Security and employment relations  salary and benefits

The sixth stage - definition of themes and final analysis: in this stage, after achieving a satisfactory result of the themes, the researcher defines and revises the main themes of the analysis. The extracted comprehensive themes of innovative culture were determined in 4 organizing themes (innovation effects, organizational learning, individual development of employees, desire and tendency to innovate) and 25 basic themes. The basic themes of innovation effects are: market-oriented orientation, commercialization of ideas, adoption of innovative approaches, willingness to progress, achievement of real goals and valuing for people. The basic themes of organizational learning are: quality studies, changes in the organization's activities, getting used to accurate thinking, promoting team work, promoting the spirit of searching for opportunities, the ability to solve problems in a new way, turning ideas into new services. The basic themes of personal development of employees are: innovation, interest, adaptation to changes, risk-taking, independence, flexibility and using the experiences of others. The basic themes of the desire and tendency to innovate are: creating the necessary infrastructure for innovation, not resisting change, encouraging new ideas, technological training and knowledge exchange.

Transformational leadership was determined in 2 organizational themes (individual considerations and mental persuasion) with 10 basic themes. The theme of individual considerations includes friendly behavior with employees, giving hope to employees, comprehensive examination of employees' problems, and helping to improve employees' abilities. The content of mental persuasion includes proposing a new solution, creating effective values, instilling a sense of authority, creating a sense of purpose, modeling and paying attention to employees' opinions.

The quality of working life was determined by 3 organizing themes (the nature of the job, security and job relations, and salaries and benefits) with 13 basic themes. The theme of the nature of the job includes the challenge of the job, the importance of the job from the society's point of view, flexibility in doing the job, having the opportunity to grow in the job. The theme of security and job relations includes having stress at work, not being afraid of being fired, having positive management and safety and health in the work environment. The content of salaries and benefits includes profit sharing, welfare and travel benefits, medical benefits, payment of adequate salaries and benefits, and fair payment of salaries and benefits.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This research aimed to identify patterns of innovative organizational culture, transformational leadership style, and quality of work life. For this purpose, the most important criteria related to innovative culture, transformational leadership style, professional ethics, and quality of work life have been extracted. Identifying the necessary infrastructure for effective knowledge management and creating innovation in universities. The importance of creativity and innovation in the success of organizations is not limited to the manufacturing sectors of the country, but this issue is also true in the service sectors, including universities and higher education institutions, which cultivate future human resources, and it becomes more important. Today, higher education has undergone many changes, and therefore, universities and institutions of higher education must be innovative and able to create an innovative culture in the environment in order to adapt to the changing and changing external environment. Innovation is a means through which organizations respond to various environmental changes. According to the studies conducted, none of the research conducted at the same time has measured the relationships between the four variables of innovative organizational culture, quality of work life, transformational leadership, and professional ethics. The results obtained on this topic were consistent with the following studies: Papinejad (2015), Rahimnia et al. (2015), Chuay et al. (2017), and Naranjo Valencia and Sanz Valle (2011).

Also, transformational leadership has been extracted in 2 organizing themes (individual considerations and mental persuasion) with 10 basic themes. Transformational leaders strengthen organizational social capital in the following ways: friendly behavior with employees; Helping to improve the ability of employees; creating a sense of purpose in the university; performance-based reward system; Techniques to adapt to organizational changes and developments, holding training workshops to improve organizational behavior and character to the importance of work conscience; Conscientiousness; improving horizontal interactions between colleagues; trust building; Attracting the participation and cooperation of employees in decision-making; Criticism spirit. Leaders encourage employees to innovate to adapt to changes by empowering human resources, involving

employees in important organizational decisions, and using empowerment techniques. The results obtained on this topic were consistent with the following studies. Moradi et al. (2020), Moradi and Zandipak (2020), Niarki et al. (2019), Alvarsi et al. (2015), Jenson et al. (2020), Gavvo et al. (2020), Amor et al. (2020), Nguyen et al. (2017), Nicolas Bastardoz and Robert Backlund (2017) and Anata Raj et al. (2016).

The other results of this research were the quality of work life, which was determined by 3 organizing themes (the nature of work, security and work relations, and salaries and benefits) with 13 basic themes. Today, the quality of work life is considered as a global concept in the field of human resource management and organizational development, and its provision and promotion is considered the main key to the success of any organization's management. Senior managers pay attention to the quality of working life as one of the organizational improvement techniques. In recent years, quality of work-life programs has played an essential role in increasing the productivity of human resources and, as a result, the efficiency and effectiveness of organizations and large companies. Strategic plans to improve the quality of work life of human resources in organizations is a far-sighted and extensive approach, which means that efficient human resources play a central role in the organization's transformation. In the past, only non-work life was considered and emphasized, but in today's society, improving the quality of work life is one of the priorities of organizations. The Quality of working life is a comprehensive and wide program designed to satisfy and attract employees' attention, help them manage changes, and retain employees in the organization. Dissatisfaction with the quality of work life is a fundamental problem that affects all employees regardless of position and position. Isolating and identifying all aspects affecting the quality of working life is a very complex task. An organization that pays attention to the quality of working life of its employees will enjoy the benefits of having a more committed workforce. The results obtained on this topic are slightly consistent with the research of Ashrafi et al. (2019).

According to the conducted studies, the power and success of new universities depends to some extent on the extent to which it can benefit from the appropriate culture of participation and joint decision-making by all its members. Therefore, it is necessary to have innovative long-term planning and visionary leaders to make changes. In today's world, innovation is the most strategic thing to maintain and strengthen the competitive advantage, and managing the culture of innovation is one of the most serious challenges in the higher education system. In addition, in order to perform successfully, it is essential to understand the values that drive and support the culture of that environment. Nowadays, the mission of universities is beyond education and research, creating a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation is one of the main missions of universities. Generating wealth, entrepreneurship and paying special attention to the employment status of students after graduation are other main missions of universities. The main link to achieve this is

innovation, innovation culture and startup. According to the analysis of the data and the results obtained from them, the following suggestions and solutions are suggested to improve the current situation:

1. It is suggested that the university administrators should encourage the employees to put innovation at the top of their work in order to develop a culture of supporting innovation. For this purpose, by establishing reward systems based on innovative performance, promotion systems based on innovative performance can encourage employees to present new ideas.
2. Making policies to develop and optimize the use of financial and economic resources to increase the sustainability and competitiveness of the university
3. The need to encourage faculty members and graduates to create knowledge-based companies in innovation centers and growth centers
4. Establishing the possibility of settling students and graduates to create start-up companies
5. The necessity of planning, managing and monitoring the cooperation of university, industry and market companies
6. The cultural field in universities should become a field for promoting innovative and entrepreneurial skills.
7. Delegating authority to employees in order to empower them
8. The need to pay attention to the opinions of employees and have friendly relations with them
9. The need to instill a sense of pride in employees
10. Creating security in the work environment without stress
11. Conventional working time and reasonable salary, reasonable medical benefits, reasonable welfare benefits
12. Creating a sense of responsibility among employees
13. Creating a sense of attachment and interest in the job
14. Improving and modifying service delivery methods

The researcher suggests that the dimensions obtained from this research should be taken into consideration by the professors of Azad universities of Mazandaran province and other researchers should also quantitatively examine these factors.

### **Ethics**

This research observed ethical standards, including obtaining informed consent and ensuring privacy and confidentiality. Also, while completing the questionnaires while emphasizing completing all the questions, the participants were free to withdraw from the research at any time and provide individual information. They were assured that the information would remain confidential, which was strictly adhered to.



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### **Conflict of Interest**

According to the authors, this article has no financial sponsor or conflict of interest.

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