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COMPARATIVE CULTURAL ADAPTATION: PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR DYNAMICS IN THE DIGITAL POST-PANDEMIC ERA

Natthawut RUNGWONG[1], Samanan RATTANASIRIVILAI[2] and Tosaporn MAHAMUD[3*]

1 Faculty of Political Science, North Bangkok University, Thailand; nattawutroongwong@gmail.com

2 Graduate School, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand; samanan.ra@ssru.ac.th

3 International College of Aviation and Aerospace, Krirk University, Thailand; tosaporn.mah@krirk.ac.th (Corresponding Author)

Abstract

This systematic literature review comprehensively analyzes the evolving dynamics of organizational cultures, crucial for sustained success in the public and private sectors, from 2016 to 2025, specifically examining transformations pre- and post-COVID-19. Prior to the pandemic, public sector cultures prioritized transparency, hierarchy, and public service, reflecting their public mandate and adherence to regulations. In contrast, the private sector emphasized innovation, customer-centricity, and collaboration to achieve competitive advantage. The post-COVID-19 era reveals a significant cultural convergence, with both sectors prioritizing rapid digital transformation and organizational agility for enhanced resilience. Distinct divergences, however, remain: the public sector maintains its focus on digital-enabled transparency and accountability to uphold public trust, while the private sector increasingly values employee well-being and psychological safety to attract and retain talent. This study highlights how external crises accelerate profound cultural shifts towards adaptive, technology-driven paradigms, even as distinct core missions are retained. Theoretically, it expands frameworks for organizational culture by illustrating dynamic adaptation and introducing concepts of cultural convergence/divergence. Practically, it offers leaders vital insights for strategic cultural development in complex, evolving environments, emphasizing sustained success.
Keywords: Organizational Culture, Digital Transformation, COVID-19 Pandemic, Public Sector Culture, Private Sector Culture

Introduction

Organizational culture has emerged as a critical factor influencing organizational success and sustainability in the 21st century. This has been evident since Schein's (2010) seminal work, which defines organizational culture as a system of shared beliefs, values, and fundamental assumptions among organizational members, and further exemplified by the development of the Competing Values Framework (CVF) by Cameron & Quinn (2006), which categorizes organizational culture into four primary types: Clan Culture, Adhocracy Culture, Market Culture, and Hierarchy Culture. Research into organizational culture has garnered increasing attention from scholars and practitioners across disciplines such as organizational behavior, business administration, public administration, and industrial and organizational psychology (Bogale & Debela, 2024; Bawa, 2025; Dias et al., 2025).

Prior to 2020, research consistently indicated a significant relationship between organizational culture and organizational effectiveness, overall performance, and competitive advantage (Dhiravegin, 2017; Kaneko & Yimruan, 2017; Arthapit & Akakulanan, 2018). A meta-analysis by Hartnell et al. (2019), which synthesized data from 148 independent samples encompassing over 26,196 organizations and 556,945 respondents, found that organizational culture uniquely explains variance in performance metrics, even when controlling for leadership and high-performance human resource practices. The relative importance of organizational culture varied across different performance indicators. Studies from this period also highlighted that organizations with strong, clear cultures often possess a competitive edge and are better able to attract and retain talented employees than those with weak or ambiguous cultures (Gavric et al., 2016; Ahmad, 2020).

However, the COVID-19 pandemic, emerging in late 2019 to early 2020, instigated profound changes in the global business and organizational management landscape. Mandatory lockdowns, the widespread adoption of remote work (work from home), and the swift shift to hybrid work models challenged organizational structures and operating methods across both public and private sectors in unprecedented ways (Zarnadze & Kasradze, 2020; Raghavan et al., 2021; Elemure et al., 2025). A study by Mikušová et al. (2023) assessed various dimensions of organizational culture and the changes brought about by the pandemic and found that many organizations shifted significantly from emphasizing Hierarchy Culture to prioritizing Adhocracy Culture and Market Culture. This transformation underscores the imperative for organizations to adapt rapidly, foster flexibility, and innovate to navigate emerging uncertainties and challenges (Devie et al., 2023; Dickson, 2025).

The rapid changes in the business environment and public-sector management during and after the pandemic raise critical questions: In the context of transformations over the past decade (2016-2025), which organizational cultures are the three most crucial for organizational success? This is particularly relevant when considering public and private-sector organizations separately and dividing the period into pre-COVID-19 (2016-2019) and post-COVID-19 (2020-2025) phases. This question is crucial for understanding which types of organizational cultures are suitable and can foster organizational success in specific contexts and periods, and which cultures remain relevant or undergo transformation in response to evolving circumstances.

Therefore, the objective of this research is to synthesize and identify the three most critical organizational cultures for organizational success from 2016 to 2025. This analysis will be disaggregated for public and private sector organizations, as well as for changes occurring before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve this objective, the research employs a systematic literature review and synthesis methodology, drawing from studies published in peer-reviewed national and international academic journals and reliable academic databases, including Scopus, WoS, PubMed, TCI, and Google Scholar, during the period 2016-2025. This synthesis will provide a clearer understanding of the trends, key factors, and contexts

influencing the significance of organizational cultures across different periods and organizational types. Ultimately, the findings of this study will offer both theoretical and practical benefits, enabling organizational leaders and scholars to better understand appropriate organizational cultures and effectively apply them within their specific organizational contexts.

Dynamics of Public Sector Organizational Culture: Adapting for Success (2016-2025)

A literature review on organizational culture in the public sector from 2016-2025 reveals significant cultural changes that impact its success. The analysis is divided into two main periods: pre-COVID-19 (2016-2019) and post-COVID-19 (2020-2025).

Key Organizational Cultures in the Public Sector: Pre-COVID-19 (2016-2019)

In the pre-COVID-19 era, the three most crucial organizational cultures for public sector success were identified as "Transparency and Accountability Culture," "Hierarchical and Regulatory Culture," and "Public Service Culture."

1) Transparency and Accountability Culture served as a cornerstone of good governance in the public sector during this period. Studies in the Greek public sector have demonstrated that organizational culture is a key factor in enhancing the effectiveness, accountability, and transparency of public organizations, particularly during crises (Kirmikiroglou et al., 2024). Research in Indonesia confirmed that organizational culture positively impacts organizational commitment, thereby improving employee performance in the public sector, especially in fostering accountability and transparency in the use of public resources (Rahmadani & Winarno, 2023). Furthermore, studies in Southern Africa revealed that leadership practices, integrity, and internal control systems are vital for public sector accountability (Bonsu et al., 2023). This culture of transparency and accountability not only builds public trust but also acts as a crucial mechanism for preventing corruption and promoting efficient budget utilization (Anselmi et al., 2017; Amalia, 2023).

2) Hierarchical and Regulatory Culture was a prominent feature of public sector organizational structures prior to COVID-19. Within the Competing Values Framework, Hierarchy Culture emphasizes control, stability, and strict adherence to rules and regulations (Ghiasi et al., 2019; Aichouche et al., 2022). Research in Thailand indicated that public organizations predominantly exhibit hierarchical cultures, reflecting formalized structures and centralized decision-making (Yosinta, 2016). While often perceived as a barrier to innovation in some contexts, in the public sector, hierarchical culture is essential for maintaining service standards, legal compliance, and ensuring fairness in public service delivery. A study in Kenya on strategy implementation in ministries found that hierarchical culture plays a significant role in ensuring consistency and uniformity in policy execution (Mugo & Namusonge, 2023).

3) Public Service Culture reflects the core mission of public organizations to respond to the needs of citizens and society. This culture prioritizes citizen-centricity, the creation of public value, and the delivery of high-quality services (Lee, 2024). Research in Vietnam demonstrated that employees' perception of normative public values influences their citizen-oriented boundary-spanning behaviors within public organizations (Luu, 2024). A study in Malaysia showed that citizens' satisfaction with local government services is linked to civil servants' perceptions and responsibilities in service delivery (Manaf et al., 2023). A robust public service culture helps build public trust and satisfaction, key indicators of public sector organizational success (Lamsal & Gupta, 2022; Heintzman & Marson, 2024).

Key Organizational Cultures in the Public Sector: Post-COVID-19 (2020-2025)

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the significant organizational cultures for public sector success underwent notable changes. The three predominant cultures identified during this period are "Digital Transformation Culture," "Agility and Resilience Culture," and "Digital-enabled Transparency and Accountability Culture."

1) Digital Transformation Culture emerged as the foremost critical factor for public sector organizations post-COVID-19. The necessity for remote work and restrictions on face-to-face interactions compelled public organizations to accelerate the development and adoption of digital technologies for public service delivery (Teguh et al., 2022; Deep, 2023). Studies indicate that an organizational digital culture, encompassing readiness to embrace new technologies, employee digital skills, and digital leadership, is crucial for successful digital transformation (Teguh et al., 2022; Fahmi et al., 2023). Research in Vietnam found that public perception of digital transformation, accessibility, convenience, and quality of digital services all contribute to and predict public satisfaction and trust (Hien, 2024). Furthermore, the development of a framework for digital public service transformation in Indonesia highlighted the importance of an organizational culture that supports digital innovation as a key success factor (Anggara et al., 2024; Zakiuddin et al., 2024).

2) Agility and Resilience Culture also became profoundly important for public sector organizations post-COVID-19. Studies have shown that agile organizations demonstrate greater adaptability to change and uncertainty and recover faster from crises (Stratone & Vatamanescu, 2024; Dickson, 2025). Research in the creative industries post-COVID-19 confirmed that dynamic governance and economic resilience play a crucial role in addressing post-crisis challenges (Usman et al., 2024). Investigations into public procurement in the post-COVID-19 world emphasized agility, adaptability, and alignment as critical capabilities for public organizations to develop (Patrucco & Kähkönen, 2021). An agility and resilience culture enables public organizations to respond rapidly and efficiently to the evolving needs of citizens (Devie et al., 2023).

3) Digital-enabled Transparency and Accountability Culture represents an evolution of the pre-COVID-19 transparency and accountability culture, integrating digital technologies as tools to enhance these values. Research in Indonesia on the Electronic Traffic Law Enforcement (ETLE) system demonstrated its role as a national police program that fosters good governance through the values of transparency, accountability, and responsiveness (Narendroputro & Rusfian, 2023). The design of a financial reporting policy implementation model in Iran's public sector highlighted the necessity of developing a culture of transparency and accountability through multi-level communication, financial resources, human capital, and technology (Samdaliri et al., 2025). A study on risk culture in public service agencies affirmed the importance of accountability, transparency, and risk-aware decision-making (Christiani & Adhariani, 2025). This culture helps build public trust and enhance the public sector's positive image in the digital age.

Analysis of Internal Changes and Driving Factors in the Public Sector

When comparing the key organizational cultures in the public sector pre- and post-COVID-19, both continuity and significant changes are observed. Transparency and accountability culture remained a foundational pillar but evolved to leverage digital technologies for enhanced transparency. The most prominent shift was the transition from a hierarchical culture, emphasizing stability and strict regulatory compliance, to an agility-and-resilience culture that prioritizes rapid adaptation. This aligns with findings that many organizations shifted from hierarchical cultures to innovation-driven (Adhocracy) and market-oriented (Market) cultures post-pandemic (Mikušová et al., 2023).

Several factors drove this transformation. Firstly, the COVID-19 crisis exposed the limitations of overly rigid hierarchical structures, which proved ineffective in responding rapidly to unforeseen emergencies. Public organizations capable of quickly adjusting work methods, delegating authority, and embracing innovation were generally better equipped to navigate the crisis (Patrucco & Kähkönen, 2021; Usman et al., 2024). Secondly, the imperative for contactless public services made digital adaptation an urgent necessity rather than merely an option (Anggara et al., 2024; Hien, 2024). Public organizations were thus compelled to rapidly

develop digital platforms, online workflows, and digital communication channels, requiring an organizational culture that supports learning, experimentation, and the adoption of new technologies (Teguh et al., 2022; Fahmi et al., 2023).

Thirdly, the shift to remote work and hybrid work models permanently altered working styles and management practices in the public sector (Blagojevic & Kecman, 2025; Elemure et al., 2025). Consequently, organizational cultures had to transition from emphasizing direct control and oversight to focusing on outcomes, trust, and virtual collaboration (Ngwira & Soko, 2024; Sujatmiko, 2025). Finally, evolving public expectations, after experiencing rapid and convenient digital services in the private sector, led citizens to anticipate a similar quality of service from the public sector (Gharbaoui et al., 2024; Hien, 2024). This pressure compels public organizations to cultivate a culture that prioritizes innovation, efficiency, and citizen-centricity.

Table 1 Key Organizational Cultures for Public Sector Success Pre- and Post-COVID-19

Period	Culture Rank 1	Culture Rank 2	Culture Rank 3
Pre-COVID-19 (2016-2019)	Transparency and Accountability	Hierarchy and Regulation	Public Service
Post-COVID-19 (2020-2025)	Digital Transformation	Agility and Resilience	Digital-enabled Transparency and Accountability
Transformation Trend	Increased Digital Dimension	Shift from Hierarchy to Agility	Enhanced with Technology

In summary, successful public sector organizations in the post-COVID-19 era are those that uphold core values of transparency and accountability while simultaneously transforming their organizational culture to be agile, flexible, and fully digital-ready. The key to success for public organizations in the current era lies in balancing stability and flexibility, regulatory compliance and innovation, and preserving traditional values while embracing new technologies.

Dynamics of Private Sector Organizational Culture: Adapting for Success (2016-2025)

A synthesis of literature on organizational culture in the private sector from 2016 to 2025 reveals significant dynamics of change affecting private-sector organizational success. This transformation can be clearly analyzed by dividing the period into two main phases: pre-COVID-19 (2016-2019) and post-COVID-19 (2020-2025).

Key Organizational Cultures in the Private Sector: Pre-COVID-19 (2016-2019)

In the pre-COVID-19 era, the three most crucial organizational cultures for private sector success were identified as "Innovation Culture," "Customer-Centric and Market Orientation Culture," and "Collaborative and Teamwork Culture."

1) Innovation Culture was identified as one of the primary factors contributing to private sector organizational success during this period. Research indicates that organizational culture is intricately linked to individual, organizational, and cultural creativity (Hermida et al., 2019). A study on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Egypt found that organizational culture is a significant driver of strategic innovation (Elkhouly & Marwan, 2016). Furthermore, studies on Adhocracy Culture, which emphasizes flexibility, creativity, and risk-taking, have shown that it is the most conducive culture for innovation (Shuliang et al., 2024; Shahin et al., 2025). Cross-cultural research comparing SMEs in Germany and Thailand confirmed that Adhocracy Culture is a primary driver of organizational innovation in both countries, leading to improved organizational performance, particularly in terms of financial and customer dimensions (Kuhn & Bhatiasevi, 2024). Innovation culture helps organizations develop new

products and services, improve operational processes, and gain a competitive advantage in a rapidly changing market (Bendak et al., 2020; Amoa-Gyarteng & Dhliwayo, 2024).

2) Customer-Centric and Market Orientation Culture was another crucial culture distinguishing successful organizations from failing ones in the private sector. Research on Market Orientation demonstrates that a market-oriented approach, which includes focusing on customers, competitors, and inter-functional coordination, is associated with business success (Osuagwu, 2019). A study in the Indian banking sector highlighted the importance of Marketing Culture, referring to a set of shared values and beliefs that help individuals understand their marketing roles and provide behavioral norms within the company (Shanker, 2018). This culture helps organizations understand customer needs, monitor competitive trends, and respond appropriately to market intelligence, which are vital factors for survival and success, especially for SMEs (Jamaludin et al., 2022; Navia et al., 2023).

3) Collaborative and Teamwork Culture served as a fundamental basis for organizational effectiveness in the private sector. Research indicates that teamwork positively impacts organizational performance, as team cohesion fosters a sense of ownership among employees and promotes cooperation. A study of Nigerian banks found that teamwork significantly influences organizational performance, with incentives a key component of teamwork and teamwork itself a subcomponent of unit effectiveness (Afolami, 2020). Research on collaborative culture in the AEC (Architecture, Engineering, and Construction) industry revealed that a positive collaborative culture is associated with lower systemic risk in projects (Sujan et al., 2020). Studies on team collaboration capabilities in technology-based startups emphasized that team collaboration is crucial for developing new capabilities and for startup success (Hernandez et al., 2018). A strong teamwork culture fosters knowledge sharing, collaborative problem-solving, and innovation, which are essential for success in complex and rapidly changing business environments (Benishek & Lazzara, 2019; Hourani, 2019).

Key Organizational Cultures in the Private Sector: Post-COVID-19 (2020-2025)

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the significant organizational cultures that underpin private-sector success underwent notable development and transformation. The three predominant cultures identified during this period are "Digital Culture and Innovation," "Agility and Resilience Culture," and "Employee Well-being and Psychological Safety Culture."

1) Digital Culture and Innovation emerged as the primary factor for private sector organizations post-COVID-19, evolving from pre-COVID-19 innovation culture by integrating digital technology as its core. A systematic study identified ten characteristics of a post-COVID-19 digital organizational culture, including cross-functional collaboration, digital leadership, digital innovation culture, employee digital skills, digital technology adoption, digital data management, risk-taking, customer digital experience focus, flexibility and agility, and digital mindset (Teguh et al., 2022). Research on the strategic benefits of innovative organizational culture found that organizations with strong Adhocracy Culture and digital culture performed better in terms of digital transformation capabilities and big data analytics than those with traditional cultures (Orero-Blat et al., 2025). Studies on the development of digital culture in large companies emphasized the importance of organizational cultures that support digital thinking, digital skills, and an understanding of Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Fahmi et al., 2023; Gupta et al., 2024). Digital culture and innovation are thus essential for organizations seeking to adapt and grow in the post-crisis era (Deep, 2023).

2) Agility and Resilience Culture became one of the most critical cultures for private sector organizations post-COVID-19. Studies in the Indonesian hotel industry found that organizational agility significantly positively impacted organizational performance, with competitive advantage and organizational culture acting as mediating variables (Devie et al., 2023). Research on resilient agility found it to be a necessary condition for employee and

organizational sustainability, with employees' willingness to accept organizational change and creativity significantly influencing their resilient agility (Prieto & Talukder, 2023). A meta-analysis of SMEs in Romania post-COVID-19 confirmed that intellectual capital management, particularly human capital, profoundly impacts organizational agility and performance. It found that fostering an organizational culture open to change and learning is essential for maintaining long-term competitive advantage in unpredictable markets (Stratone & Vatamanescu, 2024). Research on organizational resilience in SMEs has indicated that dynamic capabilities play a crucial role in fostering it and are essential for organizational survival following the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (García-Valenzuela et al., 2023). This culture enables organizations to respond quickly and effectively to new challenges (Miceli et al., 2021; Borms et al., 2023; Dickson, 2025).

3) Employee Well-being and Psychological Safety Culture is a new culture that gained critical importance in the post-COVID-19 era. The pandemic severely impacted employee mental health and well-being. Successful organizations prioritize employee well-being and foster a psychologically safe work environment. Research on Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) has indicated that PSC, defined as employees' perceptions of organizational policies, procedures, and practices for protecting their psychological health and safety, is important for employee engagement and burnout prevention (Amoadu et al., 2024; Ji et al., 2025). Studies on Psychological Safety found it to be a key factor in promoting open communication, unity, risk acceptance, and employee well-being, playing a significant role in supporting strategic management for success (Negara et al., 2023). Research has shown that organizational trust and empowering leadership influence group conflict, with psychological safety acting as a mediator (Joo et al., 2023). Furthermore, post-COVID-19 studies emphasized the importance of work-life balance policies, employee well-being programs, and mental health support as critical components of successful organizational culture (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023; Alhaider & Alqahtani, 2025; El-Qebaisi, 2025).

Analysis of Internal Changes and Driving Factors in the Private Sector

When comparing the key organizational cultures in the private sector pre- and post-COVID-19, both continuity and clear changes are observed. Innovation culture remained a significant factor but evolved to fully integrate digital technology, becoming "Digital Culture and Innovation," which encompasses both innovative creation and the effective application of digital technology. The most prominent changes include the increased importance of an agile, resilient culture and the emergence of employee well-being and psychological safety cultures as indispensable components for organizational success.

This transformation stems from several key factors. Firstly, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital transformation across all industries. Organizations unable to rapidly adapt to digital business models often faced severe difficulties, whereas those with strong digital cultures were able to adapt and even thrive during the crisis (Deep, 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2025). Research indicates that many organizations rushed to adopt digital technologies at an emergency pace. However, this rapid implementation left them with limited time to restructure processes and culture to fully align with the new environment (Reuschl et al., 2022). Therefore, cultivating a sustainable digital culture became a strategic imperative (Teguh et al., 2022; Fahmi et al., 2023).

Secondly, the pandemic and the evolving business environment increased uncertainty, making agility and resilience essential capabilities. Research on circular organizations and post-COVID-19 resilient organizations found that resilience helps organizations withstand crises and recover faster (Borms et al., 2023). Studies emphasized that sustainability, agility, and the use of digital technology are closely intertwined with organizational resilience (Miceli et al., 2021). Organizations capable of rapidly adjusting their strategies, structures, and operations in

response to changing circumstances were more likely to survive and grow (Devie et al., 2023; Prieto & Talukder, 2023; Stratone & Vatamanescu, 2024).

Thirdly, remote work and evolving work models revealed severe impacts on employee mental health and well-being. Studies have shown that 30% of employees reported challenges with work-life balance, and 45% experienced social isolation, negatively affecting their commitment (Elemure et al., 2025). Other research confirmed that the shift to digital work increased work-related stress (technostress), cognitive overload, and an "always-on culture," raising the risk of burnout, mental fatigue, and decreased job satisfaction (Akbar et al., 2025). Organizations that prioritize employee well-being, create a psychologically safe work environment, and support work-life balance are more likely to retain talented employees, enhance commitment, and achieve better performance (Negara et al., 2023; Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023; Alhaider & Alqahtani, 2025; Ji et al., 2025).

Finally, changing employee expectations, particularly among younger generations, who seek more than just financial compensation but also a work environment that supports personal growth, flexibility, and well-being (Judijanto, 2024). The emergence of "Great Resignation," "Quiet Quitting," and "Loud Quitting" phenomena post-COVID-19 underscored the critical need for closer monitoring of employee well-being and psychological safety (Riaz et al., 2024). Organizations that foster a culture that supports employee well-being and psychological safety are better positioned to attract and retain talented employees in a competitive labor market.

Table 2 Key Organizational Cultures for Private Sector Success Pre- and Post-COVID-19

Period	Culture Rank 1	Culture Rank 2	Culture Rank 3
Pre-COVID-19 (2016-2019)	Innovation Culture	Customer-Centric and Market Orientation	Collaborative and Teamwork Culture
Post-COVID-19 (2020-2025)	Digital Culture and Innovation	Agility and Resilience Culture	Employee Well-being and Psychological Safety Culture
Transformation Trend	Integrated Digital Technology	Emphasized Strategic Importance	Added New Critical Dimension

In summary, successful private-sector organizations in the post-COVID-19 era are those that integrate innovation with digital technology, demonstrate agility and flexibility in responding to change, and prioritize employee well-being and psychological safety as foundational elements for long-term success. Organizations that can strike a balance between business growth and employee well-being, between rapid adaptation and operational sustainability, are poised for sustained success and growth in this new era.

Cultural Convergence and Divergence: Public and Private Sector Case Studies (2016-2025)

A comparative analysis of organizational cultures critical for success in the public and private sectors from 2016 to 2025 reveals intriguing dynamics of both similarities and differences. These dynamics reflect the distinct missions, contexts, and constraints of each sector. The comparison can be analyzed across two key periods: pre-COVID-19 (2016-2019) and post-COVID-19 (2020-2025).

Comparison Pre-COVID-19 (2016-2019)

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the organizational cultures critical to success in the public and private sectors differed markedly, reflecting their distinct nature and objectives. The most prominent differences were that the public sector emphasized "Transparency and Accountability Culture," "Hierarchical and Regulatory Culture," and "Public Service Culture." In contrast, the private sector focused on "Innovation Culture," "Customer-Centric and Market

Orientation Culture," and "Collaborative and Teamwork Culture." These distinctions reflect the reality that public sector organizations operate under strict legal and regulatory frameworks, are accountable to citizens, and must uphold fairness and consistency in service delivery (Anselmi et al., 2017; Amalia, 2023). Conversely, private-sector organizations operate in highly competitive environments, necessitating rapid innovation to meet market demands and secure a competitive advantage for survival and growth (Elkhouly & Marwan, 2016; Osuagwu, 2019).

The hierarchical culture prevalent in the public sector, with its emphasis on control, stability, and strict regulatory compliance (Ghiasi et al., 2019; Aichouche et al., 2022), contrasts sharply with the innovation culture in the private sector, particularly Adhocracy Culture, which prioritizes flexibility, creativity, and risk-taking (Shuliang et al., 2024; Shahin et al., 2025). Studies have shown that while hierarchical culture ensures consistency and fairness in the public sector (Mugo & Namusonge, 2023), it can hinder creativity and the potential for innovation in the private sector (Valentin & Calin, 2024). An innovation culture that performs well in the private sector, enabling organizations to develop new products and respond rapidly to market changes (Bendak et al., 2020; Amoa-Gyarteng & Dhliwayo, 2024), might not be directly suitable for the public sector, which demands stability, predictability, and fairness.

Similarities between the two sectors during this period were limited but could be observed at a broader level. Both the public and private sectors prioritized serving their respective clients— citizens in the public sector (Lamsal & Gupta, 2022; Lee, 2024) and customers in the private sector (Osuagwu, 2019; Navia et al., 2023). Both sectors recognized that client satisfaction is a key indicator of success, even if measurement methods and evaluation criteria differed. Additionally, both sectors valued teamwork and collaboration, albeit in varying forms and degrees (Hourani, 2019; Afolami, 2020).

Comparison Post-COVID-19 (2020-2025)

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the divergence between key organizational cultures in the public and private sectors decreased, leading to greater convergence. However, significant distinctions remain, reflecting each sector's unique roles and constraints.

The most notable convergence is the shared emphasis by both public and private sectors on "Digital Transformation Culture" and "Agility and Resilience Culture" as primary cultures essential for success. The pandemic forced both sectors to accelerate their digital adaptation and develop rapid-response capabilities (Anggara et al., 2024; Hien, 2024). Public sector organizations had to develop digital services to maintain public service delivery amid contact restrictions (Zakiuddin et al., 2024), while private sector organizations had to shift business models to digital channels to survive and grow (Reuschl et al., 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2025). Both sectors needed to cultivate comprehensive digital cultures encompassing employee digital skills, digital leadership, and readiness to embrace new technologies (Teguh et al., 2022; Fahmi et al., 2023).

Agility and flexibility also became indispensable capabilities for both sectors (Devie et al., 2023; Dickson, 2025). Research on organizational resilience indicates that dynamic capabilities and flexibility are crucial for organizational survival in the post-COVID-19 era, whether in the public or private sector (Miceli et al., 2021; García-Valenzuela et al., 2023). Public sector organizations had to enhance agility in responding to evolving citizen demands and crises (Patrucco & Kähkönen, 2021; Usman et al., 2024), while private sector organizations needed to develop agility to respond rapidly to changing markets and consumer behaviors (Prieto & Talukder, 2023; Stratone & Vatamanescu, 2024).

Despite this convergence, key differences remain, reflecting the distinct missions and contexts of each sector. The public sector continues to prioritize "Digital-enabled Transparency and Accountability Culture" as its third main culture. This is an evolution of its foundational values of transparency and accountability, enhanced by the integration of digital technologies to

further strengthen transparency (Narendroputro & Rusfian, 2023; Samdaliri et al., 2025). This culture reflects the public sector's fundamental responsibility to citizens and the necessity of maintaining public trust, which underpins its legitimacy (Anselmi et al., 2017; Amalia, 2023). In contrast, the private sector emphasizes "Employee Well-being and Psychological Safety Culture" as its third main culture, a new culture emerging post-COVID-19 (Negara et al., 2023; Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023; Ji et al., 2025). This emphasis reflects a heightened awareness that employee well-being is critical for organizational performance, the ability to attract and retain talented employees, and long-term organizational sustainability (Judijanto, 2024; Riaz et al., 2024). Private sector organizations operating in a highly competitive labor market must differentiate themselves by creating attractive work environments, and prioritizing employee well-being is an effective way to do so. While the public sector should also prioritize employee well-being, it is often not ranked among the top priorities compared to accountability and public service delivery.

Factors Explaining Similarities and Differences

The conditions leading to similarities and differences in organizational cultures between the public and private sectors can be explained by several factors.

Firstly, the core mission and objectives of organizations are the most critical factors. Public sector organizations are primarily tasked with creating and maintaining public value, providing fair and equitable services to citizens, and ensuring public accountability through democratic processes (Heintzman & Marson, 2024; Lee, 2024). This explains why transparency and accountability remained core cultures both pre- and post-COVID-19. In contrast, private sector organizations' main objective is to generate profit and shareholder value, which necessitates innovation, market responsiveness, and competitive advantage (Hermida et al., 2019; Osuagwu, 2019). This explains why innovation and customer-centric cultures were dominant in the private sector, particularly before COVID-19.

Secondly, the operating environment and constraints facing organizations differ significantly. Public sector organizations operate under stringent legal and regulatory frameworks, engage in complex decision-making processes subject to multi-party scrutiny, and often have limited resources allocated within predetermined budgets (Mugo & Namusonge, 2023; Kirmikiroglou et al., 2024). These constraints often lead to slower cultural change in the public sector compared to the private sector (Lipych, 2025). Conversely, private sector organizations typically exhibit greater flexibility in decision-making, resource allocation, and strategy adjustment, enabling them to change organizational culture more rapidly when necessary (Devie et al., 2023; Stratone & Vatamanescu, 2024). Studies show that private-sector organizations can accelerate digital transformation during crises, despite challenges in sustaining such changes (Reuschl et al., 2022).

Thirdly, the impact of crises can drive convergence between the public and private sectors. The COVID-19 crisis created urgent, common needs for both sectors in terms of digital adaptation and agility (Deep, 2023; Mikušová et al., 2023; Elemure et al., 2025). Both sectors faced situations requiring changes in working methods, development of digital channels, and rapid response to evolving demands, albeit in different forms and contexts (Anggara et al., 2024; Hien, 2024; Zakiuddin et al., 2024). Research on digital transformation during COVID-19 indicated that many organizations, across both public and private sectors, had to extend their organizational elasticity to its limits (Reuschl et al., 2022). Thus, crises act as catalysts for cultural change, leading to greater commonality between the two sectors.

Fourthly, changing stakeholder expectations. Digital-era citizens expect the public sector to provide efficient and convenient services comparable to those offered by the private sector (Gharbaoui et al., 2024). This expectation pressures public organizations to embrace innovation and digital cultures more readily (Anggara et al., 2024; Hien, 2024). Concurrently, employees and society at large expect private-sector organizations to demonstrate social responsibility and

transparency, and to prioritize employee well-being (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023; Judijanto, 2024; Riaz et al., 2024). This convergence of expectations encourages the adoption of certain cultural practices across sectors.

Table 3 Comparison of Key Organizational Cultures between Public and Private Sectors Pre- and Post-COVID-19

Period	Similarities	Key Differences (Public vs. Private Sector)
Pre-COVID-19 (2016-2019)	- Customer/Citizen-centric focus - Importance of teamwork	Public: Transparency, Hierarchy, Public Service Private: Innovation, Market Orientation, Teamwork
Post-COVID-19 (2020-2025)	- Digital transformation culture - Agility and resilience culture - Emphasis on efficiency and responsiveness	Public: Digital-enabled Transparency Private: Employee Well-being & Psychological Safety
Trend	Increased convergence in digital and agility	Retained distinct identities based on missions and contexts

In conclusion, the comparison of organizational cultures between the public and private sectors over the past decade reveals a shift from a clear divergence in the pre-COVID-19 era to greater convergence in the post-COVID-19 era, particularly in digital and agile cultures. Nevertheless, significant differences persist, reflecting each sector's distinct missions, constraints, and stakeholder expectations. Understanding these dynamics of similarities and differences is crucial for both executives and scholars in designing organizational culture development strategies tailored to their specific contexts, while also learning from and effectively applying best practices from other sectors.

Conclusion and Discussion

This research systematically synthesized existing literature on the most critical organizational cultures for organizational success over the past decade (2016-2025), analyzed by organizational type (public and private sectors) and time periods (pre- and post-COVID-19). The findings reveal interesting dynamics of both significant changes and continuities in organizational culture.

For public sector organizations, the three most critical cultures for success pre-COVID-19 (2016-2019) were identified as: 1) Transparency and Accountability Culture, 2) Hierarchical and Regulatory Culture, and 3) Public Service Culture. These cultures reflected the public sector's core mission of creating public value, ensuring fairness, and maintaining accountability to citizens. Post-COVID-19 (2020-2025), significant changes were observed, with the three most critical cultures transforming to: 1) Digital Transformation Culture, 2) Agility and Resilience Culture, and 3) Digital-enabled Transparency and Accountability Culture. This shift reflects the public sector's adaptation to the urgent need for digital service delivery, rapid crisis response, and the maintenance of public trust through new technologies.

For private sector organizations, the three most critical cultures for success pre-COVID-19 (2016-2019) were: 1) Innovation Culture, 2) Customer-Centric and Market Orientation Culture, and 3) Collaborative and Teamwork Culture. These cultures served as fundamental pillars for competitive advantage, innovation, and responsiveness to market demands. Post-COVID-19 (2020-2025), the three most critical cultures evolved to: 1) Digital Culture and Innovation, 2) Agility and Resilience Culture, and 3) Employee Well-being and Psychological Safety Culture. This transformation reflects the advanced integration of innovation with digital

technology, the imperative for rapid adaptation to uncertainty, and a heightened awareness of the importance of employee well-being for long-term organizational success.

A comparison between the public and private sectors revealed a shift from clear differences in the pre-COVID-19 era to greater convergence in the post-COVID-19 era, particularly in digital culture and agility. However, significant differences persist, reflecting the distinct missions and contexts of each sector. The public sector continues to emphasize transparency and accountability, while the private sector prioritizes employee well-being as a key to competitive advantage.

Discussion and Theoretical & Practical Implications

Theoretically, this research supports and extends existing theories of organizational culture, particularly Cameron and Quinn's Competing Values Framework. The findings illustrate that organizational culture is dynamic, capable of adapting to external contexts and strategic imperatives (Mikušová et al., 2023). The observed shift from a Hierarchy Culture to an Adhocracy Culture (innovation culture) in the public sector post-COVID-19 challenges the traditional belief that hierarchical culture is a permanent and necessary characteristic of public organizations (Mugo & Namusonge, 2023; Valentin & Calin, 2024). This study demonstrates that even public organizations, characterized by rigid structures and constraints, can develop agile and innovative cultures when faced with external pressures.

Furthermore, this research introduces a new concept of cultural convergence between the public and private sectors in certain aspects, especially in the era of digital transformation and the need for agility. This challenges the traditional view that clearly separates public and private sector organizations (Hartnell et al., 2019). This convergence reflects the dynamics of contemporary organizational environments, in which both sectors face similar challenges, such as digital transformation, evolving stakeholder expectations, and the need for agility and flexibility (Reuschl et al., 2022; Deep, 2023).

The study also contributes by expanding the concept of organizational culture by adding a "digital" dimension. The emergence of "Digital Culture and Innovation" and "Digital-enabled Transparency and Accountability Culture" indicates that digital technology is no longer merely a tool but has become integral to the core content of organizational culture itself (Teguh et al., 2022; Fahmi et al., 2023). This integration of digital into traditional organizational cultures creates new, distinct cultural forms that warrant further future research.

From a practical perspective, this research offers valuable recommendations for organizational leaders in both public and private sectors. For public sector leaders, the study highlights that maintaining traditional hierarchical cultures may be insufficient for success in the current and future eras. It is essential to develop agile and flexible cultures while upholding core values of transparency and accountability (Mikušová et al., 2023; Usman et al., 2024; Samdaliri et al., 2025). Investing in the development of digital culture, including enhancing employee digital skills, improving digital infrastructure, and fostering digital leadership, is crucial for public organizations to deliver quality services and meet the expectations of digital-era citizens (Teguh et al., 2022; Fahmi et al., 2023; Anggara et al., 2024; Hien, 2024).

For private sector leaders, this research underscores the critical importance of fully integrating innovation with digital technology and prioritizing employee well-being as key determinants of long-term success (Negara et al., 2023; Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023; Alhaider & Alqahtani, 2025). Organizations aiming to attract and retain talented employees must cultivate cultures that support employee well-being, psychological safety, and work-life balance, especially in an era where employees have higher expectations and more options (Judijanto, 2024; Riaz et al., 2024). Investing in organizational cultures that foster employee well-being is not merely an expense but an investment that yields returns in terms of increased commitment, improved performance, and enhanced innovation capabilities (Alhaider & Alqahtani, 2025).

However, this research also reveals significant limitations and challenges in developing organizational culture. Firstly, organizational cultural change is neither easy nor rapid, especially in large organizations or those with long-established cultures (Bendak et al., 2020; Fietz & Günther, 2021). Resistance to change, organizational inertia, and a lack of leadership commitment are key obstacles that must be overcome (Ibrahim et al., 2025). Secondly, striking a balance among diverse cultures, which may have inherent tensions or conflicts, presents a significant challenge. For instance, balancing hierarchical and agile cultures, or outcome-oriented cultures with employee well-being-focused cultures (Zlatkovic, 2018; Prieto & Talukder, 2023), requires careful consideration and strategic management.

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