



Academy of Organizational
Behavior Management

Organizational Behavior Studies Quarterly

Print ISSN: 2322-1518
Online ISSN: 3456-6452

Autumn 2025 (Serial No. 55), Vol. 14, No. 3: 11-27

Developing a Pattern of Desirable Indicators for Cooperative Organizational Culture in Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts

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Date Received: 16/08/2025

Acceptance: 10/10/2025

Abstract

This study aimed to develop a model of desirable indicators for a Cooperative Organizational Culture (COC) in the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts of Iran (MCHTHI). Today, COC is considered one of the most important and influential cultural orientations within organizations. This research is applied in nature and uses a mixed-method approach. In the first phase, a meta-synthesis method was employed, and in the second phase, a limited modified Delphi quantitative method was used. By reviewing numerous sources and studies in this field, three types of cultures, namely interactive, supportive and obliative, along with 22 cultural indicators, were identified as components of COC. After analysis and incorporation of expert feedback, these components and indicators were refined and presented in the form of a comprehensive model. The results revealed that this culture can facilitate and strengthen interaction and cooperation in tourism-related organizations and foster greater participation and engagement among organizational members within an obliative environment, which is characterized by shared ethics, common goals and awareness of organizational processes and activities.

Keywords: *Organizational Culture, Participatory Culture, Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts of Iran (MCHTHI), Mixed Study.*

پژوهشگاه علوم انسانی و مطالعات فرهنگی
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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the rapid development of societies and technological advancements has made organizations more complex than ever before, increasing the need for coordination and engagement across organizational levels. A high level of cooperative organizational culture (COC) is one of the key indicators of social advancement and is deeply rooted in the culture of society. Scholars in this field argue that an organization's culture is as fundamental to its functioning as personal identity is to an individual. Moreover, they assert that fostering societal development requires a comprehensive understanding of individual identities.

Empirical findings have shown that a cooperative organizational culture encourages employees to fulfill their professional calling and strengthens their helping behavior. A multi-group analysis further revealed that cooperative organizational culture significantly influenced helping behavior among female employees, whereas workplace well-being had a greater impact on helping behavior among male employees (Kang et al., 2023).

Organizations often employ organizational-level participation and cooperation to minimize hierarchical thinking, enhance cross-functional collaboration, and promote innovation. Such cooperation yields positive outcomes, including increased synergy, creativity, employee productivity, and innovation (Tannenbaum, 2014, p. 22). The institutionalization of COC within organizations similarly provides these benefits and contributes to achieving organizational objectives.

Given that critical service organizations such as the MCHTHI also require transformation in alignment with global organizational change, adopting a partnership-oriented organizational culture is essential for adapting to emerging challenges and transformations. Consequently, in service-oriented institutions like the MCHTHI, participation is of paramount importance—without it, the organization loses its meaning. Simultaneously, as organizations strive to create a competitive advantage, researchers have sought to design a distinctive model of COC for the MCHTHI.

To this end, it is essential for researchers to consider various typologies of collaborative organizational culture using rigorous and systematic methods, while also analyzing internal and external sources, scientific findings, basic needs, and specific organizational requirements to design and validate a localized model.

A key question arises: Can a COC model grounded in local cultural values effectively guide tourism organizations toward achieving their objectives and shaping them into participation-oriented entities?

Furthermore, evidence suggests that most domestic and international studies on participatory organizational culture (OC) have followed a limited approach, relying solely on general cultural frameworks to assess relationships and effectiveness. However, cultural indicators should be derived from the context of a country's

indigenous cultural fabric.

Accordingly, this study not only investigates the nature of COC but also reviews the broader framework of related internal and external research. Ultimately, an optimal local model is designed and explained based on the cultural and value-oriented characteristics of Iran. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to develop a model of desirable indicators of participatory organizational culture within the MCHTHI.

THEORITICAL BACKGROUND AND LITRETURE

Culture

The term, "Culture" is a word that refers to a large and diverse set of mostly intangible aspects of social life. According to sociologists, culture includes values, beliefs, language, communication, and practices that people share and can be used to define them as a collective and common facet. Culture also includes material objects that are common to that group or society. Culture is distinct from, but connected to, the social structure and economic aspects of society, both continually informing them and being informed by them (Cole, 2019). Culture represents 'the way things are done here.' Scholars in management science, organizational behavior, and communication define organizational culture as the explicit product of collective choices made by a group regarding accepted behaviors when interacting with one another and key external stakeholders (e.g., customers, suppliers, and regulators). These choices emerge as groups attempt to develop adaptive strategies for engaging with their broader social environment (Gutterman, 2024).

It can also be stated that culture is an abstract and multidimensional construct, within which organizational culture (OC) can be regarded as one of its key dimensions (Farhi et al., 2015; Sanjaghi, 2015, p. 168). Culture encompasses the characteristics, values, and accumulated knowledge of a specific group of people, including their language, religion, cuisine, social customs, music, and art (Zimmermann, 2017).

Organizational Culture

Since the evolution of the concept of OC in the middle of the 20th century, this concept has been defined in different dimensions. However, what these definitions have in common is that OC includes the values, beliefs, and assumptions that are shared or communicated among members (Schein, 2010; Nazarian et al, 2017).

OC plays an important role in the overall performance of an organization. Basically, it is an important parameter of the organization's performance and effectiveness. In the first stage, OC helps the members of an organization to get a sense of identity. Employees understand that they belong to an "organization-society" that includes values, beliefs, and ideologies (Panagiotis, 2014: 416; quoted

by Zarandi and Mandani, 2015: p. 71).

One of the most complete definitions of OC is provided by Hokinski and Buchanan (2001), who define it as a coherent set of shared values, beliefs, customs, traditions, and enduring practices that are transmitted among members of an organization (Ahmady et al., 2016, p. 388).

OC is defined as the way things are done in the organization according to it. An effective culture in an organization can convey its values and standards to its employees. Employees know how to react to a situation, feel encouraged or superior, and believe they will be rewarded as long as they follow organizational beliefs and values (Balaji et al, 2020, p. 2).

According to the above definitions and the time course of each of the cases, it can be seen that the new definitions are directed towards cooperative and interactive concepts, which will be examined in line with the concept of "COC."

Collaborative Organizational Culture (COC)

OC is another culture that differs from other types according to the type of national culture of the countries. This culture is created because technologies are changing and subsequently, popular culture, lifestyle, and people's interests also changing. Therefore, the possibility of communication, cooperation, sharing and learning from each other can be done through learned or acquired things that were previously difficult to achieve (Krutka et al, 2014, p. 84).

According to some researchers, OC is a type of valuable teamwork, two-way interactions, and confidential communication that occurs using organizational knowledge and causes organizational empowerment and learning. The members of an organization in a collaborative culture go towards change and present and receive different views and freely talk about organizational problems (Khenifar et al., 2019, p. 30). From the perspective of Mutuku et al. (2012), what differentiates a participatory culture from other cultural forms is the collective effort of individuals to achieve a specific goal that benefits all members. Therefore, the essential components of this culture include a shared understanding of organizational goals and commitments, mutual trust, constructive engagement, and a strong sense of belonging to these collective objectives.

According to Martinez-Moyano (2006), in the culture of people's participation to realize organizational targets, which is considered a result of the unification of personal collective and organizational goals, people's personal goals are deeply invested (cited by Khenifar and colleagues, 2019, p. 30).

METHODOLOGY

The study's method is the type of mixed with a sequential exploratory approach (two spectrums of qualitative-quantitative study). In the first part, the meta-Synthesis

qualitative research method, and in the second part, the modified Delphi quantitative method were carried out. Therefore, in terms of purpose, the research falls under descriptive research, and in terms of results, it is among applied research, and in terms of data type, it is considered mixed or combined research.

In the first part of the research, a qualitative research method has been used. Meta-synthesis, similar to meta-analysis, is used to integrate multiple studies to create comprehensive and interpretive findings. Compared to the meta-analysis approach that relies on quantitative data from the subject literature and statistical approaches, meta-combination is focused on qualitative studies and examines the results and findings of qualitative studies, and deep understanding of the researcher is very important in this method (Beck, 2002, p. 93).

This method examines information and findings extracted from other qualitative studies with a related and similar topic. Meta-synthesis requires that the researcher conduct a detailed and deep review and combines the findings of related qualitative research (Zarandi and Madani, 2015, p. 96).

In the second part of the research, a modified Delphi method was used. The Delphi method is a structured process for collecting and classifying existing knowledge among a group of experts, which is done through interviews or the distribution of questionnaires among them and controlled feedback of the answers and comments received (Shieh et al., 2013), p. 12). The Delphi method is divided into three categories in most sources: classical, political and decision-making (Powell, 2003).

Among the characteristics of classic Delphi, anonymity of experts, repetition, feedback, statistical reporting of group members' responses and focus on consensus can be taken into account, and sometimes it is adjusted to meet the needs of researchers, which is called modified classic Delphi. Modified classic Delphi has characteristics such as group interactions, the anonymity of expert group members, no need to reach consensus, question type (open/closed), and analysis method (qualitative/quantitative) (Ahmadi et al., 2017).

The Delphi method provides a suitable way for experts to reach a consensus without the need for interaction and confrontation. When it is required to gain the opinion of a group of experts, and it is not possible to gather them in one simple meeting, Delphi can be used (Stone Fish & Busby, 2005; Linstone & Turoff, 2002, Shia et al., 2013, p. 120).

First of all, to collect qualitative data from a lot of research related to the subject, a meta-Synthesis qualitative research method was used, and by examining related research in this field, indicators were extracted and then to reach a consensus of expert opinion about the dimensions, characteristics and indicators of COC in the studied organization (Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts); A significant number of selected experts were identified and using the modified Delphi

quantitative research method, 12 questionnaires were distributed among them and after sending and receiving in three consecutive rounds, relevant information was collected and analyzed.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

As explained earlier, this study aims to extract the relevant indicators and apply them in the subsequent stages using the modified meta-combination and Delphi methods. Accordingly, Table 1 presents various models and indicators of COC, along with cultural indicators identified in prior studies conducted in this field.

Meta-synthesis, as a systematic and rigorous approach for integrating qualitative research findings, comprises a sequence of interrelated and carefully executed steps. The process begins with the precise formulation of the research question, which defines the conceptual foundation of the study. Next, inclusion and exclusion criteria are established to determine the scope and boundaries of the analysis. This is followed by a comprehensive and systematic search across reputable academic databases to identify all relevant studies.

Once studies are gathered, a rigorous quality assessment of each study's methodology is conducted using standardized tools to ensure only methodologically sound studies are included in the final analysis. The subsequent phase involves extracting qualitative data from selected texts, encompassing key concepts, themes, and findings. The next critical step entails synthesizing and analyzing findings through various approaches such as thematic analysis or interpretive synthesis, which facilitates the emergence of novel and more profound conceptualizations. The process culminates in presenting the final synthesis, typically in the form of a conceptual model, analytical framework, or grounded theory, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. This integrative process enables researchers to derive deeper and more systematic insights by amalgamating findings from multiple qualitative studies, thereby transcending the limitations of individual study results and advancing knowledge in the field. The methodological rigor inherent in meta-synthesis ensures the development of theoretically rich and contextually nuanced interpretations that significantly contribute to the body of qualitative research. Through comprehensive searches of domestic and international digital databases and libraries, the majority of relevant studies were identified, from which the following 12 studies were selected as the most principal cases. It should be noted that due to the scarcity and highly specialized nature of relevant studies in this field, the researchers exclusively examined investigations demonstrating close conceptual and content affinity with the subject of this research. The present study has meticulously and scientifically implemented all the aforementioned steps, with each component thoroughly documented in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of models and indicators of collaborative organizational culture (along with cultural indicators)

	Researcher	Indicators
1	Litwin & Stringer (1968)	Trust building - sharing - self-reflection - criticism
2	Robbins (1997)	Individual creativity - risk-taking - guidance and leadership - integrity and unity - management support - control and supervision - identity - the existence of a communication model in the organization
3	Hargreaves & Dawe (1990)	Standards - responsibilities - encouragement and persuasion - risk-taking - behavior support - intimacy - structure - identity
4	Tannenbaum (2014)	Teamwork - flexibility and agility - optimal performance - health and happiness of employees - high level of employee retention - creating a competitive advantage by attracting experts - the ability to quickly develop and deliver products and services to society
5	Ali Ahmady et al (2016)	Empowerment - group orientation - ability to develop
6	Nazarian et al. (2017)	Collectivism – power distance – uncertainty avoidance – masculinity/femininity
7	Ryerse & Rosenfeld (2018)	Promoting responsibility - encouraging and appreciating questions - appreciating different points of view - normalizing the conditions and atmosphere of the organization - creating an atmosphere for discourse - focusing on employees - updating programs - supporting cooperation in the organization
8	Mallejac (2018)	Creating internal feedback loops - Developing freedom - Ensuring information transparency - Knowledge sharing
9	Tsiring & Sizova Ya (2018)	Tribal culture - adhocracy culture - bureaucratic culture
10	Nugroho (2018)	future views and anticipation of changes - encouragement to communicate and to have a dialogue - trust in and respect for others- teamwork - empowerment - tolerance of ambiguity - risk assumptions and respect - encouragement for differences
11	Balaji et al (2020)	Tribal culture - Adhocracy culture - Market culture - Hierarchical culture
12	Tulokas et al (2024)	organizational culture - psychological safety - trust - collaboration - habits and attitudes

Source: researchers

Given the aims considered for the study and based on the classification of the cooperative organizational culture indicators in Table 1, they all indicate the fact that the existing models cannot fully and comprehensively design the cooperative organizational culture model. Therefore, the researchers decided to design a model

in addition to its intellectual and theoretical obstacles, while examining the types of cultures and indicators available in the research, to have the necessary comprehensiveness and dynamism in the organization. For this purpose, by using the modified Delphi method, they measure the main components of cooperative organizational culture.

As mentioned in the previous sections, in relation to the prioritization of the obtained indicators, a quantitative method (adjusted Delphi) is used instead of using experts' opinions; These indicators are "prioritized" in order of importance. Modified classical Delphi has characteristics such as group interactions, anonymity of expert group members, no need to reach consensus, question type (open/closed), and analysis method (qualitative/quantitative) (Ahmadi et al., 2017). At this stage, an anonymous questionnaire was sent to experts, senior managers of the MCHTHE, and a number of university professors, and finally, out of 12 experts, 8 questionnaires were adopted, and each of them was examined separately. In the first round of Delphi, people were asked to rate each of the indicators based on their importance and also to rate new factors that they consider. After sending the questionnaires and obtaining the opinion of the experts, the codes and initial information were reviewed and then they were sent to the experts again in order to obtain the opinion in the second round. In this round, the indicators that did not get the necessary points in the first round were removed and sent for the third round, that is, the screening operation of the second round indicators. Finally, out of the 27 indicators examined, 22 indicators were confirmed, and these indicators were in accordance with the codes extracted from the first part of the research - that is, the metacomposition part. Finally, these 22 indicators were determined as the main indicators of the collaborative organizational culture model.

After collecting and ranking the indicators in the Delphi method, in order to find the level of experts' agreement with each indicator, first the simplest method was used, i.e. the sum of the scores and their average. Table 2 shows the sum and average scores of each index. In the next step, the indicators were classified into 3 subject categories, which are numbered according to the separate scores in Chart 1, and The Organizational Factors Ranked by Importance in Diagram 1.

Table 2. Factors (indicators) of participatory organizational culture

Row	Factors (Indicators)	Answers	Answers' Mean	Rank (based on Importance)
1	Building trust in organization	17	8	6
2	Sharing information	17	7.3	18
3	Self-reflection of employees and managers	17	7.3	19
4	Criticism of managers and employees	17	7.8	11
5	Individual creativity of employees and managers	17	7.6	16
6	The vulnerability of employees and managers	17	7.4	17
7	Existence of guidance and leadership	17	7.25	21
8	Organizational integrity and unity	17	8.1	2
9	Management support	17	8.1	1
10	Corporate identity	17	8.1	4
11	correct communication pattern in organization	17	7.8	8
12	Collaborative work in the organization	17	8.1	3
13	Flexibility and agility	17	7.75	15
14	Health and happiness of employees	17	7.3	20
15	Promoting the responsibility of employees and managers	17	7.75	13
16	Create a space for discussion	17	7.8	9
17	Encouraging and appreciating questions and different perspectives	17	7.8	12
18	Supporting cooperation in the organization	17	8	7
19	Creating internal feedback loops	17	7.8	10
20	Development of freedom in the organization	17	6.75	22
21	Ensuring transparency of information	17	7.75	14
22	Knowledge sharing in the organization	17	8.1	5



Diagram 1. Organizational Factors Ranked by Importance

As it is clear in the table, the indicators of "management support, organizational integrity, and unity, cooperative work in the organization, organizational identity, knowledge sharing in the organization" are of high importance and are considered the most important indicators in the cooperative organizational culture in tourism organizations. be. According to the concept and content of each of the indicators, they can be divided into 3 categories: "interaction-oriented, commitment-oriented, and support-oriented" and each category includes the 22 indicators in Table 2.

In relation to the above table, it should be noted that, in some indicators, the priorities showed similar numerical values. However, the researchers finalized the ranking by comparing these values with the results obtained in the first round. As presented, the top priorities correspond to the key indicators incorporated into the proposed model. In the following section, each of the identified cultural types is discussed in detail.

1. Interaction-oriented (Interactive) culture: In this culture, the interaction, communication, and cooperation of people, managers, and groups are emphasized, and the main attention of the organization is on human-oriented dimensions. Each of

the indicators of this culture has a great role in organizational interactions. If there is interaction, an atmosphere is formed in the organization, which is considered a suitable place for establishing social interactions among employees and plays an important role in creating and promoting interactions and communication between people and their social and work lives. This culture, by emphasizing the importance of people's communication with each other in the organization, pushes the social relations between people in the right direction and is helpful for the organization. The factors or indicators that introduce and evaluate this culture are as follows: criticism of managers and employees, organizational integrity and unity, the existence of a correct communication model in the organization, collaborative work in the organization, support for cooperation in the organization, and Creating internal feedback loops.

2. Commitment-oriented (obligative) culture: This culture is a type of value thinking that emphasizes the responsibility and mutual accountability of the organization's people. In this cultural framework, beyond organizational members' commitment, we must consider the establishment of structural order as fundamental to enhancing the organization's environmental sustainability. The key indicators characterizing and assessing this culture include: (1) enhanced accountability among employees and managers, (2) organizational trust-building, (3) capacity for self-reflection at all levels, (4) cultivation of individual creativity, (5) measured risk-taking, (6) strong organizational identity, and (7) operational flexibility and agility.

3. Supportive culture: This culture emphasizes mutual relations, the feeling of being a team of the members of the organization, unique patterns of beliefs, feelings, values, and behaviors that establish a kind of relationship between the members of the organization and distinguish the organization from other organizations. In this culture, people have deep feelings and values towards the organization and have become its members with sincerity and believe that the organization is like a warm family for them, and on the other hand, the organization considers itself as a safe place for the members of the organization, which is the most His duty to the employees is to discuss "support". The most important indicators proposed to evaluate the level of governance of such a culture in the organization are as follows: creating an atmosphere of discourse, the existence of guidance and leadership, encouraging and appreciating different questions and perspectives, sharing and sharing information, management support, developing freedom in the organization, ensuring information transparency, sharing knowledge in the organization, health and happiness of employees.

Description Of The Final Research Model

In this study, researchers tried to design a model according to the research topic, so that, the dimensions, characteristics and indicators of the desired cooperative

organizational culture can be introduced and designed, and after that, the opinion of experts can be sought. Also, in this research, an effort was made to emphasize the characteristics and factors of a collaborative organizational culture that has a good spiritual, educational and humanistic benefit. According to these cases, the strategic orientation of the organization and according to the approaches that exist in enumerating and extracting the characteristics and indicators of collaborative organizational culture, three types of culture and the components of the research model are drawn in chart 1.

Criticism of managers and employees - Organizational integrity and unity - The existence of a correct communication model in the organization - Collaborative work in the organization - Supporting cooperation in the organization - Creating internal feedback loops

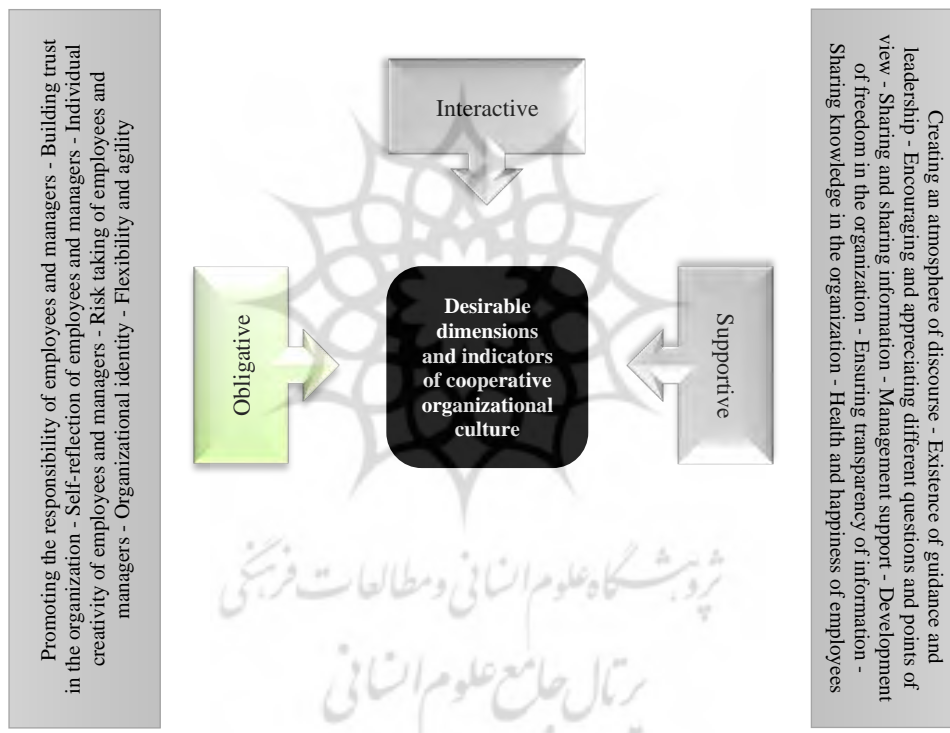


Chart 1. Model of desired indicators of COC in the MCHTHE

Discussion and Conclusion

This research systematically developed and validated a localized model of Cooperative Organizational Culture (COC) tailored to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts of Iran (MCHTHI). Unlike many previous studies that rely on imported, generalized cultural frameworks, this study grounded its model in the cultural, institutional, and operational realities of Iran. By employing a rigorous two-phase mixed-method approach— meta-synthesis to capture the theoretical breadth and a modified Delphi process to secure expert consensus—the research ensured both conceptual depth and practical relevance.

This type of culture, as a value and cooperative platform in the organization, can be fruitful in order to achieve the goals of the organization and achieve the goals and missions of the organization in a favorable way.

The process of this study was based on the background and topics related to organizational culture and COC and polling of experts, according to the study of the theoretical foundations of the research and the use of the meta-synthesis method, a total of 51 types of indicators were identified and after counting the opinions The selected experts were identified through the Delphi method, 3 types of culture and 22 indicators, and the priorities and ranks of each indicator were calculated using the modified Delphi quantitative method.

Nowadays, the directors of big organizations have come to the conclusion that OC is considered as the source of all the capacities of the organization. It is obvious that knowing and measuring the current state of organizational culture appears the significance given to social values by the organization. The complexity of the environment of today's organizations and the organic process of organizational structures bring about paying attention to the obvious impact of the human resource factor on the success of the organization, and reveals more and more the inefficiency of bureaucratic and inflexible cultures and the need for collaborative and flexible cultures that respond to the needs of communication and Today's work is increasing day by day. Besides, collaboration can reinvigorate organizations by fully engaging employees, improving retention, and increasing innovation. This can help employees thrive in a changing and diverse workplace. As organizations grow, employees are dispersed across jobs and locations, budgets shrink, and workloads expand, making collaboration a challenge. Unfortunately, many senior leaders view collaboration as a skill best applied to select projects rather than an organization-wide cultural value that should be embedded in the fabric of the company.

Among the key findings of this research is the identification of factors and indicators of a cooperative organizational culture, which is crucial because such a culture facilitates and strengthens interaction and collaboration within the organization. This approach represents one of the most effective strategies for achieving greater organizational success. According to the research results, three

main types of cooperative organizational culture were identified: interaction-oriented, commitment-oriented, and support-oriented cultures. Institutionalizing the essence of a collaborative organizational culture enables organizations to foster trustworthiness, knowledge sharing and transfer, team building, flexible organizational structures, and strategic as well as collaborative decision-making.

From an initial set of 51 indicators drawn from domestic and international literature, the process refined and prioritized these to 22 core indicators.

The Strategic Necessity of COC

The findings go beyond merely confirming the desirability of COC—they establish it as a strategic imperative for MCHTHI and similar service-oriented organizations. In the rapidly evolving and competitive global environment, organizations anchored in rigid, bureaucratic, and top-down cultures face declining agility, low engagement, and missed opportunities for innovation. By contrast, organizations embracing a cooperative cultural framework demonstrate:

- Faster adaptability to industry shifts, policy changes, and tourism market demands.
- Higher levels of employee engagement through shared ownership of goals and collaborative problem-solving.
- Enhanced knowledge creation and transfer, reducing operational silos and decision-making bottlenecks.
- Sustainable innovation capacity fueled by diverse perspectives and collective intelligence.

Implications for MCHTHI

For MCHTHI, institutionalizing this model could deliver transformative benefits:

- **Strategic Advantage:** The model equips the ministry with a cultural foundation that not only sustains performance but also differentiates it from competitors in the tourism and cultural heritage sectors.
- **Human Capital Optimization:** By institutionalizing cooperation, the organization taps into the latent potential of its workforce, turning human resources into a self-sustaining source of growth and resilience.
- **Operational Resilience:** The three cultural dimensions collectively enable the ministry to absorb external shocks—be they economic, political, or environmental—without losing internal cohesion or mission focus.
- **Stakeholder Trust:** A transparent, inclusive, and supportive culture enhances public perception and strengthens partnerships with both domestic and international tourism stakeholders.

Participatory (cooperative) culture causes more participation and interaction of the people of the organization in a commitment-oriented atmosphere that includes a wide part of common moral values, common goals, and awareness of the processes and activities of the organization. The existence of three dimensions of interactive,

obligative, and supportive in the organization can be effective in creating the flexibility of the organization in quick response, flexible atmosphere, and satisfaction of employees and clients, and in the future, identity, people orientation, and integrity cause several strains.



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